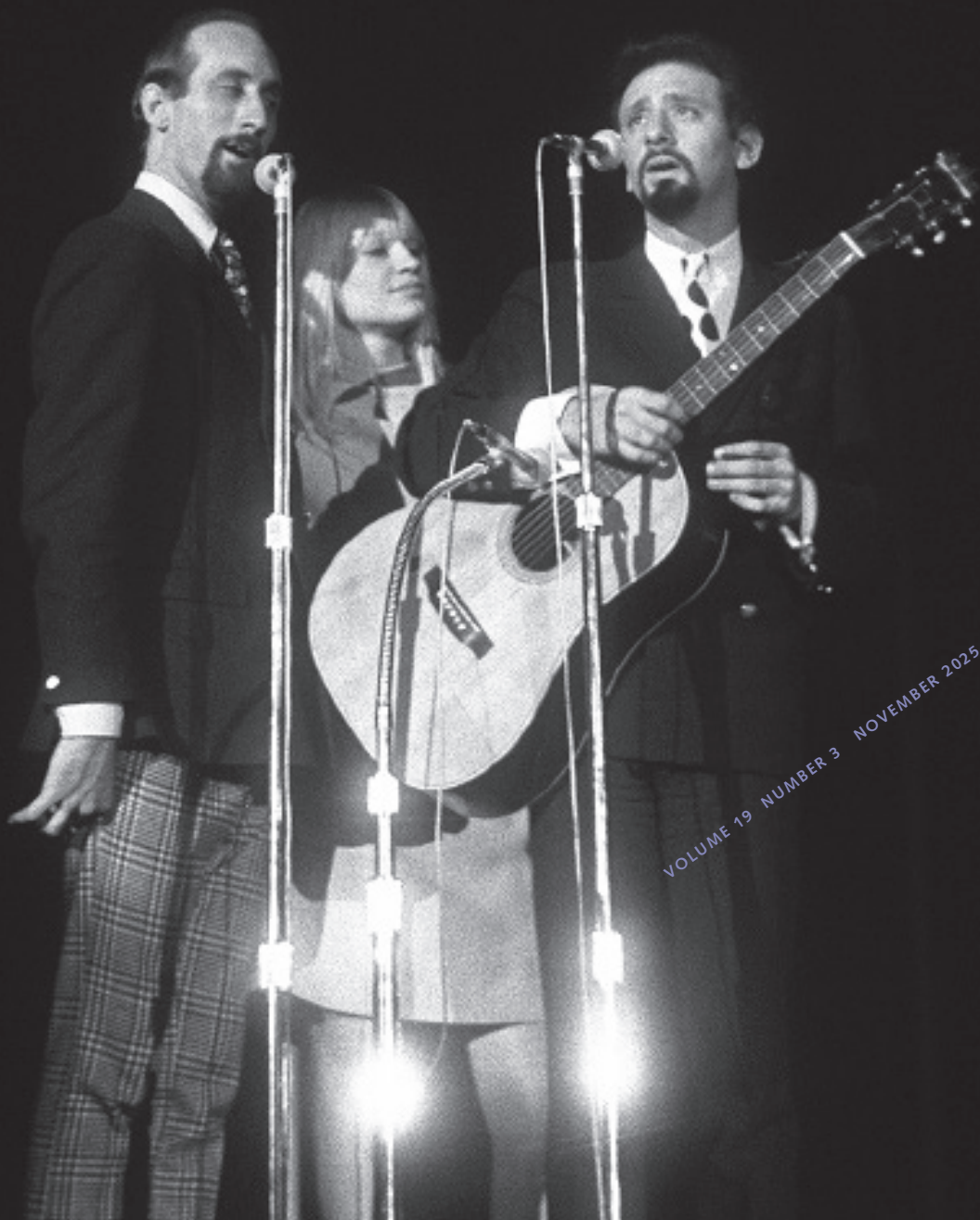


Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association

Notes



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Rhode Island Jewish Historical

Notes



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Editor's Comments

More often than not, I think of our journal as a celebration. Yes, some issues portray dark or horrifying subjects, but most have reflected our glowing rights, privileges, and opportunities. So many of us have been blessed with healthy, long, productive, and inspired lives. Indeed, this issue's "In Memoria" section profiles no fewer than eleven nonagenarians.

Yes, I can also see how our writers demonstrate various criteria. As usual, there's an amazing age range: from about 20 years to more than 90. Except perhaps for years spent away at college or in the military, four of our authors have lived virtually their entire lives in Little Rhody. By contrast, five authors have resided for only a few years in the Ocean State. This means that five more authors have lived here many decades.

Perhaps needless to say, our writers form a highly educated group, but their levels of religious observance have widely varied. Yes, one of our recurring writers is a rabbi, but many other contributors have been lay leaders. Some writers received a strong Jewish education as children; other writers came or returned to Jewish studies later in their lives. Indeed, each writer eventually discovered or decided which facets of Jewish life were most significant to him or her. Jewish friendship and camaraderie have always seemed especially endearing, however.

Our writers have often discussed their preferences for big cities, suburbia or small towns. This issue may be somewhat exceptional for its numerous references to nature, especially to tides and beaches. But the issue's most senior contributor also reflected on his love of windsurfing. There are also some memorable homages to favorite trees. Other references to music and silence also seem to occur naturally.

As always, I would like to thank so many friends and colleagues who make our journal possible. In addition to Association members, these include our writers, publications committee, officers



George and Steve

and board members, and our office manager, Jaime Walden. I am again deeply grateful to the trustees of the Harold Winstead Foundation. For 22 years, our journal has also benefitted through its close association with the staff of Signature Printing in East Providence.

Another quite special person merits our resounding and lasting gratitude. This is Steve Logowitz, a Providence native and a Temple Beth-El alumnus, who has been our distinguished graphic designer for 11 wonderful issues. He tied the amazing record set by his distinguished predecessor, Bobbie Friedman, and created approximately 2,200 pages of words, images, and spaces.

Steve and I were college classmates, and I have often felt that we still are. Indeed, in 1969, I helped implement his vision of the college's most imaginative yearbook. His vision of our journal has grown ever richer and more nuanced. I dare say, however, that the stunning results speak eloquently for themselves.

George M. Goodwin

George M. Goodwin



high school debate team;
author at far right

My Childhood in Louisville, *Part II*

Evaline Blum

This is actually the third part of Evaline's autobiography, which began in our 2023 issue with her birth in Shanghai in 1941. The author's German family, having found asylum there, remained until 1947.

Then the Blums were allowed to immigrate to America. They sailed to San Francisco and traveled by rail to Louisville, Kentucky, in order to reunite with relatives who had fled Germany between 1938 and 1940. As Evaline explained in the second part of her saga, her family's resettlement was far from easy. It brought countless disappointments and hardships.

Unfortunately, as Evaline recounts, her immediate family's attempts to gain acceptance within Louisville's Jewish and Gentile communities brought further struggles. And then her parents suffered a harrowing ordeal.

It's amazing that Evaline somehow continued to function. After graduating from junior and senior high schools, she looked forward to the possibility of enrolling in a university, if she could provide the personal and financial resources.

Please keep in mind that this series of articles has been Evaline's first attempt to write a personal narrative. Fortunately, she has been able to recall many extraordinary details without blaming herself or others.

In countless ways, she became not merely a survivor but also a thoughtful and caring person. A far more accomplished writer too.

Dad's job at Fleischaker's slaughterhouse was hard, dirty, and dangerous. A bullet once ricocheted off a steer and hit him in the leg. He was hospitalized for weeks, and the injury caused him lifelong pain. Another time, he cut off part of his finger. But his was a union job, which meant better pay, health care, and job protection. He was glad to have it and worked hard.

At 4:30 PM, when Dad came home from work, he left all his responsibilities, including yard work, at the door. When he bought the house at 2201 West Kentucky, in the Parkland neighborhood of Louisville's West End, there were a beautiful lawn, trimmed bushes,

and flower beds. After we had lived there for a few years, the front yard was overtaken with crabgrass. If you didn't look too closely, it could look like real grass. But the flower beds died of neglect. He gave away all the rose bushes, which had lined one side of the backyard, to a fellow worker.

When I was almost ten, in 1950, cutting grass became one of my jobs. But the blade of our push mower was almost never sharpened, so I had sweaty work ripping the grass out of the ground. I never had a trimmer for the grass or shears for the bushes. In the fall I raked and burned leaves. Also, never having a snow shovel, I used the blunt coal shovel from the basement.

A Lonely Life

As I got older, I became more aware of the world beyond my family. I heard kids talk about their grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents or family friends.

The only family I had on my mother's side was Uncle Eli and his family in New York City. But my mother, *Mutti*, was not on good terms with them. Her mother, *Oma*, had emigrated to Israel, but life there was too tough, so she went back to Berlin. *Mutti* had several sisters and brothers, but I didn't know where they were or if they were even alive.

The only relatives I knew were *Onkel* (Uncle) Hyman, *Tanta* (Aunt) Augusta, their daughter, Melitta, and her child, Caroline. They almost never visited our home. *Mutti* told me that they were frum, meaning ultrareligious, and kept strictly kosher. Because we weren't religious and didn't keep kosher, our home was considered traif, meaning not clean. Their strict religious beliefs kept us apart. Though Judaism was our religion too, our observances didn't go far enough. As a result, I felt strange and separate, like our family belonged nowhere.

Yes, my immediate family was truly isolated from Jewish life. We didn't belong to a synagogue or go to Hebrew or Sunday school. The only exception was my younger sister, Yeni, who did go for a year to Sunday school.

I was happy about a friendship I had struck up with a girl

at public school, the only one I knew who was Jewish. But sadly, this friendship was brief and ended abruptly. I never knew another Jew from school – not even a teacher.

The only Jews I saw often were the Niren family, who owned a corner grocery store. Mrs. Niren pressed me constantly to go the Jewish Community Center and mingle with Jewish kids, not with the Gentile kids in the neighborhood.

I didn't like what Mrs. Niren was saying. I didn't know anything about the JCC or anybody who went there. Even if I wanted to go, how would I get there? Dad worked all day, and *Mutti* couldn't take me. As a result, I shied away from going into Mrs. Niren's store.

Feeling Deeply Jewish

In spite of my distance from Jewish public life, I did feel deeply Jewish. Dad and *Mutti's* suffering was always with me. How could it not be? Their suffering formed how I saw myself and our family.

We lived in a Christian world and were surrounded by Christmas hoopla, but we never joined in. We never exchanged gifts, decorated a tree or sent cards.

Although Dad seemed indifferent to practicing Judaism, *Mutti* was much more connected. She told us kids Bible stories over and over, and we celebrated major holidays at home her way. For Hanukkah, for example, she set up a makeshift menorah. She followed the German-Jewish tradition of preparing *Bunten Teller*, a colorful plate of fruit, fruit-flavored jellies, chocolate coins, and maybe a little toy. With tears streaming down her face, she also grated potatoes for latkes. She topped them off with applesauce or sour cream.

At Pesach, *Mutti* assembled a seder plate. She also cooked gefilte fish, chicken soup, and matzo balls. Once she talked about the Exodus, but it was the family's exodus from Germany. Dad looked away.

For Rosh Hashanah, *Mutti* bought a challah from Melitta's bakery, and she set out honey and apple slices. Yom Kippur also felt like a holy day because *Mutti* fasted.

Thursdays

Mutti was careful about spending money on groceries. On Thursdays, she took a bus to the Haymarket, on the other side of downtown. Farmers sold fresh produce and chickens at cheaper prices than at stores. But *Mutti* also liked visiting with farmers and small shop owners, spending the day joking and laughing with them.

Mutti had her own way of selecting chickens. Holding a bird upside down, she blew on its tail end. When feathers moved aside, she checked their bottoms to make sure that they looked healthy.

After selecting two birds, she carried them upside down to the kosher butcher. He ritually slaughtered them by cutting their throats and letting them bleed into a special receptacle. He then plucked and burned off their feathers.

While the butcher was doing his work, *Mutti* went next door to the bakery and visited with Melitta and *Tanta*. She would have a cup of coffee and a piece of pastry and kibitz. She felt comfortable talking in German with them and telling her jokes and stories. She was also always sure to buy rye bread for Dad.

Visitors

We almost never had visitors at our home. One afternoon Dad showed up with two strangers, who were fellow workers from Fleischaker's. *Mutti*, who was in the front room watching TV, looked up when Dad walked in with the men. "These are my *gonzos*," he said. This was one of his favorite words. But *Mutti* wasn't interested, so she went back to watching her show.

As Dad and his guests went into the kitchen, I trailed behind them, wondering why they were here. Then Dad asked me, as if this was the most ordinary question, "Can you fix something to eat?" He knew that we didn't have extra food lying around. But I understood that he was acting like a big shot for his friends, so I couldn't let him down. I would do my best and nodded, "Sure."

As they pulled out chairs and sat down, I saw that the table was covered with crumbs, as usual. I quickly brushed them away. By

poking around in the fridge, I found a few leftover boiled potatoes and then a tub of Crisco (vegetable shortening) in the cabinet. So I melted the Crisco in the skillet, sliced the potatoes as thin as possible to make them look like more, and then fried them up. I turned them over and over to get them perfectly crispy. Meanwhile, the men were busy talking.

When I finally dished out the golden discs, along with a bottle of ketchup from the cabinet, they were eaten instantly. When I saw the men smiling and talking, I knew that I had made Dad happy.

Activities

I don't remember the family going anywhere or doing much of anything. A few times Dad took me along on his monthly trip to downtown Louisville, where he cashed his paycheck at a bank, got cash for *Mutti's* grocery shopping, paid the mortgage, gas, and electric bills, and his Sears credit card.

Finally, what made it all worthwhile for me was going to the lunch counter at Walgreens. I carefully studied the menu, but knew that I would get the ice cream sundae. This was followed by a movie, usually a Western or a detective show starring one of his favorite tough guys – Robert Mitchum, Jack Palance or John Wayne. I didn't like these movies at all, but I did like being with Dad.

Reading was an escape for me, so I always had my nose in a book. Every week *Mutti* and I walked to the Parkland branch library, where I was allowed to take out five books from the children's section. My favorites were fairy tales and kids' stories.

Mutti didn't read, but Dad was a reader. Every day he got *The Louisville Times* and *The Courier-Journal*, and every Saturday he went to the main library, downtown, and took out books, mostly about World War II.

I did spend a lot of time at Victory Park, which was one square block and across the street. I enjoyed a teeter-totter or a swing.

Every summer the Louisville Park District sent a young woman, whom we called "Teach," with supplies to keep us kids busy with board games, ball games, painting, and clay sculpture. In case of



family portrait, Louisville;
author in middle of top row

rain, kids and “Teach” met in the “shelter house” to play games and talk. The program lasted for six glorious weeks. After “Teach” left, the hot, humid days of summer stretched out endlessly until school started.

I didn’t much like the bigger boys who played pick-up baseball or basketball or just hung out at a corner of Victory Park. They liked pushing around the younger kids.

One afternoon my mother yelled in her heavy, German accent for me to come home. This prompted the boys to call out to me, “Hey, Nazi, your mother’s calling!” I don’t know if they knew what a Nazi was. They were ignorant, but I wasn’t going to start a fight with them. Then they wanted the German words for “shit” and “damn.” When I told them, they happily said these words over and over, and I had no more problems.

Camp Tall Trees

The summer I was eleven, Dad told me that I was going to Camp Tall Trees. I had never been to camp and didn’t know anybody who had. He then added that the Jewish Community Center was paying for me to go. I was mystified. Who or what was that? How did they know about me? But I didn’t ask questions.

The next Saturday, Dad and I went to Sears, Roebuck with a list of what to bring to camp. It was a pretty long list, and I was not surprised when Dad said that it was too much. He ended up buying half of what was listed. I was supposed to bring two swimsuits so I would have a dry one for the afternoon swim. But I would have to make do with only one.

A few weeks later, with Dad carrying our old plaid suitcase, we walked to 18th Street and took a bus to the Jewish Community Center. A crowd of kids was milling around, talking to their friends, and waving to others. I didn’t know what to expect because I didn’t know anybody, and nobody knew me.

Once we began boarding the bus, I passed empty seats that kids were saving for their friends, until I found an open seat in the back. I already wished that I had stayed home.

After the bus got rolling, I peeked at my fellow campers.

A girl sitting near me smiled and then reached out and offered me some of her snack. “Pistachios?” she asked. I didn’t know what they were, but not wanting to look unfriendly, I popped some into my mouth.

As I crushed the pellets between my teeth, I was surprised at how salty they were. The little shards sat in my mouth. Wondering how anybody could eat these, I wanted to spit them out. But I was embarrassed, so I swallowed them while the girl stared at me.

Later I found out that I had eaten the entire pistachio – the salt-coated shell and all. Now I saw that I had marked myself as a dummy.

Having been to camp before, the other campers knew which bunk bed to pick to be near their friends and for convenience. The counselors gave us lots of information, including that the latrines were down the hill. We were warned, “Look out for daddy longlegs!”

That first night, after waiting as long as possible before going to the latrine, I carefully went down the hill. My flashlight hardly lit anything. Once in the stall, as I latched the door, I looked up to see a giant spider clinging to the inside of the door. Terrified, as I jumped up and ran out and then up the hill, I peed on myself. I never again went to the latrine at night.

Camp life was boring and lonely. I hated walking in the woods while on the lookout for chiggers and poison ivy. The food, consisting of powdered eggs and powdered milk, was awful.

Swim time was interrupted every five minutes for “safety checks.” This meant that we had to stop and hold up our partner’s hands to prove that no one had drowned.

The worst part of camp life was that I didn’t have a friend and couldn’t make one. The other campers knew each other, but nobody knew me. I felt like an alien when walking to the cabin, pool, and other activities by myself.

Then there was the daily “mail call.” I never received a letter, but I didn’t expect one either. Even if Dad knew that parents were supposed to write letters, I knew that he couldn’t do so.

On the second-to-last day of camp, we had the much-

talked-about “overnight in the woods.” It had rained earlier that day. After hiking through the wet woods, we finally reached the spot where we would pitch our tents. We were hungry as bears, but had to cook supper. But the twigs were wet, so sparks from the flintstone were useless. Finally, somebody brought out some Crisco (cooking oil) to boil, and the potatoes were never fully fried. The hot dogs too were half-cooked and fell off their sticks into the ashes. But we wiped off the ashes and ate them with the partly raw potatoes.

After roasting s’mores, I was completely worn out and gladly went to our tent. I fell instantly asleep on my pallet. The next morning, when I woke up, I realized that I couldn’t see. Terrified, I ran out of my tent screaming, “I’m blind!” But I wasn’t blind. My eyelids were swollen from mosquito bites. If the previous two weeks hadn’t been bad enough, now I knew for sure that I would never come to this place again.

When I came home and opened my suitcase, it reeked of urine. *Mutti* was shocked as I pulled out the sheets. “What happened?” she shrieked.

“Daddy longlegs!” I said. My face was hot and red. *Mutti* had no idea what I was talking about.

Linda

I wanted friends, but didn’t know how to get a friend or what friends did. Sometimes, when I tried talking to a kid, I thought that I had made a friend. But the next day, the kid walked right by me.

One day, without my even trying, Linda Welch, a girl who lived down the street, became my friend. We were the same age, but went to different schools, so didn’t really know each other.

But on this day, I was on my porch, and she walked by, looked up, and smiled. I smiled back and said, “Hi.”

After that, we started meeting at the park, on my stoop or at her house. Once I was invited in. Her mother was in the front room with a Chesterfield cigarette between her fingers. She looked neat and tidy like mothers on TV.

One afternoon, while we were sitting on my front stoop,

Linda said that she was hungry and stood up. Not wanting her to go home, I asked if she wanted rye bread and whipped butter. She had never eaten them, but nodded and went inside.

Mutti came into the kitchen, she saw Linda eating and became infuriated. So Linda and I left immediately. Knowing that parents were unreasonable, she didn't hold it against me.

School Books

When I started ninth grade at Parkland Junior High School, a teacher told us students that Louisville schools didn't give out books past eighth grade. We would have to buy them. Knowing that this would be a problem, I dreaded telling Dad. But I needed books for social studies, science, and English classes.

I figured that the best time to ask him was right after the TV news ended at 7 PM. This was when he smoked his last Camel cigarette. I sat at the end of his bed and we often talked. Sometimes it was about his job or chores he wanted me to do. Once he gave me advice about my future. "You speak German," he said, "so you should go into the import-export business." I had no idea what that was.

Finally, when I got around to the books, he immediately shook his head. "I don't have the money," he said. Then he pulled up the cover, turned on his side, and told me to turn off the light.

During those first few days without books, I used a teacher's copy or shared another kid's book and followed along the best I could. Then Dottie, a girl in my homeroom, followed me to my desk. I knew little about her except that she didn't like school and had been held back for two grades. "It didn't matter," she said, because she planned to quit when she turned 16.

The next day, as I walked across the playground, I was embarrassed about not having books, but I felt that I had to tell somebody. I didn't think that Dottie would judge me because she looked like she had experienced rough times in her life. Dottie said, "I'll help you," but I didn't know what she could do.

The following day, as we were walking together across the playground, she stopped, pulled off her backpack, and handed me three books. I asked, "Where did you get them?" "Stole 'em," she said.

A teacher told us students that Louisville schools didn't give out books past eighth grade. We would have to buy them.

I didn't say anything else.

That evening, when I told Dad that somebody had given me the books, he asked, "Who?" I said, "A girl at school." "That's good," he said. "Now turn off the light."

After a while, I didn't see Dottie any more, and I wondered if she had changed schools or dropped out. But I never asked anybody.

Door-to-Door Sales

Growing up, I carried around a deep pit of shame. We wanted to be as American as possible. This was a time when many door-to-door salesmen came around, and we wanted to be welcoming to them.

For our first purchase, Dad bought a set of Collier's encyclopedias on a monthly installment plan. The books were lined up in the wooden bookcase that came with the books. Yearly books were also available, but Dad never went along with that extra cost.

The salesman used the pitch that kids who had these books did much better in school. This may have been true, but we would never know because Dad didn't want our grubby hands dirtying his encyclopedias. It was a while before I realized that he had bought them for himself. He liked to settle down in an easy chair, read, and fill up an ashtray with cigarette butts while sipping beer.

The next door-to-door salesman sold aluminum siding. After living in our house for a few years, the wood on the outside was still in good shape but needed painting. The siding salesman said that his cladding would do away with the need to ever paint again. Also, because of durability, his siding would make the house more

valuable.

To seal the deal, the salesman made a special pitch. Because our house was located on a very visible corner, people from all directions could see the cladding. This would be a powerful advertisement for his product. When Dad heard about receiving a special discount, he was convinced.

It turned out to be the ugliest cladding ever made and an embarrassment from day one. I never saw or heard of it being used anywhere else. Later, my father found out that it was mostly used on dilapidated houses as a last resort to cover up rotted siding.

The last sales pitch that my parents fell for was to host a house party to sell heavy, aluminum, waterless cookware. It was supposed to keep vitamins in the food that would otherwise be washed away. My parents had never shown any interest in vitamins, but *Mutti* was hooked.

The salesman would bring everything to cook dinner in our kitchen and clean up afterward. For her trouble, my mother would get a set of knives. If enough pots were sold, she would get a free one.

But *Mutti* hardly knew any neighbors, so who would she ask? But I got around in the neighborhood and knew some old people who helped me with gardening, so I would do the inviting. But the neighbors would have to bring their own plates and silverware because we had no extras.

It being summertime, it was very hot, so the neighbors gathered on our porch. They were desperately fanning themselves, waiting much too long for the meal to be served. When the salesman came out on the porch to give his pitch, somebody asked about prices. His answer caused a hush to settle over the group. I don't know if any guest bought a pot, but *Mutti* was happy to receive a knife set and a waterless pot, which, I think, Dad bought for her.

High School

When it came time to decide on a high school, there wasn't anybody to ask for advice. Dad and *Mutti* didn't know anything about high school, and we didn't have school counselors who offered help selecting a school. In our school, counselors were for kids who

got into trouble at school.

Most kids from my school, Parkland Junior High, went to Shawnee High, which was the local mandatory school. But I was lucky. Louisville Male High School, a downtown college preparatory school, had started accepting girls a few years earlier, so I chose it over Dupont Manual Boys School.

Because I worked after school in the flight kitchen at Standiford Field Airport, which is now known as Louisville Muhammed Ali International Airport, I couldn't be much involved in the life of Louisville Male High. I knew only a handful of kids from my classes on a very casual basis. I didn't belong to any clubs, play sports or go to my school's sporting events.

The one exception was my brief interest in the debate club. In my senior year, though I knew nothing about debate, I joined on a whim. I knew that the teacher had been dragged into this activity, and he recruited whomever he could get. With little instruction or practice, we entered our one and only debate. Woefully unprepared, we lost badly.

I liked German class, but it was hard to like my teacher, Mr. König (King), who was a cold man. Soon I understood why. He was confined to a wheelchair, and I found out later that his son was not well. So I tried hard to do well in his class and show him that his efforts were not in vain. I also wanted to impress him.

Dad wondered if I was capable of doing college-level work and, frankly, I wanted him to hear that I could from a trusted source. When Dad and I talked, I brought up Mr. König, knowing that he would greatly respect the German teacher. Sure enough, Dad felt that he could relate to him and even talk to him in German. Dad made an appointment to see him about my future. He asked, "How do you think Evaline will do in college?" I sat back.

Mr. König answered soberly, "If she studies very hard, then maybe she'll do OK." Not the ringing endorsement I was hoping for.

More about My Parents

In 1956, when a sophomore at Louisville Male High School, I was thinking mostly about myself and not much about my fam-

ily. *Mutti* was taking care of my sisters, Yeni and baby Eleanor, and the house and shopping. She also went on afternoon walks in the neighborhood.

But *Mutti* was angry a lot. When she blew up, she threatened to not come home from her walk. I thought that she meant it and was worried that she would leave us. I told Dad my fear, and he laughed and said that she wasn't going anywhere, and she didn't.

The highlight of her week was Friday night bingo at the nearby Honest Abe Hall. She had a favorite card marker and good luck charms, which she placed in a semicircle around her cards. Shouting "BINGO" was her greatest pleasure, and she also liked joking with the bingo people. If she won big, she took the money to a game at a Catholic church the next night and played until it ran out.

Dad went to work every weekday at 4 AM and never missed a day. After a few years, Mr. Fleischaker promoted him to assistant manager, though he still slaughtered steers and cut up meat. I was proud that Dad had an office job and was making more money.

Then he got a truck driver's license and filled in when the regular delivery driver didn't come in. These deliveries went to small grocery stores in towns around Louisville, such as Shelbyville, Bardstown, Elizabethtown, and Frankfort.

A couple of times Dad took me along on his route. There was nothing better than sitting in the cab and talking about school and his job, as we bounced along on the rough country roads. People liked him; he was polite and smiled a lot; and he was handsome.

The Family Falls Apart

Then came the worst day of our lives, when Dad told *Mutti* that he was moving out. Gruffly, he told her he was in love with another woman and was moving into her house.

Mutti had always feared that Dad would leave her, and now her fear had come to pass, a disaster for all of us. I loved Dad and knew how tough it was to live with *Mutti*. I wanted him to be happy, but this was not the way.

It didn't take long for this story to come out. This woman not only worked with him at Fleischaker, but lived in our neighbor-

hood. *Mutti*, blind with rage, screamed and cried without a letup. She proclaimed: “You don’t know what you’re doing!” “What about me, your wife, and your children?” “What will I do?” On and on it went.

Then *Mutti* learned that Dad had been lying to her for months. He had made up a story about going bowling with guys from work several nights a week. He even bought a bowling ball and bag to make his story look real.

Months before, when I first heard Dad’s story about going bowling, I was happy for him. Now he had friends. So American.

I didn’t blame Dad for wanting to get out of his marriage, but what would happen to us children? There was no way that *Mutti* could take care of the house or my sisters by herself. She knew it, and Dad knew it.

Then he laid out his plan. He didn’t want a divorce – just a separation. He would pay the bills and give *Mutti* her household money. But he was adamant about leaving. He wanted what he wanted, and that meant moving out.

Everything was so strange and confusing, it was as if we had been dropped into a twilight state. *Mutti* didn’t have friends to turn to and was too ashamed to turn to *Tanta* (Aunt) Augusta. Besides, what could they do?

Instead, *Mutti* turned to Boosie, Dad’s friend and our boarder. Boosie agreed that the situation was terrible, but he couldn’t talk Dad into coming home.

After work one day, when Dad was freshly shaved, nicely dressed, and smelling of lotion, he picked up Yeni and drove her to his new home. Yeni later reported to *Mutti* that Dad’s lady friend

Months before, when I first heard Dad’s story about going bowling, I was happy for him. Now he had friends. So American.

cooked dinner and was very nice. After dinner, the three of them went to Fountain Ferry Park, a big amusement park, where they had a wonderful time.

Yeni remembered the lady friend's address, 3412 Larkwood Street. So the next day, with *Mutti* pushing Eleanor's stroller, the three went to see Dad's new home. After standing quietly in front of the small, shotgun-style house, *Mutti* turned and walked away.

Days later, when Dad came by to drop off the household money, he told *Mutti* angrily that she was making a spectacle of herself and not to ever go to the house again. She shot back and wouldn't stop, proclaiming, "He was still her husband, the children's father, and she had a right to go where she wanted, and he couldn't stop her."

Dad had been gone several months when Mrs. Chloe Baker, the Christian missionary I previously mentioned, called to invite us to her house for dinner. We had been seeing much less of her, though she never lost her zeal to convert us to Jesus. On hearing Mrs. Baker's voice, *Mutti* broke down and sobbed. She told Mrs. Baker about Dad leaving the family. *Mutti* begged Mrs. Baker to persuade Dad to come home.

Mrs. Baker always favored Dad and thought the world of him. But she also knew that he was doing wrong. She decided that something drastic had to be done.

Without flinching, Mrs. Baker got in touch with a lawyer, who was a member of her fundamentalist church. Having admired Mrs. Baker's tireless missionary work in Israel and America, he said that, as a favor, he would help.

After meeting with the lawyer, Mrs. Baker asked Dad to come to her house. The fact that he went shows Mrs. Baker's forcefulness. She then laid out a plan that the lawyer would put in action. First, the lawyer would file for divorce on *Mutti's* behalf. Second, he would sue Dad's lady friend for "alienation of affection," which, in those days, was a real thing.

The lawyer would also make the case that *Mutti* had never worked, had no skills, and had young children at home. Therefore, Dad should pay full alimony and child support.

The lawyer would ask for a trial, and Dad would have to hire his own lawyer. Mrs. Baker, using hardball tactics, assured Dad that after she was done with him, he and his lady friend would have nothing left. Alternatively, Dad could come home.

It didn't take long for Dad to return home. He sacrificed his happiness to take care of his family. I was grateful to Mrs. Baker's counseling, but also always respected Dad for doing the right thing – even though it cost him so much.

Sooner rather than later, this whole sad episode was buried and never talked about again.

College

When I graduated from Louisville Male High School in 1960, there was no more guidance about college than there had been three years earlier for selecting a high school. I figured my most sensible option was to go the University of Louisville. It was a small, undistinguished city college, but it was affordable and accessible. I had no career in mind, but knew that a liberal education would give me a chance to see what I could do.

I could also continue living at home, pay *Mutti* rent, and drive to school in my old Plymouth. I also would have walking-around-money from my waitress job in the executive dining room at Standiford Field Airport. So off to the university I went.

author with her daughter, Lisa Davis,
at exhibition





Bob and Warren in their office

Ninety-five Years Old and Still Learning

Warren B. Galkin



This is the second part of Warren's autobiography. The first, focusing on his upbringing and early education, appeared in our previous issue.

As Warren explained toward the end of his second amazing article, his health seriously declined in January of this year. Although forced to move to the assisted care unit of his retirement community, the Village at Waterman Lake, in Greenville, Rhode Island, he was able to complete this article within a month.

As with his previous article, Warren received extensive encouragement and assistance from his dear friend, Dr. Nancy Munzert Carriuolo, a former president of Rhode Island College and an author of two articles in our journal. She has become my dear friend too. Nancy and her family now live in Wilmington, North Carolina. Warren was also assisted by his dear nieces, Ellen Kenner, Jane Litner, and Debby Krim, and some other loving relatives.

Sadly, having passed away on May 1 of this year, Warren was unable to see his second article's final draft. Nancy and I have made every effort to preserve its integrity, drama, and joy.

Unfortunately, I never met this distinguished but modest Rhode Islander. I had enjoyed learning so much about him. The next time I go windsurfing, however, I will be thinking of Warren.



Bob & Warren

Education is important because we spend much of our lives living between our ears. As a Jew, I have always been part of a long tradition of valuing education. In the ghettos, Jews learned that everything material could be taken from them, but not their educations, so an important part of the Jewish culture is to value and promote education among its people. I have been a lifelong learner throughout my 95 years, and I credit the Jewish culture.

Graduate School

If a college student were to ask me how to get the most benefit out of the small fortune his parents were spending on his education, I would say: decide what your ultimate goals in life are and then decide how education can give you the required tools to reach those goals. Fortunately, I did not follow my own advice.

Instead, I made excellent choices but for all of the wrong reasons. In high school, I was always near the top in any science class, so I majored in physics, dreaming of a Nobel Prize. At Brown (Class of 1951, Sc.B., physics), I soon realized that there were many students doing much better than I was with much less effort. Clearly, Warren Galkin was not going to join the ranks of top physicists of all time, a list that includes many Jews and is headed by two Jews, Albert Einstein (first) and Richard Feynman (third). Consequently, I decided to attend University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School and major in business, something practical since I was expected to join Natco, our family's manufacturing business based in Rhode Island.

At Wharton (Class of 1953, M.B.A.), I thought I would be behind other students who had majored in business as undergrads. I was wrong again. Most of the other students were engineers. The method of teaching involved case studies, which was the same problem-solving technique that I had been taught in physics, so I actually had a leg up.

Penn's Wharton School of Business was an innovative institution in the 1950s. Although I was only a graduate student, I had an opportunity to be involved in the development of early computers. I joined the computer club, and we did menial work on a computer that followed the original ENIAC, the first general purpose electronic

computer. ENIAC had been funded by the Army at Penn in 1943 for a variety of defense purposes.

More importantly, while I was at Wharton, the Army sent a dozen Japanese bankers to study American banking systems. During World War II, nobody liked the Japanese, so I had no interest in having Japanese friends, but I sat next to one, Quesabero Toyohara, in an economics class. The professor was explaining something I had not understood in the text. When I told the professor that I did not understand, he simply restated the text's explanation very slowly. This time it just took me longer to realize that I still did not understand. At the end of the class, Quesabero asked if I understood. When I shook my head, he gave me a clear explanation and that led to our friendship.

In Philly, I lived at 246 South 39th Street, right around the corner from an international house operated by Quakers for foreign students. A dozen Japanese graduate students lived there, including my friend Quesabero. On the one-year anniversary of Quesabero's absence from his wife – their first separation since World War II – he was clearly sad and lonely for her. There was not much I could do, but I bought Japanese food and a bottle of sake, and we toasted Mrs. Toyohara. He appreciated my recognition of his distress and my meager effort to help. His wife later sent Japanese delicacies that he shared with me, and I developed a lifelong taste for Japanese food.

I never tried to cook Japanese food, however. My roommate cleaned, and I did basic American subsistence cooking. My mother, though, had taught me how to bake a cake and do some Jewish cooking. When my roommate invited two commanders to dinner while their wives were away at a conference, I remembered my mother's kitchen, and I thought I knew just what to make for these special guests. I went to a Jewish deli and bought the ingredients for my favorite meal: beef tongue in raisin sauce.

Neither my roommate nor his guests were very happy at the prospect of eating tongue. I could see their faces drop when they looked at the meal I had proudly prepared. However, they cleaned their plates. When the commanders' wives returned, they called and asked for my recipe, so I guess my meal tasted just fine after all.

Aside from special occasions, such as the dinner with the commanders, I spent most of my time at Penn with my Japanese friends, and I learned some Japanese. I also came to appreciate their culture. Although I did not think deeply about it, at some level I realized that I was initially prejudiced against the Japanese, just as some Americans were prejudiced against Jews. I had experienced prejudice and knew how unfair it was. Quesabero introduced me to all his friends, and I came to value my friendship with the Japanese graduate students, something that helped me later.

Military Service

Since World War II had ended, my parents agreed to a minority hitch in the Navy when I was just 17 (July 2, 1946). I rose to Seaman First Class and served in the Reserves until I was 21 and a senior at Brown. While I was studying at Wharton, the Korean War was raging (June 1950 to July 1953). My draft number was coming up, and my draft board said that if I stayed on at Penn and earned a Ph.D., they would give me an exemption, but I had already been accepted in spring 1953 for Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Newport.

So I was faced with a problem: I would need to be in the Navy before my number came up or be drafted into the Army. I went to the Naval Officer for Procurement in Boston, and since my draft number was coming up on the upcoming Monday, the officer told me to report to OCS on the preceding Sunday.

I earned my commission as an ensign in 1954. On my first day of active duty, though, I got an armed escort to the brig in Newport. When I checked in at OCS, no one was expecting me, so the officer of the day took all my ID cards, put them into an envelope and told me to come by on Monday morning for processing. In the meantime, he told me to report to the barracks for a bunk assignment and directed me to have supper in the mess hall.

As soon as I got into the line, however, the orderly looked at my civies and asked to see my pass. Of course, I did not have a pass or any ID, so he called the provost marshal at the brig, who told him to feed me, but not let me get away. After supper, armed shore

patrol officers packing pistols marched me to a paddy wagon and took me to the Provost officer at the brig. The Watch Head at the Procurement Office in Boston had changed but eventually my story was verified. Nevertheless, I always remembered that on my first day of active duty, the Navy made it clear they never wanted to see me in the brig again.

After officer training, I was sent to Charleston, South Carolina. The Charleston Naval Shipyard was assigned responsibility for converting two destroyer mine sweepers to marine self-defense ships to become part of the Japanese coast guard. My first assignment was to assist Lieutenant Commander Robert Epps.

After World War II, no one wanted to work with the Japanese and give them two good ships, so the lieutenant commander asked to be transferred. There was no one else willing to do the assignment because everyone anticipated more fighting than cooperation between the American and Japanese. So I was the green ensign, just out of OCS, who was assigned this major job.

The Japanese engineering officers, Captain Minoru Yasunaga and Commander Nobuoshi Ohara, had been senior officers during the war, and when I met them on a ship's gangplank, they looked surprised and annoyed. Japanese usually do not show emotions, but they took it as a slap in the face that they were being told to work with an ensign, the lowest ranked officer.

When I started to tour their ship, I stepped back, bowed, and said, "After you please" in Japanese, and ushered them in before me. It was the first respect they had seen. Unfortunately, I could barely understand their rapid-fire response. Luckily, though, I remembered enough to say in Japanese: "I am very sorry, but I do not speak fluent Japanese." The fact that I had tried, though, meant a great deal to them.

American Jews and Japanese were often treated as outsiders, but in this case, we had good reason to bond and become lifelong friends. The Japanese wanted excellent ships. Nobuoshi Ohara said he had experience in Japan as a ship's superintendent, but he needed to learn as much as he could about American shipyards.

My charge was to get the ships ready on time and on bud-

get. Nobuoshi knew what had to be done, and if I worked with him, he promised to teach me how to be a good ship's superintendent. He could go anywhere as my guest in the shipyard, so by working together, we both benefitted.

Having made friends with Japanese citizens at Wharton made me the one officer in the yard who could get the assignment done with a minimum of conflict. Once again, I had unwittingly made a very important decision that had benefits I never could have anticipated.

After the ships were ready, I was responsible for organizing their formal transfer to the Japanese on October 19, 1954. As part of an office that managed the Fifth Naval District and supervised ship building, I had moved on to Baltimore. So many of us were Jews in the office that we joked that if America ever went to war with Israel, our office would need to close. This active duty in Baltimore concluded my obligation of three-and-a-half years of active duty in the Navy.

Warren (in naval uniform)
at Greenville



I continued, though, to see my Japanese friends over the years in Tokyo and also in Newport, where I would own a condo on Goat Island and the Black Ships Festival takes place. In 2002, Minoru passed away, and in recent years I have lost touch with my other friends, but I still enjoy speaking a little Japanese when I patronize Yamato Hibachi and Sushi in Smithfield, near where I now live.

Having remained active in the Rhode Island Naval Reserves, I retired as a Lieutenant Commander after 22 years. I lived, traveled, and played on the ocean all of my life, so the Navy was a natural choice of armed services for me.

My enjoyment continued in the Reserves because of my relationship with people I had known when I was on active duty and because I was given challenging assignments. For example, through the Navy Research Lab, I was able to collaborate with NASA on building a better space satellite. I enjoyed every minute of my twenty-two years in the Reserves and was able to serve without disrupting my work at Natco.

My Role in the Family Business

During the mid-1950s, once I completed my obligatory active duty in the Navy, I was free to join the family business. Natco had been founded in 1917 by my father, Arthur Galkin, in a mill building in Arctic, Rhode Island. Nevertheless, few Rhode Islanders have heard of this longstanding business, whose head offices are still in West Warwick but with manufacturing at additional locations in the U.S. and overseas.

Natco's home goods have included vinyl floor coverings and such textiles as drapes, bed covers, pillows and rugs. Additional products have included lawn and garden items that have been sold at such businesses as Walmart and JCPenney, but under various trade names (not a Natco label). Because Natco has traditionally kept a low profile, many Rhode Islanders own its household goods but do not know it.

Since Jews have periodically lost all their material goods and needed to start anew, the Jewish culture has fostered a belief that something can be made from seemingly nothing. My father, Arthur

Galkin, started out in the junk business, and our family has always tried to turn what other people considered waste into good products.

During World War II, my brother, Bob, bought roofing waste, and we turned it into stair treads, which were packaged and sold in chain stores like Home Depot. After the war, Bob realized that linoleum and vinyl were additional waste products that could be put to good use. We could make more money than such commercial floor companies as Armstrong because we paid by the pound for waste from main flooring mills. Truck beds were located at each of the major mills, and when a truck bed was filled with waste pieces, a tractor hauled it to us. So we gained usable materials.

When I entered Natco's bag division as a production manager fresh out of my military service, the conversion of such waste is where I had an opportunity to use my knowledge of physics and machinery. I installed production and cost accounting systems and designed automated systems.

My first innovation addressed a contract with Pan American Airlines to produce flight bags, a business in which we competed all over the globe. One machine had been making single bags. These goods, which went to the cutting department, were then made into sheets and stacked. Next, in the screen-printing department, each piece (after being precisely positioned) was put on racks manually to dry overnight.

My machine was automated. The process was faster with virtually no waste. In fact, the new machine saved six percent of materials. The machine was also more accurate than a man, so only two operators were needed: one to run the printer and the other to remove the finished goods. These two people replaced both the cutting and screen-printing departments. During the late 1950s and early '60s, although we competed internationally, we seldom failed to win a contract with Pan Am.

I then became plant manager and designed automated equipment for the mat division. We had been using three inefficient machines to create floor mats from large 6' x 9' or 9' x 12' rolls. One person ran the cutting machine, while four other men stood behind the machine and walked backwards to lay the mats on the floor.

Walking between the loose piles of mats was uncomfortable and dangerous, so the workers did not like the job. They quit frequently and needed to be replaced.

I designed a single machine that could do the work of these three machines and fourteen men. All that was needed was a man to operate the machine by pushing buttons. Vacuum cups picked up the goods and delivered them to the far end of the machine as fast as the cutter could feed them. While the cutter was cutting one piece, the next piece was picked up and ready, so one machine with a single operator was putting out more production than three machines and twelve walkers. We even had a spare machine to handle current needs and, if needed, future needs. The new machines lit a fire under Bob, Natco's excellent salesman, to seek out even more business.

I was a little too introverted to be the great salesman my older brother was, but in addition to designing and building machinery, I found a niche in dealing with unions. That is where my graduate degree from the Wharton School was invaluable: I had learned how to work with people and negotiate.

The union came into the company shortly after I joined the company. I negotiated every contract after the first one. We never had a strike, and we never had a grievance that was not settled at the shop level. Some of the jobs we eliminated were unpopular anyway, and we always found other jobs for the employees to do that were better than those they left.

Of course, popular jobs were harder to eliminate. Piecework jobs were a favorite in the shop because the workers could earn quite a bit more money if they worked hard. For example, the machine that cut vinyl for rolls in the old procedure dropped the sheets on the floor, and the heavy sheets had to be picked up from the floor and carried. My new machine left the sheets on the top of the table at a convenient level, but the workers were still paid the same piece rates, so management and employees benefited. I also set up production controls and, as time went on, I maintained these systems.

My brother and I continued to go to the office throughout our eighties, but when Bob's son-in-law, Michael Litner, took over as president and CEO in 1979, Bob became chair, and I became vice

chair of the board. So our responsibilities eased up considerably.

Now Michael's son, David, is working for the company and preparing to take over as the fourth-generation president and CEO when his father retires. I am hopeful that someday David's children will succeed him, and the family business will stay intact for many years to come.

Family

Life cannot be all work and no play, and I have had plenty of play – most of it with family. Jews have long had to band together and support each other dating back to the European ghettos. I have benefitted greatly from that culture of togetherness and support.

I had a failed first marriage to Renee, an Israeli citizen, whose parents and she had settled in Israel to escape the war in Romania. We met and married in the United States and traveled throughout Israel, Rome, and Paris with her parents. However, in a few short years, I realized that she loved my bank account more than me.

When that marriage failed, I lived for a time with Brother Bob and his wife, Wini Blacher Galkin, and their three young daughters. Fortunately, my second marriage to another Jewish woman, Joyce Brier (Wini's widowed stepsister) was long-lasting and full of love.

Joyce and I had first met on a family trip in 1948. We did not get together, though, and marry until the spring of 1976, when the time was right. We moved into my modest home in Warwick, which was large enough for us to enjoy and take care of. We did not have any children together, but I helped raise Joyce's two children.

Thanks to Bob, his three daughters, and their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, including spouses, we have a robust family. Bob and Wini had begun an annual, extended family trip years ago. Most recently, in November 2024, all 39 of us cruised the Caribbean together.

Although the tradition of annual cruises had begun with our father, I began taking the whole family on ski trips. When a family member married a young Italian woman, her family held a recep-



Joyce & Warren

tion in Naples in March. Most of my ski group attended, so about two dozen of us took a train from Naples to Rome and then a sleeper train to Zell am See, Austria, a mountainous area surrounding a large lake. We skied the day we arrived all around the lake and then in the mountains. It was one of our most memorable family trips.

Annually, the family also went to New Hampshire's Loon Mountain, the closest major ski area to Rhode Island. I skied down a rip saw, a double-black diamond, which I did not know until we finished. Such runs are the most challenging and advanced in skiing. Being well into my eighties, I was glad that I started the run ignorant of its difficulty.

During my eighties, I also enjoyed windsurfing in Newport. I had taken up this sport on my honeymoon with Joyce.

My family has always embraced the idea that money should be used but not wasted. My honeymoon was no exception. I had won a prize at a convention of the American Society of Travel Agents, with one week at a hotel in Guadalupe and a second week at a hotel in Martinique. So I used the prize as our honeymoon destinations.

In Guadalupe, a teacher of windsurfing did not speak English, and neither Joyce nor I could understand his French. So I watched and essentially taught myself. This was the inauspicious start to my 43 years of windsurfing and a very happy marriage.

Joyce and I continued to travel to destinations in Europe

and Asia. We especially enjoyed Lake Constance, which touches France, Germany, and a bit of Austria. Ferries travel out to islands in the lake. The area is beautiful and charming.

I have maintained a lifelong interest in travel to Israel. I had taken a cruise to Israel when I first joined Natco, and I traveled there again with my first wife. More recently, Joyce and I joined Bob and Wini on a couple of Mediterranean cruises that included Israel. The ingenuity and hard work that are so evident in Jewish culture have made Israel not just a political hotbed, but also a hotbed of economic prosperity.

When at home in Rhode Island, Joyce gardened in our greenhouse, and we both enjoyed music. I was intrigued by organ kits and built five organs. I was not musically talented, but since we kept two (three-keyboard) organs in the basement of our home, we decided to take lessons. Broadway shows were our favorite music, and we sometimes played duets.

We also enjoyed supporting the Boys & Girls Club of Warwick in various ways, especially the annual silent auctions. We donated Natco products, and I delighted in outbidding others for an apple pie that usually brought around \$1,000. Newcomers to the auction did not know that part of the fun was outbidding me for that seemingly ordinary apple pie. They watched in amazement as the price of the apple pie continued to rise. I was the first Club member to be inducted into its Hall of Fame, an honor I gladly accepted.

I credit Joyce's kind and generous nature with much of our involvement with other Rhode Island organizations. For example, we also supported physics and brain science fellowships at Brown University and a scholarship for the Spanish department at the Community Preparatory School in Providence. Perhaps one of those bright young students will win a Nobel Prize, something I could never do. We also supported the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, the Aviation Hall of Fame, and the Japan-America Society and its Black Ships Festival of Rhode Island.

I was also honored by several Rhode Island organizations. I received the Common Cause Distinguished Service Award and, with Brother Bob, was awarded an honorary doctorate by New England

Institute of Technology (NEIT). We met another honorary degree recipient, David Ortiz, who is better known as “Big Papi.” Also in 2017, in keeping with our closeness as a family, Bob, Wini, and I were inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame.

As a member of Brown’s Class of 1951, I was honored to serve as a class marshal at three graduations: 1991, 2001, and 2011. In the last, I was especially honored to serve as the alumni marshal-aide in charge of Ruth Simmons’ presidential party. After marching down College Hill, I returned up the steep hill with the president’s group. No doubt because of my age (82 at the time), a woman was assigned to carry a water bottle and monitor my progress up the hill. I was proud that she grew weary, but I made it up the hill just fine.

Much of the pleasure in my life has revolved around staying active. During the 1990s, Bob and I were among the first to buy condos

on Newport’s Goat Island in Newport. Both of us bought two condos in the same building to be sure that our families could enjoy visits.

I was able to windsurf right outside my front door. Although not particularly interested in team sports, I had great balance right into my eighties. So I loved to ski in the winter and windsurf in the summer. Being active all year is one of the ingredients for a long life.

Warren windsurfing



Changes in My Active Life

Except for our family's annual cruise, my active lifestyle slowed way down when Joyce developed dementia. Several years later, she passed away on June 7, 2019 at the age of 86.

Then I concentrated on my other lifelong interests: reading and writing. I particularly enjoy reading science, current events, and political commentary, and engaging in conversation on those topics. Most recently, in addition to writing the first part of my autobiography for this fine journal, I have also published "Gaza: Trouble Spot or Peace Beacon" as a guest columnist for *The Providence Journal* (February 25, 2024). Still another article was "Two Destroyers for Postwar Japan," which I wrote for the U.S. Naval Institute's magazine, *Proceedings* (volume 150, number 11).

I also write poems (rhyming couplets sounds too serious) for family occasions, and one of my nieces, Debby Krim, has picked up the tradition. The poem that I wrote and recited at Brother Bob's memorial luncheon at the Crowne Plaza in 2022 went like this:

Bob

*When they assembled my brother Bob,
An absent-minded engineer was assigned to do the job.
While each part was perfect from his front unto his rear,
When he had them all assembled, he had left out one switch and one
small gear.
Then they took him for a test ride, and the driver said, "Go slow,"
But he double clutched right into high and would never shift to low.
Then they sent him for a check-up to a famous body shop,
Where even great Greg Granatelli, said, "This case I'll have to drop"
For there is no low gear in his transmission, nor an ignition switch
to stop.*

Bob and I are like two parts of a whole. Our desks were pushed together so that we could face each other: two parts of a whole.

My Nineties

Not surprisingly, during my early nineties, I was ready to leave the home Joyce and I had shared in a modest neighborhood in Warwick. I gifted my home and contents as well as my car to Maria Timas, our longtime housekeeper. That may sound very generous, but I was really just escaping the problem of dealing with 95 years of collected memorabilia, books, photos, and so on. When I handed over the keys, I was done downsizing.

In September of 2022, I settled into a small apartment with other elderly folks at the Village at Waterman Lake in Greenville, Rhode Island. I chose the apartment farthest from the dining hall so that I would need to take a long walk at least three times a day if I wanted to eat, another of life's pleasures. The dining room has excellent choices, but it does not serve my favorite dish, beef tongue, or other Jewish specialties that I learned to love in my mother's kitchen.

Fortunately, another of my favorite foods, chocolate, is readily available. Every morning I drink chocolate milk with my pills, and after every lunch and dinner I eat chocolate ice cream. Family members bring me boxes of chocolates, and a friend recently brought me a memorable chocolate babka from NAVAD Bakers in East Providence. (This word means "nomad" in Hebrew.) Although chocolate has been found to have health benefits, I am not sure a nutritionist would recommend quite so much chocolate for a long life, but it seems to have worked for me.

Then in January 2025, at the age of 95, I became ill. My three nieces, numerous grandnieces and grandnephews, as well as my former housekeeper, came together and moved me to the assisted care portion of the Village at Waterman Lake, where I now reside. Family has always been there whenever I needed them.

Conclusion

Talking about myself is my favorite subject, and the one subject on which I am a world expert. When I look back on my life as a whole, I can say that I am proud to be a lifelong Rhode Islander. I am equally proud to have been born a Jew and raised with Jewish values. I had become a bar mitzvah, but in middle school I began

reading science books and learning about the creation of the universe. Consequently, I was led to believe in science, not organized religion or the existence of a soul.

Nevertheless, having always embraced Jewish culture and heritage, I am proud of what Jews have accomplished and continue to contribute. I respect others' religious beliefs as long as they respect my disbelief. I attended, for example, a relative's wedding at the historic Touro Synagogue in Newport. In my dealings with others, whether or not they are Jewish, I have always consistently tried to be a mensch. I am also thankful for the opportunity to reflect on 95 years of a life lived well, at least from my perspective.

Warren, Bob, and family







Providence Art Club

Salutations

Michael Fink

What angers the author? Though we've been dear friends for two decades, I don't have the foggiest idea. Perhaps artifice, but it too may spark his bottomless curiosity.

Somehow, Mike is both an unconventional yet a profoundly spiritual Jew. Yes, he belongs to a congregation or perhaps one belongs to him. Presiding at a Passover seder, surrounded by loved ones, may be his favorite ritual. Another is summoning memories.

Mike has always loved learning, but he's not much concerned about academic boundaries or fashions. He loves to publish articles, as demonstrated by his dozens in our journal and in his ongoing column in *Jewish Rhode Island*, but he couldn't care less about rules or regimens. This is evident in his remarkable daily attire.

Beyond family and learning, perhaps Mike's greatest loyalty is to nature. This may have begun when his parents and siblings moved to the East Side, where their home was still surrounded by pockets of wilderness. But Mike's love of nature could have evolved even earlier, when, as a toddler, he lived across the street from Roger Williams Park. Of course, Williams has always been one of his heroes.

Mike and his wife, whom he calls "Lady Michael," still reside on Creston Way. One reason is its proximity to the monument to Count Rochambeau on nearby Summit Avenue. This landmark may have triggered Mike's evolution as a Francophile, but he became an Italophile too.

For decades, Mike and Michael have enjoyed a vacation home in South County. It was never intended primarily for vacations, however. Rather, it became a setting for further wonder, praise, and adoration.

Yes, Mike's articles have grown shorter, but his mind, heart, and spirit still carry extraordinary weight. It's his driving that worries many. And shouldn't he be eating more?

I would like to begin by saluting the sadly vanished and much missed Wayland Diner, where my friends and I often took our weekend communal coffee break, among the cafes on the Square. I grieve for the absence of the booths, where sugar was presented in a bowl with a lid. Milk or cream was brought to a table in a glass pitcher. The lady who served us was a regular, but she filled us in on where else she worked beyond the narrow confines of her admirable weekend routine.

To me, the Wayland Diner represented the last and best American custom of democratic egalitarianism, which brought me back to the values of my proud past. Once upon a time, a cup of coffee cost a dime, as in Barbara Stanwyck movies, in which she sat at a diner's counter.

As for other examples of modesty, I can recall that my grammar schoolteachers were by custom maiden aunts, who shared quarters with their relatives. These teachers also walked to the nearest public schools – before the bussing of pupils took over for “egalitarian” aims and purposes.

As for additional role models, my generation idealized the youthful soldiers whose families displayed flags and stickers in their windows to affirm the fact that a G.I. had been sent far away in the war-torn world of World War II. Once most of the soldiers came marching home again, I watched closely as our heroes sought – and found – the postwar values of the American dream.

My uncle, Herbert L. Fink, who had fought in the Battle of the Bulge, came home on crutches. I was a guest at his marriage to Olive Norton. She would have converted if a rabbi had been willing, but instead the ceremony was Christian. Their only surviving child identifies with both religions.

I kept a portrait of Olive, painted by Herbert, in my college room, but when he wanted it back, I delivered it. For years I sought it, but to no avail.

Herb's half-brother was Sam. During my boyhood, he too was my heroic guide. If and when their visits to their father coincided, they would bow to each other, which never failed to move me to tears.

Sam was married at the Narragansett Hotel, but later divorced. When Sam died, we held the mourning ceremonies at our house, where I continue to light his *yahrzeit* candles.

Uncle Herb reentered my life story when he suggested that I apply to teach English at RISD. That was more than 65 years ago! Eventually, I broke the record for the length of my faculty career!

During my college years at Yale, I learned the values of irony and paradox. They were expressed by my professor, Cleanth Brooks, as part of the “New Criticism.” With his Southern accent, he placed value in the phrase, “On the other hand.” Brooks quested for contradictions.

Among the Holocaust survivors and renowned Jewish figures whom I invited to address my RISD classes, I can include Isaac Bashevis Singer, Roman Vishniac, and Ruth Gruber. Art Spiegelman stands out because of his total lack of sentimentality! Far from idealizing his father, he accentuated his moral “failures.”

At RISD, I co-directed a documentary film about local Holocaust survivors with my colleague, Peter O’Neill. Among the survivors whom we interviewed were Alice and Ray Eichenbaum. We were astonished and impressed by their courage on multiple levels.

At commencement, Peter and I dined with the Eichenbaums. Alice admired my vest, which illustrated the use of mice as “Jews.” So, I took it off and gave it to her. Within a few days, she created a lovely vest and gave it to me.

It seemed to me that Spiegelman embodied the values of art that avoid easy and trite meanings. For me, art is not the search but the skill and the courage to tell and to draw.

My “politics” are totally pro-Zionist and pro-Israel, and my current enthusiasm and pride are for my brother Chick’s granddaughter, Julia. She lives and works in Tel Aviv, and I send my hopes and dreams for her success and happiness! My hopes and prayers are pledged to her future in the land of her quest.

י"ב
ISAAC LEVY

BORN

JAN. 6. 1845

DIED SEPT. 12. 1921

HIS WIFE

ANNA LEVY

NÉE SILVERMAN

BORN AUG. 15. 1848

DIED SEPT. 17. 1913

ה'תרע"ג

LEVY

MEMORY OF
BELOVED SON
AND BROTHER
NAME IS BETTER THAN
US. OINTMENT

MR. KENNETH
MAY 2
1870 -
FEBRUARY 28
1934



Rhode Island Roots: *My Family's Story*

Elizabeth Ann Kay

Stephen Kay, the author's first cousin, published an excerpt of his autobiography in our last year's issue. His father, Barney, and Liz's father, Milton, were not only brothers, but business partners. They had been born in Albany, married sisters from Newport, and eventually lived in Providence and then in greater Boston.

Liz has built an impressive career and carries deep friendships across decades. Since childhood, she has also found inspiration and strength through her connection to and love of the sea. This has become especially apparent through her home near Boston.

I am once again grateful to Steve and Liz's cousin, James Tobak, another member of the Levy and Engel clans, who is my dear friend and neighbor. He has shared many facets of his proud Newport heritage with me. Jimmy, who served as a RIJHA vice president in 2004, also wrote about his roots in our 2017 and 2022 issues. He introduced me to Cousin Steve, who, in turn, introduced me to Cousin Liz.

A Legacy Begins

Throughout my childhood, I heard stories about our family's roots in Newport and Providence. These stories stretched across oceans, through city streets, and into summer afternoons on the warm sands of Middletown's Third Beach.

Our family's American journey began with my great-grandparents, Abraham Kohn (1872-1932) and his wife, Elizabeth ("Bessie") Silverman Kohn (1874-1942), who emigrated from Ukraine during Russian pogroms. It seems likely that the Kohns lived in Slavuta, a town in western Ukraine on the Horyn River, because their eldest son, David, stated that this was his birthplace when he registered for the American draft in February 1942. Family lore also

Farewell Street Cemetery, Newport

has it that Abraham Kohn swam a river, reached a coast, and then sailed to America.

The 1910 federal census in Albany, New York shows that Abraham had emigrated in 1905 and was naturalized six years year. He worked as a peddler, hauling an “ash wagon.” It is quite possible but not entirely clear that Abraham later arranged for his wife, Bessie, and their three sons, David, Samuel, and Ruben, to emigrate.

After arriving at Ellis Island, the Kohns lived for three months above a grocery store on the Lower East Side. But after settling in Albany, the family continued to open their humble living space to newer immigrant families, as they had once been welcomed.

Living space became even more precious, for Bessie soon gave birth to three more sons: Bernard (“Barney”), Alexander (“Alec”), and Milton. The youngest, born in 1915, was my father. By 1918, near the end of World War I, David was serving as a private in the infantry.

Abraham opened a small grocery store, which he operated the rest of his life. By 1910, the Kohns were living at 281 Sherman Street. By 1930, according to the federal census, David, a shoe “merchant,” was living elsewhere with his wife and their two youngsters. Samuel also became the proprietor of a shoe store, where Ruben, Barney, and Alec worked as clerks. Bessie was still living on Sherman Street in 1940, two years before her passing.

Abraham and Bessie were buried at Ohav Shalom Cemetery in Guilderland, about 15 miles west of Albany. Their eldest son, David, would also be buried there in 1976, during the Bicentennial year.

At the time of Bessie’s passing in 1942, David and Ruben were still living in Albany; Samuel in Glens Falls, New York; and Alec was serving in the military at Ft. McClellan, Alabama. Barney and Milton were living in Newport.

A Love Story in Newport: The Levy and Engel Families

Meanwhile, my mother’s ancestors had emigrated from Germany before living in the Northeast. My great-grandfather, Isaac Levy (1845-1921), had lived with his family in York, Pennsylvania, and they eventually settled in Newport. Isaac’s son, Max (1870-

1941), married Irene Engel (1884-1963), who had grown up in New York City. My grandparents married in Newport, where they enjoyed a town rich with history and tradition. Nevertheless, her nickname became “Bub,” which was short for the Yiddish word, *Bubbe*.

Max Levy was known within our family as “The Judge.” He was Newport’s first Jewish judge (of Rhode Island’s district court), but also became a respected attorney and a city solicitor. Additionally, he served in the state legislature as a representative and a senator.

And perhaps as meaningfully, “The Judge” served as president of Congregation Jeshuat Israel, which was better known as “Touro.” Having become the seventh president after the congregation had reopened in 1883, he served four terms: 1908, 1915, 1916-20, and 1923-24.

But Max wasn’t our only ancestor who attained this honor. His father, Isaac, had been the first of the new presidents. Additionally, Max’s uncle, Julius Engel (1857-1927), served three terms: 1900–02, 1904–05, and 1906–08. Yes, our family’s involvement with Touro has been a proud tradition.

My grandparents, Max and Florence Levy, reared three children: Samuel Hillel (1908-1992), Florence Ruth (“Fof”) (1910-1987), and my mother, Anna Esther (1916-2008). The family lived at 32 Ayrault Street, just off of Broadway.

“The Judge,” who understood the importance of connections in Newport, enjoyed friendships with some key officials. For example, Mortimer Sullivan, who served as mayor from 1923 to 1935, lived next door to the Levys. He was also an admiral, so my grandparents spent time with him at the Newport Naval Base.

My grandmother, “Bub,” was also deeply engaged in political and social activities. She proudly became the first woman to serve on the state’s Republican Central Committee and later worked on William Henry Vanderbilt’s successful gubernatorial campaign. “Bub” had become one of Newport’s first women voters. Accordingly, we believe that she had also become one of the town’s first Jewish women voters.

When Brothers Marry Sisters

Two brothers, Barney and Milton Kohn, who had grown up in Albany, eventually made their way to Newport, where they changed their name to Kay. Soon Kay's-Newport, a women's shoe business, became known for its elegance and customer service. Eventually, the business expanded to include Sage Allen stores in Boston, Chicago, and New York City, but the Kay's stores in Newport's Bellevue Shopping Center and on the East Side's Wayland Square remained the crown jewels for decades. Indeed, the Rhode Island stores served loyal customers into the mid-1980s.

Barney and Milton didn't merely go into business together. They also married into the Levy family. Milton married my mother, Anna Levy, in 1939. That same year, Barney married Florence Levy Ball. Barney's young stepson, Stephen Ball Kay, who had lived briefly



with his mother in Newport, grew up in Providence. He continued his business and philanthropic careers in Boston.

“Brothers married sisters,” we say. This phrase only begins to describe the stories between business partners, siblings, and couples. Let your mind imagine the conversations.

The Kay’s-Newport stores were known for their beauty and personal touch. Each store was stylishly curated with architectural elements inspired by Newport’s historic mansions. These elements included grand fireplaces, wood paneling, and elegant seating. In fact, Milton and Barney purchased living room paneling and fireplaces from the old Vanderbilt estate as part of their stores’ interior designs.

My father, Milton, was famous for helping customers find the perfect fit, even stretching Italian leather shoes in the back room to ensure comfort and style, especially for his favorite and most discerning shoppers. After Dad’s passing in 1990, many wrote to us to share warm memories of his patience and charm.

My Siblings

I have three older siblings, all of whom were born in Providence. Martha Engel Mann, born in 1941, lived most of her adult years in Beverly, Massachusetts. Before passing away in 2022, she lived in Albuquerque, where her husband, Phillip, of 57 years, still resides. My brother, Philip Max Kay, born in 1945, lived in Beverly and Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts, before moving to Vail, Colorado. His daughter, Deborah Kay-Murphy, lives with her husband, Chris, and their young family in Seattle. My sister, Irene Florence Seff, who was born



**Kohn brothers and wives, Albany, ca. 1940:
Milton (third from left), Anna (far left),
Barney & Florence (far right)**

in 1946, lived with her husband, Eric J. Seff, in Mamaroneck, New York and later in Albuquerque. She now resides in Houston, nearer to her daughter, Rachel Seff Koenig. One of Rachel and Dave's two children is in high school, the other in college.

Having been born in 1956, I am nearly 16 years younger than Martha and a decade younger than Irene. As a result, my three siblings spent far more time together, sharing East Side friends and school experiences.

My memories of Newport and Middletown are more like mini-snapshots than entire photo albums. I easily recall summers spent at Mrs. Peabody's Beach, which is formally known as Third Beach. It had tiny white cabanas tucked at the bottom of the road.

Our family lived at 468 Wayland Avenue in Providence. In 1960, following the construction on the Massachusetts Turnpike, we moved to Newton to be closer to the expanding Kay's-Newport business. My father helped open many of the new stores in the area. At this time, Barney and "Fof" were also living and working in Boston.

Around 1970, again for our family's business needs, my parents and I moved to Pawtucket, just over Providence's East Side border. I entered West High School. My siblings were already enjoying college and building their own lives and families.

Our family belonged to Temple Beth-El, where I became a Confirmand. This was probably the first such class instructed by Rabbi Leslie Y. Gutterman.

I remember visiting Aunt "Fof" and Uncle Barney's charming home on the corner of Third Beach Road and Green End Avenue in Middletown. It stood behind a long gooseberry hedge. Beautiful, low fieldstone and slate walls, cleared from the land during colonial times, crisscrossed the property. At one corner of the property stood an old red schoolhouse, built in 1794, which lent a sense of history to the grounds. Beautifully restored in 2020, the schoolhouse became a charming private home.

Those Newport visits were full of laughter and long chats. My mother and "Fof" shared stories while I played.

Most of my summers were spent at Walt Whitman, a wonderful, coeducational camp in Piermont, New Hampshire.

Many Jewish families from around New England and New York sent children there.

Fortunately, Newport remained a permanent thread in our family story. My niece, Rachel Seff Koenig, who is my sister, Irene's, daughter, remembers dipping in and out of Narragansett Bay with her grandparents, cousins, and family friends- those gentle waters holding generations of joy.

Springtime Rituals: Planting for the Past

In 2001, my sister, Martha, and her husband, Phil Mann, invited me on a springtime, Saturday drive from Boston. After reaching Providence, we veered off I-95 and soon turned through the wrought iron gates of Temple Beth-El's cemetery.

There, beneath a large pine tree, was our family plot – marked with the double-handed symbol of the priestly blessing (*Birkat Kohanim*). The gravestones of Milton C. Kay (1913–1990), Barney L. Kay (1908–1996), and Florence L. Kay (1910–1987) rest side-by-side. A space remained for my mother, Anna, who passed away in January 2008, and is now buried next to my father. Two more lots remain.

Martha opened her trunk and pulled out trowels, a bucket of water, and colorful geraniums. After she and Phil had married in 1965, they began a ritual – cleaning our family's headstones and planting fresh geraniums each spring. That day, she handed me the trowel – passing the tradition on to me. We cleaned, we planted, we laughed, and we got sweaty and dirty. We also remembered and reflected. We placed small stones on the headstones, in keeping with Jewish tradition, and walked among the resting places of Providence friends and neighbors.

Later that day, we drove to Middletown and Newport, where we passed by “Fof” and Barney's old home, Third and Second Beaches, the old Kay's-Newport store, and eventually arrived at the Farewell Street Cemetery. There we honored more family. These included my Levy great-grandparents, Isaac and Anna; my Levy grandparents, Max and Irene, and their son Samuel; Max's uncle and aunts, Julius, Augusta, and Florence Engel; and my grandmother,

Augusta's nephew, Harold Werner, (1920-2008), who lived in Newport his entire life. His dear nephew, James Tobak, who grew up in Newport and lives in Providence with his dear wife, Jill, also became my friends and have joined me on later visits to Newport.

In front of each gravestone, we planted. Each memory was gently dusted off and made vibrant again. Stones and geraniums planted anew, left in memory. This annual tradition – a day's drive to both cemeteries to clean, plant, remember, and reflect – continues to this day.

Reflecting on My Life and Leadership

These day trips provide me with opportunities to look back on my life and sort out where and how I have acquired various responsibilities and honors. Given that my siblings were older and off creating their own families and livelihoods, I am distinctly aware that I grew up largely as an “only child.”

When my parents and I lived in Newton, my mother worked as the head of public relations at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. In 1971, when we moved back to Rhode Island, she held a similar position at Pawtucket Memorial Hospital.

I followed her lead, taking on professional positions in public relations, marketing, strategy, and business development. My organizations included: New England Aquarium, WBZ television's Evening Magazine, Westinghouse Broadcasting, and Northern Light Productions. In 2001, I shifted to the marketing agency side, serving at various Boston firms.

Ironically, when I had graduated from Northeastern University's School of Education, I was recognized with the Award for Professional Promise. I guess that it gave me the liberty to step out and lean in, lend my expertise, and build enterprise where I could.

Over the past 25 years, much of my career has been working in marketing agencies in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries, specifically those dealing with chronic and rare diseases. Thus, for nearly 20 years, I have also been fortunate to help expand the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association, a global leadership accelerator and talent pipeline. Having been a member of its Boston and



Cousins James Tobak, author, and
Stephen Kay at Touro Synagogue

national boards, I now serve as a member of its senior executive or Constellation League.

My Roots in the Sea

In 1976, given my strong and happy memories of those Middletown and Newport vistas and their strong pull towards the sea, I had joined Sea Education Association, an undergraduate, semester-long program in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. After studying ocean sciences, I sailed aboard a 125-foot research vessel, *Westward*, through the Caribbean and back to Woods Hole.

My ties to SEA became foundational to whom I am today. Having become the first alum appointed to its board of trustees, I later chaired the marketing committee. I have also built many strong friendships, which enabled me to weave together my love of the

marine environment and professional aspirations.

My first job was in education and my next in public relations at New England Aquarium. My later responsibilities included work on Boston's July 4th Harborfest, press relations for scientific research on the endangered North Atlantic's Right whale, and running some of the first whale watches from Boston to Cape Cod. I also worked with press crews that came to the aquarium from around the world.

Enamored by experiential education, I also worked at Boston Harbor's Thompson Island Environmental Education Center. A primary purpose was to bring kids together from distant neighborhoods to break down barriers and open minds. I later held a position on the Center's board of advisors for many years. Still later, with a group of dear friends, I helped create a women's sailing program for the Camden Yacht Club.

My Home

For 25 years, I have owned a home in the small town of Hull, a seven-mile peninsula located a ferry-ride east and south of downtown Boston. My bayside home overlooks World's End, in Hingham Harbor, a property of the Trustees of Reservations. Daily, I witness rising and falling tides, sea ducks, cormorants, and sometimes a harbor seal, an osprey or a bald eagle, which thrive within the 177 acres of wetland in Boston's outer harbor.

From home, while continuing my consulting business, I work with community members on land-use initiatives and master plans. I remain dedicated to coaching women to strengthen their self-confidence and advance their careers.

My Jewish Roots

In 1990, my family shared a Passover seder. My father, Milton, while seated at the head of the table, told the familiar stories, but emphasized "peace and love of family." At the end of the service, he handed his *Hagaddah* to my middle sister, Irene, who had been one of the original families to study and worship in their homes in Mamaroneck, New York.

A month later, my father passed away quietly from a heart attack. He left a hole in our family and its tradition of honoring our Jewish roots. As a result, Irene assumed the responsibility for pulling our family together and creating her own Kay Family *Hagaddah*. Although rich with tradition, it was also bound with our own family's stories.

In 2015, after my siblings moved west to Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico, a family gathering became less viable. In order to continue our Passover tradition, I decided to bring together 16 members of my extended family under my roof. These guests included my dearest friends from Sea Education Association and their kids, who are now dear godchildren.

Given my commitment to share stories and provide a listening ear, I have provided some prose and prayers beyond the Reform movement's *Hagaddah* and Irene's interpretation.

Touro Synagogue

Touro continues to hold meaning for our family. This is where my first cousin, Stephen Ball Kay, married his second wife, Nan Bennett, in 1984. My niece, Rachel Seff Koenig, who is my middle sister, Irene's, daughter, married David Koenig there in 2003. His father kept a boat in Newport Harbor, adding yet another thread to this important place.

Steve, a prominent businessman and philanthropist in Boston, made a generous donation to Touro in recognition of Moses Seixas, one of the congregation's early leaders. In August of 1790, Seixas had famously corresponded with President Washington about religious liberty. Today, the texts of the Seixas and Washington letters are engraved on twin granite pedestals within Touro's courtyard so that the words will live in perpetuity.

Recently, Steve, Rachel, and I worked with the Touro Synagogue Foundation to create educational signage for visitors and to help celebrate Seixas and Washington's vision of religious freedom. Our family names – Kay, Levy, and Werner – are also carved into bricks that line the pathways.

On a trip to Newport this past summer, Steve and I once

again visited Touro's courtyard. Having found the plaque showing the names of all past presidents, we were proud to see our own relatives' listed as well.

A Tulip Tree

When my father, Milton, passed away in 1990, we planted a tulip tree in his memory at Providence's Roger Williams Park. This had been one of his favorite places. With my older siblings and my cousin, Steve Kay, he would enjoy feeding the swans and walking the trails together. In 2008, when my mother passed away, we planted a



rhododendron beside the Japanese bridge in her memory as well.

On my visit to the park this June, nearly 35 years since planting the tulip tree, a blustery southwesterly wind rustled its fully flowering leaves. I could hear whispers of kindness, pride, and memory. My parents had loved tulip trees, and this one was quite special.

Once again, I felt the presence of those who had come before me and built lives in Newport, Providence, and beyond. Those who loved, laughed, and led. Newport, especially, is truly part of our family history.



**eder at author's home;
she is seated at head of table**



AUGUST 1944

The Jews of Burrillville, Rhode Island

Cole Metzger-Levitt & Michael Fine

This article is probably a first: one written by a nephew and his uncle (or vice versa). It was also written in at least two states and probably two countries.

Cole, a native of New Orleans, was a bar mitzvah at Gates of Prayer, a Reform congregation, and was active in the Jewish Community Center. He still enjoys many sports, including skateboarding and hiking. He graduated from high school at Middlebridge in Narragansett.

Currently a student at Georgia State University, Cole lives in the Virginia Highlands neighborhood of Atlanta. His fascination with history began at age eight. He is currently studying the dissolution of Yugoslavia, including various ethnic dimensions. After completing his bachelor's degree in 2028, he's thinking about pursuing a master's in history.

Cole began writing this article while spending the summer in Rhode Island with his Uncle Michael and Aunt Carol Levitt. He made many trips to Burrillville and another to New York City to gather sources and conduct interviews.

Michael Fine is both a physician and a writer (or vice versa). Born in the Bronx, he grew up in Glen Rock, New Jersey. He earned his bachelor's degree in philosophy at Haverford College in 1975 and his medical degree at Case Western Reserve University eight years later.

As Michael explains, however, he began writing at age 14. His other pursuits have included: driving a cab in New York City, serving as a ghost writer for a "corrupt" cardiologist, caring for Angus stock on a farm in Kentucky, laboring in a metal fabricating plant in Pennsylvania, and community organizing in the South Bronx. Medicine, he explains, was supposed to be a temporary detour before settling on writing.

**Duke of Windsor, Austin Levy
& Marcus Thompson, Harrisville, August 1944**

But his medical career has been impressive indeed. He first journeyed to Rhode Island in 1983, when he served as a resident in family medicine at Brown and at Pawtucket's Memorial Hospital. Michael later became a clinical instructor at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. He practiced in Danielson, Connecticut, and Mansfield, Massachusetts, before founding his own practice, Hillside Avenue Family & Community Medicine, in Pawtucket.

After serving as physician-in-chief in the department of family and community medicine at Rhode Island and Miriam Hospitals, he directed the department of health services at Rhode Island's Department of Corrections. He then directed the state's Department of Health and chaired the state's Board of Medical Licensure and Discipline before turning his attention to writing.

Michael is currently president and board chair of Primary Care for All Americans and Chief Health Strategist for the City of Central Falls.

Michael and his wife, Carol, also a physician, have lived in Scituate for decades. No doubt this peaceful setting has enabled his writing to flourish. Since 2007, he has produced four books about healthy living and health-care reforms. But he has also published a novel and three collections of stories. His latest volume is *The Jewish Prince of Denmark and Others Stories* (Stillwater River Press, 2024). One of his stories appears in *RhodeIslandNewsToday.com*, on the last Sunday of every month. Or to read a free Fine story every month, go to: www.michaelfinemd.com/free-story.

Burrillville is a small town in northwestern Rhode Island, almost equidistant from Providence and Worcester and from Woonsocket and Putnam, Connecticut. The town claims about 16,000 inhabitants in 14 villages. Burrillville has never had a synagogue nor an organized Jewish community, but it has had a few prominent Jews. Its most distinguished Jew did not consider himself one, however.

Once a farming and mill community, Burrillville's population descended primarily from European Protestants and Catholics and French-Canadian Catholics. The town is home to the Zambarano Unit of the Eleanor Slater Hospital, a state institution that was once a tuberculosis sanatorium and now cares for patients with chronic medical and mental health illnesses. Most Burrillville residents work

at Zambarano, in one of the town's small businesses or for the town government. Still other residents work at home or commute elsewhere.

Burrillville was strongly influenced by at least six men who were born Jews as well as some of their wives and families. Many of the men who lived or worked near each other were well acquainted.

Austin T. Levy became the town's leading citizen and its major benefactor. A progressive industrialist, he advocated worker-friendly employment and social policies, although not without some controversy.

The other Jews were far less visible beyond the immediate area. Louis Bleiweis, who became Levy's biographer, was a journalist and a spirited public citizen. Harry Jacobs was the town doctor. The Berk family, which ran the local shoe store and then a haberdashery, also housed Louis Bleiweis when he first came to town. Irving Rosenberg, who ran the New York Department Store on Fountain Square in Pascoag as well as a bowling alley, lived in Pascoag with his wife and four children. Upton Hillelson ran another mill and lived in Pascoag with his wife, Shoshanna, and their three children. Abraham Stanzler, who lived in Narragansett, Rhode Island, owned and ran the Star Theatre in Pascoag and several others around the state.

We can't know the full extent to which these people knew and supported one another. In other small Rhode Island towns, such as Bristol, West Warwick, and Woonsocket, however, small Jewish communities developed, following a pattern common across small-town America. Initially peddlers, many immigrant Jewish men opened small dry goods stores. The more successful businesses evolved into small department stores. And many Jewish immigrants brought their families and other Jews to their new homes.

Burrillville, however, was not such a place. Some Jews left their Jewish heritage behind by intermarrying or ignoring or denying their Jewish heritage. There were a few exceptions, however. These individuals and families still prized their heritage and the communities in which they grew up.



Austin T. Levy



June R. Levy

Austin T. Levy

Austin Levy's father, Theodore, who had been born in Strasbourg, France, in 1842,¹ came to the United States in 1852 with his parents and siblings.² The Levys moved to Philadelphia, where they started a cigar business.

Theodore and his brother then moved to New York City,³ where he met Joanna Jane Oppenheim, who had been born in the U.S. in 1854 to parents who had emigrated from Germany in 1840.⁴ Theodore and Joanna were married in 1876 by Rabbi Gustave Gottheil of Temple Emanu-El, the city's first Reform congregation.⁵ The couple lived in an apartment in Manhattan and had two children: Selma, born in 1878, and Austin Theodore, born in 1880.⁶

Theodore Levy died in 1884, when Austin was only four. Joanna remarried in 1885 to Emanuel Berman in a ceremony performed by a justice of the peace,⁷ but he died in 1891, when Austin was eleven, leaving Selma and Austin in the care of their Aunt Jane.⁸

It is unknown if the Levy children received any facets of a Jewish education or any Jewish rituals were celebrated in their childhood homes. Given their surname, however, they were surely considered Jews by many others.

Austin attended Grammar School 69 and high school in Manhattan until he reached the age of 15, when he enrolled for a year at City College. He then entered the workforce as an office boy

for a New York linen importer, earning three dollars a week.

Austin next became an assistant buyer for a men's clothing manufacturer. This position brought him to Rhode Island to inspect textile factories. Then he went into business for himself, working on commission as a sales representative, representing woolen mills and selling their cloth to the garment trade.⁹

In 1905, Austin met June Rockwell, the daughter of Charles Bristed Rockwell, Sr., a well-connected pillar of Rhode Island society whose ancestors had arrived on the *Mayflower*. Rockwell and his family lived at 610 Hope Street in Bristol in the former Giles Luther House, which had been erected in 1809. Rockwell owned Cranston Worsted Mills, which Levy represented.¹⁰

In 1907 Austin married Elizabeth Knopf, in New York, in a ceremony performed by a Protestant minister.¹¹ Their marriage did not last a single day, however.¹²

At about this time, Levy realized that the cloth he was attempting to sell was subpar. He demanded that his boss either hire a new superintendent or lose his best salesman. As a result, Levy went into business for himself. In 1909, he leased a mill in Greenville (which still stands on Route 44) and named it Stillwater Worsted Mill.

Business boomed, and in 1912 he leased a second mill, in Harrisville, perhaps with the financial support of his soon to be father-in-law. Levy and June Rockwell married, presumably in a civil ceremony, in 1915, when she was 29.

The couple resided in the former William Tinkham House, which had been built in 1856 at 169 East Avenue in Harrisville. They would soon remodel their home, expand its spacious grounds to include gardens and tennis courts, and rename it "Southmeadow." In 1915, June donated her Bristol home to the local Nursing Association, which used it until 1973, when it again became a private residence.

Levy purchased the Stillwater Mill in 1921.¹³ His holdings would eventually grow to 11 mills in three states. He was no doubt a visionary and a shrewd entrepreneur. But Austin and June Levy would influence the Harrisville community in many ways: through

philanthropy as well as business.

In many ways, Austin Levy's reforms and innovations were – and still are – unprecedented. More than progressive, they could in some sense be considered radical.

As a result, Levy built housing for all mill employees, paid his workers fairly, shared profits with them, and eventually sold the mill to them. He also employed a full-time industrial nurse to attend to his employees. When Stillwater workers lived in the company's houses, they were charged only what they could pay.¹⁴ Levy not only provided his workers with two weeks of paid vacations, but paid them for four weeks, so that they could enjoy their time off.

As his mill business became increasingly profitable, Levy, an industrial pioneer, decided to implement profit sharing. In 1915, he spoke to all his employees, telling them about the importance of this new endeavor. Levy continued to give annual speeches to new employees about profit sharing.¹⁵

In 1919, Levy called representatives of mill employees to a meeting. The federal government was considering a 48-hour work week. Levy wanted to ask his workers whether they should preemptively transition to fewer hours. After a vote, they opted to keep the 56-hour work week.¹⁶

But Levy remained concerned about how his workers would benefit from a shorter work week.¹⁷ He speculated about educational opportunities for children and how the adults would spend their leisure time. When the 48-hour week was finally implemented, he raised his employees' pay from 60 cents to 67 1/2 cents per hour in order to make up the difference that resulted from fewer hours.¹⁸

Despite Levy's innovations, Stillwater Worsted Mill was not spared from the labor unrest that pervaded American society during the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1921, for example, 140 of his 320 mill workers walked out.¹⁹ Levy decided to continue operations, however, because he believed that workers should have freedom of choice and action.²⁰

The friction between those who stayed and those who walked out would result in an assault and lead to court hearings in which Levy participated. The mill would eventually close temporar-

ily to ease tensions, despite an influx of community members who crossed the picket line to resuscitate the faltering mill.²¹ But Stillwater recovered and became prosperous again.

Levy wrote and spoke about industrial relations. He believed that the purpose of business was to improve employees' lives and build communities. He continued to argue for higher wages and shorter hours, which, he believed, would fire further economic growth.

As a result of his efforts, both Stillwater and Harrisville survived the Great Depression. Although Austin and June funded the construction of several public buildings, they requested anonymity. During the Depression, the couple built the Assembly Theatre, which is still in use today. They also built the courthouse, post office, a school, and the town hall.²²

There is no evidence, however, that Levy had a formal connection to Rhode Island's Jewish community. For example, there is no record that he ever established a synagogue affiliation. Although he spent time with Louis Bleiweis, his biographer, and he likely knew Upton Hillelson, there is no evidence that he had much contact with the few Jews or their families who lived in Burrillville.

In 1937, however, Levy did make a significant contribution to the United Palestine Appeal, a forerunner of the United Jewish Appeal.²³ In 1950, he joined many prominent members of Rhode Island's Jewish community by adding his name to a proclamation published in the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*. The proclamation expressed financial support for Israel, Providence's General Jewish Committee, and the Miriam Hospital, for example.²⁴

Despite his dedication to social causes, there is no evidence that Levy belonged to local fraternal organizations. Never a Freemason, for example, he did not belong to Harrisville's Granite Lodge No. 26.

When Levy retired in 1946, he sold his company to his employees, but his final years were not spent idly. He and his wife bought and developed property in the Bahamas. Noting a lack of dairy products and fresh eggs, Austin and June also started a cattle and poultry business there.²⁵



Levy (second from right) at his farm,
Eleuthera Island, Bahamas



In 1947, the couple created the June Rockwell Levy Foundation, a nonprofit organization providing grants and scholarships primarily to aid the people of Providence County (which included Harrisville). Eventually, a huge number of beneficiaries throughout Rhode Island have included hospitals, community health centers, colleges, universities, technical schools, and arts organizations. The Foundation still funds four-year scholarships for two Burrillville High School graduates. In recent years, 50 to 100 annual grants have totaled over a million dollars. In 2023, the Foundation's assets had reached almost \$33 million.

In 1950, still an idealist, Levy ran for the U.S. Senate as a liberal Republican. His Democratic opponent was none other than John Pastore, who had been the country's first Italian-American governor. Levy won in 21 towns, including Burrillville, which then had an overwhelming Democratic population. Pastore retired from the Senate in 1976.

Austin Levy died in 1951 at Rhode Island Hospital in Providence. June survived two more decades.

In 1933, Levy had helped renovate Harrisville's First Unitarian Church. Austin and June were buried at their own nearby site, however. This is on the east side of Main Street, opposite the post office and the Austin T. Levy School. A bronze plaque attached to a boulder proclaims: "He loved life and his fellow man and gave his best to both"; "Our First Lady."

Louis Bleiweis

Louis Bleiweis was born in Paris in 1915. He emigrated to the U.S. as a child and grew up in Mamaroneck, New York.²⁹ Having won a school essay contest as an eleven-year-old ninth grader, he was nominated by an English teacher to write a column on school news for the *Mamaroneck Daily Times*. When he graduated from high school at 15, he became a full-time sports reporter for the paper. Eight years later, he started the *Mamaroneck Herald*, a weekly, and then became the Westchester County correspondent for the *New York Post*.³⁰

Bleiweis came to Woonsocket in 1944 to work for its news-

paper, *The Call*. He became the bureau chief in Pascoag and Gloucester. He also traveled to Foster and Scituate, reporting on high school sports, community events, and local politics.

Initially, Bleiweis was a boarder in the home of the Berks, one of the very few Jewish families in Burrillville. He then rented an apartment from the Berks, before he and his wife, Annette, bought their first home.³¹ She was a local Catholic, only a year younger than he.

Bleiweis knew and regarded everyone in town as a friend, and the feeling was largely mutual. He was a good listener, told everyone's story, and made sure to publish acquaintances' photos in the paper.³² Bleiweis also started the Lions Club in Harrisville. Additionally, he suggested that June Rockwell Levy donate funds to build the town's hockey rink and made sure that needy people in Harrisville received some help.

Although the Bleiweis' daughter, Maxine, was reared as a Catholic, Louis thought of himself as a Jew his entire life. He fasted on Yom Kippur and traveled often to Worcester and Providence for gefilte fish and other delicatessen treats.

We do not know exactly how Bleiweis came to know Austin and June Levy or write Levy's biography or how much time they spent together, but it was Bleiweis's job to know everyone in town. He worked on Levy's senatorial campaign, writing many materials.

We do know that Bleiweis knew Burrillville's other Jews, including Dr. Harry Jacobs, the Berks, the Rosenbergs, and the Hillelsons. Maxine Bleiweis has memories of all those people as well as many fond memories of growing up in a mill town where people felt secure, where life revolved around the sounding of mill whistles, and where everyone learned to swim at Spring Lake.³³

**wedding of Louis & Annette
Bleiweis, May 15, 1949 at
St. Patrick's Church, Harrisville**



When Louis died in 2005, hundreds of people came to his wake. He was probably the only non-Catholic buried in Burrillville's St. Patrick's Cemetery, a gesture of the love and respect that the community felt for him. The Harrisville Pond, on Sherman Road, was renamed Bleiweis Memorial Park. It's a beautiful spot adjacent to the 22-acre pond.

Harry Jacobs

Harry Jacobs was born in 1907 in Concord, Massachusetts and went to Tufts College.³⁴ Most likely, he also graduated from Tufts Medical School. A captain in the Army Medical Corps, he served for five years in the Pacific Theater during World War II.

Dr. Jacobs came to Pascoag in about 1946 and practiced in a second-floor office in Fountain Square, next to the Rosenberg's New York Department Store, until 1975.³⁵ During his last two years, he practiced in Chepachet. He is fondly remembered for making house calls!³⁶

Dr. Jacobs may have moved to Pascoag to be closer to his older sister, Ida Jacobs Israel, who lived in Woonsocket by the late 1930s.³⁷ Her husband, Cyril, was also a physician. There were other Israel relatives living in Woonsocket. Cyril's brother, Fred, was a lawyer. His son, Richard (1930-2022), a lawyer, would become Rhode Island's first Jewish attorney general and later a superior court judge.

Dr. Jacobs married Etta Mae Mowry Blessington, who may have been his nurse or secretary. Their courtship and marriage were said to have been kept secret because of his religion.³⁸ The former Mrs. Blessington had two daughters, Jean and Mary.

With Louis Bleiweis, Dr. Jacobs was a foundering member of the Burrillville Lions Club. He was also a member of the Harrisville Freemasons Granite Lodge #26 AF & AM, with the Berks, Irving Rosenberg, Morris Marcus (owner of the Rhode Island Glass Company) and Edward Berman, a *Call* reporter and editor from Woonsocket who also lived briefly in Pascoag.

Dr. Jacobs died in 1977, and his funeral was held at B'nai Israel Synagogue in Woonsocket. He is buried in its cemetery.

Berk Family

The Berk family lived in Pascoag and owned Berks' Shoes and Men's Stores, which were located in Smithfield, Providence, and Uxbridge, Massachusetts.³⁹ Harry Berk, a cobbler, had lived in Vilna and arrived in New York in about 1900. In about 1902, after his wife, Tillie, learned that Pascoag was looking for a cobbler, the couple moved there. Harry set up shop and later developed a shoe store and a clothing store and then added other locations. Tillie's brother, Louis Zetel, had dry-cleaning shops in Woonsocket and Pascoag but lived in Woonsocket.

The Berks had seven children: William, Thomas, Abraham, Sam, Sadie, Martha, and Cora. Only William and Thomas stayed in Pascoag in order to run the family business. Larry, William's son, who also stayed in Pascoag for many years as part of the business, remembers preparing for his bar mitzvah at an Orthodox congregation, Shaare Zedek, on Broad Street in South Providence. The party was held at Providence's Crown Hotel. Larry also remembers driving his younger brothers to Hebrew school two days a week and shopping at Speigel's and Davis's delicatessens. The Berks eventually joined Temple Beth-El.

Harry passed away in 1928 at 46 years of age. Tillie remained in Pascoag for 60 years before moving to Providence in 1959. Sam Berk, who was Tillie's son and Larry Berk's uncle, died suddenly and tragically of a heart attack one night in 1956 after playing cards with Louis Bleiweis. Tillie passed away in 1963 and is buried with Harry in Lincoln Park Cemetery.

The Berks knew the Rosenberg and the Bleiweis families very well.⁴⁰ They also knew Harry Jacobs and the Hillelsons, but had no contact with Austin Levy.

William, Thomas, and Larry Berk belonged to and occasionally led Harrisville's Freemasons Granite Lodge #26 AF & AM and a number of Pascoag civic organizations.⁴¹

The Berks' shoe store on Thayer Street in Providence survived for 50 years. It closed in January of 2025. The Berks also operated a shoe store in Cambridge.

Rosenberg Family

Irving Rosenberg (1902-1992), who owned the New York Department Store on Fountain Square, brought up his family in Pascoag.⁴² He was born in Lanovits, Galicia, in what is now Ukraine. In 1921, when he was 19, Irving emigrated to the U.S. He followed his father, who had emigrated in 1913, and settled in Chepachet, and he worked in his father's store. The story of how Irving protected and cared for his younger brother and two sisters was brilliantly told by his sister, Bess Lindenbaum, in this journal.⁴³

Irving moved away from Chepachet for a period, but the 1935 Rhode Island census states that he was the "proprietor" of his own "department store" in Pascoag. He and his wife, Rose (1909-2003), a native Rhode Islander, began by selling clothing to mill-workers, but then offered sheets, towels, and appliances. The New York Department Store became a marquee business on Pascoag's Fountain Square.

The Rosenbergs had four children, Alvin, Estelle, Yvette, and Steven, who grew up in Pascoag. The 1950 census shows that Alvin, who was 14 and the eldest child, was already working as a clerk in the department store. When the girls were ready for high school, the family moved to Pawtucket so that they might find suitable partners. The Rosenberg sons had celebrated their bar mitzvahs at a synagogue in Worcester. After the family's move to Pawtucket, the Rosenbergs became members of Temple Beth-El.

Both Irving and Rose had been active in the civic life of Pascoag. He was a member of the Pascoag and Burrillville Chambers of Commerce and the Granite Lodge of Freemasons in Pascoag and the Granite Lodge of Oddfellows in Burrillville.⁴⁴ Rose was a president of the Youth Conference in Pascoag and became a Grand Matron of the Order of the Eastern Star.

Irving and Rose formed a close friendship with Dr. Wulf Vinsberg and his wife, Leah, who were Holocaust survivors. Dr. Vinsberg worked and lived at Zambarano Hospital in nearby Wal-lum Lake.

Irving and Rose, who spent their final years in Delray Beach,

are buried in Boynton Beach, Florida.

Hillelson Family

Irving Hillelson and his wife, Mildred, owned Andrew Worsted Mills and lived in Pascoag briefly. They later lived in Central Falls and then in Westport, Connecticut.

The Hillelsons' company, which was incorporated in 1949, had 180 employees in Rhode Island, but also had mills in Vermont and Atlanta.⁴⁵ Upton Hillelson knew Austin Levy, but his daughter, Ruth, does not recall that they had a close relationship.

Irving and Mildred's son, Upton Mervin Hillelson, and his wife, Shoshanna, lived with their children in Pascoag for a few years. He worked as Andrew's treasurer. Upton was later president of his own textile conglomerate, Granite Mills. Seeking better educational opportunities for their children, the Hillelsons moved to Providence and then Warwick, but they kept a summer house on Echo Lake, across from the Rosenbergs, with whom they were close.⁴⁶ Yvette Rosenberg babysat for the kids.⁴⁷

The Hillelsons were very close to the Ginsbergs in Wallum Lake and had many friends from the Holocaust and refugee communities, who visited them in Pascoag each summer.

Some other Jews spent time in Pascoag. Julius "Bernie" Russ had a store, Plantations Candy, Tobacco and Paper Company.⁴⁸ Ben Soloman sold clothing from a van. Ed Berman, who lived in Pascoag for a few years, belonged to the Granite Lodge of Freemasons.

Conclusion

Looking back, it is hard to know what it was like to be a Jew in Burrillville from 1902, when the Berks arrived, until 2005, when Louis Bleiweis died. It is clear, however, that there were a few Jews or people with Jewish ancestry who knew one another. There were a small number of families who spent time together between the early 1940s until about 1970. Two or three of those families were close, and several owned stores and businesses that employed or catered to many people in Burrillville. Although the Jews of Burrillville did not create their own Jewish institutions, some belonged to synagogues in

Providence and Woonsocket and were also buried there.

Nevertheless, these Jews had a lasting impact upon one another and the larger community. We can only imagine how their Jewish origins or understanding of Judaism played a part.

Somehow, however, Austin Levy seems the exception to every rule. He probably received little or no Jewish education, married a wealthy Gentile, and had only a few Jewish acquaintances in Burrillville. Nevertheless, he became an idealist – exceptionally sensitive to his employees' needs and deeply caring about his community. He even sought political office to broaden his influence. Ironically, Austin and June may have become *menschen* without even knowing that word.

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See Ida Jacobs Israel's oral history interview, conducted on December 6, 1982, in Woonsocket for the public library in Concord, Massachusetts. The interview was part of a series, "New Perspectives in Concord's History." Most likely, the Jacobs were Concord's first Jewish family. Jacob was the second son, and Ida was the eldest daughter.

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**announcement of Levy's death, 1951,
from Marcus Thompson**

STILLWATER WORSTED MILLS, INC.
HARRISVILLE, RHODE ISLAND

November 26, 1951

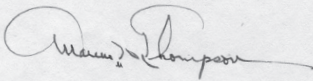
It is with deep sorrow that I inform you of the death of Austin T. Levy, founder of Stillwater Worsted Mills. Although he relinquished the leadership of our Company in 1942, his keen interest in the progress of our people never ceased. With his passing we have, indeed, lost a good friend.

In respect to his memory and as a tribute to a life devoted to the well being of the people, these mills will be closed on Tuesday, November 27th.

Visiting hours will be held at the Stillwater House, Harrisville, at the following hours:-

Monday - November 26th	2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.
Tuesday - November 27th	1:00 P.M. to 2:30 P.M.

A Memorial Service will be conducted at The Assembly, Harrisville, on Tuesday afternoon at three o'clock.


President



JCC's basketball team with its coaches,
Alan Litwin and the author

Jewish Community Center Hoops: *70 Years of Friendly Competition*

Harris K. Weiner

I've known the author for about 35 years. We became friends as commuters, often riding buses together from Hope Street to offices downtown.

Soon we discovered many other connections, including, for example, Temple Beth-El. Later, we discovered that Providence Country Day School, which my son, Michael, attended, was Harris's alma mater.

Sports also brought us together. Since childhood, Harris has excelled in such endeavors as tennis, football, swimming, and basketball. He was also a sports editor of his undergraduate newspaper, *The Bowdoin Orient*.

I'm still trying to gain proficiency in one (or any) athletic endeavor. In 1986, after purchasing my first bicycle since my bar mitzvah, I crashed and horribly fractured my right leg. Ever since, I've enjoyed reading about sports, especially Harris's five previous articles in *The Notes*.

No doubt the author's competitive spirit has suffused his lengthy and distinguished legal career. I'm not sure whether he prefers offense or defense, however. Perhaps refereeing. Harris has also enjoyed teaching law and coaching mock-trial competitions for many years.

The first part of Harris's article was originally published in the January 8, 2020 issue of *Jewish Rhode Island*. It belongs in the historical record. He recently updated his courtside report. I hope that Harris's narrative has only reached his career's halftime.

The advent of the local basketball season raises the perennial hopes of Bruce Wolpert's University of Rhode Island Rams, Judge Howard Lipsey's Providence College Friars, Judge Michael Silverstein's Brown Bears, and the author's Bryant Bulldogs. It's also a good time to feature and celebrate a piece of Rhode Island Jewish basketball history – JCC hoops.

When the Boston Celtics were winning 11 championships in 13 seasons during the Bill Russell and Red Auerbach era, a local group in Providence was playing great basketball at the Jewish Community Center. Located at the former Providence police station on Sessions Street, behind the current Dwares JCC, this collection of hardcourt characters probably had more fun than their professional idols.

Although they never joined the ranks of the 27 Jewish members of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, Marvin Homonoff, Bill Levin, Steve Lehrer, Don Katz, Richard Katz, and Richard Yoken were the AZA Spartans representing the Sessions Street JCC. (Founded in 1924, the Grand Order of Aleph Zadik Aleph, or AZA, was an international, youth-led fraternal organization for teenagers.) Because the JCC had only an outdoor, blacktop court, the club team practiced during winter at Nathan Bishop Junior High School's gymnasium.

"I remember because we won," remarked Homonoff, whose overtime sharpshooting from the left side of the key put the Spartans into a championship. Now 69, Homonoff vividly places that game in the mid-1960s, when the boys were 15 to 17-year-old high schoolers.

The roots of the East Side JCC relate back to the Hebrew Educational Institute (incorporated in 1914) at 65-67 Benefit Street, where the AZA youth club hosted informal walk-on games and practiced for league competition.

"I played pick-up there a couple of times," stated Jules Cohen, 85, the legendary Yale tennis star, who had also captained his Providence Country Day School's basketball team. "I think it was built in the late 1940s. It had low ceilings." Cohen recalls being 14 or 15 when he negotiated that compact court.

After Providence decommissioned the Sessions Street police station during the 1950s, the building was acquired by the Jewish Community Center (formerly the Hebrew Educational Institute) and was partially repurposed for community activities, including Sunday clubs for the youngest children and AZA basketball for teens. Some of the older high schoolers found part-time employment there as basketball referees, basket room attendants, and weekend counsel-

ors for the youngsters who played Ping-Pong, bumper pool, board games, and kickball.

Big, lovable Dave Hochman and Steve Leavitt were key staffers. Elliot Goldstein was the head of physical education, and he organized the first adult men's basketball league, which flourished after the newly constructed JCC opened in 1971.

Straddling those two epochs is Steve Lehrer, who still competes despite multiple knee surgeries. He enjoyed playing with his friends during the first few years of the league before a wider range of ages joined. "I remember painting the three-point line on the court with Elliot Goldstein," he explained. "Things have changed and have not changed. It is still a great group of guys," says Lehrer.

Among the more accomplished players were: Kenny Steingold, who was a standout ballplayer at Clark University; hardnosed Eddie McGovern, who played at the University of Rhode Island; Tom Pearlman of Amherst College; Brown's Ric Landau; and later, David Greenberg, who honed his smooth style at Springfield College. That list also includes Jeff Kent, who grew up on the JCC basketball court, continued at U.R.I., and went on to play professionally in Israel.

Although the league was predominantly Jewish, others have always been welcome.

Outside teams can also submit rosters for inclusion in league play. Members and sponsored guests are eligible for the informal pick-up games on Monday and Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings. Open play is not limited to men, as several women were regulars, including Lisa Waldman, whose brother, Steve, was a b-ball devotee. Interest is so intense for those slots, especially on Sundays at 7:30 AM, that eager athletes line up before the JCC turns on its lights.

Steve Lehrer explains that "ten to fifteen guys are waiting when the building opens. Four to six more show up later and have to wait to play. Early Sunday is a good time if you have Patriots tickets or family plans for the day. Young kids at home are still sleeping while the dads and sisters shoot hoops."

As those toddlers learned to dribble, many joined their fathers for open gym. Howard Schacter coached his sons, as well as

Thankfully, today the physicians outnumber the attorneys. The doctors, though less coordinated, are more useful to the injury-prone Weekend Maccabees. “Despite the lawyers, there were no real quarrels...”

many others, and played with his oldest son, David, a.k.a. “Butter.” Jim O’Neil, a former Brown hoopster, hit the court with his son, Patrick, a future Colby College gridder. Moses Brown’s Neal Steingold joined his son, Kenny. Joe Cohen shared his love of the game and his deadly outside shot with his boys, Jaimie and Jesse. Roger Pearlman extended the JCC’s father-son hoops tradition to his son, Akiva, thereby completing a three-generation legacy.

Roger also bequeathed to the Center an assortment of “crazy shots from behind his ear that somehow went in,” according to a longtime, hardcourt enthusiast, the tenacious defender Harley Frank, who played “religiously” three times a week for 27 years. Frank discloses that “when I started, Lou Pulner ran the court, broke in rookies, and loved to play with Alan Litwin.” A C.P.A., Litwin was one of the few players who passed more than he shot, although he made the first three-pointer in league history.

Many statistics were kept, but assists were not. Steve Lehrer offers the implausible explanation that the scorers’ table for the league was understaffed. Not surprisingly, there are also no stats on dunks.

Paul Formal, the unofficial “dean of JCC basketball,” describes Pulner as his favorite player to draft for his team. “He could shoot, rebound, and never gave up,” he explains. In his forty years of JCC ball, Formal identifies Steve Litwin, a swift southpaw, as the best point guard. David Dorson, he adds, is an outstanding younger version. Tom Foley, Steve Abrams and six foot-eight Willie Walters

from Boston College were dominant big men. Worcester Polytech's running back, Paul Barrette, was explosive. The Wallick brothers, Peter and Dale, were also aggressive and competitive. Greg and Keith Marsello were terrific athletes.

Other stalwarts were: Country Day's Andy Lewis; Classical High's Dov Pick; Pawtucket West's Mike Bigney; and Butler Hospital's Harold Foster. Some additional regulars were: a bank-shot specialist, Ken Kirsch, and a banker, Lou Amoriggi. Still others were: "Running Rob" Stupell, "Total Package" Paul Kaplan, and "Gentleman Jim" Gadol.

Richard Bornstein, a former Classical High captain, was not only a versatile player but a dominant presence for many years. He had been talented enough to be a walk-on player at U.R.I.

Joining Formal as perennial league captains were: John Weitzner, Jeff "The Commissioner" Goldberg, Joey Cohen, and Roger Pearlman. Certified high school referees were hired, including former player John Scoliard, whom Harley Frank describes as "one of the best."

No other players would corroborate Scoliard's officiating skills on the record. His lacrosse refereeing, however, was widely praised.

Among Paul Formal's favorite gym memories are a few guest appearances by Ernie DiGregorio, the great Providence College All American and NBA Rookie of the Year. Ernie recalled: "Swish, swish, swish...from way out. He played no defense but had the quickest release. The greatest shooter I ever saw."

Another North Providence native, Joe DiOrio, fondly remembers how he and his brother, Dave, were welcomed at the JCC. "It was well organized, we always had a game, and we met great people. A lot of us were lawyers, a lot of personalities."

They included, for example: Mark Mandell, Esq. (Division I baseball); Doug Emmanuel, Esq. (tennis talent); Doug Neu, Esq. (strong hoopster); Tom Mirza, Esq. (football speedster); Andy Sigal, Esq. (Country Day captain); Marc Decof, Esq. (Moses Brown football); Jon Maslin, Esq. (Long Island-style playmaker); as well as the previously referenced Steve Litwin, Pulner, DiOrio and Homonoff.

May I also include myself (a Country Day football QB and tennis standout)? Because many of the nice guys (like Steve Lehrer) did not like picking open-gym teams, the lawyers were happy to choose the squads.

Thankfully, today the physicians outnumber the attorneys. The doctors, though less coordinated, are more useful to the injury-prone Weekend Maccabees. “Despite the lawyers, there were no real quarrels,” remembered Joe DiOrio. “It was a fair game and great fun.”

Steve Litwin summed up the magic of JCC hoops. “Guys have been playing together for 50 or 60 years. It is not just the basketball; it is the camaraderie. I love it.”

A 75-Year Tradition: An Update

Competitive recreational basketball is fun and slimming, but not a guarantee of longevity. Unfortunately, we have recently lost several pillars of our local Jewish basketball community.

Judge Howard Lipsey passed away on July 25, 2020. He had been voted Hope High School Class of 1954’s “Most Likely to Succeed,” and he did. A student body leader, he graduated from Providence College three years later and then studied law at Georgetown University. While practicing in Providence, Howard had trained Lou Pulner in divorce law, and the judge’s son, Bruce, played ball at the JCC.

Steve Lehrer died unexpectedly on February 13, 2021 at 71 years of age. He had taught high school math and technology in Bristol for over 30 years, served as a summer camp director, and led Trinity Rep volunteers for many seasons during his retirement. A quiet mensch, he had played basketball at the JCC for over 50 years.

On June 10, 2024 we also learned of the sudden death of Lou Pulner, age 66, who had been a highly regarded political and legal commentator on local television, a former prosecutor, a Barrington town solicitor, and a practicing family-law attorney. Lou was gregarious and fun. He had migrated to golf after three decades of basketball dominance at the JCC.

Another devoted golfer was the talented hoopster, Richard

Bornstein, whom we lost on April 13, 2023 at age 72. Richard was well known and liked since his youth at his family's Miller's Delicatessen on Hope Street and subsequently as a businessman, real estate specialist, and philanthropist. The Jewish Alliance's Dwares JCC annual charity golf classic was named in his memory.

The absence of these hardcourt legends has not only diminished the local, Jewish adult amateur basketball landscape, but a further blow was suffered. In 2023, formal league play at the JCC on Thursday nights was suspended.

According to Dan Hochberger and other regulars, that loss of competitive playing time was attributable to one phenomenon – the advent of the pseudo-sport of pickleball. Please note that Steve Waldman is excluded from that generalization. He was an outstanding JCC basketballer, who had moved on to the highly competitive sport of racquetball before pickleball. He became the most athletic “pickler” in the outdoor group at Nathan Bishop Middle School. He also lives across the street and would otherwise be driven crazy by the incessant clacking of the wooden paddles on hard plastic balls.

Rick Engle, whose elegant strokes were obviously crafted in real racket sports, is also exempt from the stigma of participating in a glorified board game. This author's wife, Jan, however, who unconvincingly denies pickleball addiction, does not qualify due to her inconsistency... on the court.

Fortunately, bar mitzvah boys and bat mitzvah girls do not yet dream of professional pickleball careers. They fantasize about having an owner's floor seats at National Basketball Association and Women's NBA games. That begins with learning how to dribble, shoot, and even play a little defense. Providence's Jewish Community Center, having been housed in three locations, is where that happily has happened for 75 years.

Fortunately, pick-up games continue at the JCC, but these occur at 7 AM on Sundays. Such games are precluded for most players who have active Saturday night social lives. I hope that the JCC will always host weekend Maccabees.



Ode to the Ocean State

James B. Rosenberg

Having met at Temple Habonim more than 35 years ago, Rabbi Jim and I feel like old friends. But we became much better acquainted when he began writing for our journal.

This is Jim's third article since 2019. His dear wife, Sandy, also wrote an article for our 2023 issue. I hope that this duo will contribute many more.

Jim and I share two alma maters: Hebrew Union College and Columbia University. He was an undergraduate on Morningside Heights, and I earned a master's degree in its art history and archaeology department. But perhaps we enjoy a far larger and deeper alma mater, The 1960s.

Beyond our devotion to prayer, study, and humor, I think that Jim and I share another key attribute. We love observing our own front and backyards, if not a larger world. So much intrigues and fascinates us, especially that which we are unable to categorize, classify or frame. For that matter, we love surprises – at least those that somehow seem life-affirming. Does this also mean that we are voyeurs?

I seldom drink coffee, but Jim enjoys hanging out at Starbucks on Wayland Square. In some sense, it has become his office and study. He greets and converses with all kinds of people while often reading and writing. It's not exactly a coincidence that he and I may also bump into each other while searching for treats across the street at Books on the Square.

Jim and I share still another attribute. Neither of us ever planned to live in Little Rhody for more than a few years, but we somehow found and made our homes here. Perhaps we're so intrigued by Little Rhody because we can place it within many surprising or unintended contexts or we're always finding exceptions to rules. Yes, he and I share a sense of humor.

But Jim and I are also quite different in other ways. He is musical, and I am visual. As the following essay magically demonstrates, he is also a poet.

Part I: The Ocean State

I, the Ocean State

Tidal tug of longing

Great green fury

Raging to be free

Of shores which bind me

To man-made names:

Atlantic, Pacific...

Mapless amoeba,

I break my tears

Upon stone hearts.

The motto of Rhode Island, “The Ocean State,” gives voice to a paradox. Yes, we are the smallest state in the Union, but our coastline, including Block Island and the lesser islands of Narragansett Bay, extends for more than 400 miles!

Salt water is everywhere – our rivers, our bays, our tiny piece of the Atlantic Ocean; and by extension, little Rhody flows into the vastness of the Seven Seas. Those few times I have sailed on a public fishing boat two hours southeast past Block Island to the watery world 90 to 160 feet above a fishing spot known as Coxes Ledge, I have come to experience what Herman Melville, in *Moby Dick*, called the “harborless immensities” – water, water, everywhere, out of sight of land. On a rough day, while riding in the trough of an especially high wave, we are down in a valley of grey-green ocean water kissed by the overcast sky.

Boats are everywhere in our state – many of them seaworthy, some of them barely suitable for a small lake. A number of our boats are used for fishing.

Beginning in 1974, I served 33 years as rabbi of Temple Habonim. Accordingly, my family and I lived in Barrington. I caught all kinds of fish: winter flounder, summer flounder (fluke), tautog (blackfish), squeteague (weakfish), scup (porgie), bluefish, striped bass, cod, hake. On several occasions, I caught our supper in the Barrington River.

One cannot live very long in the Ocean State without learning to call our clams “quahogs”; don’t ask me why. One fine afternoon I am with two friends on a well-appointed power boat on Narragansett Bay fishing for tautog. A bare-chested “quahogger” is nearby in his skiff, working his long rake, scraping the bay’s bottom for clams. “Ahoy! Ahoy!” he called. Was he in trouble? As we draw closer, he asks us in his deep, mellow voice, “Would you happen to have some Grey Poupon?”

And, not to forget, our official state appetizer is calamari, squid prepared in any number of ways. As citizens of the Ocean State, we Rhode Islanders know well both the smell and the taste of salt.

During my years in Barrington, I developed what I might term a subliminal “tide consciousness.” Since Habonim sits just across New Meadow Road from the Barrington River, I always knew, more or less, where the water stood: high or low. I do confess that when the water stood at the midpoint, I rarely had the time, unless there was a fishing pole in my hands, to stay at the water’s edge long enough to determine whether the tide was coming in or going out.

What I do know is that on average the distance between high tide and low tide in Rhode Island waters is about five feet. When living in Barrington, I always took special comfort in my sense of identification with the always changing, always-the-same watery rhythm of the Ocean State’s salt water world.

In contrast to the regularity of our tides, there stands Rhode Island’s weather, which, as is true for all six New England states, is almost totally unpredictable. Yes, we do have four, more-or-less distinct seasons; but, as Mark Twain is said to have quipped, “If you don’t like New England weather, wait a minute.”

In a typical calendar year, our Ocean State temperature ranges from above 100 degrees in July and August to below zero in January and February. In some winters, we have only a foot or two of snow. Within a relatively recent winter, we had almost no snow until the end of January, followed by seven additional feet by mid-March.

Of course, some of us remember the Great Blizzard of February 6 and 7, 1978. Near-hurricane force winds whipping three feet

of snow into drifts of twenty feet throughout much of our state.

We have not lacked our share of summer and autumn hurricanes. During my family's years in Barrington, we survived, with different degrees of damage, Hurricanes Gloria (1985), Bob (1991), Irene (2011), and Sandy (2012). If you don't like the weather in our Ocean State, wait a minute!

Part II: Religion in the Ocean State

Cliff Walk

*The sound of the tide licking
Smooth stones that silken evening
Under the diffuse glow of the August moon*

*Was like the sound of God breathing,
Like no other sound in Rhode Island...*

There is not just one sound of God's breathing in the Ocean State. As is true the world over, God has many voices here. Nevertheless, what I heard so long ago strolling along Newport's Cliff Walk with a dear colleague has stayed with me for decades.

Of course, the Rhode Island to which my family came in 1974 is far different from the Rhode Island of Roger Williams in the seventeenth century or the early days of the Sephardic synagogue in Newport during the eighteenth. During my fifty years as a rabbi in the Ocean State, I have had the privilege of meeting and working with a large number of the state's clergy – more than I can count. Although I have reached out to Muslim and Buddhist leaders, the vast majority of my colleagues in interfaith dialogue have been Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not single out a few of those who were especially effective in helping me to grow into my sense of what it means to be a religious person.

Father Edward Flannery

I first heard Father Edward Flannery (1912-1998) speak in the mid-Sixties, when I was an undergraduate at Columbia Col-



Barrington Beach



lege. His well-received book, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, had first come out in 1965. Flannery was speaking at Earl Hall, Columbia's center for a number of campus religious groups. I was deeply impressed by his courageous forthrightness, his damning of his own Roman Catholic Church for its manifest anti-Semitism throughout the ages. He was clearly a man of integrity, not afraid to speak truth to power.

As a young rabbi in Barrington, I was delighted to learn that Father Flannery had returned to the Diocese of Providence in 1976. For the next 22 years, the two of us had the opportunity to meet quite frequently. Early on, he had dinner with my young family before he spoke at our Shabbat worship, addressing members of my synagogue, along with members of Barrington's Protestant and Catholic clergy and laity. During the 1980s, when I was an adjunct instructor of religious studies at Connecticut College, in New London, Father Flannery twice spoke most forcefully to my students taking my Holocaust classes.

Father Flannery was a frequent attendee at a monthly lunch for rabbis and priests hosted by Rabbi Wayne Franklin of Providence's Temple Emanu-El. Father Flannery was an unrelenting advocate for Catholic-Jewish dialogue. I was impressed by his almost compulsive need to force his colleagues to face their church's centuries-long complicity in what he has called "the anguish of the Jews."

On another level, I admired his ability to help us rabbis begin to grasp at least something about the almost infinite complexity of the Vatican's bureaucracy.

The two of us had one major theological difference, however. I argued that Scripture – in our case, our *Tanakh*, our Hebrew Bible, especially our Torah – is not "the word of God." Father Flannery insisted, however, that Scripture – both the Old and New Testaments – is literally the word of God.

At times, I admit, our disagreement became a bit testy, but never accusatory. Ours was what the rabbis of old called "a controversy for the sake of heaven." From the time that I heard Father Flannery speak to the sad day of his funeral, I knew in my heart that he was a man who lived his integrity in both word and deed.

Rev. C. Neal Goldsborough

Neal Goldsborough (born 1952) was Rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Barrington from 2001 to 2008. In 2005, he served for ten months as a Navy chaplain in Kuwait to multifaith and multicultural American soldiers. More specifically, Neal spent those

ten months at Expeditionary Medical Facility Dallas, a forty-four-bed combat support hospital at Camp Arifjan, south of Kuwait City. He never did set foot in Iraq.

Though he was only a few years younger than I, Neal had the physical and the emotional stamina of a man half my age. He did not want to leave his family and his church to spend ten months living in a tent in the desert, but as a chaplain in the Navy Reserve, he answered the call of duty.

Neal served “God and country” under extraordinarily stressful circumstances. In Kuwait, he witnessed more physical and psychological suffering than most of us see during an entire lifetime. It is difficult to imagine how Neal managed to maintain his “ministerial presence” in such a sea of pain. It is equally difficult to fathom the depth of the psychological complexities involved in his readjustment to the mundane routines of civilian life.

As a way of gaining perspective on his ten months “over there” with the troops, Neal wrote a powerful book, *Where is God Amidst the Bombs?: A Priest’s Reflections from the Combat Zone*. (It was published by the Episcopal Church’s Forward Movement, in Cincinnati, in 2008.) Though the book is small in size, it is vast in terms of the themes which it explores. Partially based on e-mails he sent home to Rhode Island from his desert base, it is filled with grim and gritty details. Nevertheless, the book’s very title suggests the profundity of the author’s questioning.

Neal’s profoundly disturbing experiences in Kuwait led to his ongoing commitment to live with the discomfort of troubling questions rather than surrender to what he calls “the theological garbage” of pat answers. Additionally, Neal was too honest – emotionally, intellectually, spiritually – to claim that he answered the question posed by his title.

Nevertheless, Neal’s personal struggle to come closer to an answer can strengthen all of us in our own struggles to find some sense of meaning in our world at war. Of all the clergy I have met in our Ocean State, however, nobody has better demonstrated what it means to maintain a deep but questioning faith in the midst of the hellhole of war.

Rabbi Saul Leeman

While Rabbi Leeman (1917-2017) was involved in myriad ways with the Jewish community of greater Rhode Island, I knew him as my distinguished older colleague. Long after his retirement, Saul continued to attend meetings of what was then called the Rhode Island Board of Rabbis. Time and again he would astonish us younger rabbis with his enormous erudition. He appeared to have an almost photographic memory of the entire text of our *Tanakh*, our Hebrew Bible. In recognition of his mastery of Biblical Hebrew, the Jewish Publication Society appointed him to serve on their committee of translators for the third section of the *Tanakh*, *Ketuvim* (Writings).

I had the great privilege of studying Talmud privately with Saul for close to a decade, before I retired from Temple Habonim in the summer of 2007. By then, Saul was in his eighties, but still sharp as a tack.

At first glance, we formed a most unlikely *chevruta* (study partnership). Beginning in high school at the Yeshiva Etz Hayim in Borough Park, Brooklyn, and continuing through his years at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan, Saul had a strong background in Talmud. My own exposure to Talmudic studies was "thin," to put it politely.

In general, I am grateful for the rabbinical education I received at the New York school of the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. In particular, I will forever be in debt to the late Rabbi Eugene Borowitz for introducing me to the world of modern Jewish religious thought. That said, I learned little Talmud during my five years at HUC-JIR.

I was not surprised, then, that Saul seemed somewhat reluctant to study Talmud with me on a weekly basis. I well understood that he did not suffer fools gladly. However, I made it clear to him that I would never enter his home on Elmgrove Avenue in Providence unprepared.

Bringing a copy of the Adin Steinsaltz edition of the tractate *Bava Metzia*, which includes a clear Hebrew commentary as well as a Hebrew translation of Aramaic passages, I took the plunge

into the sea of Talmud:

Two men grab a single cloak. This one says, 'I found it.'
The other says, 'I found it.' This one says, 'It's all mine.'
The other says, 'It's all mine.'

Soon, however, I felt encouraged by Saul's firm but welcome guidance.

Week after week, Saul and I spent an intense session wrestling with such questions as: What does it mean to own something? Does being the first to see a lost object make one the rightful owner? Or must one take physical possession of the object in order to claim ownership?

My weekly visits with Saul continued year after year. As he helped me become a more capable swimmer in the challenging crosscurrents of Talmudic discourse, I came to view my hour with him as one of the high points of my week. When engaged with a text, we were participants in a discussion that spanned the centuries.

For example, a *Mishnaic* text from the second century investigates a Torah text from the tenth century B.C.E. A piece of *Gemara* from the fourth century challenges the *Mishnah*. Then the great medieval commentator, Rashi, put a new twist on that piece of *Gemara*, but he was contradicted by his sons-in-law and grandsons in the *Tosafot*. All this on a single page of Talmud!

Saul became my rabbi and teacher. Without his guidance, I would never have learned how to swim in the sea of Talmud. Thank you, Saul, for helping me achieve a deepening sense of rabbinic authenticity.

Part III: Art in the Ocean State

Mermaid

Anima of the sea
Singer of salt
Keeper of wrecks and secrets
Silent storm beneath
The cool skin of moonbeam waves

*Hair curling and spilling
Over ripe breasts
Undulating midriff flowing
Into a swim of fins and scales
Even Odysseus cannot resist
Your wordless call.*

The call to Odysseus was the voice of his Muse. In my case, it was my Muse, Erato, dictating to me the phrase, “a swim of fins and scales.” Why the noun “swim”? Because Erato insisted that I use it. I could not resist her call.

When I have spoken with artists of every kind here in the Ocean State, they have almost always told me of the power of their Muse. For them, it has been their nearly irresistible and unforgettable force, resembling “the sound of God breathing.” Since hearing it on Newport’s Cliff Walk 35 years ago, I too have carried it with me.

Boosters of our Ocean State have claimed that Rhode Island has a greater share of artists per capita than any other. Perhaps this is an overstatement; nevertheless, my quick internet research suggests that we are most likely within the ten top states that provide a nurturing environment for artists. We have our renowned RISD; we are also home to such well-known institutions as PPAC and audience-challenging Trinity Rep.

Artists who live in Rhode Island also have the advantage of living between the major art markets of Boston and Manhattan, but in a far more affordable place. We also have an abundance of old lofts for living and working.

Since New Year’s Eve, 1994, Barnaby Evans, has created a fluid sculpture or performance of fire and water. Generally held on Saturday evenings, twice monthly from May through November, WaterFire has developed into an extremely popular attraction. It is viewed primarily from the banks of three interconnected rivers flowing through downtown Providence: the Providence, the Woonasquatucket, and the Moshassuck. Hear the sounds of Native

Americans?

In July of 2006, after numerous delays, my wife and I were able to take two guests to experience WaterFire. This evening was well worth the wait, however. Having arrived early enough, we could meander over to a bridge above the Providence River and view the ceremonial lighting of chunks of pine and cedar deposited in some of the hundred braziers.

A bare-chested, athletically built young man, twirling a stick of fire in each hand, began to move in flowing steps from brazier to brazier, igniting one after the other. These flickering flames soon cast their spell upon the water and in the gathering darkness.

As many Rhode Islanders know, volunteers serve as ritual keepers of the flames. Throughout each evening, cautiously and ceremoniously, these men and women maneuver their scows alongside low-burning pyres. When fed, the logs once again burst into fire, which leap forth with renewed life. Sparks dance in sympathetic responses to sounds of music filling the night air. Along the rivers' edges, thousands of eyes pierce the darkness, bearing witness to a ceremony that seems as old as time itself.

This is the magical transformation of darkness into light.

Caught up in a confusion of senses, I felt as if I were a silent participant in some ancient religious rite, the meaning of which I could but dimly perceive. No wonder the crowd's voices remained subdued.

In every WaterFire, there is a truth in the beauty that can transport us to another realm. Through this process, we become more appreciative, more fully present individuals – if only for a moment.

There is also a public truth that WaterFire jubilantly proclaims: we are all connected! We are one! Within the presence of others, we are called upon to be larger than ourselves; we are called into community. As the four of us moved ever so slowly through the crowds along the three rivers, my cousin, David, obviously caught up in the joy, turned to me and said, "This is what cities are for."

Part IV: Ocean State People

Sea Glass

*A blue that's almost ice
I hold it to my eye
Translucent
Light passes through
But not shape
Rough edges made smooth
No longer cutting
Water worn
Tamed

Life fragment
Tossed overboard
Scraping the bottom
An accident of time and tide*

During the 33 years that Sandy and I lived in Barrington, first with our daughter Karen and five years later also with our son David, I took numerous solitary walks along the town's beach, where the tides of Narragansett Bay sent us gifts upon the moist sand. These included shells of clams (quahogs), scallops, horseshoe crabs, and – on rare occasions – a captivating piece of sea glass.

That “life fragment” suggests to me those accidents of time and tide have combined and recombined to form my own person and the persons I have come to meet here in the Ocean State. To look through sea glass brings some light but scant shape; rough edges are smoothed. The following brief sketches of three people I have met since moving to Rhode Island in August of 1974 point to the rich variety of individuals who live in the Ocean State.

Senator Jack Reed

I don't think I've ever met a person who has truly enjoyed standing in line. Whatever might be waiting for us at the end of the line, we can rest assured that it is not a pot of gold wrapped in a

rainbow.

Despite its frustration – or maybe because of its frustration – standing in line is an expression of the deep democratic values that most of us still uphold. After all, you can never be quite sure just who might be with you, waiting to check in or out. Be we rich or poor, powerful or powerless—most of us feel bound together in what seems to be an endless line – waiting for Godot or who knows what.

Early on a Monday morning in January, 2002, I was standing in a very long line, waiting to get into Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. The line was barely moving. Many individuals were stamping their feet and clapping their hands in a losing battle against the damp cold. Most people happened to be Black because they were awaiting the annual scholarship breakfast held on Martin Luther King Day.

As I was inching forward, I caught sight of Senator Jack Reed. Most likely, some officials would appear and whisk him out of the cold and into the warmth of the ballroom. Much to my surprise, however, Senator Reed, along with one of his distinguished looking associates, headed to the very back of the line. Sure enough, one uniformed official after another went over to escort him into the building. But Senator Reed had other ideas.

There he stood in the cold, chatting with his constituents. But how many additional votes would he possibly win by this gesture of solidarity? I must confess that sight deepened my respect for our American system of government – a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Clearly, on that cold and damp day, more than twenty years ago, Senator Jack Reed demonstrated with his deeds that he was a mensch, and he continues to be a mensch to this very day.

I Never Learned Her Name

One day, not long after we had moved from Barrington to Providence's East Side, I found myself running errands back in Barrington. My busy day was proceeding without a hitch until I returned from the Citizens Bank to my car. Having completed transactions for several different accounts, I didn't want to lose the bank

receipts during my supermarket shopping. So, after sitting down in my Taurus wagon and dutifully placing each precious piece of bank paper in its proper place, I then began walking across the parking lot to Shaw's.

No sooner did I slam the car door shut than I was overcome with that sinking feeling, which comes when we realize that a moment's carelessness is about to cost us a considerable amount of time and trouble. Sure enough, through the window of the locked car door, I could see my set of keys tantalizingly close yet totally beyond my grasp. Fortunately, I had left the driver's window open a couple of inches.

With some trepidation, I rolled up my sleeves and inserted my right arm through the narrow opening. It was a very tight squeeze. Try as I might, my fingers could not reach the door lock. So, I withdrew my arm and adjusted my angle of approach so that the tips of my middle and index fingers just managed to brush the top of the lock. After several more attempts, however, I was forced to admit that I could not reach the plastic cylinder in the "down" position.

What was to be done? I could not bring myself to call my wife and ask her to drive down from Providence with an extra set of keys in order to bail me out of my embarrassment and frustration.

Thank goodness, I did have my wallet in my pants pocket. Perhaps I could find some kind of gripping tool at Shaw's so that I could regain access to my wheels. I was moving up and down the aisles of the supermarket, not quite sure what I might be looking for. But there it was: a one-piece Farberware, squeeze-and-grip salad server. The price tag for my freedom to drive would be just about ten dollars.

Then, as I proceeded to my car, I saw the answer to my unspoken prayer. A young woman – at least two or three decades my junior – was entering the car parked right next to my wagon. I called out, "Excuse me, could you do me a BIG favor?"

As she turned in the direction of my voice, I was relieved to observe that she wore a kind and cheerful face. Her body size was probably just the right fit for the task at hand. "I left my keys in the car. The window is partly open, but my arm is too big to let me reach

the lock.” Without hesitation the young woman came over to my Taurus, sized up the situation, made one or two preliminary maneuvers, and with admirable agility unlocked the door.

I thanked the woman profusely, but in my confusion and embarrassment failed to ask for her name. So, whoever you are, thank you again for helping me out of a jam of my own doing. Your display of grace to a complete stranger continues to light my way almost two decades later. After fifty-plus years in Rhode Island, I remain convinced that, for the most part, the milk of human kindness flows freely.

Chutema Am

On a crisp day at the end of March, 2015, as winter was easing into spring, I found myself enjoying a bowl of medicinal Nam Yaa soup at the Angkor Restaurant in Providence, just around the corner from Adler’s Hardware. I have been a fan of soups and chowders ever since my first sips of Campbell’s chicken noodle soup, but I have never tasted such a magical combination of spicy yet delicately balanced flavors, as is found in the Nam Yaa broth.

When I met him years ago, the owner and chef of Angkor, Chutema Am, was a physically fit and articulate Cambodian man, who looked ten years younger than his actual age of 49. As it was near the closing time for lunch, I happened to be the only customer remaining in the cozy room. Chutema came over to chat with me.

Over the years, Chutema and I had shared bits and pieces of our lives. I had learned that he was the father of two daughters and a son. His elder daughter, from a previous relationship, was almost 30 and fairly independent. Having been divorced from the mother of his two younger children, Chutema had been raising them on his own. He was determined to see his daughter, a college freshman, and his son, a junior in high school, graduate from college.

As I was finishing my soup, Chutema had begun to tell me for the first time the tragic circumstances. Once his children were safely launched, he sought to do everything possible to find out the fate of his mother and nine siblings.

The seventh of ten children, he had been living with his

large family in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. One day in 1975, when he was just eight years old, Khmer Rouge soldiers, under the diabolical leadership of Pol Pot, took over the city. Forcing their way into Chutema's home, they took him and his father to one of the Khmer Rouge's agricultural forced labor camps. He never knew if his mother or his nine siblings were alive or dead.

Chutema's story had chilling parallels with the 1984 British movie, "The Killing Fields," based upon the actual experiences of a Cambodian journalist and interpreter, Dith Pran, and an American reporter, Sydney Schanberg, who were working together for *The New York Times*. Pran was taken from Phnom Penh to a forced labor camp but ultimately escaped through the jungle to safety in Thailand.

After managing to escape from their prison camp, Chutema and his father took the same terrifying jungle journey to Thailand. Thus, they avoided the fate of two million Cambodians whom Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge murdered in the notorious killing fields.

Chutema told me how he and his father spent two terrifying weeks struggling to survive on their way to Thailand, hiding out during the daylight hours to avoid discovery and certain death. I found it almost impossible to comprehend how the man standing in front of me could have managed to endure such physical and emotional trauma, especially when still a little boy.

Chutema admitted that his early days in Rhode Island, where he and his father arrived from a Thai refugee camp in 1976, were by no means easy. While he felt deeply indebted for all the help provided by the International Institute (now part of Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island), he found himself repeatedly a victim of racism. He added that his teenage years were particularly difficult; he was always getting into fights. It took him years to overcome the burden of being perceived as being "so different."

Looking towards the future, once his daughter and his son graduate from college, Chutema intended to spend considerable time in Cambodia seeking answers to his mother's and nine siblings' fate. He would need to search from village to village, where there are poor records or perhaps none. He was hoping for at least some

glimmer in the darkness of not knowing if there was even a single survivor among his loved ones.

As I prepared to say goodbye to Chutema on that early afternoon in 2015, I wondered whether he would ever experience the relief that comes from finding at least some answers, sad though they might be, to the questions he had been living with for four decades. I wondered whether he would ever find what we call “closure” – perhaps a lesser word for peace.

Sadly, Chutema is no longer a part of my life here in the Ocean State, but my memory of him and his story both blesses and haunts me.

Part V: Transformations in the Ocean State

Sea Smoke

*Ten below zero. Rare for these parts.
The river ice flows south with the ebbing tide.
Out of the grey pockets of salt water, still ice free,
The sea smoke rises – young mothers in virgin white robes,
Hands held high to the brightening sky.*

*A faint breath of breeze, and the vapor freezes
To the bare limbs and the evergreen needles
On the Western shore.*

*Caught in the first rays of the rising sun,
Trees explode into a symphony of crystal.
Thundering silence of a January morning,
The still, small voice of a new day.*

Winter mornings are often cold in the Ocean State, but rarely this cold – cold enough to produce what meteorologists call “Arctic Sea Smoke.” It occurs when unfrozen salt water meets still air that is zero or even lower.

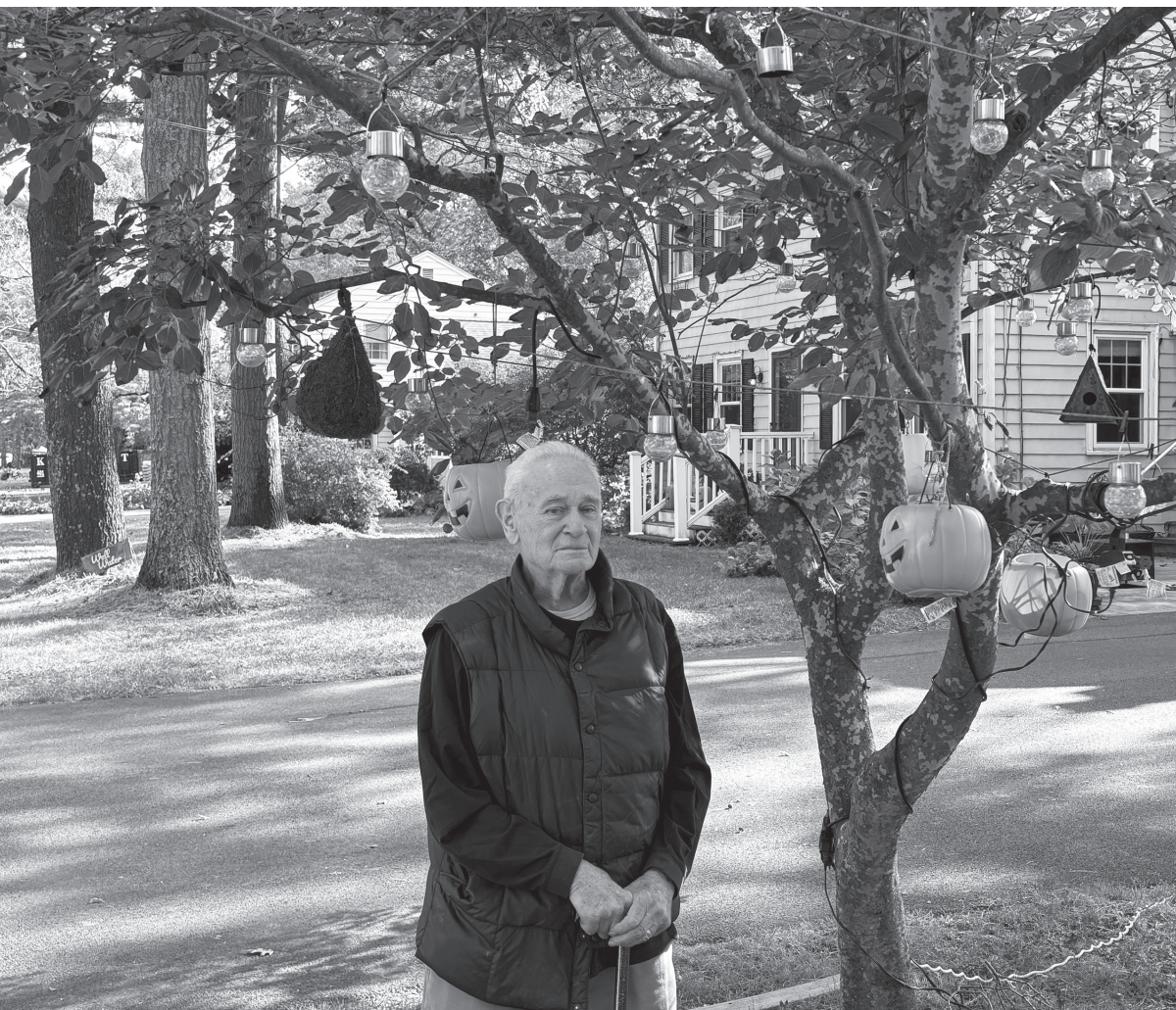
What I observed that morning took my breath away. Here was a scene of transformation, of poetry in motion.

I had moved to Rhode in August of 1974, just after turning

30. Today, at 81, I have lived through the transformations – from middle age to old age. I do not yet have the words to describe the final stage of my journey.

A Tree Grows in Barrington

Perhaps some clues may be found in front of the Barrington house where we had moved 51 years ago and remained for 33 years. A Korean dogwood stands four or five feet from the



street and an equal distance from our driveway. Today, this tree also reaches into the wires running along Old Chimney Road. I would estimate that it has grown to a height of 25 feet or so. This year its yellowish white blossoms appeared in early June, about usual for Korean dogwoods.

I first set my eyes upon this particular tree in May, 1974, when it was merely a sapling. Believe it or not, my initial encounter with our dogwood occurred *indoors* – in the charming offices of Boston Educational Research on Beacon Hill. I was there with my wife Sandy, a BER writer at the time, who was, as they say, “very pregnant.” She would give birth to our first child, Karen, just a few weeks later, on June 19.

A number of Sandy’s coworkers – all smiles and giggles – led us into a small room to show us their surprise present for the new baby. There it stood, the Korean dogwood, perhaps five feet tall, its roots planted in the soil of a burlap bag.

“What in the world are we going to do with that?” I remember thinking in an irritated sort of way. “How are we ever going to get it to Rhode Island? What are we going to do with it in the meantime?”

Truth be told, I don’t remember Sandy’s reaction. But I have a hunch that she wasn’t thrilled with her coworkers’ “originality.”

As it turned out, we schlepped the tree to our apartment house in Brookline, where it endured in its burlap wrap, next to the front stoop, until late July. A week or so before our move-in date, on August 1, I somehow managed to get the tree into the back seat of our AMC Matador, then drove down to Barrington. I dug a big hole in the front lawn of our new home, stuck the roots of the tree, burlap and all, into the hole, filled in the dirt, gave it a good dousing with a newly pur-



author facing Korean dogwood
at his former home

chased garden hose, and hoped for the best.

Our Korean dogwood is a survivor. The first major threat to its very existence came rather early in its life, just two or three years after we arrived in Barrington.

One fine summer morning, having stepped out onto our driveway to pick up the morning newspapers, I discovered that some mindless vandal had taken an axe to the tree, attempting to split it in half at the point where its two largest limbs formed a “V.” As soon as I returned from a panicked trip to a local garden store, I sprayed the wound with some kind of tree medicine – I have no idea what they called the stuff – and bound the tree back together again with heavy twine. Whatever I did, however inexpertly, it worked!

Yes, our Korean dogwood is a survivor; it has withstood every kind of weather that southern New England could throw at it. After the blizzard of February 6 and 7, 1978, the tree remained buried under snow drifts for several weeks. Our daughter, Karen, only three years old, kept on asking us, “Where my tree? Where my tree?”

On September 27, 1985, Hurricane Gloria tore off the top half of a pine tree in our backyard and deposited it with a thundering boom into the roof of our family room. But our dogwood held its ground.

Six years later, on August 19, 1991, the eye of Hurricane Bob blew directly over Barrington. Once again, however, our dogwood remained resolute. And so it stands to this very day, having withstood 100-degree-heat, subzero cold, snow, ice, lightning, and drought.

I do not think that it is overly sentimental to say that our Korean dogwood, a gift to honor our first child, has become part of our family. Its roots are now in the soil of our family history.

Before Sandy and I moved to Providence’s East Side, the dogwood can be seen in almost countless photos, which show our growing family in shifting configurations and celebrations. We stood in front of its bare winter branches, its yellow-white late spring blossoms, its deep green leaves of high summer or its autumn dress of red and brown. As we continue to grow and change, so does our Korean dogwood, the five-foot sapling I met so long ago in a town-

house office on Beacon Hill.

I don't know how long a typical Korean dogwood is supposed to live. To be honest, I do not care to know. I can only hope that this particular dogwood lives to that day, ages and ages hence, when each of our grandchildren – Lucy, Clara, Charlotte, Joey, Isaac – will take the opportunity to stop by 3 Old Chimney Road and reflect: "This tree is part of who I am."



bimah, Temple Habonim

Finding a New Rabbi for Temple Habonim

W. Robert Kemp

Recruiting a new rabbi is usually a difficult, if not daunting task. Finding a successor to a longtime and beloved spiritual leader may be especially challenging. Fortunately, the experience of recruiting Rabbi Jim Rosenberg's successor was hugely successful.

So many lay leaders played helpful roles. Surely one of the most influential advocates was Bob Kemp, who cochaired the rabbinic search committee from 2005 to 2007. Bob and his family had joined Habonim in 1987, soon after moving to Barrington. He not only served as congregational president from 1996 to 1997; chaired a long-range planning committee since 1997 but also holds the distinction of being the longest-serving board member—for, yes, 35 years. Bob, a merry workhorse, has also chaired the Temple's long-range planning committee since 1999.

A Philadelphia native, Bob studied public and international affairs at Princeton and earned his law degree at Penn. Early in his career, he worked for a company in Michigan. After it was acquired by Textron Inc., Bob and his family relocated to Rhode Island, but he's not yet convinced that his metamorphosis to a Rhode Islander has been complete. In fact, as Textron Systems' general counsel in the area of intellectual property and governance, he commuted to the corporate office in Wilmington, Massachusetts.

Though now retired from his legal career, Bob seems as busy as ever. Since 2010, for example, he has served on the board of directors of Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island. Presently its corporate secretary, he also cochairs its governance committee. Bob was a board member of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island from 1998 to 2002. As a RIJHA board member, he serves on our acquisitions and publications committees.

Bob, an avid photographer, also enjoys writing whimsical and satirical poetry, including haikus, limericks, and musical takeoffs. He likes to point out that three generations of his family have been educators. His mother, Barbara, was a teacher and a librarian; his wife, Lois, is a retired reading specialist. One of the Kemps' three children is a math teacher, and another is a data base manager at

Reading is Fundamental in Washington, D.C.

Bob also enjoys playing piano, especially for his four grandchildren. This pastime may suggest that the successful search for a new rabbi may have musical components. Yes, cacophony must be avoided, but melody, rhythm, and pauses may also be important. Indeed, good listening is always a key.

Shortly after our family moved to Barrington from suburban Detroit in 1987, I became involved in the leadership of Temple Habonim. Lois and I chose Barrington as a place to live because of the good reputation of the Barrington public schools and because of Temple Habonim.

My first volunteer position was chair of the Ritual Committee, and I became Treasurer in 1993, a position that put me in line to be Vice President in 1994-95 and President from 1996-97. I have served continuously as chair of the Temple's Long-Range Planning Committee, a board position, since 1997; and I frequently tell friends that my personal long-range plan is to find a successor. In addition to updating the Temple's Strategic Plan every five years, our committee has become involved over the years in various Temple projects, including early planning for the expansion of the Temple sanctuary and establishing our first endowment fund.

In the more than 35 consecutive years that I have been either a Temple officer or board member. I had no experience more rewarding than the multiyear adventure of finding Rabbi Andrew F. ("Andy") Klein to succeed Rabbi James B. ("Jim") Rosenberg. Jim had served Habonim for more than 30 years, when, on October 28, 2004, he informed the Long-Range Planning Committee of his intention to retire on June 30, 2007.

This came as a shock for us, because Jim was not only the rabbi most Temple members had known, but he was also the model of what we thought our rabbi should be. He was intellectual; he sang and played guitar; he was religious school principal for most of his 30 years; he shoveled snow and responded to emergencies; and he was part of our lives. It was typically thoughtful of Rabbi Rosenberg to give us a heads-up of a little more than two and a half years, a

luxury that probably few synagogues enjoy; but we knew we had our work cut out for us.

The Search Begins

In the spring of 2005, Temple President Patricia Buff selected the members of the Search Committee, as required by our Temple's constitution. The eleven members of the committee spanned the generations of our extended family, ranging from the late Herb Malin, a founding Habonim member, to newer members of our community, such as Alan Buff, Pat Buff, Harold Foster, Jill Glickman, Jerry Katz, Janet Shansky, Stephen Sheinkopf, and Jennifer Trachtman-Rooks. The late Paul Segal and I cochaired the committee. Eight of our members had either served or would go on to serve as president of our congregation.

Our committee began meeting in the fall of 2005. The process of matching Reform Jewish congregations with rabbis who are searching for a first or a new pulpit is prescribed in meticulous detail by the Central Conference of American Rabbis ("CCAR") and is the ultimate "Jdate." Founded in 1889, the CCAR is the largest and oldest rabbinical organization in the world. Its members are primarily Reform rabbis ordained at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and Reform rabbis ordained at liberal seminaries in Europe. We invited the late Rabbi Arnold Sher, the CCAR's placement director, to meet with us to explain the search process.

Unfortunately, our relationship with Rabbi Sher got off to an awkward start. We had recently completed a Temple expansion and renovation, including a sanctuary featuring a ceiling designed by a Temple member and architect, Jay Litman. It had been inspired by the waves of the sea. We told Rabbi Sher how proud we were of our recent accomplishment.

None of us will forget how taken aback we were by his response: "It's no Taj Mahal." But Rabbi Sher's deft guidance of our search process more than compensated for this initial slight, which became – in retrospect – a source of mirth.

Rabbi Sher described the steps that would be required, provided us with a realistic timeline for the process, and discussed with

us a general profile of whom we could expect to apply. Additionally, he provided us with the handbook of CCAR placement procedures, which became the Bible for our search.

Like any well-run dating service, the CCAR requires congregations to submit a profile to launch the search process. In order to develop our profile and application to the CCAR, our first task was to survey our membership to find out not only what qualities congregants were looking for in a new rabbi, but also what they envisioned as the Temple's future goals. We also needed to create PR materials portraying a high-quality image of our synagogue to send to our applicants.

We divided our committee into subgroups. Several members, working under the expert direction of Roberta Segal, developed the membership survey. Many of the questions included in the survey were taken directly from the CCAR application. We were pleased that half of the congregation responded to our survey! Roberta also facilitated four well-attended "town meetings" to supplement what we learned from the survey. Several other members of our committee, led by Alan Buff, worked on the PR materials.

Application to the CCAR and Interviews

Using the results of our survey and town meetings, we submitted our official application for a new rabbi to the CCAR Placement Office. Our goal was to provide a self-portrait of our community in the hope of attracting rabbis with whom it would resonate.

We described our commitment to "building a strong sense of community, to the pursuit of ethical ideals, and to creating a community based on acceptance and inclusiveness." We added: "We strive to provide a supportive and accessible Jewish environment, to be a place of peacefulness and spirituality, and to maintain a stable and continuous Jewish presence in our community." Concerning our religious school, we said: "We hope that our students will have learned how to live a meaningful life with unanswerable questions."

Crucially, we described the kind of individual we were seeking as our rabbi as a person "who is connected to and internalizes Jewish thought morally, ethically, and intellectually, and embodies it

We didn't have to wait long before the first resumes began to arrive, and between May and September we received applications from – appropriately! – 18 rabbis.

in his/ her daily life.”

Our application was posted on a secure website that was accessible to rabbinical candidates looking for a good match. We didn't have to wait long before the first resumes began to arrive, and between May and September we received applications from – appropriately! – 18 rabbis. They were from many different states and from three foreign countries (Canada, the United Kingdom, and Russia). The applicants included men and women.

The first step in the winnowing process prescribed by the CCAR was to have a telephone interview with those applicants whom, we felt, based on their resumes, had the potential to be a good fit with our Temple. We agreed that if any one member of the group wanted to grant a telephone interview to a candidate, he or she would be interviewed. We asked each rabbi selected for a phone interview to send us some samples of sermons and other writings. We reciprocated by sending them our packet of PR materials so that they could learn more about us.

Our committee developed a phone interview script with a standard set of nearly 20 questions. Additionally, a few specific questions would be based on a candidate's resume or writings. In addition to basic questions, such as “What is it about Temple Habonim that is attractive to you?”, our more probing questions included some of the following queries: “What was the greatest motivator for you to become a rabbi, and what aspect of being a rabbi brings you most satisfaction?” “What made special the most beautiful worship services you have participated in, either as a rabbi or as a congregant?” “As

Jews, we all think about and sometimes struggle with our belief in God in different ways. In what ways do you help provide guidance to congregants on such issues of spirituality? How does your belief in/concept of God affect the ways that you guide others in your role as a Rabbi?” “How would you describe the ideal relationship between a rabbi and a congregation and between a rabbi and the lay leadership of a congregation?” “What examples from your experience illustrate a relationship of the type you would prefer?”

We had phone interviews with six of the 18 applicants. Each interview lasted about one hour, after which the search committee met privately to discuss our reactions to the candidate and to his or her responses. Of the six rabbis whom we interviewed by phone, we invited four to Habonim for in-person interviews.

Visits to Habonim and Other Congregations

The schedule of these visits was as follows. The rabbi was met by one or two members of the search committee and given a tour of the “Jewish” East Side of Providence and of Barrington. Then each candidate met privately with Rabbi Rosenberg; our education director, Linda Silverman Levine; and with our beloved Temple secretary, Marjorie Blowers. The rabbi was taken to dinner at a local restaurant by several committee members before an interview at the Temple with the entire search committee.

The discussion began with a candidate’s *D’var Torah*. The interview began with a standard set of questions, and it followed with a few more questions specific to an applicant. During both the in-person and phone interviews, we encouraged rabbis to ask questions of us. At the close of each interview, a rabbi was driven back to his or her hotel, and the committee stayed to discuss our reactions and a person’s responses. The following morning, several committee members joined a candidate for breakfast.

Our goal was to have as much opportunity as possible to get to know our applicants so that we could make the best-informed decision as possible. We also sought to give applicants an opportunity to learn as much as possible about our Temple community.

After interviewing four rabbis in Barrington, we narrowed

our field to two. Then each was visited by about half of the members of the committee in a candidate's current congregational setting, which I referred to as his or her "native rabbitat." Visits occurred during a weekend so that committee members could attend a Shabbat service at which a candidate officiated. We conducted these visits with differing degrees of stealth and cover stories, depending on whether a rabbi had already disclosed plans to his or her congregation to seek another pulpit.

Our committee was impressed that one of our applicants, Rabbi Andrew F. Klein, the associate rabbi at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, had been especially forthright with his congregation about his decision to enter the CCAR placement process to seek a position as a senior rabbi. In his letter to the Hevreh community, Rabbi Klein had written:

Our tradition abounds with stories teaching us to follow our hearts and live the lives that God intends us to live... When I first came to Hevreh as a rabbinical student six years ago, it was my dream to work as Rabbi Zecher's assistant, to connect with this warm and loving community, to live in the beautiful Berkshires, and to find a place to work that really felt like home. All those dreams and more have been fulfilled since I moved to the Berkshires in June of 2001. After five wonderful years of Hevreh's embracing, training, and challenging me, I feel very excited about being ready to meet the demands of serving a congregation on my own.

In 1974, when Jim Rosenberg was installed as Habonim's rabbi by Roland B. Gittelsohn, his former senior rabbi at Boston's Temple Israel, he was a young man with an infant daughter. By contrast, Rabbi Klein had been in his mid-40s when he entered rabbinical school in 1996. He was ordained in May 2001.

Rabbi Klein had earned his bachelor's degree with honors in psychology at the University of Texas in 1973. After earning certification in elementary education the following year, he taught in the Houston Independent School District for five years. Andrew Klein then became a hairdresser and a small business owner for 17 years before realizing his lifelong dream of entering rabbinical school.

Doing the math, we realized that Rabbi Klein was in his mid-fifties when he interviewed with us. Consequently, we were well aware that he would not have a tenure as long as Rabbi Rosenberg's, but those considerations faded to irrelevance as we learned more about him.

Rabbi Klein's resume included the following personal statement, disclosing traits and commitments whose genuineness we immediately recognized when we met him:

As a spiritual leader, I am committed to creating a synagogue atmosphere that is warm, inviting, and compassionate, one that provides safety and healing, spiritual exploration, and religious growth as members journey through daily life experiences and major life challenges.

As a teacher, I am passionate about Jewish texts, ancient and modern. I excel in presenting seemingly complex topics so that they become accessible and enjoyable. I treasure the moment when a student makes a connection between an ancient Jewish text and a current life situation.

As a rabbi, I model leadership that empowers a congregation to discover its strengths and realize its goals. I am skillful at building teamwork and consensus so that the community becomes both dynamic and unified. I am eager to be part of a congregation that nurtures and supports the growth of its members while encouraging me to grow as a rabbi and as a human being. I embrace the sacred responsibility and obligation inherent in being a congregational rabbi, and I am grateful for the opportunity to touch human beings in this profound way.

Lois and I had the good luck to visit Rabbi Klein in his home, meet his husband, Adam Mastoon, an accomplished professional photographer, and share a meal and conversation that neither of us will ever forget. We were impressed by Rabbi Klein's exceptional integrity.

Lois and I also observed a Friday night service Rabbi Klein conducted by himself. We were especially impressed by the participatory atmosphere he fostered by inviting congregants to read portions of the service.

Rabbi Klein's Visit

In late October 2006, the search committee met on a Sunday evening for many hours to discuss in detail the candidates still in the running. We compiled information from resumes, phone and in-person interviews, writings, reports on our “native rabbitat” visits, and our feelings of personal connection with the candidates. We reviewed our congregational survey results and developed an evaluation matrix to make sure our deliberations reflected our membership’s wishes and needs. Our committee unanimously agreed to invite Rabbi Andrew F. Klein back for a second visit to Barrington.

We coordinated his second visit to obtain feedback from Temple lay and educational leadership in order to help us confirm our choice. On the first day, we arranged for Rabbi Klein and his husband, Adam, to meet the members of the Board and the Long-Range Planning Committee in an informal setting at the Temple for about an hour. Then Rabbi Klein delivered a *D’Var Torah* we had asked him to prepare for us. We wanted to hear him speak formally as a rabbi as well as an opportunity to ask him questions. After this meeting, members of the Search Committee met separately with the Board and the Long-Range Planning Committee to obtain their feedback.

During the second day of his second visit, we asked Rabbi Klein to teach the pre-school class in the morning and the Confirmation class in the evening because we wanted to see his interactions with children spanning the full range of ages of the Temple’s children.

Our pre-school teacher, Sarah Foster, and a few members of our committee observed the pre-school class in the morning. Our education director, Linda Silverman Levine, and several members of the committee observed the Confirmation class in the evening. After the Confirmation class session, we asked members of the class to write down their reactions to Rabbi Klein while we met with him separately for a final meeting.

Linda Silverman Levine reported that when she met with Rabbi Klein for the first time, they immediately entered a meaningful dialogue about Jewish education. Sara Foster described Rabbi Klein’s interaction with our preschoolers as “magical,” and one member of our Long-Range Planning Committee described Rabbi Klein as

“compelling.” Marjorie Blowers, whose opinion counted hugely with all of us, made no secret of her very strong endorsement of Rabbi Klein.

Our Decision

On November 27, 2006, the search committee presented its unanimous formal written report to the Temple Habonim’s Board of Trustees, recommending that the Board approve the committee’s recommendation that Rabbi Klein be elected as our next rabbi. Janet Shansky was the primary author of our report to the Board, and her good judgment, sense of order, and care were reflected in it. We told the Board that our decision was not made lightly but rather with much deliberation, discussion, reading, thought, many long meetings and late nights, and hundreds and hundreds of emails. Several committee members took time off from their jobs or shortened vacations to be present for interviews or meetings, and all of us were away from our families much more than we would have liked. But every one of us would do it again without hesitation.

We were motivated by our love for Jim Rosenberg and our desire to find his worthy successor. Rabbi Jim did not participate in our deliberations, but he told me that he considered Rabbi Klein “beyond worthy.”

Under our Constitution and By-Laws, upon the Board’s approval, the recommendation was presented to the entire Congregation at a special meeting. The Congregation overwhelmingly approved the recommendation.

Three years later, in 2010, our successful search was immortalized by our resident genius and playwright, Joseph Shansky, with my assistance, in “The Rabbinical Dream,” a play that drew musical inspiration from “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” and its thematic inspiration from Rabbi



Rabbi Andrew Klein celebrating his 50th birthday at Habonim

Klein's dream of becoming a senior rabbi with his own congregation. The theme was introduced to the tune of "Close Every Door to Me," which I sang as Rabbi Klein:

*My spouse says I'm the best
But I could be so blessed.
It is now time that I make my dream known.
For I know I shall find
My own peace of mind,
For I have been promised
A shul of my own.*

It is impossible to convey the joyfulness of Joe's dramatic account of our search (available on DVD!), which included Elvis impersonators representing the competing rabbis in "The Rabbini-cal Idol" (a takeoff on "American Idol"), and a triumphant finale, including a 50th anniversary birthday cake for Temple Habonim and Rabbi Klein. The chorus sang (to the tune of "Any Dream Will Do"):

Rabbi Klein:

*A crash of drums, a flash of light
my fondest hopes burst into sight
a brilliant rainbow changed the darkness
this is my new home.*

All and Chorus:

*And now we start a new beginning
our hearts are brimming, and the dream is to
the world and I, we are not waiting or hesitating
Now our dreams come true.*

For those of us who had the honor and good fortune to have been a part of the sacred process of choosing a new spiritual leader for Temple Habonim, it truly was a dream come true.

Andrew F. Klein served as our rabbi from July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2020, when he was succeeded by another beloved rabbi, Howard Voss-Altman.



Peter, Paul & Mary in concert
(Peter at right)

My Friend, Peter Yarrow

Robert Corwin

The author, a Providence native, seemed somehow destined to devote his life to folk music and the visual arts. When he was nine years old, for example, his mother took him to an Odetta concert at the Rhode Island Auditorium. In 1965, already a fan of the Newport Folk Festivals, he met Peter Yarrow, whose mother, Vera, had grown up in Providence. By this time, Robert was already an aspiring writer of folk songs.

Although the author's paternal grandparents, Saul and Anna Cohen, had been founders of Temple Emanu-El, his parents, Jerome and Phyllis Corwin, joined Temple Beth-El. Robert began his religious education on Broad Street, but he happily remembers his earliest visits to the Orchard Avenue building in 1954. Walter Feldman, the Brown art professor, was creating mosaic pavements for the new synagogue's exterior and interior.

Robert, a bar mitzvah and a Confirmand at Beth-El, was also encouraged to become a teacher's assistant. But the author loved spending time at the Temple for another important reason: his active participation in Cub Scouts and then Boy Scouts. Although he eventually made his home in Philadelphia, Robert still enjoys attending High Holy Day services at Beth-El.

Jerome Corwin (1913-2015), who was a 1934 graduate of RISD and a World War II veteran, became the creative director and executive vice-president at Paramount Greeting Cards in Pawtucket. (This highly successful enterprise is mentioned in this issue's obituary for Gloria Winston.) Also a photographer, Jerome collected photos by and befriended many of his prominent contemporaries.

Robert followed in his father's footsteps, graduating from Hope High School. In 1971, he earned a bachelor's degree in art at U.R.I. and also worked at Paramount. The author later studied photography at RISD with Aaron Siskind and took courses in graphic design at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and in advertising design at the School of the Visual Arts in New York City. He also earned a master's degree in spiritual psychology

and counseling at the University of Santa Monica (in Southern California).

Robert has published and exhibited his photos nationally. He has also built an exceptional collection of guitars, which he plans to donate to a major American library (assuming that it will still belong to the federal government).

I first met the author in about 2014, when he was helping care for his father at Laurelmead. His mother, Phyllis, a Pembroke College alumna who became a social worker, had passed away a decade earlier.

Robert and I discussed many fun facets of folk music. As I fan, I had written an article about the Newport festivals for the 1998 issue of our journal, and it was republished six years later in our Association's anthology, *The Jews of Rhode Island*. On Robert's most recent visit to Providence, in October, we spent more than three hours discussing folk music, folk art, photography, and Beth-El.

Many of you have your Peter stories, and I know that, following his recent death, you have been reading more. I can share a few snippets about the mensch I have known since he became my true older brother 59 years ago. (That's me in the photo below, peeking over Peter's shoulder on the right.) We had met in Providence in December, 1965, thanks to Peter's first cousin, Leon Burt (1917-1976). This is the city where I became me and where Peter's beloved mother, Vera, and her family, originally known as the Burtakofskys, had settled in America.

According to naturalization records, Vera's parents, Barus and Olga Burt, had been born in Russia, and immigrated with their



seven children to Glasgow in September 1906 and then to New York City in October. The Burts went immediately to Providence, where they were naturalized in 1913. Vera, one of three daughters, was the youngest child.

Most of the Burt fam-

ily is buried in Lincoln Park Cemetery in Warwick. Leon's parents, Henry and Rose, and his uncle and aunt, Maynard and Blanche, are buried there, as are their sons, Allen and James. Both Leon and Maynard became optometrists and practiced together on Weybosset Street.

Vera Burt married Bernard Yarrow, who had been named Rubin Yaroshevitz in his native Russia. He and his parents immigrated to New York City in 1922, when Bernard was 22. He earned a bachelor's degree at New York University in 1925 and a law degree at Columbia three years later. Bernard had his own practice in New York City, until he was appointed an assistant district attorney in 1938, a year after the Yarrows' first child, Elena, was born.

Peter was born in 1938, but his parents soon divorced and found other spouses. Peter's stepfather, Harold Weisbrod, was the executive secretary of Manhattan's Central Synagogue (a Reform congregation). Bernard became a Protestant following his remarriage.

When Peter and I met in 1965, I was an impressionable and entirely smitten 16-year-old, and Peter was a wise and famous elder of 27. I shoved a big pile of typewritten lyrics to my songs in his face, and he responded with, "Send me a reel-to-reel tape."

Peter, who was still introducing folks like Bob Dylan, John Denver, and Gordon Lightfoot to the world, became my songwriting mentor. I would meet him at his New York townhouse or his hotel in Boston before a concert, and he would listen to my songs and support me. This was Peter.

In 1998, when the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago moved into the beautiful Art Deco library building it had renovated, there was a wonderful weekend of celebration. I was asked to exhibit my photographs in the new gallery space. Before the reception for my exhibit, there was a little "light entertainment." Joni Mitchell sang. Then Joni and I cohosted the reception.

I believe that every Jewish boychick of my generation had an Uncle Itzy, who would embarrass him by putting his big hand firmly around his little cheeks or pinch his face at a bar mitzvah and say, "Is this a *punim* or is this a *punim*?"

I will never forget Peter, Joni, and me hanging out chatting in the basement below my gallery space after the reception was over late that night. Who else but Peter would stop suddenly to grab my cheeks, turn to Joni of all people, and proclaim, “Is this a *punim* or is this a *punim*?”

Peter called us “Pedro and Roberto” or he would greet me with “Corwinilla!” He would always introduce me as his brother and as a “brilliant” photographer.

Peter, who had studied painting, not music, at New York City’s High School of Music and Arts, had a wonderful eye and sense of design. Like Mary, however, he would choose a photo that expressed emotion rather than a more flattering example.

Peter also called the two of us “co-politicos.” We participated in many marches together over the decades.

In 1986, for example, Peter told me that I had to join him

a studio session with Paul on the left, Peter on the right





Peter with Bob Dylan, the Burts,
and Bob's girlfriend

in walking on this thing called "The Great Peace March," which sought nuclear disarmament. So, I drove to Baltimore to meet him at a concert with

Pete Seeger and others that he had organized for the following night. We would start the march to D.C. the following morning.

After the concert, we jammed into my new BMW. Tom Chapin, a big guy, sat in the front bucket seat, and Peter sat with his bum mostly on the center console, where the power window buttons were located. Every time Peter moved, the window would let in chilly, night air, and then he would laugh uncontrollably. I can still hear Peter's high-pitched laughter. Peter loved to be silly, and private time with him usually included falling out of our chairs laughing until our stomachs hurt.

At times, being Peter's friend could also be challenging yet prove to be a great blessing. During the 1960s at the Newport Folk Festivals, I was often thrilled to be brought back to the performers' mansion at the end of a nighttime concert. Seeing his flaws taught me the valuable lesson that we are all human. Consequently, I became close and comfortable with many of his friends, including Odetta, Pete Seeger, Doc Watson, Tony Rice, and BB King. Never having felt intimidated, I believe that I was set up well for life.

Peter once spoke of how freeing it was that we both knew each other's dirtiest laundry. We felt that we had absolutely nothing to hide from each other!

I knew that I could travel to a P, P & M concert, spend quality time together before the concert, spend intimate time alone together during intermission, and then go out to eat together after the concert. I also knew that after I drove five hours, Peter might never look me in the eye for the entire night. I learned acceptance and to

give Peter his space.

Like most brothers of 59 years, however, we did have our disagreements. Once, when totally deep within an extremely intense blowout, Peter met with me at an Indian restaurant outside of Philly to talk. He said, “I do know that we love each other, and we will come out the other end stronger.” This too was part of having Peter as a friend.

This past year, Peter would say, “I just came home from radiation treatments, and I’m totally wiped, so let me call you after I’ve taken a nap.” And then he would call back and spend 40 minutes on the phone trying to help me deal with my chronic head pain. Peter introduced me to Dr. Alejandro Berenstein, a pioneering and world-famous brain specialist at the Mount Sinai Health System. Peter then took an afternoon off to join me at my appointment.

The last time I crashed at Peter’s place, he was in the middle of excruciating radiation treatments. Nevertheless, he set me up to relax in his vibrating chair while he lovingly made up the fold-out couch for me to sleep on. All this was Peter.

Peter had been saying goodbye to me for the last year or two, starting with a talk where he explicitly wanted to make sure that we had said our goodbyes and expressed our love for each other. He wanted me to know that he was at peace and appreciated that he had lived a good life. He was ready to go, if it be the next day or in a couple of years.

During the past year, I received countless texts, always ending in, “Love you, love you, love you, XO XO XO.” He also included funny little drawings made of type.

In July of 2024, we were at an event honoring Peter and Noel (Paul’s new name) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, blocks from where Peter grew up. It was an intimate event with close family, friends, and decades-old members of the P, P & M family. I can’t remember seeing Peter happier or prouder. When he kissed me on the lips, I knew then that either he was moving on in the process of saying goodbye or I was going to get whacked when I got back to my car.

Two weeks later, Peter and Noel performed in Tarrytown,

New York. This would be their last time together shown in the second photo. Just before leaving the theater, at the end of a long and tiring night, Peter took the time to be with the six-year-old son of friends of mine, who were visiting from Hawaii. Peter couldn't have been more attentive or sweeter.

As we walked out of the theater together, Peter, knowing I had a long, late-night drive home to Philadelphia, said, "I'm going to head back to the City, so you can take my hotel room." This was Peter.

He had me follow him back to the hotel, took me up to his room, gathered his things, and we hugged for the last time as I walked him to the car. Peter passed away on January 7, 2025.

I will miss the brother who loved to share food and eat off each other's plates. For example, he was game to try the jellyfish I suggested at a backstreet, mom and pop restaurant in Philly's Chinatown. He always helped the waitress clear the table, and then asked about her life.

I have been blessed to have been part of the Peter, Paul & Mary family for most of my life. Peter surrounded himself not only with excellence, but also with big hearts.

While I often think of Peter as my best friend, I know well that I'm not the only one who feels this way. Peter had that magical ability to make each of us lucky ones feel special and loved in a unique and special way.

Peter Yarrow





THE ARTWORK OF

Ori Sherman

Kathryn de Boer: *Graphic Artist*

No doubt, you have enjoyed Kathryn's graphic designs on numerous occasions without knowing her name or recognizing her understated yet masterful style. Yet, she has been an amazingly gifted and prolific graphic designer for more than a half-century.

A native of suburban Minneapolis, Kathryn grew up at a Conservative congregation, Adath Jeshurun, where she became a bat mitzvah and a Confirmand. She also attended the metropolitan Talmud Torah on three weekday afternoons (after public school) and on Sunday mornings.

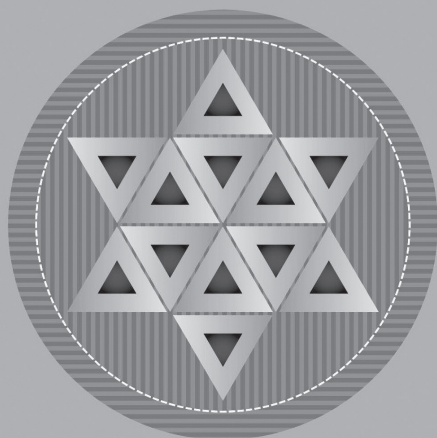
Kathryn came to Rhode Island to study at RISD and earned her bachelor of fine art's degree in 1972. This soon led to a 35-year career at Brown, where she created an enormous variety of publications, documents, and images. Kathryn's most familiar designs may be found in the *Alumni Magazine*, but she has also crafted materials for three capital campaigns, numerous academic departments, and countless books, posters, and invitations.

RISD presented another gateway, for this is where she met her husband, Cory, who became a distinguished architect. His sense of style is similarly understated.

Kathryn has designed a huge number and a rich variety of materials for many of Rhode Island's Jewish communal institutions. These have included, for example: the former Jewish Federation, the Jewish Alliance, the Bureau of Jewish Education, Brown-RISD Hillel, and Temple Emanu-El, where her family has belonged for decades.

As if her talents flowed from a bottomless well, Kathryn has also designed numerous items for relatives and friends to mark joyous and sad occasions. Her work can be both clear and surprising, fun and somber, spare and ornate.

I believe that, at her best, Kathryn can be considered a scribe, but she prefers the term *hiddur mitzvah*, which means "beautifying a commandment." Yes, she is a versatile interpreter of Hebrew letters and words, but further understands that profound ideas can be expressed in simple, refreshing, and mysterious ways. Indeed, Kathryn may be a relatively quiet person who seldom signs her work, but she is also highly imaginative, versatile, and resourceful. Somehow, she knows how to use a minimum of means to achieve marvelous effects.

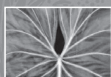


PURIM!

mmmm prune-apricot and honey-and-pecan Hamentaschen
from the de Boers

רפואה
שלמה

for Judy & Refuah Shleimah



Noah Michael

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם

★ Mazel Tov to you!

★ שהחיינו וקימונו
והגיענו לזמן הזה



"Sherman is an image-maker in whom the mingling of traditions, memories, and dreams create a stimulating tapestry of an authentic artistry dedicated to exploring and revealing his own intense pleasure and love of Judaism and visual art."

STEVEN MARK DOBBS
Curator, Jewish Community Museum
San Francisco
1987



Wednesday
December 2, 2009
7 pm
15 Keene Street
Providence

Dear Friends,

You are invited to an **exhibit and slide lecture** of the extraordinary work of artist Ori Sherman.

Born in Jerusalem, Ori grew up in New York City, where he attended the High School of Music and Art. He graduated from RISD in 1955 and then moved to California.

Ori worked in many media, including painting, sculpture, and textile design. Long fascinated with Hebrew calligraphy, stories, and wisdom sayings from the *Tanach*, Ori incorporated these elements into many of his works.

Please join me in my home for a unique show of his work, followed by light refreshments.

VARDA LEV



איש חמדות • שלום לד
חזק וחזק

My Student Journal at Hebrew Union College, 1983

George M. Goodwin

By 1980, I stood upon a broken bridge or at another crossroads. Fortunately, I had been able to pursue my dream of studying art history and in 1975 wrote a dissertation about the educational function of art museums. I sought a museum position, but was unable to find one that measured up to my lofty expectations. Then again, in that era, Jews were not exactly embraced by museum staffs or boards.

Consequently, while living in Los Angeles, my hometown, I optimistically pursued several related avenues. I conducted extensive interviews for UCLA's Oral History Program, and I taught part-time at several colleges. My longest run was 15 semesters at RISD's sister, Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, but a tenure-track position never materialized there or elsewhere. Accordingly, I also worked part-time as an archivist of sorts- an administrator in the liquidation of my father's large and prestigious law firm.

Inevitably, I was forced to seek a new pathway. But what could I possibly love as much as art, museums, and teaching? And how did this predicament affect my circuitous search for a wife?

Following my parents' and my twin brother's example, I had become quite active as a volunteer in Los Angeles's Jewish Federation. This led in 1979 to my participation in a mission to Israel and Egypt, and it resulted in my quite active participation in Federation's Young Adults Division. (Y.A.D. sounded a lot better than another possibility, Single Adults Division, or S.A.D.)

Though I had known one rabbi quite well for my entire life, I never considered for more than a moment the possibility of following in his footsteps. Who could? Yes, I was a spiritual person, but one drawn passionately toward people, objects, and places rather than texts or rituals.

Within a few years, having both fulfilled and exhausted my opportunities as a lay leader, I seriously considered becoming a federation staffer. In Los Angeles, however, this meant earning a master's degree in Jewish communal service at the local campus

of Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary that had been founded in 1875 in Cincinnati.

Needless to say, I was not eager to earn another graduate degree. Nevertheless, in 1982, I convinced myself to audit a course in Jewish communal studies taught by a recent acquaintance, Prof. Bruce Phillips, who was my exact contemporary. Fortunately, I soon discovered that I was not a complete Jewish ignoramus, and I even liked some of what I was studying. Then I convinced myself to apply for admission to HUC's School of Jewish Communal Service.

I did not discuss this decision with my parents, especially in view of the fact that my mother, Madeline, had already served a decade on the school's advisory committee. If possible, I wanted to be accepted on a meritocratic basis. But I was dubious about my chances.

Yes, I was accepted, but conditionally. The school's administrators insisted that, like most of its degree students, I had to pursue a concurrent master's degree at the neighboring University of Southern California. In fact, my credentials had been submitted there, and I was welcome to enter the program in social work, public administration or gerontology. I chose the p.a. program, but refused to take the Graduate Record Exam. Hadn't I already demonstrated some intellectual proclivities? Unfortunately, a few months later, I was forced to take that foolish test. I'm still angry with USC, even though my wonderful son-in-law, Adam, loves his undergraduate alma mater.

The dual HUC and USC programs were designed to last 24 months: two consecutive summers at HUC, four regular semesters at both institutions, and a December trip to Israel. Though it meant going back to school more than full-time, I thought that I would at least give it a try. If the programs were challenging and somewhat satisfying, then I would imbibe the next dose of medications.

Indeed, I was quite surprised to discover during my first summer, in 1983, that I enjoyed many facets of HUC. Fortunately, some of my professors-- mostly Reform rabbis with doctorates-- considered me a junior colleague rather than a procrastinator or a lost soul. I quickly began to appreciate their scholarly achievements, and I also began to enjoy several of my fellow students, who seemed almost young enough to have been my own.

As the following entries and excerpts may demonstrate, I also

soon discovered that I liked the requirement of keeping a daily journal, often referred to as a “log,” which four of my professors critiqued every few weeks. While seated at my dining room table, I dashed off 65 typewritten pages that first summer.

My renewed enthusiasm for writing and research led me to tackle HUC’s required master’s thesis during my first rather than my second year. I actually grew to love this challenge, and the result was a study nearly as long as my Stanford dissertation but one that was perhaps more readable and insightful.

Although I grew to respect, admire, and love more than a few of my HUC mentors, none wanted or was able to figure out where I might fit within the Jewish professional world. (Perhaps some of these professors hadn’t yet figured out where they belonged.)

Over two years, I especially enjoyed the following faculty (listed in alphabetical order): Gerald Bubis, Stanley Chyet, David El- lenson, Norman Mirsky, and Michael Signer. Jerry and Michael were my thesis advisors. Yes, there was one woman on the communal service faculty, Rita Lowenthal, but her primary task was supervising students’ internships, and she was not considered a professor.

As if they had nothing else to do, students in my program were also required to serve two days per week for four semesters as interns at Jewish organizations. I worked consecutively in two of Federation’s departments, but never felt sufficiently challenged or rewarded. Essentially, I was an observer, which, perhaps, I had always been and inevitably remain.

Yet, another opportunity suddenly arose after my first year in the dual-degree program. In 1984, after the passing of Edgar F. Magnin, my rabbinic anchor and my great uncle, I was invited by our family’s congregation, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, to create a memorial exhibition, which I lovingly did. I came to believe that this reward was the true reason why I was required to spend a second year in L.A. as a graduate student. I still think of this exhibition as one of my most important and rewarding accomplishments.

My brother, Theo, had met his wife, Susan, through Federation’s Y.A.D., and this is where I met Betsey in 1982. We were engaged in Montreal, a few weeks before I enrolled at HUC, and we were married in December 1983 at her family’s Reform congregation, Temple Emanuel, in Andover, Massachusetts. Unfortunately, given my overwhelming graduate school responsibilities, I

was unable to give her the attention that she (and I) deserved. Somehow, perhaps with the Almighty's help, we persevered and prospered. Yes, while "courting," we had taken a course at the University of Judaism, a Conservative educational center, called "Making Marriage Work." We had friends who also took this course, but it didn't work so well for them.

In 1985, after my graduations from HUC and USC, we moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where I worked as the associate executive of its Federation and Betsey continued with her national computer company. Two years later, following the birth of our first child, Molly, we decided to move closer to Betsey's family or mine.

There was an opening at the Rhode Island Federation, where I interviewed, and we moved to Providence in 1987. We thought that we would stay three to five years. Unfortunately, my position was quite disappointing for several reasons, but we decided to stay a while longer, especially after the birth of our second child, Michael.

I thought that I would pursue some other professional possibilities. While a member of St. Paul's Mount Zion Temple, I had organized an exhibition and a symposium to celebrate the centenary of its notable modern architect, Erich Mendelsohn.

Fortunately, another extraordinary opportunity arose in Providence, when I became the archivist of our congregation, Temple Beth-El, in 1988. Then other projects followed. Thus, Betsey and I have lived in Providence for 38 years- far longer than anywhere else. Indeed, this period has become longer than half of my lifetime. Perhaps one day I will become a Rhode Islander. For the time being, however, I consider myself a "Rhode Angeleno."

I'm quite proud that in 2010, five of my 24 classmates at HUC and I were awarded honorary doctorates in recognition of our 25 years of Jewish communal service. Not only was my L.A. family able to attend, but my mother, still active on the College's advisory committee, marched with me in the academic procession. I believe that we're still marching together.

I've kept in touch with a few of my caring classmates, but, far sooner than later, many of our dear professors passed away. Alas, the latest, three years ago, was David Ellenson, at 76 years of age. Without any administrative training or experience, he had become HUC's highly effective president. David, a historian, had also been kind enough to write a blurb for the dust jacket of RIJHA's *anthology, The Jews of Rhode Island*, which I had

envisioned and coedited.

Unfortunately, HUC has changed in numerous ways. As you may know, its original campus in Cincinnati has closed as a seminary because applicants to the rabbinic program prefer the New York City and L.A. campuses. Even though the School of Jewish Communal Service received a significant endowment, resulting in its rebirth as the Zelikow School, it has attracted fewer students. Its professorial director lives in greater Boston, and much instruction is conducted by Zoom. Students, who reside around this country and in a few others, assemble in L.A. only a few weeks each year. But I guess that Zelikow and Zoom somehow go together.

Even if unable to pursue my newly discovered role as a federation staffer during the late 1980s, I believe that I eventually found a larger and far more fulfilling purpose within the realm of Jewish communal service. Quite fortunately, our kids found even better roles.

Molly, who had become a Hillel leader in college, quickly found a place within New York City's Jewish hierarchy. Yes, she was required to earn a master's in public administration in order to pursue greater responsibilities at the nation's largest federation, but she has become highly versatile and successful- in many ways putting me to shame. Her initial specialty was allocations to local beneficiary agencies. Then she focused on grantsmanship, and now she is a major gifts officer.

Michael, a linguist, has performed *mitzvot* in developing communities and countries. Yes, it may sound ironic, but he worked for two oil companies based in Houston, and he too has earned two master's degrees, including one in foreign service. He now conducts *mitzvot* on behalf of an international chemical company.

I probably deserve little credit for our kids' academic or professional success. No doubt Betsey and our parents provided far more nurturing roles. Yes, Molly and Michael had studied for several years at the former Alperin Schechter Day School in Providence, and both kids became Confirmants and post-Confirmant graduates at Temple Beth-El. Yet, through a combination of factors, both found their own thoughtful, useful, and inspiring ways.

Please pardon me for boasting about our family's blessings. And yes, I wrote an even longer journal during my second summer at HUC, and it too resides in our basement.

June 20, 1983

My log. An initial entry. What do I say?

I enjoy writing: usually have. I have written journals at various times in my life, often during a trip. When I studied in Italy in 1969, I kept a daily journal. I wrote every night for four months. It had great meaning for me then. Strange thing is I never went back to study it. I know where it is if I have the urge.

I am very happy about beginning HUC. I like beginnings. The beginning of a semester, especially a school year, has always given me positive feelings. Fresh faces. Optimism. High expectations. Energy. A clean slate.

The beginning at HUC has been unusually warm. Compared to my previous educational experiences (as a student), particularly at graduate schools, beginnings have been botched. Missing faculty. Poor introductions among students. Little merriment. Mostly stiffness and an effort to impress one another.

Yesterday's orientation was fun. I hadn't anticipated beginning with a service. Nice touch. I was impressed with the group's participation. So much energy and enthusiasm. The pace was too fast. I was pleased that I was chosen to read. Lucky it was in English.

Prof. Michael Signer was a real surprise. A sharp intellect and a sense of showmanship. He gives the appearance of being quite eccentric, at least in contrast to the young, idealistic, and impressionable students, who seem a bit bland. This course will be full of surprises.

Signer got into some intellectual meat. Reminded me of Chaim, the guide on my mission to Israel and one of the first people with whom I had serious discussions about Judaism since I left Sunday school. I already begin to feel my mind expanding and horizons broadening.

Simultaneously, I feel my old world beginning to fade away. The transition is not abrupt – in fact, rather gentle. At the beginning of this experience, which I have eagerly awaited, I am hopeful. I am also protecting myself against possible disappointment by not being unduly hopeful. Things will emerge soon enough.

June 27

There were many highlights to the weekend retreat at Lake Arrowhead. Getting away from the city, if only for a few days, was refreshing. Above the banks of smog, it was good being again part of nature. Blue skies. Tall trees. A scampering squirrel. Squawking blue jays.

This leads me to the important subject of services. As many as I have experienced in a two-day period except for the High Holy Days. I must confess that I reached a saturation level. After an hour and a half of prayers on Saturday morning, I was not ready for Torah study. I also would have enjoyed more prayers in English or even some written by students. But I must state, however, that I was impressed by the spirit of the services. There are many students- faculty, too- who are deeply involved. In fact, no rabbi was needed to lead worship. The services seemed to propel themselves.

On Friday evening I liked praying outdoors. This is an idea that has appealed to me through my study of religious architecture. Saturday night I also enjoyed the *Havdalah* service, which was almost entirely new to me. I liked the darkness pierced by candlelight, the swaying bodies, the repetitive music, the sweet smell of spice. It was moving.

The moment that gave me the strongest rush of emotion was on Saturday morning, when the Torah, having been removed from the makeshift ark, was carried through the dining hall. I was surprised to see students – and so many – kiss the sacred scroll. This is a total departure from my experience as a Reform Jew at Wilshire Boulevard Temple. I was also impressed visually by men and women wearing *tallit*. The spectacle was, simply speaking, impressive. I think the photographs I later took out-of-doors will be quite handsome.

June 29

Stephen Passamaneck's morning class was quite difficult for me. I don't know what is going wrong. It seems that every time I ask a question, I am saying something wrong. Today I asked if there was a reform movement within Judaism by the time of the Babylonian Talmud. The question was not appreciated. Later, when I asked what

significance a Talmudic passage might have today, the professor suggested that I was not capable of understanding the answer.

I had no intention of defying authority, asserting my intellect or attracting attention to myself. I thought that I was coming up with good, honest inquiry. On Thursday I intend to say nothing to try to ameliorate the situation. This is indeed an unpleasant decision, given the general atmosphere of HUC.

Jerry Bubis's class today was fascinating. His guest was Rabbi Laura Geller, who discussed women and their roles in Judaism. She is a bright, articulate, and effective speaker, but do I still have to like her? Maybe I feel threatened or even a bit jealous. Nevertheless, I can respond somewhat objectively to her comments.

My thoughts are that Judaism, despite an historical prejudice in favor of men, honors its women. They have positive – even hallowed – roles within Jewish life. Thus, I am not in the least bit concerned about what they or men wear in synagogue. I am not particularly concerned whether we need more women-oriented rituals. That's fine with me. I am pleased that women have been the basis of volunteer work in communal affairs. Fine. I would like them to continue to be active. We need better leaders.

I am not terribly sympathetic to her remarks about the hardships of working rabbis. At least she has a full-time job in a field for which she trained! She has a measure of respect within her professional community. She obviously derives much satisfaction from her work.

My feeling is that there is a need for continual reform within Judaism, as in most other things, and that much of it will occur. Men and women are only gradually learning more about themselves, and men are not necessarily to blame for past injustices.

June 30

Following Rabbi Geller's presentation, Jerry Bubis discussed the changing roles of Jewish women in America. A chart summarized much of this information. The amount of change over three generations is staggering, perhaps representing a breakdown in the social system as it has been known.

Of course, I was quick to see how my family's experiences related to the social model: exactly. My own experience in selecting a mate (and perhaps fathering and grandfathering) follows contemporary trends. I cannot say that I am either in favor or against the developments that have occurred. This is simply what has happened.

No doubt I would have enjoyed marriage sooner, and no doubt I will regret caring for young children when I am an older man. But this is not how I planned my life! No doubt the trends will change again.

Michael Signer was kind enough to spend about an hour of precious class time addressing one of my concerns. Before verbalizing it, I really had no intention of asking it. The timing seemed to be right. I asked: "How does knowledge (of The Bible) lead to faith?"

Michael gave a learned answer, but, as he would agree, did not actually answer my question. He agreed with my point, that I could teach the literature of painting, but not necessarily its love. Signer said he is not a guru, recommended a man who may be, and suggested that historical and literary study enhances personal belief.

July 5

Jerry, I thought, was again right on this morning. I am surprised how much I tend to agree with him. I do not intend for him to become my guru, however. Yet it is easy for me to follow in his wake.

He is a strong leader, a quality I like and admire. He is a big man, probably older than most of the faculty, experienced in many professional worlds, and confident about his thinking. He certainly complements HUC's regular academic staff, which seems to reside in the world of books. Bubis likes books, too, and has a good mind, but sees a world beyond academia. Out here where I reside.

A good personal conversation occurred with Michael Signer during a class break. I was surprised to learn about his knowledge of Art Center College of Design, where I taught for 15 semesters. He has a brother-in-law who studied there. Michael and I also mentioned our experiences as doctoral students. I was further surprised to learn about his involvement in HUC's Skirball Museum. I surely

I was experiencing a different syndrome in my life, even though many important events have transpired during the past twelve months: my purchase of a home, the termination of one career, the beginning of another, as well as my engagement to be married.

would like to get to know Michael and possibly use him as a thesis or an independent study adviser.

July 7

In Stephen Passamaneck's "Thought" class, I once again felt like an anthropologist, observing a foreign culture (traditional Judaism), not my own. A description of the morning prayer service left me cold. Too much regimentation, not enough individualism. I think I understand the reasons why. But today? Religion for me is a highly personal form of expression. I have no desire to form more traditional religious habits, even though I find it helpful to better understand them. In various discussions of traditional life, I find the evolution of the Reform movement – a "modern" Judaism – inevitable. I do not regret the passing of a more harmonious or pious era.

July 8

I was a bit surprised – and I have discovered that I like surprises – to hear Jerry mention my great uncle, Rabbi Edgar Magnin. I have not referred to him, and the few students who knew of him were startled to make the connection. Edgar was referred to as a symbol of Reform Judaism in the L.A. community, a personification of an era as well as an institution. Perhaps I will discuss my relationship with him on another occasion. I hope that it is not a sad occasion.

Edgar is, of course, much the reason for my being at HUC. That is, he laid the groundwork for what I have later developed. Still, I am very proud of him and he, hopefully, of me.

July 11

I attempted to explain in Jerry's class that I was experiencing a different syndrome in my life, even though many important events have transpired during the past twelve months: my purchase of a home, the termination of one career, the beginning of another, as well as my engagement to be married. Having gone through a college-age period of searching, even a possible identity crisis, I no longer feel the compulsion to search for great personal meaning. Rather, I am searching for a way to be useful in society: some responsibility, some money, some power, some respect.

Michael surprised his class by ending on such a sour note. He walked out of the room when there was a bit more than routine opposition to another exegesis. He was, simply speaking, disgusted. He shouldn't have been. Kvetching should not have been taken seriously.

Fortunately, during the break, I had a moment to talk with him. Evidently, he likes to associate me with Stanford, which I do not particularly care for. Over the last eight years, if I have demonstrated anything, it is that I am more than a son of the doctoral farm.

Signer and I also chatted about his doctoral studies in Toronto and his interest in modern sculpture, especially Lipchitz. He also called Etrog "a poor man's Henry Moore," which sounds more like something I would say. In class, I was able to answer a few routine questions about Constantine and pantheism, but otherwise restrained myself.

Passamaneck seemed to approve of my question about the problem of rivaling God's perfection in the writing of the Torah scroll. As with Persian carpets or Indian sand paintings, it is not a problem. He and I seem to be getting along better. That is important to me.

July 13

Last night Uncle Edgar came to the house for dinner. I had a chance to talk with him – rather, listen. I was hoping to do this, and it was possible for a few minutes between drinks. As everyone says, he is a truly “remarkable” man.

He asked me about my being at HUC, which was of course an opportunity for him to express his opinions and reminisce. He repeated much of what he had told me as recently as two weeks ago, but he also added a few new bits of insight.

Uncle Edgar, out of jealousy, condescension or concern, does not care much for HUC today. He does not like the rabbinic faculty, whom he considers unsuccessful pulpit rabbis. Obviously, he does not know much about these people as individuals or the nature of higher learning and education today. Otherwise, I think that he would have some respect for a person like Michael Signer, who is indeed brilliant, and whose work is simply different from that of a pulpit rabbi. I think that Signer belongs where he is, even if HUC may be something of an asylum from the everyday world.

Edgar naturally compares all rabbis to himself and only by the criteria that have made his career successful- fabulously successful. Edgar wants rabbis to be charismatic leaders, who can inspire, uplift, and reach ordinary people. He dislikes the idea of preaching (perhaps scholarship, too), and insists that he has never preached. Instead, he prefers to give a “talk,” often about current events or books he has recently read, quickly moving from one topic to another. He resents the idea of talking down to congregants, insisting that rabbis are not superior to laymen.

Uncle Edgar thinks that most rabbis trained at HUC are processed in a mechanical way. Of course he does not say why he has been an exception, possibly “the” exception. The implication is that he always had enormous natural ability- talent, “star” quality or possibly genius. He likes the idea of genius and often refers to such examples as Emerson, one of the major influences on his life, as well as Michelangelo, whose painting of the creation of Adam he has interpreted for me. Edgar said last night that the rabbinate has produced no wonders of humankind, adding that this has been a failure.

Edgar has told a story many times, most dramatically when

he was honored by HUC as “Alumnus of the Century.” (I was present on that occasion, but he does not remember it). He tells the story of how bored he was as a student in Cincinnati for nine years and how much that he wished that time had passed more quickly. Then, when he had graduated and was ready to leave, he locked himself in an empty room, sat down, and cried. “Wept like a baby,” I think were his words. Edgar realized how dear the school had been to him, that it was his home he was leaving.

As I have grown older, I have grown to love Edgar even more, but also see some of his faults. But Edgar is Edgar. 93 years old. 67 years at Wilshire Boulevard. A mind that is alive. A soul full of aesthetic feeling. A strong sense of patriotism. A pride in Judaism, its history and people. A man who still walks sprightly, whistles a tune, and has a twinkle in his eye.

This man is vital. He is an optimist. He gives me hope.

Something remarkable, truly extraordinary, has given this man to us. Perhaps this is a meaning of God.

July 14

Between classes I did some fun and surprising reading in the library. Beginning with the article on architecture, I paged through *The Encyclopedia Judaica*, which I had never used. I was amazed to see short articles about some of my favorite architects: Dankmar Adler, Michel de Klerk, Louis Kahn, Gordon Bunshaft, and the Los Angeles greats, Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler. I was pleased to see their Jewish identities confirmed and in fact celebrated.

Jerry strongly disagreed with another of my ideas, which had been developing slowly in my mind, but just recently crystalized. Though it may exist, I have not yet encountered a nonapologetic statement at HUC of what Reform Judaism is or should be today. In my interpretation, which could easily be that of a small minority, most statements about the Reform movement seem to be conciliatory. The implication is that there is a need for a return to more traditional ways: more Hebrew in prayers, more ritual outside of the synagogue, more observance of Jewish law, more strengthening of all

aspects of Jewish community.

Obviously, I am most concerned with the last item. But I still believe strongly in the notion of Reform Judaism as I have experienced it over the last ten or twenty years. It is difficult to express this idea in a sentence or two, but I will give it a try.

I think Reform Judaism is a modern expression of the faith. It values – even glorifies – the past, but sees in it a contemporary light. Judaism is not a belief that dominates or even necessarily orders one's life. It is one dimension of human experience, equal to most others and not necessarily superior, which gives the individual, family, and ethnic group meaning. It guides our behaviors, patterns, and thoughts, and it intensifies our feelings. Reform Judaism does not constitute Truth. It is one of many truths. For me, Reform Judaism is most desirable when it gives life dimension, balance, and some degree of wholeness.

I am pleased that Jerry offered to meet with me privately to discuss these ideas, and I intend to pursue it. I hope that he is not antagonized by me because I want to maintain a good, evolving relationship with him.

July 18

The material that most interested me today was Jerry's lecture-discussion about the changing role of women and women's roles in marriage. A conservative in many ways, he hypothesized that most women, when given the choice, will opt for motherhood over careers. This would be a redefinition of the most radical thinking of the early (1970s) feminists.

I am a little confused about women's enthusiasm to join the working world of men. So most women want equality in carrying out meaningless tasks? Only a tiny number of women (as men) will enjoy a truly stimulating, rewarding, and satisfying profession. They, on the other hand, can play the role of mother, which, in my opinion, should not be demeaned.

When the problem of motherhood is defined in terms of staying home and doing menial chores, then I can see why there is much reluctance. But somebody has to do this.

I suppose that I am willing to contribute a good part of my energies to child rearing. This is easy for me to say, however, since I have never changed a diaper nor lost an evening's sleep. My goal, I suppose, is to be more egalitarian than my father, who, strapped with his own responsibilities, left parenting mostly to my mother.

Jerry's class also looked at the idea of compatibility in marriage. He mentioned almost parenthetically that today's therapists, including Jews, are looking favorably at the living-together experience before marriage. Though Betsey and I are not sharing a residence, we have nearly become husband and wife. Most of our relatives and friends see us in that light. Further, our relationship is totally faithful, in spite of external demands.

Jerry listed the criteria by which compatibility in a relationship can be measured. All of them seem to apply to us. From physical to financial to intellectual to philosophical. There is another interesting variable, however. That is age. Though only six years older than my partner, I feel protective of her. She perhaps respects my experience in the world. It seems so far that we are a good pairing of individuals. Though we could not have predicted that such a pairing would occur, it has, and for the better!

July 21

As Michael said, I am "warming up" to the source material. This comes as something of a surprise to me. Though I still have neutral feelings about *The Book*, I am beginning to feel some attraction toward rabbinic literature. As I suppose I should have known,

Perhaps one of my greatest problems is that I am a product of a lifelong academic experience. I am too damn intellectual and critical, caught up in a world of words, ideas, journals, and books.

I am finding that scholars of yore did say and write things that have meaning for me today. The character of the scholar, for instance.

In Michael's class today, I was impressed by the beauty of a passage. The nature of prayer was compared both to a bathhouse and an ocean. I was able make a fairly obvious observation about the relative depth of each. Building upon Michael's analogy of a painting by Brueghel, I was able to see the relative meaning of a painting by Rothko. Michael easily saw the parallel, and some of the students did too. I'm looking forward to the final assignment.

Before giving me back my log today, Jerry cautioned that he had cut me into pieces. He had worked hard on critiquing the journal, and there was much for me to learn.

After reading his comments, however, I feel hurt. I think he was harsh – unnecessarily so. Even though the last comment is "good log," I think that a concluding statement would have been useful. Most of his remarks are a few words or phrases and lack continuity. Further, he seems to focus on the weak points or the points where we disagree.

My basic reaction is that I have revealed – even exposed – myself in my writing only to make myself more vulnerable than if I had said little or nothing. I don't want to be probed, dissected, and embarrassed. I am happy with who I am, what I have been, and who I might like to be. I do not want to be reshaped "for my own good."

I can handle the HUC material on an intellectual basis, probably as well as most students. I am open to and eager about the HUC experience. I want to be inspired, uplifted, and supported. I want to fit in.

Perhaps one of my greatest problems is that I am a product of a lifelong academic experience. I am too damn intellectual and critical, caught up in a world of words, ideas, journals, and books. Thus, I resent the idea that I have to be more "rigorous." I am rigorous, often to a neurotic degree.

If I were less scrutinizing, less compulsive, and less demanding, I would probably be a happier person. I could put my work in a perspective and leave it when I wanted. This is one of the things I am looking forward to in marriage: escape from a perpetual dialogue

with myself and an endless critique of experience.

July 26

Today wins the award for the greatest contrast of emotions: the highest high and the lowest low. Both emotions were derived from similar kinds of institutions, however.

Having just come from the Westside Health Care Center, I feel awful. As low as I've felt in a very long time. I could cry.

The place is a warehouse of the dying. There are human skeletons and shadows propped up in chairs, reclining on beds, suspended in nothingness. The place is like a foreign land or planet, indescribably pitiful. The late paintings of Géricault come to mind.

Why shouldn't these wretched bodies be allowed to die? Why was there lifelessness prolonged? The answer, in part, is financial. The Westside Health Care Center is an investment, a profit-making institution. A business. It provides a minimal level of care, at relative low costs, according to State of California standards.

The place reminded me of Dickens- the orphanage in *Oliver Twist*, for instance. It seemed not comical, however, but a ghoulish joke.

The big lift of the day came later through a visit to the Victory Boulevard campus of the Jewish Home for the Aging. My class was invited to lunch, and each student was assigned to a table with a group of six or seven oldsters. Though few of us were eager for this assignment, all displayed fortitude and cheerfulness. Looking around the huge dining room at my classmates, I felt proud. They truly seem to be caring. I can't think of any other class that I have been a part of – or taught – where the members would have accepted such a challenge and possibly enjoyed it.

Our field work instructor, Rita Lowenthal, asked us students how we could foresee ourselves as *alter cockers*. Gosh, how do I see myself three years from now? Even now, that's a tough question.

Suffice it to say that I don't want to live for the sake of maintaining a medical technician's salary. When my body and my mind go, let me go. I would like to grow old in some style and comfort and maintain some residue of dignity and meaning.

As for now, I want to go visit my fiancée and celebrate my youthfulness. *Carpe diem*: live for the day! That would be a measure of growth for me.

July 29

Rita Lowenthal asked me to comment further on my prospects for aging. How do I see myself at 70 years, for example?

It is very difficult for me to do so. I still have difficulty reading the next two or three years. Looking backward, there is absolutely no way that anybody, including myself, could have predicted the life I have led.

Around the time I was in high school, it seemed important for me to be able to predict the future, resorting to charts, maps, and diagrams. Over the years, however, I have grown a bit more flexible.

I truly believe that I am now living more for each day. Enjoy what I can, while it lasts, because it won't for long. Grin and bear it. Do the best I can under the circumstances. Here I sound like a stoic, not a hedonist.

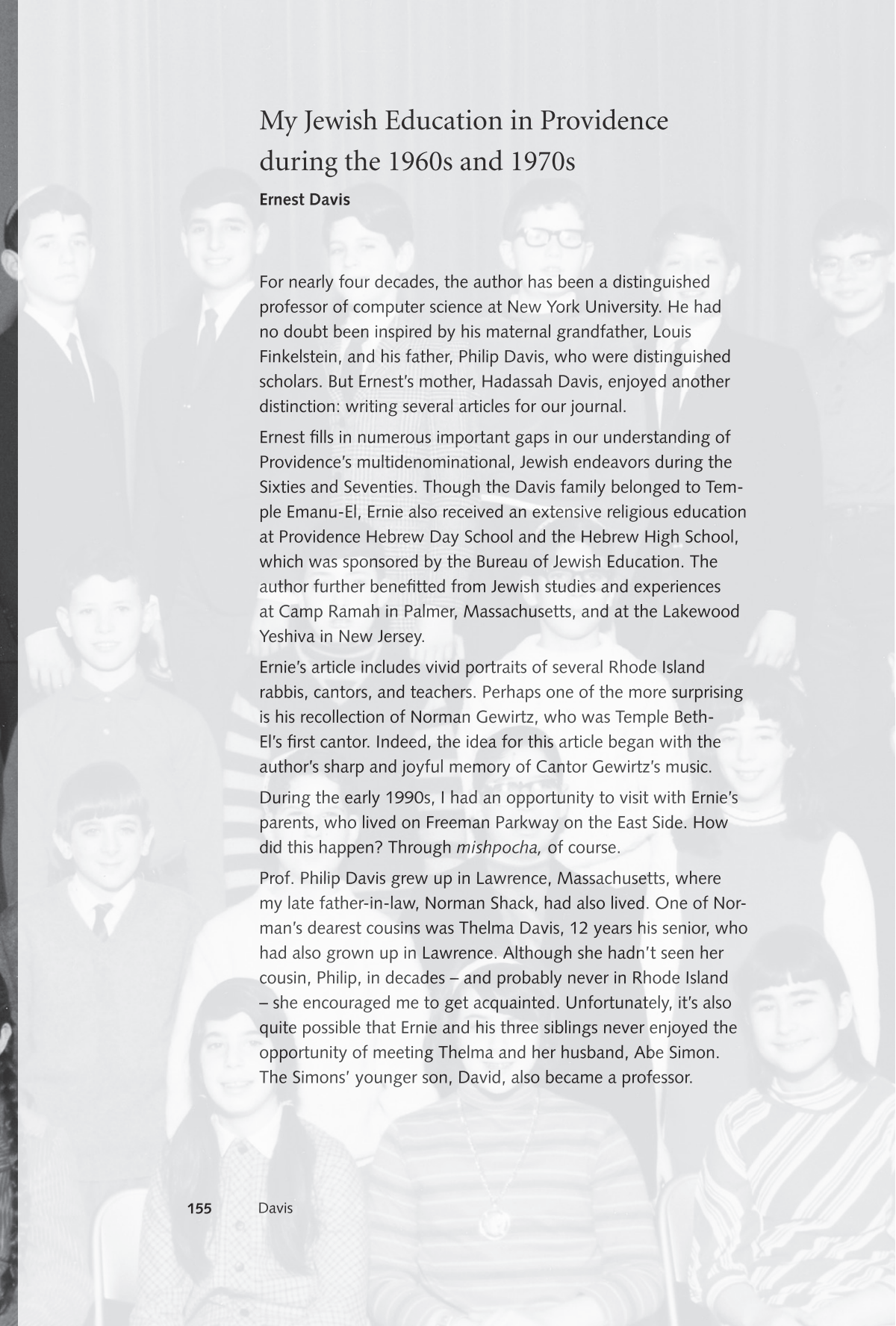
I'll try to be a bit more specific. I hope to live much like I do today. My body is in good repair. A sound intellect, still curious and controversial. Even a little bit of a maverick. Many good things around me: books, works of art, beautiful household objects, clothes, natural beauty. Living in my own residence, in some comfort, with considerable privacy. Time to myself, but not huge amounts. I will obviously need something to do. Even if I am no longer working for a living, I will be engaged in activity. I have always been active, especially when not working for a living. To put it another way, I have never let my work get in the way of my living.

I will need other things. Love, sex, companionship. A family. Perhaps a large family. A circle of friends, Jewish and Gentile. A sense of belonging to a place, even a country. A system of values, beliefs, and principles. Hope. Peace. Freedom. Reasons for living. This is not asking for a lot – just everything under the sun!



Providence Hebrew Day School, sixth grade class, 1968:
author is in second row from bottom, second student from left;
Mrs. Julia Robinson is teacher on left, and Rabbi Armin Traub
is next to her





My Jewish Education in Providence during the 1960s and 1970s

Ernest Davis

For nearly four decades, the author has been a distinguished professor of computer science at New York University. He had no doubt been inspired by his maternal grandfather, Louis Finkelstein, and his father, Philip Davis, who were distinguished scholars. But Ernest's mother, Hadassah Davis, enjoyed another distinction: writing several articles for our journal.

Ernest fills in numerous important gaps in our understanding of Providence's multidenominational, Jewish endeavors during the Sixties and Seventies. Though the Davis family belonged to Temple Emanu-El, Ernie also received an extensive religious education at Providence Hebrew Day School and the Hebrew High School, which was sponsored by the Bureau of Jewish Education. The author further benefitted from Jewish studies and experiences at Camp Ramah in Palmer, Massachusetts, and at the Lakewood Yeshiva in New Jersey.

Ernie's article includes vivid portraits of several Rhode Island rabbis, cantors, and teachers. Perhaps one of the more surprising is his recollection of Norman Gewirtz, who was Temple Beth-El's first cantor. Indeed, the idea for this article began with the author's sharp and joyful memory of Cantor Gewirtz's music.

During the early 1990s, I had an opportunity to visit with Ernie's parents, who lived on Freeman Parkway on the East Side. How did this happen? Through *mishpocha*, of course.

Prof. Philip Davis grew up in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where my late father-in-law, Norman Shack, had also lived. One of Norman's dearest cousins was Thelma Davis, 12 years his senior, who had also grown up in Lawrence. Although she hadn't seen her cousin, Philip, in decades – and probably never in Rhode Island – she encouraged me to get acquainted. Unfortunately, it's also quite possible that Ernie and his three siblings never enjoyed the opportunity of meeting Thelma and her husband, Abe Simon. The Simons' younger son, David, also became a professor.

My Family

My parents were born on the same day, January 2, 1923: my father, Philip Davis, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and my mother, Hadassah Finkelstein Davis, in New York City.¹ They started college – Harvard and Radcliffe, respectively – in 1939, at the age of 16. They were married on their 21st birthday, January 2, 1944, in New York City. They had four children: my older sister, Abby; my older brother, Frank; myself; and my younger brother, Joey.

My father, a mathematician, was the chief of numerical analysis at the National Bureau of Standards in Washington, DC. Our family lived in Chevy Chase, Maryland, and belonged to Congregation Adas Israel. We moved to Providence in 1963, when my father became a mathematics professor at Brown University.

Life in Providence suited my parents very well. My mother, in particular, soon became a great enthusiast for Providence and Rhode Island. She did a master's degree at Brown in American history. Roger Williams was one of her heroes. Throughout her life she continued to study Rhode Island history and she wrote numerous pieces about it, including a few for *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*. My father was happy at Brown and had many good friends among his colleagues there.

My parents were members of Temple Emanu-El. They were moderately observant but by no means strictly so. They kept kosher but not rigorously. They observed the holidays in a positive sense: *Kiddush* on Friday nights, and a festive meal with seasonal foods on *Yom Tov*; seders on Passover, often a *sukkah* on Sukkot, menorah-lighting and presents on Hanukkah. They did not follow the prohibitions, however. They felt free to drive, use electricity, and so forth on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*.

My mother went to shul from time to time; my father, only on the High Holy Days. Later in her life, my mother was part of a class led by Rabbi Saul Leeman, which read through the entire *Tanakh* in Hebrew. My father's Hebrew, as he once complained, never got past "Hebrew II," in spite of many efforts.

At this time, my mother's father, Louis Finkelstein, was chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the leader of

Conservative Judaism in the United States, and a noted scholar. Within and beyond the Jewish community, he was widely admired and honored, and I adored him.



author's parents, Hadassah & Philip, 1948

Most years, I took a train by myself down to New York City to be with him for Passover seders and for the first days of Sukkot. (He lived alone; my grandmother and he had been divorced before I was born.) Grandpa, a Jewish scholar and a religious leader, was scrupulously strict in all of his religious observances. His apartment was filled, floor-to-ceiling, with Jewish books. Early in the morning, my grandfather used to study Talmud for an hour every day; he also knew the *Mishnah* by heart. He would tell stories of his teachers at the Seminary, such as Solomon Schechter, and about his own father, who was an Orthodox rabbi in Brooklyn. He would invite many guests to share the holidays with him. I remember meeting Elie Wiesel and Hannah Arendt, for example.

Providence Hebrew Day School

When my family lived in Washington, D.C., my parents sent my older sister and brother to public school. After our family moved to Providence in 1963, these two siblings remained in public school. There was no Jewish high school for Abby, and Frank would start high school the next year. But my parents decided that my younger brother, Joey, and I should go to PHDS, Providence Hebrew Day School, at its recently built Elmgrove Avenue building. I was in second grade.

At this time, PHDS was an Orthodox school, but not nearly as strictly Orthodox as it became later. Most of the students were from Conservative families. Few of the boys wore *kippot* or *tzitzit* outside of school. Many of the teachers, particularly in the younger grades, did not emphasize Orthodox teachings, and the Conservative parents, at the time, did not feel that the school challenged their religious choices.

PHDS met from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM. Half the day was spent on secular studies, and the other half on Jewish studies: Hebrew language and grammar, but also *Chumash* with Rashi and, in later grades, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Talmud. The study of *Mishnah* began in 5th grade, *Gemara* in 6th. Each day began with morning prayers, and at lunch we sang *birkat ha-mazon* after eating. The State of Israel was a constant presence at school. We sang Israeli

songs; we read about Israel in Hebrew classes; we celebrated *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*. In June of 1967, when the Six Day War broke out, we prayed for victory.

By contrast, the *Sho'ah* was seldom mentioned. We had heard of it, of course, but it was almost never discussed in class, and *Yom Ha'Shoah* was not observed.

Rabbi Cohen, Cantor Gewirtz, and Rabbi Raizman

When I arrived at PHDS in 1963, Rabbi Akiva Egozi was principal. In 1964, he was succeeded by Rabbi David Yehuda. I barely remember them. I vividly remember their successor, Rabbi Norman (Nachman) Cohen, who took over in 1967. Rabbi Cohen was intense, serious, and very Orthodox in his views and practice. His appointment marked a turn in the Day School toward greater Orthodoxy.

One incident involving Rabbi Cohen, though small, made a lasting impression on me. In the sixth grade, my class had been increasingly at odds with our teachers. We got along poorly with Rabbi Armin Traub, who was our teacher for religious subjects in the fall, and worse with Dr. Rosmarin, who took over in the spring. Neither teacher had any idea how to deal with a class of unruly eleven-year-olds, and the classroom atmosphere was generally nasty and hostile on both sides. Our class acquired a reputation, no doubt deserved, for being difficult; the fact that it was a large class, consisting mostly of boys, probably made things worse.

Toward the start of the seventh grade, Rabbi Cohen came in for a short meeting with the class. This was very unusual in itself. Toward the beginning of the meeting, he said to us, "Last year, we made a mistake; his name was Rosmarin." I was very surprised, both that he would think of it that way, and that he would admit it so frankly to us.

Seventh grade was better. Our new teachers that year for secular topics – Mrs. Roberta Eck for English and history, Mrs. Corrado for math and science – were much better and more easily connected with us than our teachers in previous grades. Very likely, we had matured a little as well.

In seventh grade, Cantor Norman Gewirtz of Temple Beth-El organized a choral group for students in my class and adjoining ones. He had written melodies and two-part choral arrangements for a number of passages from the *Siddur* and the *Pirkei Avot*. He taught these to us, and we performed them at some kind of school event. The songs have stuck with me for fifty-five years; I recently wrote down the music and posted it on my website.²

The most remarkable new teacher that year, though, was Rabbi Chaim Raizman, who taught us *Chumash* and *Talmud*. He was one of the most charismatic and engaging teachers I have ever known. Extremely Orthodox, he believed in the literal truth, both of the Bible and of traditional Jewish legends of all eras – from biblical times to modern, miracle-working Hasidic *rebbe*s. His frank enthusiasm made his teaching charming.

That year Rabbi Raizman taught us the chapters of Leviticus that deal with the Temple service and the Talmudic tractate *Bava Kamma*, which is the law of torts. In Rabbi Raizman's hands, this material, which can easily be very dry, seemed engaging, important, and profound.

Temple Emanu-El, Rabbi Eli Bohnen, and Rabbi Joel Zaiman

While growing up, I mostly prayed at Temple Emanu-El: in the children's service before my bar mitzvah, and in the USY (United Synagogue Youth) service after my bar mitzvah. I was part of the *Hazanim*, a group which did the cantorial singing at the children's service. The group was all boys; this was before the days of egalitarian Conservative services.

The senior rabbi at Temple Emanu-El was Eli Bohnen, who served from 1948 to 1973. He was universally beloved as a generous and sweet soul and admired as a man of sterling character, a *ba'al middot*, as my grandfather used to say. He was unfailingly gentle and pleasant – I don't remember ever seeing him angry – but it was evident that his gentleness came from strength and commitment. A U.S. Army chaplain during World War II, he had participated in the liberation of Dachau, which made an indelible impression on him. His wife, Eleanor, was warmth incarnate.

On Shabbat afternoons, he used to host a dozen or so teenagers for study and pizza. Usually, we would study the weekly *parashah*. Our meeting would end with *Havdalah*. Rabbi Bohnen would make *Havdalah* over brandy; at the end, he would pour the brandy into a dish and light it on fire.

Rabbi Joel Zaiman was assistant rabbi at Temple Emanu-El until Rabbi Bohnen's retirement in 1973; he then served as senior rabbi until 1980. Rabbi Zaiman was much more formidable, no less admired than Rabbi Bohnen, but not as beloved. He was fiercely intellectual. His sermons were questioning, demanding, and unsatisfied with the spiritual state of the world; his exaggeratedly precise enunciation emphasized that. He took over the Shabbat afternoon study sessions, but pizza was downgraded to pretzels.

Ba'al Koreh: Camp Ramah, Cantor Lurie, and Temple Beth Sholom

When I was nine and ten years old, I attended Camp Ramah New England for two summers. The camp is located in Palmer, Massachusetts.

Ramah formed an important part of my Jewish education in two respects. The first was the *Shoah*. As I wrote above, it was not much talked about at the Hebrew Day School or in my family. I only knew in general terms what had happened.

My first real awareness of it came at Camp Ramah. *Tisha b'Av* always falls in the middle of the camp's season, and, at Ramah, its focus was much more about the Shoah than anything else. We had readings from a pamphlet – excerpts from Elie Wiesel, poems written by children at Theresienstadt, and so on – and a talk by an Auschwitz survivor.

The second reason for my heightened Jewish education was more complicated. At Camp Ramah's Shabbat services, the pre-bar mitzvah boys could get called for *maftir*. They would recite the blessing for the *Haftarah*, and then the cantor, who was a counselor, would read the *Haftarah*. So, we were taught the tune for the *Haftarah* blessing.

When I got home to Providence in the fall, I told my mother that I wanted to learn how to read *Haftarah*. She arranged for

lessons with Cantor Lurie, who was the assistant cantor at Temple Emanu-El. (The senior cantor was Ivan Perlman.) When I went over to Cantor Lurie's office for a lesson, he gave me the trope written out in musical notation, which I knew. (A few years later, he certainly would have given me a cassette tape, but those were still uncommon in 1967.) I took it home, easily learned it, and went back to his office the following week. And at that point, I thought we were done.

Very much to my surprise, I found out that we were not. Cantor Lurie told me that the next thing I had to do was to learn to read Torah. I don't know whether this was my mother's idea or his; it certainly wasn't mine; but I didn't object. Over the next few weeks, I first learned the Torah trope, and then memorized a few short passages, one per week, and showed them off to Cantor Lurie at our weekly lesson.

After a few weeks, Cantor Lurie told me that our weekly lessons were over. Now I had to learn to read all of *Parashat Bereishit*, which was my bar mitzvah *parashah*, and I should come back and see him when that was done.

I learned it in a leisurely way over a few months. Then I went back to see Cantor Lurie, and I performed for him. When I was finished, he called my mother on the telephone. "Ernie has learned the Torah reading, approximately," he said. "Very approximately. If he's going to read the Torah in *shul*, he has to learn it much better than that."

My bar mitzvah was going to be celebrated in New York, at the synagogue of the Jewish Theological Seminary. My grandfather and all the school's scholars would be attending. I continued working on my *parashah*, and in a few months I knew it well enough to satisfy Cantor Lurie. So, I was able to read the Torah at my bar mitzvah in October, 1969.

That was just the start of my readings, however. Having continued to learn to read Torah, I read it once every month or two at the USY service at Temple Emanu-El. The Temple read Torah on a triennial cycle, doing only one-third of a *parasha* every week, which made it easier.

When I was in tenth grade, it turned out that Temple Beth

Sholom, at that time a Conservative synagogue at Rochambeau Avenue and Camp Street with a small and aging congregation, needed a weekly *ba'al koreh* (Torah reader). Its leaders heard about me. After a trial run, I was hired for \$25 a week.

Learning the entire *parashah* every week required as intense an effort as I've ever put into anything that was not a full-time job. But I did it, and I got quite good at it. I was as good as anyone in Providence, as far as I knew.

Talmud in High School

By the time I finished eighth grade, in 1970, the Hebrew Day School had started an Orthodox high school for boys. Rabbi Cohen, naturally, made a point of urging me to continue there. I was determined, however, to move on to Classical High School, which my older brother and sister had attended.

Never for an instant have I regretted that decision. Even if I had wanted to stay at the Hebrew Day School, I don't know whether my parents would have permitted it. Seldom had they insisted on anything with us, but they might well have drawn the line there.

But in ninth and tenth grades, even after I had moved on to Classical, I studied Talmud once a week privately with Rabbi Chaim Raizman and his son, Aaron. Rabbi Raizman and I met at Ohawe Shalom, the small *shul* in Pawtucket, where he had a post. One of my parents would drive me over from our home at 175 Freeman Parkway, and Rabbi Raizman would drive me back. After studying for an hour or so, we would *daven Mincha* and *Ma'ariv*.

It turned out that Temple Beth Sholom...with a small and aging congregation, needed a weekly *ba'al koreh* (Torah reader). Its leaders heard about me. After a trial run, I was hired for \$25 a week.

In the summer after I finished ninth grade, Rabbi Pearlman, who was a teacher at the Hebrew Day School, organized a group of a dozen or so students for a two-week visit to the Lakewood Yeshiva in New Jersey. He invited me to join them. On the train ride south, he remarked to me that there was no need to let our hosts at the yeshiva know that I was studying at a secular high school and was not ordinarily *shomer mitzvot*.

We stayed in some rented rooms near the yeshiva. The whole day was spent studying Torah: one tractate of the *Gemara* in the morning and a different one from a different *siddur* in the afternoon. (I think that it was *Makot* and Rosh Hashanah.) We also studied various legal and ethical treatises and prayed three times daily. (This may well have been the only time in my life that I said all three prayers daily over a two-week period.)

The elder yeshiva students who taught us also had us over for Shabbat meals (in groups of two). They were very friendly and welcoming and even reasonably open-minded. Although I enjoyed my time at the Lakewood Yeshiva, I later had no temptation whatsoever to spend any serious time in that kind of setting.

Some months later, Rabbi Joel Zaiman gave me private lessons in the tractate *Kiddushin*. In those private lessons in his office, he was more relaxed than in larger, more formal groups. His approach to Talmud was, naturally, more reflective of modern scholarship than anything that I had encountered previously.

Once we were studying a passage in the *Gemara*, which asks why one particular *Mishnah* follows another. Rabbi Zaiman remarked, “The Rabbis here are looking at a question that we, from our heretical standpoint, would phrase more generally as, ‘What is the organizing principle of the *Mishnah*?’” “It’s a question,” he continued, “that we ‘still haven’t figured out.’”

All of this Talmud education was done for free. As far as I know, my parents did not pay either Rabbi Raizman or Rabbi Zaiman, and the Lakewood Yeshiva did not charge us any kind of tuition.

Hebrew High School

During my high school years, I also attended the Hebrew High School sponsored by Rhode Island's Bureau of Jewish Education. My memories of it are dim, but luckily here I can call on some contemporary notes.

Having been chosen valedictorian of my class, I wrote an address in which I gave a frank assessment of the program's strengths and weaknesses. (In fact, after the Bureau's Hebrew High School closed a year later, it was completely reorganized under the auspices of Temple Emanu-El. There were new teachers and a new curriculum.)

Luckily, I showed a draft of my speech to my parents. My father's reaction was, "You are not giving this talk." It was the only time I can remember that my father absolutely forbade me from doing anything. He was completely right and, after looking back, I'm somewhat shocked that, at the age of seventeen, I considered that my remarks would have been at all appropriate for a graduation.

I wrote a new speech about the need for tolerance among factions of the Jewish community. It was well received. However, I did keep my draft, and now it comes in handy as a record.

Our classes had about a half-dozen students, all graduates of the Hebrew Day School. We met about once a week for an hour or two – sometimes after school, sometimes on Sundays – in various places. Our teachers, at least in the last years, were Mrs. Rebecca Twersky for religious studies and Mr. Segal for Hebrew language.

My ungiven valedictorian address had listed our subjects of study. In Bible, we studied parts of Isaiah and Jeremiah, some of the minor prophets, part of Job, a chapter of Proverbs, and all of Ecclesiastes. In *Mishnah*, we studied part of Rosh Hashanah and part of *Sotah* (a tractate of Talmud). When combining Hebrew language study and Jewish history, we studied the eras 135-800 C.E. and the 20th century from Hebrew textbooks. In Hebrew grammar, we worked our way through the various verb conjugations, and Mr. Segal led us in Hebrew language conversation.

I summarized what we had learned: "We have gained an upper hand in our struggles with the *Pi'el* and the *Pu'al* (two forms

of verb conjugation). We are better equipped to study the Bible and commentary. We can get the gist of an article in an Israeli newspaper, though the finer points may pass us by.”

In the valedictory that I did give, I talked about a series of three talks that we heard one semester from three visitors: Rabbi Cohen from PHDS, Rabbi Zaiman from Temple Emanu-El, and Rabbi Leslie Gutterman from Temple Beth-El. The bringing together of three parts of the community was very gratifying.

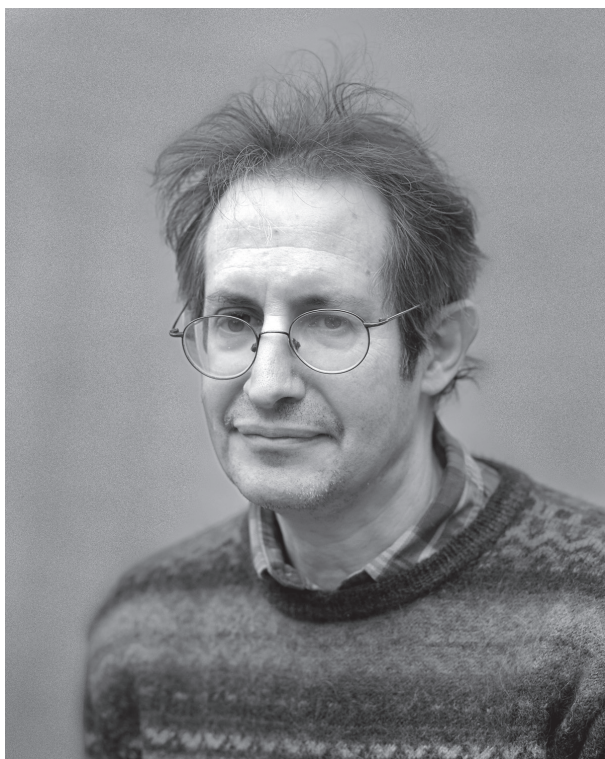
What Has Stuck with Me, Fifty Years Later

In 1974, I left Providence to attend Yale, and I earned my graduate degrees at M.I.T.

I am no longer at all observant. I go to shul only sporadically. I have not read Torah in shul since 1987. I have not studied a page of Talmud since 1977. I have been married to a wonderful woman since 1983, but because we had no children, we did not have to decide how they should be educated and brought up.

Nonetheless, my early Jewish education remains an essential part of my life, my activities, and my outlook on life. I am also still in touch with a few of my classmates from the Hebrew Day School.

I vividly remember the prayers, songs, and many passages of *Humash* that I learned for my Torah reading. My Hebrew remains



Prof. Ernest Davis

good enough that I was able to follow and enjoy the delightful series of classical music interviews, “Intermezzo with Arik,” from Israeli educational television.

After Robert Alter’s extraordinary translation of the Hebrew Bible was published in 2018, I worked through it verse-by-verse from Genesis to Chronicles, in English and Hebrew. I take great pleasure from talking Torah, in both the narrow sense and the broad sense of Jewish thought, tradition, and culture, with my family and friends, including friends on social media.

My views of the world in many respects bear, indelibly, the stamp of the Jewish tradition and the Jewish texts that I learned from my teachers when I was young.

Overall

In 1912, my grandfather, Louis Finkelstein, then 17-years-old, had applied to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary. At this time, the Seminary had fewer than a dozen faculty members, and applicants were interviewed by the president, Solomon Schechter. He asked Grandpa, “Why do you want to come to the Seminary?” Grandpa answered, naturally, “To learn; to study Torah.” “No, Mr. Finkelstein,” said Schechter. “You come to associate with great men.”

In that spirit, I conclude this note by remembering with gratitude my dedicated teachers, great men and women, who enriched my life so much, and the Providence Jewish community and institutions, which enabled my Jewish education.

1

My father wrote numerous personal memoirs. These, and other family histories, can be found on my website: <https://cs.nyu.edu/~ed1/personal>

2

<https://cs.nyu.edu/~davise/personal/Gewirtz/GewirtzMelodies.html>



family seder, 2018; Tonya, Jeff and their children at the head of the table

Connecting the Dots: *My Journey to Judaism*

Tonya Glantz



Tonya and I may feel like old friends, but we have known each other relatively briefly. Fortunately, we became better acquainted during her recent presidency of Temple Beth-El.

Perhaps Tonya and I feel close because of our academic backgrounds. Both of us can always add one more exception to a topic under discussion. And we probably enjoy reading and writing as much as yacking.

I should portray Tonya as a seeker of truths. She has achieved so much for herself and others during a relatively short time. Perhaps I'm still searching or struggling.

Perhaps part of Tonya's success is based on her identity as a native Rhode Islander. Too many people still joke about my never being able to make the necessary or proper transition.

But her religious quest and transformation have been truly extraordinary – far more impressive than my own small steps.

Is Tonya more optimistic than I? Perhaps, but I believe that both of us are hopeful and grateful people.

I'm truly proud that both of us have found or made homes at Beth-El. How or where else might have we established our friendship? I doubt in a faculty lounge.

The opportunity to live a life where my personal, spiritual, and professional values fit together is a gift that I appreciate every day. At 57 years, I know who I am, what I stand for in the world, and what matters to me. At the very heart of this knowledge is my identity as a Jewish woman whose connection to a Reform community continues to support who I am at home, work, and in the world.

My journey to becoming Jewish is a mosaic reflecting the gifts of people, experiences, and personal discoveries. Writing this article has been a wonderful

opportunity for me to reflect on my journey with gratitude and anticipation for how the journey continues.

As a social worker and a researcher, I am a consummate observer and gatherer of information. When I revisit my journey to becoming Jewish, I realize that I spent 25 years collecting information and building my understanding. Although I had felt a strong connection to Judaism, I would not claim it for myself until I was 38 years old. For me, the action of becoming Jewish reflects a process that took a quarter of a century and a deeply meaningful exploration of self. Becoming Jewish is a gift that people gave to me; a gift that I gave to myself, and a gift that I have given to others.

Childhood

I grew up in Federal Hill, a predominately Irish and Italian neighborhood in Providence. I lived there with my parents, Anthony and Cheryl Chiavaroli, of blessed memory. I was the eldest of three children. My brother, Tony, was born when I was six; my sister, Donna, when I was eight.

Our surroundings were racially, ethnically, and spiritually homogenous. I attended a Catholic school until fourth grade, when I entered Samuel W. Brigham Middle School and my world began to expand. I was later excited to attend Classical High because many of my friends were also accepted there, and I knew that we would get a good education. My parents prized education above all else, and they expected that my good grades would become a pathway to college.

My curiosity and affection for Judaism began perhaps symbolically at age 13, when I was completing summer reading requirements in preparation for my freshman year at Classical. I was introduced to the work of Chaim Potok, whose books invited me into the culture, social contexts, and spiritual diversity of the Jewish people. The ideas of Judaism as a central force in the life of an individual and as an intimate tie within a family system and a community deeply appealed to me. I was also struck by the beauty and complexity of the Jewish faith and its people.

I read all of Chaim Potok's books because each one revealed another layer of spiritual, social, cultural, and political contexts of its

diverse Jewish characters. I was struck that the characters all considered themselves Jewish despite differences in their levels of observance. I was accustomed to religion as an absolute that one fully accepted if he or she wanted to belong.

My interest in Judaism came at a time that coalesced with my adolescent stage of development, my parents' progressive leanings, and the recognition that who I was did not quite fit my religious affiliation. This healthy unrest aided me in questioning everything and heightening my curiosity about other people and their traditions. At this point, my Jewish exploration was purely cerebral, because I was not sure how to talk about it with my family or friends, and I did not know any Jews.

Classical High

Fortunately, as I entered my freshman year at Classical, I met students with many racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds from several Providence neighborhoods. It was both a wonderful and an intimidating experience.

My first Jewish friends were as curious about me as I was about them. Through these friendships, I was invited to experience Jewish practices and worship.

My favorite memory is my first *Shabbat*. I am forever grateful to one friend, Robin Aronson, who invited me to share *Shabbat* with her family. It was beautiful and seemed like the most natural extension of Friday night for Robin and her family. The idea that they honored this practice every week felt special to me.

We also attended Saturday services at Temple Emanu-El, which felt so foreign to me. I remember being especially taken by the congregation's response to the words: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh Adonai Tzevaot*. I had no idea what they meant or why people reacted as they did, but there was something intimate and beautiful about this part of the service that continues to be special to me in my own worship today.

I recently learned that Robin's mother, Myrna Aronson, passed away. I was so glad that I had the chance to tell her what spending that first *Shabbat* meant to me and about the seeds that she

and her family planted. Remembering Mrs. Aronson and her gift to me is a blessing that makes me smile.

My high school experiences and friendships helped me to understand the beauty in people's differences. At this point, however, I did not think about becoming Jewish. Yet, I was in love with idea of Judaism and how it was manifested in my friends' lives.

At this time, I was preparing for Confirmation at Holy Ghost Church on Atwells Avenue in Providence. One of my teachers made a statement about Catholicism being the one true religion, and it did not sit well with me. I raised my hand and offered the possibility that this religion was true for us, as Judaism was true for many of my Jewish friends. I suggested that there could be more than one true religion.

This idea was not well received, and I was asked to speak with a priest for his guidance. The experience was insulting and made me question what my beliefs were and the belief system of my childhood faith. As a child, I was not especially rebellious, but my mother taught me to stand up for what was right not with disrespect but with facts and conviction. The message I received at church was not to question but to blindly accept. This experience most definitely planted seeds for my future profession as a social worker, and it reinforced my affection for the discussion and debate that often accompany Torah study.

In addition to the wonderful Jewish friendships that I made during my first year of high school, I also had my first boyfriend, who was Jewish. His name was Larry Shein. After our freshman year, he and his family moved to Israel, but they returned for our junior year.

After graduation, Larry entered the Israeli army. His service helped me see that the idea of fighting for the rights of a Jewish state and against anti-Semitism added to the complexities of being Jewish. I further realized that being Jewish and living a Jewish life are choices that people make.

Larry and I remained in touch for many years. I am grateful for having visited him in 2003, when he was being treated for an aggressive form of lung cancer, which ultimately took his life. His

kindness, sense of adventure, and unwavering friendship are gifts that I carry along with his memory, which is a great blessing.

URI and RIC

I continued to explore Judaism through friends and other experiences. For example, I took advantage of some Hillel programs at the University of Rhode Island, and I often dragged one of my non-Jewish friends with me. Yes, it was a bit odd showing up as a Gentile for a Jewish enrichment program.

However, Hillel leaders and other students were kind and open. Some of my favorite memories are learning to make challah, which I continue to enjoy. I also attended special lectures on Israel and speakers from the Israel Defense Forces, who opened another dimension of being Jewish.

Eventually, I replenished my connection with URI Hillel.



author in middle with Hillel friends, 1986

Thus far, I have served on its board of directors for seven years.

As an undergraduate, I had an amazing mentor in URI's psychology department. Ira Gross encouraged me to push myself and to grow academically. He had a love for Israel, and during a sabbatical studied *kibbutzim*. He also enjoyed sharing his experiences.

Dr. Gross was instrumental in my decision to apply for an undergraduate research grant regarding the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and addiction. I had noticed a trend among clients with whom I had been working. Dr. Gross also encouraged me to pursue publication of my research. We were both excited when my article was accepted and published.

Dr. Gross was also a force behind my decision to apply for a position at the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), the state's child welfare agency. I had always imagined pursuing a clinical graduate degree. While working at DCYF, however, I discovered my passion for understanding systems and finding ways for them to work.

I decided to apply to Rhode Island College's School of Social Work to pursue this interest and to build my capacity to improve the systems that were not helping the children and families. Graduate school was wonderful. I loved the experience and was able to focus my studies on both clinical and macro (or systems) practices.

My identity as a social worker reflects my upbringing and the values that my mother instilled in me. These values are also a great fit with Jewish values, especially those of *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*.

Jeff

In 1997, during my second and final year of study for my master's in social work, I joined two friends on a committee to organize our ten-year high school reunion. As we selected names of classmates to contact, I agreed to reach out to an old friend, Jeff Glantz, whom I had not seen since Thanksgiving break during our freshman year in college. Jeff and I had been good friends throughout high school, but we lost touch at URI. I was excited to reconnect with him.

Although he was unable to attend the reunion, Jeff and I stayed in touch through phone calls every night for almost two months. He was living and working in Syracuse, and I was still in Rhode Island. He then invited me to go to a wedding of a high school friend in December of 1997. Some of Jeff's closest friends were from high school, and seeing them again was like another homecoming.

Jeff and I dated and were engaged in August of 1997. During our courtship, we discussed the fact that he was Jewish and I was Catholic. My parents loved Jeff; my mother especially loved cooking for him and surprising him with new recipes. Jeff's parents, Ronald and Muriel Glantz, were wonderful and welcomed me into their family with great affection. Our different faiths were not an issue for either of our families. Both families were truly happy that their children had found such a great life partner.

I was so excited to enjoy Jewish celebrations with Jeff's family that I soon initiated planning for the High Holy Days, Hanukkah, and Passover. I still occupy this role today. It did not matter that I was not yet Jewish; something about these traditions spoke to me.

Jeff and I sought an interfaith wedding. Although my priest, Father David Convertino, was open to a joint ceremony, only one rabbi was willing to marry us. He requested a \$5,000 fee. This unpleasant situation showed me the separation that existed for many interfaith couples. I would later be proud to be part of a community, where my clergy and congregation embraced interfaith families and value all of its members.

Jeff and I decided that we would have a wedding without a rabbi. Instead, we would integrate Jewish traditions within a ceremony conducted by Father David at the Coonamessett Inn in Falmouth on Cape Cod.

I was truly moved, however, when I reached out to Temple Beth-El for suggestions for music at our wedding service. I was pleasantly surprised by its kindness and support.

Our ceremony was beautiful. We purchased a white *Shabbat* tablecloth from Rhoda's Judaica shop on Hope Street, which we have used ever since. My stepfather stained pine poles and my mother

cut ivy from our yard for the *chuppah* that family members carried at our wedding. Many of my in-laws' friends were at the wedding. These included Josh and Carl Feldman and Myrna and Lou Aronson. Myrna actually did the calligraphy for our invitations.

Having been married in October of 1998, we are now preparing to celebrate our 27th anniversary.

Children

We had our first child, Jacob, in 2000 and our second, Ella, in 2002. Their births led to my greatest struggles with the values of my childhood religion, which opposed reproductive freedom and gay marriage and continued to minimize the roles of women. I realized that for many years, while attending religious services and considering myself Catholic, I had disagreed with so many of the Church's teachings. I struggled but found a way for my own value system to coexist with those of the broader Church.

I also knew that the struggle would be even more difficult to navigate with children. I wanted authenticity across my personal, professional, and spiritual identities. The Jewish concept of *shalom bayit*, peace in the home, truly resonated with me, and I realized that the Jewish values I had observed in my friends' homes and in their actions were a better reflection of myself and what I valued.

Having worked through this realization for over a year, I tried to process the impact that stepping away from Catholicism to



embrace Judaism could have on my parents, siblings, and friends. In the end, when I acknowledged my desire to become Jewish, it was liberating.

It was a cold Saturday morning at our home in the Edgewood neighborhood of Cranston. Our family was having breakfast, and I shared my intention to convert to Judaism with Jeff, Jacob (who was five), and Ella (who was three). Jeff was very surprised. Jacob said, "Mom, now you can be Jewish too like Daddy, me, Ella, and Pepe and Bear (our cats)." I found my son's comments to be so interesting and sweet. I guess that my family was not confused after all.

When I told one of my closest Catholic friends about my intention to convert, she said, "It's about time! I thought you were going to do it in college. I am so happy for you."

The connection that I felt to Judaism all those years ago has never left me. I needed to finally give myself permission to embrace it.

I would become very proud of building a Jewish family and rearing my children as Jews. They embraced their Jewish identities, which would become strengths in their adult lives.

Conversion

When I embraced the idea of conversion, I was faced with the question of how one becomes a Jew. First, we decided to try out a few synagogues. Jeff had grown up at Temple Emanu-El, but

I suggested that we first try Temple Beth-El. Its clergy had been so helpful before our wedding, and I had attended a very moving memorial service for a beloved RIC professor, Nancy Gewirtz.

When we arrived at Beth-El on a *Shabbat* morning, everyone was very friendly. I remember the way I felt when Rabbi Sarah

wedding, 1998

Glantz



Mack and Cantor Judy Seplowin began the service. I was elated because both were women, which, from my background, seemed especially empowering. Next, Rabbi Sarah invited a congregant up to read the Torah portion, which, in Hebrew, went entirely over my head.

After Rabbi Sarah gave her interpretation of the passage, a congregant spoke out in disagreement and provided an alternative assessment. I remember feeling very confused and uncomfortable because this type of dialogue or disagreement did not exist in my faith community. Quickly, I realized that this behavior was normal and that the rabbi encouraged congregants to join a conversation.

At the end of this first service, I felt a sense of calm and comfort. I knew that Beth-El would be our synagogue. I could not know on this cold Saturday morning that my family and I would begin a relationship lasting over 19 years, and one filled with *simchas* and comfort for losses. This day also began my relationship with Sarah Mack, who became my rabbi, my teacher, and my friend. She prepared me for my conversion by sharing texts, powerful conversation and reflections, and loving support along my journey.

I vividly recall the day of my conversion: February 2, 2007 (21 *Shevat* 5767). I also vividly recall the essay that I had to write explaining why I wanted to become a Jew and my preparation for the *mikveh*. The *mikveh* was a very powerful experience that filled me with intense emotion.

It was followed by a *Shabbat* dinner with Josh and Carl Feldman, who were close friends of Jeff's parents and became our adopted Jewish family in Providence. Carl had grown up at Emanu-El but joined Beth-El and eventually became its president. All of us attended that evening's *Shabbat* service at Beth-El, where I joined Cantor Judy, Rabbi Mack, and Rabbi Gutterman and received a special blessing. The lovely *oneg* that followed was very welcoming to my parents, friends, and Jeff's parents.

Being Jewish: Receiving and Giving Gifts

Although I had officially completed all the steps toward becoming a Jew, including joining the community and enrolling our

children in religious school, I felt that I had more to do to truly be Jewish. As our children moved through religious school, I loved how immersed they were in the community and the ease with which their Jewish identities emerged.

I was studying for my doctorate in education through URI and RIC's joint program. On Sunday mornings, while seated in the Bagel Café and waiting for religious school to end, I did my own homework. Then I decided to learn to read Hebrew so that I could support Jacob and Ella in their studies.

As I studied with Stan Freeman, a longtime teacher, who encouraged me to read prayers from a *siddur*. The first gift that I received after my conversion, allowing me to feel more Jewish, was the ability to follow along in Hebrew during services and then to read and sing aloud. I remember my first *Kol Nidre* service after studying with Stan because I welled up and felt the intensity of this holy day. I thought to myself: I am Jewish.

After seeing a posting in the Temple bulletin about an adult *B'nei mitzvah* class, I spoke with Rabbi Sarah and Cantor Judy, who fully supported my joining the group with three others. All of us wanted the experience of being called to the Torah. After months of practice, Cantor Judy helped me practice my portion by reading with me from the Torah scroll.

Feeling so small as I stood before the Torah, I tried to clear my mind of business in order to be worthy of the moment. When my classmates and I chanted Torah at our *B'nei mitzvah*, I was not only grateful to Cantor Judy and Rabbi Sarah, but I felt in my heart with certainty that I was Jewish.

As I became more involved with Beth-El and a regular fixture on Sunday mornings, Anita Steiman, the religious school's director, asked if I would like to become a teacher. My academic and professional background made me a good fit to teach pre-kindergarten students. Having watched my own children grow and embrace their Jewish Identities, I felt that I could play a small role creating a foundation for other students.

For a decade I taught Pre-K, and I loved every minute of it. Inevitably, toward the end of every school year, one student would

ask, “Mrs. Glantz, I am Jewish; are you?” I would answer, “Yes, I am Jewish too.” The other children would share in this realization with a sense of excitement and happiness. I would think to myself that these children’s earliest educational experiences contributed to a positive sense of themselves and their Jewishness.

What I did not anticipate was the gift that teaching gave me. They allowed me to experience the joys of their Jewish childhoods and to feel what it is like for a child to discover the wonders and meaning of Jewishness. When I finished my last year of teaching in 2020, I felt a sense of fulfillment as a Jewish educator. It was an affirmation of my Jewishness.

My Presidency

Over the years, I also found myself active on various Temple standing committees as well as the board of trustees and the executive committee. In 2020, I was invited to accept the nomination to become Beth-El’s president.

Being hesitant, I took some time to think about the role. After some consideration and consultation with friends and clergy, I accepted the nomination and was appreciative of the congregation’s vote of approval. It was an honor to serve my community for two consecutive terms or four years.

My predecessor, Rob Stolzman, had a theory that each Temple president has a unique skill that is needed during his or her tenure. I believe that my ability to listen, be supportive, give and receive feedback, and navigate differences of opinion served our community and me well.

My term, which began during the pandemic, brought forth numerous challenges that our clergy and community met with grace and kindness. Then, as we moved beyond the pandemic and life returned to a normal cadence, we were faced with the violent attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023. These attacks spurred acts of anti-Semitism at our Temple and around the world.

I quickly moved beyond my own Jewish identity to feeling a closer connection to the entire Jewish people. Our sense of anger and hurt was profound. Our feelings of helplessness at not doing enough

to shield our people felt like a panic.

I was reminded of a conversation that I had with Rabbi Sarah when I was studying for my conversion. After learning about Jewish displacement and oppression before and during the Holocaust, I commented on how so many of our holidays and festivals mark our struggle to exist. I remember saying aloud that embracing a Jewish identity also brings with it an awareness of the risk that solely exists because of one's Jewish identity.

Acknowledging this fact gave me pause and called for a response. Was I willing to accept this risk too? But did I also recognize the gift of resilience that the Jewish people have passed forward? Would I accept both the risk and the resilience? My response was "yes" because I too was Jewish.

Although it has been fulfilling to reflect on my Jewish journey, after almost 20 years, I simply think of myself as a Jew. Yet, when my Jewishness is recognized by someone else, I somehow feel a deepened sense of contentment.

Jacqueline

I had babysat for my nephew, Andrew, and I attended his bar mitzvah and wedding. He married the loveliest woman, Jacqueline. Like sunshine, she was the best addition to our family. She was not Jewish, but eager to learn about Jewish traditions and food. Almost six years ago, Andrew and Jacqueline had their first child, Teddy. Four years ago, they had their second, Charlotte.

Early in her marriage, Jacqueline called and asked, "Auntie Tonya, do you think you could teach me to make Hanukkah cookies?" I was of course thrilled to have a baking buddy and spend time with Jacqueline. She also called to help with Passover and find out what she could bring for the dinner before Yom Kippur. She called for other Jewish recipes or sent photos when she made Hanukkah cookies with her children.

Jacqueline probably had no idea how much it meant to me that she called me for all her Jewish questions. After almost 20 years of taking my Jewishness somewhat for granted, my becoming a Jewish auntie was one of my most wonderful gifts.

Jacqueline passed away on August 17, 2025.

I regret not telling her how wonderful it was to be her aunt and her “go to” for all things Jewish. Jacqueline’s curiosity and desire to learn to bring Jewish things into her home reminded me of myself so long ago. Her memory will forever be a blessing.

As I mourn the loss of this amazing woman, taken from us far too soon, I feel an affirmation of my Jewish identity. I am comforted by the ritual of saying Kaddish and carrying the blessing of her memory with me.

Choice

Whether a person becomes a Jew through conversion or descends from countless generations, each of us is called to decide what being Jewish means and how to bring this meaning into the world.

During my first true Passover, I was speaking with a Jewish colleague and trying to explain the importance to me of keeping Passover as a “Jew by Choice.” She responded with a statement that still echoes with both truth and complexity. She said, “Tonya, in the end, we are all Jews by choice, who are called to decide what being Jewish means to us every day.”

Yom Kippur, 2018



It has been almost 20 years, and I can still hear her words so clearly and feel their truth profoundly. I am a Reform Jew, a mother, a wife, and a social worker whose personal, spiritual, and professional identities are united in my Jewish identity. It has been so rewarding to revisit my journey and to share it with you.



In Memoria:

November 1, 2024 – November 1, 2025

Warren B. Galkin, the younger son of Arthur and Shirley Galkin, was born in Providence in 1929. He was predeceased by his wife, Joyce.

[Please read his insightful autobiographical articles. The first appeared in our 2024 issue; the second is in our current issue.]

Mr. Galkin, a life member of our Association, is survived by his stepdaughter, Cathy Gennert, and his three nieces, Ellen Kenner, Jane Litner, and Debby Krim.

Died on May 1, 2025, in Greenville, Rhode Island at the age of 95.

Alan G. Hassenfeld, the younger son of Merrill and Sylvia, was born in Providence in 1948. Following in his parents' footsteps, he became a towering industrialist and philanthropist.

Mr. Hassenfeld, who was interviewed for a 2019 article in our journal, studied at Moses Brown School and graduated from Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts, where he became a champion tennis player. Beginning at six years of age, he enjoyed spending numerous summers at Camp Androscoggin in Maine with a boyhood Moses Brown classmate, Jeffrey Brown, who was also a fellow Cub Scout. Mr. Hassenfeld maintained lifelong bonds with many camp alumni.

Before entering the University of Pennsylvania, he studied briefly in France, and a year later participated in the Experiment in International Living in Australia. At Penn, Mr. Hassenfeld achieved national prominence as a tennis player and also competed in squash. As an undergraduate, he also began serving in the Air National Guard.

In 1970, following his graduation from Penn, Mr. Hassenfeld joined Hasbro, the toy company that had been founded in 1923 by his grandfather, Henry, and his brothers. It was later led by his

father. Rising through the ranks, Alan became deeply involved in Hasbro's international operations.

He served as executive vice president and in 1989, following the sudden death of his older brother, Stephen, he became the company's chief executive officer. He continued in this role until 2002. Through acquisitions and the development of new products, Hasbro became ever more successful, rising to number 169 on the Fortune 500. He served as chairman until 2005.

Mr. Hassenfeld achieved even greater renown as a philanthropist and a humanitarian. While seeking higher levels of product safety, he sought to end the use of child labor in toy manufacturing. In 1994, through the Hasbro Charitable Trust, he helped found Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence and remained a key benefactor. In 2008, Mr. Hassenfeld established the Hassenfeld Family Initiatives, which advocated for children, education, health, and social justice in numerous countries. He also chaired the Jerusalem Foundation and led its American endeavors for more than 25 years. He supported our Association's move to its new quarters within the Dwares Jewish Community Center.

Mr. Hassenfeld grew up at Temple Emanu-El and later affiliated with Temple Beth-El. He was an honorary board member of the Jewish Alliance. He also served on the boards of Brandeis and Brown Universities.

He is survived by his wife, Vivien; his stepchildren, Karim and Leila Azar; and his sister, Ellen Block.

Died on July 9, 2025, in London at the age of 76.

Elaine Hoffman, a daughter of the late Irving S. and Etta (Cohen) Chandler, was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Her family soon moved to Providence, and she spent the rest of her life in Rhode Island. Her husband, Dr. Melvin D. Hoffman, a president of the Rhode Island Medical Society, passed away in 1984.

After graduating from Hope High School, Mrs. Hoffman began working as a secretary. She and her husband lived initially in Cranston, and in 1960 the Hoffmans relocated to Providence.

After completing her bachelor's degree, Mrs. Hoffman

helped several psychiatrists and psychologists with their research. Following her husband's passing, she traveled extensively and became a travel agent.

Mrs. Hoffman was deeply involved with numerous Jewish organizations, including: Hadassah, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Miriam Hospital's Women's Association. Extremely devoted to Temple Beth-El, she helped lead a committee that made recordings for the blind for several decades. She also enjoyed playing canasta.

Mrs. Hoffman is survived by her children: Eric, Phyllis, and Andrew.

Died on November 15, 2024, in Providence at the age of 97.

Bernard "Buzzy" Labush, a son of the late George and Evelyn (Kahnovsky) Labush, was predeceased by his wife, Greta.

A Providence native, he graduated from Hope High School in 1945 and Bryant College three years later. As an Army veteran, he was active for decades in the Jewish War Veterans' Sackin-Shocket Post 533. He also served as the War Veterans' state department commander and on the national executive, communications, and scholarship committees.

Mr. Labush was a certified public accountant for 35 years in Cranston and also taught accounting at Johnson & Wales University for 25 years, 22 years as chair of the accounting department.

A former board member of Temple Beth Israel, Mr. Labush was also a past president of Temple Am David and served on the board of its men's club. He was a life member of both the Providence and South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Associations. Mr. Labush also played active roles in numerous Masonic lodges.

Previously a resident of Warwick, he moved to Delray Beach, Florida 35 years ago and joined Temple Anshei Shalom. Active in numerous social and communal organizations, he was also an avid bowler.

Mr. Labush is survived by his children: Steven, Tamara, Sheryl Barlow, and Iris.

Died on December 27, 2024, in Delray Beach, Florida at the

age of 96.

Judith M. Lichtman, the daughter of the late Albert and Florence (Berman) Melnik, was a native of Camden, New Jersey. She was predeceased by her husband, Dr. Henry M. Lichtman.

Mrs. Lichtman earned a bachelor's degree at Rutgers University. After obtaining a master's degree from New York School of Social Work, she worked at Jewish Family Services in New York City.

During more than six decades in Providence, Mrs. Lichtman continued helping others. She was an active member of the National Council of Jewish Women and Volunteers in Action, as well as a volunteer in Providence's public schools. Mrs. Lichtman, a member of Temple Beth-El, participated in various adult education programs.

Some of her additional endeavors included knitting and tennis, but she was especially fond of theatre. She and Henry enjoyed performances at and supporting Trinity Repertory Company, Gamm Theatre, and 2nd Story Theatre.

Mrs. Lichtman is survived by her children: Michael, Janet DuBose, and Jonathan.

Died on October 23, 2025, in Providence at the age of 95.

Dr. Edwin S. Mehlman, the son of Sol A. and Rose (Slitt) Mehlman, was born in Hartford, Connecticut and grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts. He was predeceased by his wife, Lesley.

After graduating from Classical High School in Providence, he studied at Wesleyan University. Dr. Mehlman earned his dental degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Following his service as a captain in the Air Force, he completed advanced training in endodontics (root canal therapy) at Boston University.

Dr. Mehlman became Rhode Island's first specialist in endodontics when he began his practice in Providence in 1965. Lasting no fewer than 45 years, it was distinguished by numerous honors. For example, he taught at various dental schools as well as Rhode Island's Samuels-Sinclair Dental Center. He also published scholarly articles in several dental journals and received numerous professional awards and honors.

Dr. Mehlman served as president of the Rhode Island Den-

tal Association and the state's Association of Endodontists. He was instrumental in the creation of a Donated Dental Services program, which provides free dental care to the needy and disabled.

Dr. Mehlman, who lived in Barrington, was president of Temple Habonim from 1969 to 1970. His devotion to Rhode Island's Jewish community also included service on the board of the Jewish Federation and the presidency of the Bureau of Jewish Education. As a natural and indefatigable educator, he served as president of Rhode Island's Lifelong Learning Collaborative and on the committee for the renovation of Barrington's high school.

Dr. Mehlman, a life member of our Association, had fun playing bridge, and he also enjoyed writing frequent letters to the editor of *The Providence Journal*.

He is survived by his three sons, Jeffrey, Brian, and Erik, and his dear friend and companion, Fran Lourie.

Died on July 8, 2025, at the age of 89.

Herbert E. Sackett, the son of Morris and Evelyn (Sergy) Sackett, was born in Providence and spent nearly his entire life in Rhode Island. He was predeceased by his sisters, Shirley Sackett and Edna Sonkin.

Mr. Sackett's daughter, Shelley, wrote a colorful portrait of him in the 2015 issue of our journal.

His career in his family's business, Sackett's Greeting Cards, was launched while still a student at Nathan Bishop Junior High School. It gained momentum by the time he graduated from Hope High School in 1946. Four years later, while continuing to make many lifelong friends, Mr. Sackett earned a bachelor's degree in business administration at Rhode Island State.

After assuming leadership of his family's business in 1968, he expanded it to a 60-store chain in six states. As a trailblazer in the card and gift industry, he mentored his daughter.

Mr. Sackett was a lifelong member of Temple Emanu-El, which his parents had helped found. He also belonged to and helped lead United Brothers Synagogue in Bristol, where he eventually settled.

Mr. Sackett enjoyed numerous pastimes, including: cheering for the Red Sox and the Patriots; weekly skiing trips to Stratton, Vermont until he was 84; collecting and cataloguing antique canes; and eating frozen pudding ice cream at Gray's in Tiverton. While devoted to providing support for hospice care, he also had a wonderful sense of humor.

He is survived by his children, Richard and Shelley, and his partner, Ronnee Wasserman. He was predeceased by his grandson, Taylor.

Died on October 10, 2025, in Bristol at the age of 96.

Roberta A. Shack, a daughter of the late Merrill and Leah (Dalton) Cohan, was born in Portland, Maine. She was predeceased by her husband, Norman, whom she had known since she was five-years-old, and her younger sister, "Bunny" Rossen.

Mrs. Shack graduated from Portland's Deering High School in 1946 and Lasell Junior College two years later. She also studied at Vesper George School of Art and worked as a professional artist until her marriage in 1952. Mrs. Shack enjoyed painting watercolors, especially of flowers, until the end of her life.

Initially residents of Methuen, Massachusetts, the Shacks lived in Andover, Massachusetts, for six decades. Surrounded by additional friends, "Bobbie" spent her final years in North Andover. Devoted to five generations of her family, she was a talented and proud homemaker. She deeply enjoyed celebrating holidays and birthdays with numerous guests.

Mrs. Shack, an active member of Temple Emanuel for five decades, played a key role in recruiting Rabbi Robert Goldstein. She also enjoyed gardening, decorating, playing tennis, listening to classical music, and traveling. She was an excellent bridge player.

Mrs. Shack, a perennial optimist and a life member of our Association, is survived by her four children: William, Betsey Goodwin of Providence, Karen, and Nancy Grecoe.

Died on July 16, 2025, in North Andover, Massachusetts at the age of 96.

Paul A. Silver, the son of the late Dr. Carroll M. and Gail Silver, and the stepson of the late Evelyn Macie Fain Silver, was born in Providence. He spent almost his entire life there.

An alumnus of Moses Brown School, Mr. Silver earned his bachelor's degree at Harvard College in 1972 and his law degree at Boston University three years later. Beginning immediately thereafter as an associate at Hinckley Allen in Providence, he became a partner in 1981 and spent the duration of his distinguished career with this firm. He never chose to retire.

Mr. Silver's specialty was trusts and estates, and he became one of the foremost practitioners in New England. Among numerous awards, he received the Harold B. Soloveitzik Professional Leadership Award from the Rhode Island Foundation in 2010.

Mr. Silver served on numerous Rhode Island boards and committees, including: Moses Brown School, Camp Ruggles, The Providence Athenaeum, Providence Ronald McDonald House, Rhode Island Community Food Bank, and his lifelong congregation, Temple Beth-El.

Paul and his family enjoyed much fun together, including travel. Recently, he and his wife Katherine ("Kit"), along with their two sons and two granddaughters, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Paul and "Kit" had met on the first day that they enrolled at Harvard. Perhaps she soon sensed that he enjoyed cooking.

Mr. Silver is survived by his wife and their two sons, Andrew and Nathaniel, and their grandchildren.

Died on July 5, 2025, in Providence at the age of 75.

Selma Penzell Klitzner Stanzler, the daughter of Israel and Celia Schmuger, was born in New York City. She was predeceased by her three husbands: Robert Penzell, Robert Klitzner, and Milton Stanzler.

Having spent most of her youth in Providence, Mrs. Stanzler graduated from Hope High School in 1949. She became a leader in Hillel, Sigma Delta Tau, and the Student Senate at the University of Rhode Island, from which she graduated in 1953. Immediately thereafter she launched her career in Jewish communal service as a program assistant at Providence's Jewish Community Center.

This pathway became her calling.

Mrs. Stanzler and her first husband, a transplanted New Yorker, lived in New Bedford. After his passing, she and their two children moved to New York City, where she taught school. After marrying Robert Klitzner, a native Rhode Islander, she returned with her children to Rhode Island and then gave birth to a third child. After becoming widowed once again, Mrs. Klitzner married Milton Stanzler.

She broadened her Jewish communal endeavors, which had focused on the former Federation. For example, in 1990-91, Mrs. Stanzler chaired the Career Women's Affiliate of the Women's Division. She later became deeply involved as a leader of the resource center later known as the Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center. She and Milton were members of Temple Beth-El.

He had been a founder of Trinity Repertory Company, and Selma became a theatre devotee too. For better and worse, so much of her life had been "dramatic."

Following his passing in 2012, Mrs. Stanzler moved to Chicago to be closer to her son, David Penzell, and his family. But her close friendships with many dear Rhode Island friends endured.

Mrs. Stanzler, a life member of our Association, is survived by her children: David and Stephanie Penzell, Michael Klitzner, and her stepdaughter, Jill Stanzler. She was predeceased by her stepson, Jonathan Stanzler.

Died on December 17, 2024, in Chicago at the age of 93.

Eleanor Wasser, a daughter of the late Harold and Helen Abrams, was born in Providence in 1949.

She received her religious education at Temple Torat Yisrael in Cranston. After graduating from Cranston High School East in 1967, she attended Katharine Gibbs School.

Three days after her future husband, Marvin, graduated from medical school at the University of Bologna, he went to his 10th-year reunion at Cranston East, which was also Eleanor's. They began dating a few days later, when he entered a three-year training program at Rhode Island Hospital.

Mrs. Wasser was president of Temple Sinai from 2011 to 2013 and was also a Sisterhood president. She sang in the Temple's choir and played flute duets with her daughter, Emily.

Mrs. Wasser also derived much pleasure from knitting, creating greeting cards, bowling, and playing Mahjongg. She loved hosting family gatherings and traveling to Europe and Asia.

She is survived by her husband, Dr. Marvin Wasser, and their children: Jason, Rachel, and Emily.

Died on April 19, 2025, in Providence at the age of 75.

Eugene G. Weinberg, a son of the late Hyman and Anna Weinberg, was born in Providence and spent almost his entire life here. He was predeceased by his wife, Arline, and his older brothers, Gerald and Walter. Beginning in 2006, three articles about Gerald's military service during World War II appeared in our journal.

Always known as "Gene," Mr. Weinberg received his religious education at Temple Beth-Israel in South Providence. As an active member of its Boy Scout Troop 10, he enjoyed numerous trips to Camp Yawgoog.

After graduating from Classical High School in 1944, Mr. Weinberg enlisted in the Merchant Marine and was sent to the South Pacific. In order to qualify for the G.I. Bill while attending college, he then enlisted in the Army and was sent back to the Pacific. He entered Brown in the fall of 1947, became active in the Tower Club (a Jewish organization), and majored in English and American literature. During his junior year, he married Arline, a Pembroke student, and graduated with the Class of 1951.

As Mr. Weinberg explained in his 2005 article in our journal, he had begun his business career in his father's fur shop by 12 years of age. In 1951, he opened a retail shop, New Interiors, at 39 Franklin Street, with his brother, Walter, and a friend, Ida Guny Millman. One of the first of its kind in Rhode Island, it specialized in contemporary furniture. As a result, Gene frequently traveled to Scandinavia to view and purchase pieces. The successful business later operated at two other locations before closing in 1993.

Mr. Weinberg enjoyed numerous sports, including tennis,

golf, and skiing. Some of his additional pastimes were teaching English at International House and taking courses at Brown Learning Community. He also read for a weekly radio program, "Insight," for the visually impaired.

Additionally, Mr. Weinberg enjoyed playing bridge, travel, photography, reading, and music. On the night that he and Arline had moved from their contemporary home in Greenville to a large Colonia Revival on Providence's East Side, they planned to attend a Theodore Bikel concert at Veterans' Auditorium, but it turned out to be a memorial for President Kennedy, who had been assassinated that day. The Weinbergs built two more contemporary-style homes for weekend retreats.

In 1954, as a member of Temple Beth-El, the entrepreneur helped provide furnishings for its new home. He later served two terms as a trustee and participated in a *havurah*. He was also active on the boards of John Hope Settlement House, the Arthritis Foundation, and the ACLU.

Mr. Weinberg, a life member of our Association, served as president from 1998 to 2000.

He established a fund in Arline's memory.

He is survived by his children: Dr. Robert, Richard, and Susan.

Died on June 19, 2025 in Providence at the age of 98.

James R. Winoker, a son of the late Israel and Sarah (Levenson) Winoker, was born in Providence in 1931. He was predeceased by his wife, Marilyn (Horovitz), and his brother, Myron.

Mr. Winoker, a graduate of Classical High School, received its honorary alumnus award. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics at Brown, where he was a member of the Tower Club and president of Hillel. His loyalty to Brown was further expressed by serving as a member of its Corporation and as a member of the Medical Corporation and the Medical Board of Overseers.

Having graduated from Harvard Business School, Mr. Winoker was active in its Rhode Island and national alumni organizations. He received an honorary doctor of public service degree from

Roger Williams University, was vice-chair of the president's council at Providence College, and was a fellow at Brandeis University.

Mr. Winoker's dedication to education was further expressed through his Army service from 1955 to 1958. As a member of the Army Management School, he taught at Ft. Belvoir.

A visionary business leader, he had begun his career at seven years of age by selling *Collier's* magazine door-to-door. As a cofounder of B. B. Greenberg Co., a jewelry manufacturing business, he belonged to New York City's 24 Karat Club.

Mr. Winoker's vision and determination were further demonstrated in his role as a cofounder of Belvoir Properties, the first developer to help establish Providence's Jewelry District. Now known as the Innovation District, it became home to many businesses, medical and educational institutions, and research groups. As a former owner of the Biltmore Hotel, he helped develop many other commercial buildings, including downtown's Union Station. He and Marilyn received many awards for their achievements in historic preservation.

Additionally, Mr. Winoker served on numerous corporate boards, including Narragansett Electric, New England Electric, National Grid, and Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank. He was also elected the first president of the Jewelry District and president of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. In 2023, following many honors, he was inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame.

Mr. Winoker was also a major leader of Jewish organizations. He was a vice president and an honorary trustee of Temple Emanu-El and a trustee of the Jewish Federation. Beyond Rhode Island, he cochaired the U.S. Holocaust Museum's campaign in Washington, D.C., and he was a trustee of the National Conference for Community and Justice (formerly the National Conference of Christians and Jews).

Mr. Winoker's love of spectacle and harmony was further demonstrated through his loyalty to the Rhode Island Philharmonic and its Music School.

But Mr. Winoker also knew how to have fun. He belonged

to the Hope, University, Brown Faculty, and Dunes Clubs, and he loved cheering for the Red Sox and the Patriots.

He is survived by his children: Susan, David, and Steven.

Mr. Winoker, a life member of our Association, died on May 14, 2025, in Providence at the age of 93.

Gloria Winston, a daughter of the late Samuel and Ruth (Ur-dang) Markoff, was born in Providence in 1926 and lived virtually her entire life there. She was predeceased by her husband, James, their son, Shmuel, of Jerusalem, and her sisters, Dorothy Nelson and Bernice Gourse.

Mrs. Winston graduated from John Howland School, Nathan Bishop Junior High, and Hope High School and earned a bachelor's degree in sociology and in psychology at Pembroke College. In 2024, when celebrating the 75th reunion of her Class of 1948, she led the procession of Brown alumni down College Hill. But most of her life's extraordinary accomplishments had resulted from amazing, uphill efforts.

For example, she served as community relations director for Paramount Greeting Cards, the company founded by her father and led for many years by "Jimmy," her husband of 50 years. Having originated in Providence, this hugely successful manufacturing company eventually relocated to Pawtucket. Many of its records and mementos were donated to our Association.

Mrs. Winston was the founder and president of Program Coordinators, which provided touring services to Rhode Island visitors. She volunteered with an astonishing array of the Ocean State's causes and organizations. For example, she was the longest-serving volunteer at The Miriam Hospital, where she derived considerable joy from her interaction with patients (and they from her).

Mrs. Winston, a true dynamo despite her diminutive size, volunteered to settle new Americans with the National Council of Jewish Women, and she was a counselor and clinic assistant at Planned Parenthood. She also cochaired a capital fund drive for Butler Hospital and chaired the RISD Museum's first annual fund drive during the 1970s. Somehow, Mrs. Winston also found time and

energy to chair telethons for the Rhode Island Philharmonic and the United Arts Fund. And she also enthusiastically supported Trinity Repertory Company, Camp JORI, and Meals on Wheels.

Is it surprising that she had been nicknamed “GoGo” as a child?

Mrs. Winston, a lifelong member of Temple Beth-El, took extraordinary pride in marching with fellow alumni in Confirmation class processions, eventually, if not for decades, as the first in line.

Despite so many causes, loyalties, and endeavors, Mrs. Winston was especially devoted to her large and far-flung family. Her numerous survivors include her children, Laura and Ted.

Mrs. Winston, a life member and a major benefactress of our Association, died on March 8, 2025, in Providence at the age of 98.

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