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The current issue, like most others, demonstrates the vitality and resilience of our people—be they natives of or newcomers to Rhode Island. This issue may be somewhat unusual because so many articles are about young people. Most articles fall within three categories: tales of South Providence, the pleasures and perils of art, and remembering and memorializing the Holocaust. A fourth category presents a potpourri of topics.

Since Mattie Pincus became a founder, women have played significant leadership roles in our Association. Only one, however, has served as president, and Geraldine S. Foster is also the only second-generation president. Eleanor Horvitz enjoys the distinction of having been the Association’s only librarian-archivist. Judith Weiss Cohen was an editor of this journal, and Bobbie Friedman has been its only graphic designer. While Anne Sherman has been the longest serving office manager (20 years under eight presidents), all of her predecessors have been women.

Given their tradition of dedication and effectiveness, it should not come as a total surprise that women slightly outnumber men as contributors to this issue. Many of these women have written about themselves, but two male authors have also written about notable women. Fortunately, over several recent decades, women’s prominence within Rhode Island Jewish history has been recognized.

Alas, one of the most important features of our publication is “In Memoria.” Although obituaries customarily appear near the close of each issue, they are no less important than full-length articles. Suggesting that our work never ends, it also makes sense that “Life Members” are listed after the departed.

Once again, I would like to thank to all who help create our splendid journal: our thoughtful and caring authors; Stanley Abrams and his discerning publications committee; Anne Sherman, a well of assistance and optimism; Bobbie Friedman, my talented and forgiving colleague; and the professionals of Signature Printing. I am of course grateful to you, our curious and loyal readers.
I had just graduated from Central High School in Providence, and June 1938 also marked a new beginning. At age 16, I started job-hunting, qualified as a secretary or stenographer. Jobs were scarce, but fortunately my father, working as a factory foreman at the Clover Bead & Novelty Company, wangled a job for me. Providence, at that time, was a center for novelty jewelry—“costume jewelry,” as they called it—rip-offs of the real thing. Diamonds were replaced by rhinestones, and something called white silver substituted for real silver. I started at ten dollars a week (with 25 cents deducted weekly for Social Security).

My friends Doris and Ruth also got jobs as secretaries. Following the pattern of the time, both were married at age 19. In those days, serious careers for women were never considered, and jobs were stopgaps, ways of marking time until the real goal of marriage was reached. But I was destined for a different, uncharted path. Much as I longed to be like every one else, fitting the norm and marrying at 19, I was always out of sync, it seemed to me—always the wrong age, place, time, sex or ethnic background.

HURRICANE AND BICYCLES
My strongest memory of that brief period of my life was the Great Hurricane of 1938. With the September hurricane, a great tidal wave came in from the Atlantic, moved into Narragansett Bay and swept up the Providence River, engulfing downtown Providence. Since Clover Bead & Novelty Company was located on Mason Street, farther uptown and on a slight rise, we were not flooded. The factory closed
Principal Charles H. Abbott, Vice Principal Howard Lewis, and senior secretary Mary K. Anderson. Mr. Abbott dictated long letters (mostly about his Bates College alumni group or his blueberry farm in Maine), and Mr. Lewis assigned me more practical chores. Mary K. Anderson shared with me knowledge of the daily operation and faculty gossip. Most of the faculty were of Irish-Catholic background and, in keeping with the times, were unmarried women. I also learned that I had been hired because it was politic to have one Jewish secretary. (Why not a Portuguese secretary, I would wonder in later years. But such thinking, of course, was far down the road.)

Dear Mr. Clamon,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to inform you that I have been offered a position as the secretary at Nateh Bishop Junior High School. The school is located on Providence's East Side, and it has a strangely mixed population—both the city's wealthiest Jews and the near-destitute "Bravas" (Portuguese blacks from the Azores). It was not a happy mix, though animosities never exploded, but simmered below the surface.

At age 17 I was too young for the job, hardly older than the students themselves. Certainly the hulking ninth-grade boys were taller than I! I found it difficult to fraternize with the faculty, as I was expected to do, and only gradually emerged from my shell of shyness. But I loved the job (which would last for five years). Not only did I start at the heady salary of $12.50 weekly but finally earned $20 dollars a week as my salary automatically increased. Working hours (though longer for the clerical staff than the faculty) were better than those offered in a Providence business office—with the school holidays and long summer vacations. I loved operating the school switchboard (high technology for those times), as well as staffing the front desk, giving out late slips and solving minor student problems.

I was lowest on the totem pole in the school office, taking my orders from

Few students, despite their relative youth, were willing to date non-Jewish boys, but stayed with our own tribe (if we were lucky enough to be asked on a date). The only problem of those visits was the nighttime walk home, across a dark, abandoned field, which I always dreaded.

During that time I made my first important purchase—a ten-dollar, secondhand bicycle, which I named Millicent and which, despite my parents' disapproval, I learned to ride. (I had never been allowed to own a bike as a child—too dangerous, too expensive!) It would be the first of a string of bicycles and of ever more ambitious trips. I can still recall that exhilarating feeling of streaking down a steep hill at breakneck speed, that sense of power. I also recall leisurely rides along back country roads, as I made ever more distant exploratory trips. Ultimately, I would join American Youth Hostels, sharing with others overnight bike trips around the countryside, staying at barns, farmhouses, YMCA dorms, and the like.

Meanwhile, I had taken city exams for a secretarial job, and, after six months at Clover, was hired by the Providence School Department to work at Nathan Bishop Junior High School. The school, located on Providence's East Side, had a strangely mixed population—both the city's wealthiest Jews and the near-destitute "Bravas" (Portuguese blacks from the Azores). It was not a happy mix, though animosities never exploded, but simmered below the surface.

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My best friend in that period was Martha Berstein—and, in fact, the whole Berstein family. Martha, too, was a secretary, working for Rosenberg Jewelers, where they, too, made “novelty” jewelry. The Bersteins (parents Bob and Laura, Martha, and little brother Irving) lived on Sackett Street—a better neighborhood than mine, but just several blocks from Corinth Street. Welcomed in, I was there whenever I could be—spending long hours, day and night, in that lively, voluble, colorful atmosphere. Martha and I laughed at the restrictive Providence rules, the Jewish values, but lived by them nevertheless. For instance, we would not dare date non-Jewish boys, but stayed with our own tribe (if we were lucky enough to be asked on a date). The only problem of those visits was the nighttime walk home, across a dark, abandoned field, which I always dreaded.

I was also friends, in those days, with one Dorothy Sherman (who was some ten years older than I). The Shermans lived in the second floor flat at 65 Corinth Street, and Dorothy and I would take long bike rides or hikes together, sharing long talks. She was very bright, and (only later would I discover this) suffering from mental illness. (In later years, she would be in and out of mental hospitals, and—much later—she would track me down and send me a series of threatening letters, blaming me for her disastrous life. She would feel I had stolen everything from her—that I would go on to college, marriage, children, while she was left with nothing. Those later letters were indeed scary, ominous, but police officers told me no action could be taken against her unless she attempted to kill me.)
One summer, while at Nathan Bishop, I managed to get a job working for my New Jersey cousins—the Levines—in the office of their Asbury Park hotel, the Brunswick. As it turned out, this was not a good job—and I was exploited (despite, or perhaps because of, being a relative) working long hours for little pay—with no time for the beach. But I managed time for friendly exchanges with my three young cousins, with the waiters and waitresses (New York college students scrounging for tips), and with my office coworker Bernie (whose last name I no longer recall). More importantly, I had made my first break from home, my first step toward independence. I learned that there was a world beyond my Providence.

**Cultural Outlets**

Back at Nathan Bishop, I gradually shed my shyness, and connected, not only with Mary K. Anderson, but the teachers who were her close friends. I began to realize that they, with post-high school training (normal school, as it was called in those days), had far better hours and salaries than we secretaries. But I was not drawn to the idea of teaching, even if I had had the credentials. Yet these were years of intellectual growth (following up on the introduction my high school boyfriend Tony had given me). I avidly read classic literature, visited the RISD Art Museum and the large downtown public library, and discovered whatever cultural outlets Providence had to offer.

I also made a timid foray into the art world, taking Saturday morning drawing and painting lessons at RISD. I had a small owlish instructor, who saw hope for me. “You are going to be a painter!” he would say emphatically. But I had grave doubts, as I struggled with oils. Do I really “have” it? And, if I don’t, how could I continue down this path? I believed there was a clear-cut demarcation line between the gifted and non-gifted. Ultimately, deciding I did not “have it,” I dropped the classes.

**Dating**

These were also the years of dating boys—Jewish, of course. Providence was a city of separate communities, each ethnic group confined to its own location and its own identity. The Italians lived in one part of town, the Jews in another, the blacks in still another. Other ethnic groups also had their places. There was a hierarchical structure. In my parents’ view, the Jews occupied the top level, the WASPs next, then the Irish, the Italians, and the unfortunate blacks at the bottom. Though I was vaguely uncomfortable with these values, I never really questioned them—outwardly or inwardly. (That would come later, as my world view and life experiences broadened.)

Paradoxically, though my parents had severed all connections with their ancestral past (as had many Jews of that generation), they maintained those prejudices. (Examined in later life, I saw it as a defensive measure. Jews had had a long history of shabby, unfair treatment, official and unofficial anti-Semitism, and they paid it back in kind.) Yet, at the same time, my mother looked down on Yiddish accents, carefully seeking out an accent-free husband. My handsome father spoke English as if American-born (though he had come to America as a ten-year-old, from Lithuania). He filled the bill.

Among the Jewish boys I dated, one emerged as front-runner—namely, Jerry Clamon. He was a decent, kindly fellow, with a good sense of humor which I appreciated (though I still longed for my Italian high school sweetheart). But Jerry, with his own successful business, controlled his working hours, and picked me up in his comfortable car every day after my workday ended. It was pleasant to have a car ride home and not resort to the interminable trolley rides (transferring downtown from one trolley to another). My relationship with Jerry dragged on, with his urgency topped by my indecision. (Jerry would later die in the War, killed in the Normandy invasion—giving me a posthumous appreciation of the fine human being he had been.)

**An Epiphany**

Meanwhile, I was restless, ready for a change, after four years at Nathan Bishop. One day, I attended the graduation of my old friend Bea Schwartz. Despite her Central High background, she had managed to enter the Normal School in town (which later became Rhode Island College of Education) and acquired her degree after a four-year program. Suddenly, sitting in the audience, I had an epiphany. Why shouldn’t I go to college, even now? If Bea could do it, perhaps I could do it. (I was 20 years old.)

But it was 1941. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. In my restlessness and confusion and patriotism, I considered joining the Wacs (Women’s Army Corps). But I was too young for officers’ school, which I wanted.

I turned again to thoughts of college. I talked it over with the head guidance counselor at Nathan Bishop, a wise, motherly woman named Mary Elizabeth Quinn. Fortunately, she encouraged me. If she had expressed one note of disappointment or amusement or scorn or astonishment, that would have ended it. But she said, “Why don’t you go up to Pembroke College at Brown University, and see what they think?” No teachers’ college, no inferior school, but the best. Why not? What
had I to lose, she pointed out to me.

At Brown, Margaret Shove Morriss, the dean of admissions, told me that of course I was unqualified, having had no college preparatory classes in high school. BUT, she added, IF I spent time being properly tutored in a foreign language and in algebra, and IF I could pass entrance exams, the admissions staff could consider taking me in conditionally.

Meanwhile, my friend, the ever-resourceful Bea, had been working part-time as a waitress in town. She was about to leave, and suggested I take over the job. She would suggest me as a replacement. “You’ll make far more money than you do as a secretary,” she pointed out. I was not nearly as adventurous and gutsy as she, but I followed her lead, leaving Nathan Bishop and the office world for Cobb’s Bar & Grille on Weybosset Street. I quickly became a competent waitress (it was all a matter of proper organization, I discovered) and, with tips and minimum salary, earned double the amount I had earned at Nathan Bishop. It was a lively, heady atmosphere, and soon my weekly take was over 40 dollars.

Fellow waitresses urged me to join them, heading south for the winter, where they assured me lucrative waitress jobs awaited. But I was focused on college. I had money in the bank, and I had also found two excellent tutors (former high school teachers) who guided me through the intricacies of algebra and French. The algebra tutor also insisted on taking me through a basic Latin course.

At Brown I easily passed the English and history exams (based on my own years of reading), and the College accepted the recommendations of my tutors for math and language. I was on my way.

But, even with my jubilation, I felt a kind of shame. I was too old. Why hadn’t I entered college, like every one else, right out of high school? Fortunately, many courses for Pembrokers were given at Brown, particularly in those pre-war years when Brown men were in short supply. But Pembroke itself remained intact, a cluster of buildings several blocks north of the main Brown campus. It provided a cozy, protective atmosphere. Particularly appealing was its oldest building– Pembroke Hall on Meeting Street– later to be renovated. At that time it housed Pembrokers’ mailboxes in the basement, offices on mid-floors, and a magnificent library on the top floor. The library, as I recall, was a wonderful retreat with large upholstered chairs where one could read on wintry afternoons as a fire crackled in the fireplace. (The library had been a reality, but the fireplace may have been an invention of my memory.)

My expenses were easily manageable. I lived at home, like a small group of Brown/Pembroke “day” students– unfortunately missing out on dorm life but making expenses manageable. Trolley fare across town was a seven-cent token (plus a two-cent transfer), and I brought lunch daily in a paper bag.

I recall, around that time, walking through a downtown street and running into our family doctor, Samuel Kenniston, whose two daughters had gone to Pembroke. “I understand you’re going to Pembroke, and they took you in conditionally,” he remarked. (Apparently my mother had shared this information during a visit.) “That’s nice that you’re going there,” he continued, “but don’t worry, you don’t have to be a top student.” (This, apparently, was based on my “conditional” status.) Privately fuming after this exchange, I smiled, thanked him, and determined that I would indeed become a “top student.” (There is nothing like rage to fuel one’s determination and drive.)

Based on both an essay I had written about an October bicycle trip and my English exam, I was put into an advanced English class (skipping the usual introductory course), with four other students– Don Parks, Barbara Whipple, Dorothy Hiller, Connie Coulter. Though these four were years younger than I, we found ourselves operating on the same wavelength, and they became my best friends. We would all go on to become English honors students– becoming part of the small, elite program– and cementing our friendship.

It was fortunate that I connected with them, since I was conscious of being an outsider, a freak. Since every incoming Pembroker was given a “senior sister,” I was assigned Ella Bagley. She was one of the few blacks in the school, but also much older than her classmates. Thus the administrators chose to match the two freaks. But, alas, I never achieved more than a polite exchange with the reclusive Ella.

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Another good friend of that first year was Pat Synan, a perky pretty fresh-
man, who always appeared directly in front of me in required services at Pembroke Chapel. But Pat's career at Brown would prove to be short-lived. Pat was caught entertaining a boy in her dorm room—a no-no at Pembroke. At least lip service was given to chastity and decorum. (Years later, Pat would have her revenge, moving to San Francisco where she married, finished college, took law school entrance exams, and became—in rapid sequence—a lawyer, a district attorney and, finally, a Bay Area judge. Pembroke and Brown would later view her as one of their distin-
guished alumnae, inviting her back for all occasions.)

My other good friend of the time, surprisingly, was Irv Berstein. Martha's kid brother, four years younger than I, had grown up, but he was still funny, bright, and decidedly taller. We entered Brown together, finally equals, developing our friendship on a new basis. (Irv would go on to a distinguished career as a scientist, graduating magna cum laude from Brown before acquiring a Ph.D. at Cornell.)

Meanwhile, I chose electives—one from each discipline of study, as was required—and immediately signed on for Astronomy 101. My efforts paid off at semester's end with an “A-plus,” and I was offered a job as assistant to Prof. Charles H. Smiley, the director of Brown's Ladd Observatory. Normally this sinecure would have gone to a male graduate student. But these were the war years, so the slot was available to a lowly Pembroke freshman.

It was a dream job. My work involved correcting the Observatory clocks daily, taking the information, as I recall, from Greenwich, England, making the math adjustments, and passing them along to all of Providence. A heady experience. But even header was learning to operate the 10-inch refracting telescope, sharing the stars with visiting Scout troops and the on-campus Naval ROTC classes. I was also exposed to Dr. Smiley's ideas about navigation (he had worked out his own method), which he explained to me as well as to the Naval ROTC students. How could he know that such a “modern” system would soon be obsolete! Dr. Smiley expected me to continue in astronomy, majoring in one of the allied sciences (since there was no astronomy major), but I had little background for that. I had had no high school courses in chemistry, physics or mathematics. “You can pick them up easily,” Dr. Smiley assured me, handing me books and giving me far better grades than three years, taking classes through the summers, feeling that I must rush it because of my age. Brown was still something of a playboys' and playgirls' school. But I was definitely jealous of the residential students and felt like an outsider as a “townie.”

Midway through my college years, the war had ended, and vets, returning to school under the GI Bill, changed the ambience. They were serious, older, politically-savvy. I acquired a new boyfriend, one David Bell (a would-be author),
who came from an observant Jewish family. I juggled him along with Tom Wallace whose family was Irish.

One subject almost destroyed me—my earlier nemesis, physical education. We were expected to take one gym class per semester for the first few years. There was an ongoing feud between Pembroke’s gym department, headed by Bes-sie Rudd, and the English majors—a natural hostility, it would seem. My friend Connie, who had ignored the gym requirements, suddenly found herself taking ten gym classes a week in her senior year before she could graduate. I had dutifully taken my classes each semester, but had great difficulty passing the swim test required for graduation. I attempted the required two minutes of treading water—impossible—and was hauled, gasping, from the pool. I was passed (conditionally) but told that I could never go out on boats stored at the Brown boathouse. (Not until years later did I learn where it was located.)

With money from campus jobs, scholarships, and literary awards, I covered my expenses and graduated in June 1946. (Officially I was class of ’47 and served many years as its alumna secretary). I had proved Dr. Kennison wrong—and graduated with highest honors in English and summa cum laude. My parents watched proudly from the sidelines as I marched down College Hill and into the First Baptist Meetinghouse to receive my diploma. They were prouder than I. As I viewed it, if I could amass those honors, anyone could do it with the necessary effort. So much for self-esteem!

NEW YORK CITY
I couldn’t wait to get to New York, which, based on several childhood visits via the overnight steamer, I viewed as Shangri-la. I don’t think my parents were happy about my move, but they raised no objections. I was 25 at the time, so it had been postponed for so long! My life—my real life with a dazzling, glamorous lifestyle—would begin when I moved there.

Through a publication called Editor and Publisher, I found an ad for a secretary in the public relations office of a New York company, and was hired via mail. I arrived in the city in August 1946 with a battered suitcase, a half-finished telescope from my assistantship at the Ladd Observatory, and a few clothes and dollars. It was difficult to find accommodations in those busy postwar years, but I rented a bed in a dorm (the Martha Washington on lower Lexington Avenue). The dorm was like a hospital ward, and I left as quickly as I could.

Having answered an apartment-share ad, I lived briefly at the Beaux Arts Apartments on East 44th Street. This ended abruptly, when my roommate objected to my entertaining visiting college friends. (My friend Dorothy Hiller had come for dinner and stayed overnight.)

Meanwhile, my new employer was Radio Inventions, Inc., a company comprised of engineers. They had invented a process called radio facsimile, which sent printed copy over the airwaves, arriving at the other end in print form. This process was expected to revolutionize the newspaper industry. Radio Inventions never did succeed, though other companies would develop the fax process (which would not replace printed newspapers, but would serve other purposes). Working there for a year as it struggled for success, I found myself stuck in a secretarial job. When a copywriting job opened, a young man, a MAN, was hired from the outside.

Disillusioned, I began to hunt for newspaper or magazine jobs. (Knowing that I wanted a career in writing, I never considered becoming a teacher or a social worker.) By answering an ad, I was eventually hired by an English-language Zionist newspaper. I had little, if any, knowledge of Zionism, but the job was gratifying.I earned less pay than I had at Radio Inventions ($40 a week, instead of $50), but I edited copy, turning interminable, convoluted editorials into understandable English. The Answer, as the newspaper was called, was sponsored by an organization called the American League for a Free Palestine. Based on biblical authority, it insisted that all of Palestine and Jordan should become the Jewish homeland.

As a political neophyte, I was not interested in Zionist politics, but in my opportunity to edit copy and review cultural events dealing with Jewish themes. It was during that time that Israel was born, and I covered that event as well. It was also, for me, the beginning of a true and dawning sense of identity with my Jewish roots.

I had also found a better place to live. My father had an old friend, Jane Devans (originally Jennie Cohen), and two of her daughters, living on West 8th Street, knew of an apartment in their building. Elated, I moved into a small walk-up, cockroach-ridden and rundown, but my own.

My social life also began to improve. In those days, any time you saw a “for rent” sign in a window, you grabbed the place, and then called a needy friend. In no time at all, I had helped several Pembroke friends (Mareon Fuller, Jean Brocklehurst, and Dolly McCarthy, who had just graduated) find rooms in the same building. Jennie Cohen’s two daughters, Lee and Pat, and their husbands split the ground floor into two, one-room apartments (but which included the luxury of a backyard). My college chums were on the next floor (front half), with two young fellows in the rear, and my roach-ridden flat was in the rear on the top floor.

I appreciated my apartment, but envied tenants a few doors down. I would
glance out my back window, and see two young men and a girl seated on a terrace. I could hear the glasses clink, and viewed them as sophisticated New Yorkers. They would turn out to be Bill Backalenick, Danny Cassel, and Bill’s sister Sylvia.

**MARRIAGE**

Pat and Lee decided to give a backyard party, inviting all the tenants, plus the nearby Bill and Danny. They had known Bill for years, as Jennie had once rented rooms in the Backalenicks’ Sea Gate home (a Brooklyn ocean-side community, which turned resort in the summers). Thus we were all thrown together. I remember Bill, pitching darts and ignoring others, and thought that he—slim, curly-haired, blue-eyed—was attractive. But apparently I made no impression on him.

Later, making an aggressive move (rare for me), I invited him to the nearby American Museum of Natural History, where I was completing my telescope. I left him a message in the downstairs hall of his building, signed “Irene.” With no memory of me, Bill thought the note had come from Irene Abarbanel (a pretty blonde friend who also lived on West 85th Street), and he appeared, as suggested, at the museum. It was the other Irene, he found, probably to his disappointment.

Bill was born in Seagate. His family claimed to be the first Jewish family in that community. His father was a pharmacist, with a drugstore in nearby Coney Island. The children attended private school (Brooklyn Ethical Culture). But his father died when Bill was ten, and his three sisters ranged in age from 7 to 14. Life turned upside-down for them, as their mother returned to teaching and running the pharmacy. They were forced to be on their own, meeting other kids on the block and finally attending public school.

Bill went on to become a graphic artist, actually learning on the job—though he’d had an inspiring, encouraging art teacher in high school. During the war years, he volunteered for the Merchant Marine (because it paid better than the traditional armed forces, and he needed to support his mother—then ill—and his younger sister, whose husband was killed in the war). After the war, he and his friend Dan Cassell founded their own business, which went on to considerable success as a New York art studio/marketing company. I don’t think Bill was impressed with my brains so much as my college degree. Never having gone beyond high school, he was impressed with all academic trimmings.

It was on a bike trip through Connecticut that Bill proposed marriage (he claimed he was kidding), and I said, “I’ll let you know in Old Saybrook.” The answer was “yes.” Actually, it was the marrying time, right after the war. We were all getting married. Jennie’s two daughters were newly married, and Dolly and Mareon married the boys in the rear apartment on West 85th Street. (Only Jean Brocklehurst held out, leaving the area and later becoming a nun.) So it was in the cards that I would marry Bill—even though we hardly knew each other.

We were married in October 1947 at the home of Bill’s older sister Theda in Cuyahoga Falls, a suburb of Akron, Ohio. She made arrangements for a local Conservative rabbi to officiate. My parents, who were thrilled by our engagement, were able to attend, as were many of Bill’s relatives. He and I then returned to New York to begin our life together.

**POSTSCRIPT**

Though I never again lived in Providence, I would return for visits with my parents, who had moved to Pawtucket. (My mother died in 1964 and my father in 1969. They belonged to a Jewish lodge, which provided burial in Lincoln Park.) I would also return to visit old classmates, to attend class reunions, to support Brown. In later years my son Paul would attend Brown (’72), providing further reason to visit. All other relatives (cousins, aunts, uncles) had died or moved away.

By strange coincidence, one of my three daughters (Lisa) moved to Atlanta and married Robert Kwasha whose father Herman had graduated Brown ’28. Of the Kwashas, only “Aunt Lottie,” now 101 years old, still lives in Providence. (Stationed in the Pacific, she had served as a staff sargeant in the Wac during World War II.)

But now, in these later years, memories of Providence and of Brown have grown increasingly important. Although I had been invited to become a graduate student in Brown’s English department, I believe that moving to New York was mostly the right decision. Brown and the whole area now look quite wonderful to me, but I am still drawn to New York, and go into the city whenever I can. I will turn 89 in August 2010 and plan to continue reviewing Broadway and Off-Broadway shows.
The author was born in Providence in 1925. He grew up on Willard Avenue and Robinson Street and graduated from Classical High School in January 1943. One of his most influential instructors at Classical was James F. O’Neil, who taught English. Having been enrolled in an accelerated program, Hal was able to complete his first year at Rhode Island State College before being drafted in September of that year. He served as a rifleman in France, Belgium, Germany, and Luxembourg, and received numerous decorations, including a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star, and two Battle Stars.

Returning to Rhode Island State on the GI Bill, Hal earned a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering in 1948. A week later he married Rosalie Korman, and the young couple moved to Cleveland, where he worked as a research engineer with the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, a precursor of NASA. The young couple helped revitalize and liberalize an Orthodox congregation. Hal later worked for General Electric in Schenectady, New York, designing guided missiles for the Cold War. The Blooms joined a Conservative congregation. After his department was moved to Philadelphia, Hal and Rosalie bought a home in Levittown, Pennsylvania, with assistance from the GI Bill, and joined another Conservative congregation.

When transferred to Valley Forge, Hal worked on space exploration projects, including vehicular and space station design. During the 1970s, he managed 300 engineers, economists, psychologists, and medical personnel. After General Motors sent him back to Schenectady, he worked on super-conducting magnets and settled with his wife in Providence, a small town in Saratoga County, New York. They worshipped at a Conservative congregation in Gloversville. The Bloom’s four children were already grown, but he and Rosalie have remained near one daughter, in Greenfield Center, and are active in her Reform congregation.

While their parents and in-laws were still living in Rhode Island, the Blooms visited at least once a year.
When Hal returned to South Providence during the late 1960s, however, he was “appalled” by what he saw. The shtetl he so fondly remembered had disappeared. This aberration launched his writing career, which resulted in dozens of columns for The Jewish Herald. Some of these essays and others, partially based on information provided by our Association, were self-published as an anthology in 2004. (The title of this article is the same as the book’s.) Alas, Hal, who is also a poet, has often returned to South Providence, but only from stanza to stanza.

WILLARD AVENUE

During my boyhood days, mostly in the 1930s, South Providence was the center of Jewish life in Rhode Island. True, there were enclaves in such places as the East Side, the North End, Pawtucket, Bristol and, in the summer, the “Pier,” Conimicut, and Oakland Beach. Yet, from all such locations, Jewish families converged on South Providence for shopping for their ethnic foods, for many of their religious activities, and for a good deal of their social involvement.

If South Providence was, indeed, the center of Rhode Island’s Jewish life, a short stretch of Willard Avenue and its environs was the center of South Providence’s Jewish commercial and religious life.

Within the half mile or so of Willard Avenue that ran from just west of Prairie Avenue almost to Plain Street, there were three synagogues (plus another on Robinson Street, in the next block). There were also seven kosher butcher shops; five large ethnic grocery stores (none belonging to a chain); four bakeries (plus two nearby, one on Robinson Street, the other on the corner of Bogman Street and Prairie Avenue) that catered to Jewish tastes like challah and bagels. One would choose from among three fruit and vegetable stores, and from two fish markets (that carried the carp and buffel favored by Jewish housewives for gefilte fish). In addition, there were other establishments that provided necessities for Jewish living. Within a block of Willard Avenue, one also found a kosher restaurant; a mikveh (ritual bath), and a kosher slaughterhouse for chickens.

None of this, of course, was assembled in a mall, today’s ubiquitous conglomeration of chain stores. Each and every business on the Avenue was a separate entity. Each was owner-operated, and it survived (or, unfortunately, went under) as a direct result of the owner’s commitment to quality, responsiveness to customers’ demands, long work days and, most difficult, the ability to maintain a positive cash flow.

During most of the week, Willard Avenue was quiet. Much of the observable activity would consist of the delivery of goods to the various stores, the dispatching of customer orders to those who had previously phoned in, and the casual strolling of window shoppers and competitors surveying each other’s wares.

On summer afternoons, these weekly periods of doldrums would often find many of the store owners ensconced in chairs under the awnings in front of their stores, some snoozing, others engaged in conversations with other passersby. When school was out, such times offered me the chance to sit out there with my father and grandfather, and listen to the man-talk they exchanged.

On Thursday afternoons, the tempo on Willard Avenue picked up. This was when the housewives would begin their shopping for Shabbos. While many of the ladies would phone in their orders for Friday morning delivery, a goodly segment of customers (mostly the older generation) preferred to see, poke, and smell their purchases—especially the meat, poultry, fish, fruit, and vegetables. As the afternoon wore on, the stores and sidewalks would gradually fill. Then after a minor lull around suppertime, the stores and sidewalks would reach the “crowded” state later in the evening.

Friday was generally a quiet day on the Avenue—mainly last minute shopping, a few deliveries, and clean-up of stores for the Sabbath. By late afternoon, the street would be almost deserted—most stores would close well before dark.

The doors of the synagogues would be open, the older men would be gathering at the entrances, and Yiddish phrases would be echoing in the street. In a short while, the word would be passed to start Sabbath Eve’s Mincha (afternoon) service, and the congregants would file inside. Latecomers, hurrying to the service, could hear the first words, “Ashrey yoshivey bayeschoh...” They’d shortly be welcoming the Sabbath services.

With the whole morning devoted to services, it was natural that there would be a continual coming and going, primarily of young people, in and out of the doors. This resulted in a small crowd accumulating at the entrances and a gradually increasing level of chatter as they exchanged greetings and gossip. When their conversations escalated to a level that intruded on the service, elders clad in their talesim (prayer shawls) and carrying their sidurim (prayer books), would appear briefly in the doorway and issue stern warnings to “zei shtil” (be quiet).
If there happened to be a Bar Mitzvah on a Saturday, the congregation would swell somewhat just before the reading of the Torah, and the group standing outside would filter back inside in time to help pelt the Bar Mitzvah bucher (boy) with the traditional bags of raisins, candy, and nuts.

After the morning service, the synagogues would empty quickly as the families headed home for lunch, and Willard Avenue would return to the relative quiet of the day of rest.

As sunset approached, however, the Avenue began to come to life again. Not only did the observant Jews begin hurrying to the synagogues for the Mincha and Ma’ariv (evening) services, but workers began slipping back into closed shops to start the process of preparing for the Saturday night reopening.

Working in semi-darkness, the shopkeepers quietly began unpacking cartons and crates, arranging displays of their goods, and organizing the tools of their trades for efficient service when the moment of truth arrived. That moment was the official time of sunset, which marked the end of the Sabbath.

Within minutes of the time the clock hands indicated that event, the Avenue came to life. Lights came on in every closed shop (and in many residences), cars would begin pulling into parking spots, and sidewalks would be jammed with people, as if by magic.

On Saturday night, it would seem as if every Jew in America (or at least Rhode Island) was walking on Willard Avenue. People who hadn't seen each other in weeks would meet and stop to chat. Others, who saw each other every day, would have some new tidbits of gossip to exchange and would stand on the sidewalks or in the stores talking. Coming to the Avenue on Saturday night was as much a social experience as it was a shopping excursion.

I would be remiss if I didn't record the fact that there were a large number of black inhabitants of Willard Avenue, with whom the Jewish population lived in relative harmony. For the most part, these residents of color held jobs in the stores on Willard Avenue, performing clean up, deliveries, repairs, and like chores. One of the more unusual jobs was that of chickenflicker.

Chickenflickers were employed at the chicken slaughterhouse located around the corner from Willard Avenue on Gay Street. There, chickens were slaughtered according to kosher ritual by the shockhet (kosher slaughterer). After the chickens were slaughtered, the chickenflickers had the job of plucking, or flicking, them. The chicken carcasses were hung by their feet, and the feathers were plucked by hand. When the chickenflickers were finished, there were generally only a few pinfeathers left to be removed by the merchant prior to being displayed to customers. For this difficult job, the chickenflicker was paid 15 cents per chicken (only five cents before my time). In later years, after an enterprising coworker organized them, they were paid 50 cents per chicken.

I have spoken of the sights and sounds of Willard Avenue, but I cannot overlook the smells. Some of those smells are as vivid today as they were long ago. Of course, there were some bad smells, but perhaps artistic license will allow me to bypass them, and will permit me the nostalgic pleasure of the good smells—the combination of fresh bread, cookies, and “chop suey” (a name given to a particularly spicy little chocolate cake-let) baking in the bakery; the overwhelming perfume of dill pickles, sour tomatoes, and pickled cabbage in the grocery store; the heavy chocolatey smell at the candy counter of the variety store; the sweetish, musty smell in the dry goods store; the spicy odor of the beef pickling in the butcher shop.

Unfortunately, once I left for college, went to war, got married, and moved to Ohio, I lost touch with all of this. In the meantime, “they” redeveloped Willard Avenue. The synagogues, bakeries, butcher shops, and grocery stores were replaced by a huge housing complex. All the sights, sounds, and smells vanished and now exist only in fading memories.

**BLOOM’S BUTCHER SHOP**

Soon after arriving in the country, my Zaidee, Jacob Bloom, took up his old country trade by working in his cousin's kosher butcher shop in Woonsocket. This occupation lasted several years, but Zaidee said he was not happy working for somebody else.

So when the time came that my father was old enough to be of some help to him, Zaidee Bloom decided to try his hand at operating a rented farm just outside of Woonsocket. While this was an enjoyable time for my father, what with horses to tend and ride, and a farm pond to swim in, it was not an ideal location for his four sisters, his mother, and his grandmother. At their urging and voluble insistence, Zaidee looked around for another opportunity.

Thus, it was that around 1920, give or take several years, Zaidee established his own kosher butcher shop on Willard Avenue in the heart of the shtetl. In subsequent years, in whatever other business or jobs my father engaged, he always spent evenings, Saturdays and Sundays, helping out his father at the butcher shop. By the mid-1930s he was there pretty much full-time until 1941.

I liked those arrangements because when he was there, I was allowed to spend time with him at the butcher shop after school, on weekends, and during vacations. One of the most enjoyable memories I have of Zaidee Bloom's butcher...
shop is that of Saturday night. Back in the mid-1930s, I was just old enough to be allowed to participate in what was, to me, the excitement of helping Zaidee and my father serve the scores of customers who came to shop.

In preparation for Saturday night, my father would let himself into the shop as soon as the first shadows of evening heralded the end of the Sabbath. In fact, he sometimes cut the time a little too close, which worried Zaidee more than a little. Working furiously, my father would cut up steaks and chops and arrange them artistically on the shiny, white, enamel trays. Corned beef and tongues would go into the spotless long display case. Shoulder roasts and rolled roasts would be placed to show the desirable "grain" and lack of thick fat. Moving at top speed in semi-darkness, he would have it all ready in time for "lights on" when full darkness set in.

When the lights were turned on, the shop would shine like a new dime. Almost everything was white and spotless. (I knew because I was there scrubbing on Friday before we closed for the Sabbath, but that's another story.)

In no time, the shop would be full of customers, all trying to get my father's attention, and all trying to peer over the display case to watch Zaidee and my father slice or chop or saw.

My father reveled in this hustle and bustle. He joked with one customer, sales-pitched another, cut a roast for a third– all without missing a beat. Zaide worked slowly and methodically, one customer at a time, answering few questions from the customers (and mostly in Yiddish). He was an island of calm in a stormy sea.

My job in all of this (at least in my earliest years) was to answer the phone. Understand, a major portion of the business was the delivery of meat orders on six mornings a week (none on Saturday), and Sunday morning's delivery was one of the largest. The phone calls on Saturday night for Sunday delivery could number near the hundred mark, and the questions posed on the phone concerning freshness, portion size, alternative cuts, and so on could seriously reduce my father's time to attend the customers in the shop. By placing me at the phone, my father's time was conserved, and the questions reduced considerably.

And this is my most vivid memory of Saturday night at the butcher shop. Standing outside the window as the lights went on, my father and Zaidee in gleaming white aprons, jackets, and pants; the bright red meats in the window contrasting with the clean white fixtures and interior; and my father, Henry Bloom, with a smile that stretched from ear to ear.

#### THE TURKISH BATH

On Friday mornings, as soon as the orders were packed into the vehicle for delivery, and the vehicle was sent off, the process of cleaning up the store for the Sabbath began. Whether it was Zaidee Bloom's and my father's passion for cleanliness, or a requirement of the Vaad Hakashros (the religious organization that oversaw the maintenance of kosher standards), the object of the cleaning process was to remove any trace of our product from the work area.

Meat residue, bloodstains, bone dust, and suet smears had to be cleaned from wooden work benches and chopping blocks. The marble slabs in the display windows, the wooden floor, the inside and outside of the refrigerated display case, the walls near the work benches, every knife, cleaver, saw, and meat tray had to be cleaned. The heads of the huge meat grinders had to be disassembled and cleaned. It was all a considerable task which was made difficult by the tendency of the blood to stain the wood, the bone dust to collect in crevices, and the suet to coat surfaces.

The answer to these problems, according to my father, was lots of hot, soapy water liberally laced with ammonia, and a heavy dose of elbow grease. Meanwhile, Zaidee and I concentrated on the less physically demanding jobs.

As a child in the late '30s, my primary role in all this was the cleaning of the display case. After all, I was the only one available and small enough to fit inside this case. Climbing in with brushes and a bucket of soapy water, I would scrub the inside surfaces carefully and then rinse with hot, clear water. It was not hard work, but the ammonia did make it unpleasant.

Anyone who came to the door during this labor took one whiff of the ammonia and quickly left. As a matter of fact, after we spread the sawdust, stepped out onto the sidewalk, and locked the door, anyone we encountered made haste to cross the street! No wife in her right mind would let us into her house smelling the way we did.

Now came the best part of the day, maybe the week– the Turkish bath, which was located in the North End on Candace Street. On arrival, Zaidee, my father, and I would receive a big towel and a sheet, and we proceeded to the dressing (in this case the undressing) room, where we stripped off all the smelly clothes. Now in the buff, we went down the steps to the heart of the baths.

First stop was the old-fashioned steam bath. Large stones were being heated in one corner of the approximately 20 by 20-foot room, half of which was occupied by a bleacher-like assembly of unpainted benches. On one end of each bench was a cold water tap, under which sat a large wooden bucket and several felt hats, the function of which you will soon see.
The attendant, who was also in the buff, would frequently poke one or two of the rocks out from the rest and douse them with water to cause clouds of steam. By the time we had arrived, this had been going on for hours, and the room would be quite hot and damp.

The planned mode of indulging in this experience was to start out sitting or lying on the lowest-level bench, and as one became acclimated to the temperature, move up to the next level, where it was somewhat hotter. This would continue until one reached one’s limit of endurance. Since the top bench was within three feet or so of the ceiling, and the temperature there must have been close to 200 degrees, few present would be found at the top. Most of the participants, therefore, would be found on the lower benches.

For me the challenge was to get up as high as I could as soon as I could, and that is where the felt hats came into play. As I moved up the bench levels and felt the heat getting uncomfortable, I would move over to the cold water tap, pick up a hat, fill it with cold water, and dump it on my head! After filling the hat again I would place it on my head, and move up another level. Obviously, this was not a method that originated with me. (Why else would the hats have been there? Certainly, nobody was expecting to hold services there.) Eventually, I became bored with this phase of the adventure, and engaged in another activity that I had seen others in the steam bath carry out. When the steam bath attendant was signaled, he would bring over a large wooden bucket filled with hot, soapy water. Then, using a bundle of leaves (oak or maple, I’m not sure which), he would dip into the suds and proceed to scrub one’s body, ending with a light patting motion. For most of the people I observed going through this ritual, it induced drowsiness up to the point of sleep. It, therefore, got one’s attention when the attendant ended things by dousing a snoozer with a bucket of cold water.

When my father was ready, we’d move on to the next part of the bath, the pool. The main pool was a standard swimming pool– to this young boy it appeared tremendous. It was probably 60 to 75 feet long. The “macho” people like my father dived right in, hot bodies into cold water. Until I learned to swim, I had to use the more cautious approach, the ladder. The slow descent was excruciating.

After paddling around in the pool for a while, I arrived at a condition just opposite that in the steam bath– cold-soaked. My father would notice my blue lips, and he’d send me to the next pool, the hot pool.

In an alcove, just off the swimming pool, there was located a small, steaming pool. Apparently, it was made for those who were turning blue in the large pool. Oh! What a pleasure it was to take the few steps down into that enveloping warmth!

For a while then, the men would either swim or sit in the steam bath, while I alternated between the swimming pool and the hot pool. All too soon, my father would call me to return upstairs to dry off, and to prepare to leave.

After toweling off, we wrapped ourselves in our sheets and settled onto cots, where the men would take a short nap. As for me, in no way could I take a nap during the day. I’d toss and turn, sigh and squirm, and the cot would squeak. Finally, my father would give up, wake Zaidec, and we’d get dressed in clean clothes, which I imagine my father brought with us. We’d then drive home, to a house prepared for the Sabbath, change into “going to shul” clothes, and head off to shul.

WHEELS OF COMMERCE

By the time the 1930s rolled around, the wheels of commerce in the United States had pretty much evolved from iron-rimmed wooden wagon wheels to rubber-tired steel automotive wheels. Nevertheless, there were still some rugged individualists in Providence who carried out their businesses from anachronistic horse-drawn wagons. In fact, a few such conveyances were operating until just before the start of World War II.

I was particularly aware of this mode of commerce because my Zaidec, Joseph Lubin, owned and operated one of these horse-and-wagon teams as he peddled fruits and vegetables in South Providence during the days of my childhood. Two other such produce vendors were Mr. Lass and Mr. Altman.

It is only fair to point out that there were even more primitive wheels of commerce in operation during part of this period– pushcarts! Not the romantic versions seen in the movie, *Hester Street*, but rather, rickety, grime, discard-filled carts used by two or three early “recyclers”– the junk men who collected rags, bottles, and odd pieces of metal. Using their own muscle-power rather than horse-power, they propelled their carts through town, combed neighborhoods for odds and ends abandoned by others, and delivered their gleanings to the various junk dealers on Ash Street (a now-defunct road one block south of Willard Avenue). From the junk men, a couple of my eight-to-ten-year-old cohorts and I would occasionally earn nickels and dimes by bringing them pieces of aluminum, copper, and lead, or bottles that we had scavenged from the vacant lot on Willard Avenue or the dump on Eddy Street.

All three of the produce vendors maintained quasi-regular routes in and around South Providence on schedules that were known to neighborhood house-
wives. Many of the housewives counted on peddlers to provide them with fresh produce without the need for the ladies to bundle up their children, dress for the outdoor weather, and make the time-consuming trip to the store.

Generally, the regularity of the peddlers’ routes was such that housewives could wait at their windows at the proper times, and they could call their orders down to the peddlers as the horses slowly clip-clopped along the street. Some days, however, a peddler might be early, late or decide to try a new street. For such situations, if the peddler felt that the sound of horseshoes on pavement would not be sufficient to attract customers’ attention, he would call out an announcement of his wares. My Zaidee, for instance, would sing-song a loud “fruits and vegetables, fresh fruits and vegetables” a number of times or, for variation, name his produce—“red ripe tomatoes; cu-u-u-cumbers.” Mr. Lass, who was a very large man with a stentorian voice, had a unique call that I still remember. His “Hey, look ‘em over!” would drown out any other sounds on the street.

When not peddling, my Zaidee kept his horse and wagon on the rear portion of his property on Bishop Street in Providence, where the horse was stabled in a large barn, next to which he parked his wagon. Access to these accommodations was via an alley (now reconstructed Alphonso Street and Janes Street). As I remember, Mr. Lass and Mr. Altman, both of whom lived on Willard Avenue, stabled their horses in the row of stables that lay behind the group of stores on the north side of Willard, opposite Hilton Street.

Like the other peddlers, my Zaidee’s weekdays began about 3 o’clock in the morning, when he rose, dressed, hitched up the horse and wagon, fed the horse, and left the house. By 4:30, he would be at the wholesale market near Canal Street, inspecting the produce, negotiating prices, and loading his purchases on his wagon. He had built the wagon superstructure himself, constructing it with several tiers so as to enable easy display of the produce and to make it more difficult for young opportunists (who frequently trailed the wagon) to “sample” the more desirable goods.

After the loaded wagon was driven home, Zaidee would have a quick cup of tea and head off to his synagogue to be there for the 6 o’clock Shacharis (morning service). After the service, he’d come back home for breakfast, feed the horse again, and be off on his route by 7:30 or 8.

While it was a prideful thing for me to have a Zaidee who was driving a horse and wagon, my ultimate ego trip was to sit up there on the seat and ride with him as his helper. From the time I was about five until I was about nine, this would occur on many happy occasions when school was not in session.

Zaidee would time his route so that he came to our house on Willard Avenue around lunchtime. He then could visit and have lunch with us. After lunch, with Mom’s permission, I would climb up beside him, and off we’d go.

Most of his route passed through those South Providence streets that were lined with three-decker houses. These streets included Willard, Robinson, Dudley, Blackstone, and Somerset. As he passed, customers would hail him, ask his prices, question him as to the freshness and quality of his wares, and generally agree to a purchase.

The next step, if I was along as his helper, was for the ladies to wrap up some money in a scrap of paper or cloth and to drop it down to my Zaidee. If there was change due, Zaidee would give me the change and the order, and I would proceed to deliver them up the stairs to the customer.

It may be of interest to note that few, if any, paper bags were involved in these transactions. In fact, many items of produce were not sold by weight, but by volume—quarts, pecks, and bushels. The peddler carried cylindrical wooden measures in these sizes, and they were used, not only to determine the quantity of the produce being purchased, but also to deliver the produce to the customer.

At my age, I could carry amounts up to a half-bushel to the top floor tenements. Not only did I earn recognition as a helper, but I also sometimes earned rewards—cookies, candy, even a penny or two.

I was privileged to watch Zaidee fabricating and mending the complex harness gear needed to hitch the horse to the wagon. Zaidee had taught himself the art and craft of working the leather, horsehair, and brass into bridles, reins, traces, and horse collars of professional quality (so much so that users came from other parts of New England to seek his gear). In my mind’s eye, I can still see Zaidee astride his harness maker’s vise, rubbing beeswax into the heavy cotton thread, and (with two needles) pulling the thread through the leather, into which he had pre-drilled the holes with his awl.

It has been nearly 70 years since I last rode as a helper on my Zaidee’s wagon, toted measures of apples and potatoes up the back stairs of Providence’s three-deckers, and watched as he deftly put the finishing touches on a smoothly fitted horse collar of shiny black leather and gleaming brass fittings. Yet, it does not seem so long ago that he looked up from cinching up a strap or wiping up one last drop of neat’s-foot oil from his tools, took me home to dinner, and said, “Nu, tahtele, lommir gain essen (well, little father, let’s go eat).”

ca. 1960
In 1921, faced with increasing dangers from pogroms in Ukraine, the Lightman family emigrated to the United States. My father, Solomon “Shlome” Lightman, had made plans for this move well in advance because it involved so many people. The entourage included my mother, Eva; the children, Julius (later called Gene) and Rose; my mother’s mother, Miriam Orodenker; and my father’s father and mother. Several other members of our extended family accompanied us. They included my father’s sister, Rifka; her husband, Aaron Waxman; and their children, Eva, Dorothy, and Martin. My father’s brothers, Hymie and Harry, were already in the United States.
Uncle Harry Waxman and his family lived on the second floor of a house at 178 Willard Avenue. This was just next to the intersection with Gay Street. My grandparents lived in a flat just below Gay Street.

A huge kitchen with a gigantic coal-burning stove was our central living space. We spent most of our time there. We had a living room, but it was closed during the winter months when the heat was off.

Meals involved discussions of local, national, and international politics, which of course included Jewish affairs and Palestine. We also discussed music and literature. My father was an ardent Labor Zionist and a supporter of Norman Thomas, and we children adopted those beliefs.

Yiddish was the language spoken in our house until my parents died. They had learned English, but neither of my grandmothers had done so. Yiddish was very useful in our store because many customers who had emigrated later in life had a greater familiarity with Yiddish than English. Yiddish also helped me communicate with Jews from Germany and Poland during and after World War II.

My memories of those early years are rather disjointed, but a few stand out. My paternal grandfather, Reb Meir, spent his entire time in the Rusische Shul (South Providence Hebrew Congregation) on Willard Avenue and immersed himself in rabbinic literature. He was revered by the religious Jews of South Providence. I can remember sitting on the Waxman porch with my cousin Dorothy during his funeral in 1927. All shops on Willard were closed, and mourners filled the street and sidewalks as they walked in the funeral procession.

My mother was very proud of the fact that she had passed the exam to become a citizen. I took her to Roger Williams High School the first time she voted on November 8, 1932. This was when Franklin Delano Roosevelt opposed President Herbert Hoover. She entered the voting booth, closed the curtain, and suddenly a loud voice emerged: “Straight Democrat.”

The majority of Providence Jews lived in South Providence, and that is where one had to shop for kosher food and other necessities that traditional Jewish households needed. Willard Avenue contained groceries, bakeries, seafood, butchers, dry goods, pharmacies, and other stores. There was a slaughterhouse, where shoppers selected chickens, and there were also tailors and barbershops. There were two synagogues and another a block away.
Shortly after our arrival, my father opened Lightman’s Delicatessen and Grocery Store, which was located at 222 Willard Avenue, opposite our house on the corner of Hilton Street and Willard. Next to us on the avenue side was another store. Next to it was the entrance to an automobile service garage, which had another entrance on Hilton Street.

My parents spent the rest of their working years in the store. My brother, Gene, had to sacrifice his dream of attending college because his presence was essential to the success of the operation. It was not the career he would have chosen. He must have worked 80 hours a week with very little time off. My parents took naps during the day, but my brother did not. He must have been exhausted.

Gene often revealed his unhappiness and anger. Only after he retired and moved with his wife Terry to Florida did my brother’s true spirit emerge. It was a side that many of his close friends had seen: a man with a sense of humor. It was then that we became close. Fortunately, Gene and Terry enjoyed their retirement for many years in good health, and they became the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers of their group. When my parents grew older and retired, it was Gene and Terry who looked after them.

Lightman’s was enlarged when my father purchased the vacated adjoining store. We now had an additional door on the Willard Avenue side. Lightman’s became the largest and busiest store of its kind in Rhode Island. Large windows enabled customers to see the displays of fruits and vegetables that were carefully arranged to attract buyers. To make room for customers and additional items, stands were set up outside when warm weather arrived, and overhanging awnings protected the food and buyers from rain. The stands had to be dismantled before closing. Local shoppers dropped by several times during the week but distant customers from all over the state came to us on Saturdays to do their weekly shopping. Until her marriage, Rose worked on Saturdays, as did other relatives.

At age 13, I began helping out on Saturdays. I started waiting on customers, which I enjoyed because I liked chatting with them.

When Gene obtained his driver’s license, we purchased our first automobile to make deliveries. It had flaps instead of windows on the sides, and it had to be cranked. Later we began buying maroon Chevrolets.

The store became so busy that we had to hire a driver to deliver our orders. His name was Vinnie, a handsome young African-American, and I helped him make deliveries. I loved working and chatting with him and having discussions on music and other topics. One day we stopped at his residence on a dirt street just two blocks from where we lived on Harriet Street, and I met his wife and baby. My relationship with Vinnie had a lasting effect on my feelings about race.

Eventually, my father obtained a driver’s license. The first time he decided to drive to the store, however, he left home and took a right turn on Potters Avenue. He came to a gentle stop at a telephone pole on the next block. My father never drove again. Fortunately, after I got my license at 16, I became my parents’ driver.

The store was open seven days a week. Mondays through Thursdays and Sundays we were open from 9 AM to 10 PM. We closed at sundown on Fridays and at about midnight on Saturdays. For years my father tried to get proprietors of other stores like ours to close on Sundays, the slowest day of the week, but he was not successful. My father and brother rose at 6 AM several days a week to go to the farmers’ market to buy fruits and vegetables that were in season.

Saturdays were incredibly busy from the time we opened until the midnight closing. There was no air conditioning, and ceiling and standing fans were of little help in the summer. Fly paper hung from the ceiling because screen doors were of little help in preventing their entry.

My mother cooked tongue and corned beef and made wonderful pickled cucumbers, tomatoes, and watermelons that customers devoured. Sauerkraut was stored in a large barrel, as was herring. Some women with rare eyesight claimed that the herring a few layers down had more milt than those on the surface. In those days tomatoes and other fruit were not treated to retard ripening. They were sold at a lower price within a few days. One had to keep an eye out for the few customers who tried to speed up the ripening process by squeezing.

While women shopped, many men helped themselves to magnificent corned beef or tongue sandwiches on fresh rye bread. No one would have eaten the lean, tasteless beef that is mostly served today. Instead, customers demanded extra layers of fat carved from corned beef’s exterior.

We sold four varieties of wonderful lox: regular, belly, nova, and an almost white, fatty fish, which must have provided a month’s supply of omega-3 with every bite. My mother was famous for her ability to cut the thinnest slices of smoked salmon in the city. This was important because it allowed for additional servings. All of the other varieties of traditional smoked fish were also available, as were cheeses, hot dogs, rolled beef, and salami.
Over the years my father added and discarded other products. For a while we had ice cream and a soda fountain dispensing egg creams, milk shakes, and sundaes. (In earlier days non-homogenized milk was stored in large containers, and customers brought bottles to hold it.) With the end of Prohibition in 1933, liquor was sold for a brief period. By far the most dangerous items sold, fortunately for only a brief period, were fireworks. These were stored in the basement under less than safe conditions. Had they caught fire, half of Willard Avenue would have been destroyed.

**BEACHES**

Work on Saturdays in the summer was so exhausting that we often drove with open windows to Roger Williams Park or into the country to cool down. In the 1920s, there was Curwin's Beach on Narragansett Bay, about two miles from the store. It had a small sandy beach and a hill with picnic tables. We would often go there on Fridays after sundown and sometimes on Sundays, leaving only one person in the store for several hours. Unfortunately, the beach became polluted.

By 1930, the success of the business allowed my mother to start taking summer vacations accompanied by her grandmother, Rose, and me. Among our early destinations were beaches in West Barrington, Conimicut, and Riverview. Sometimes we rented a cottage and at other times we shared a kitchen with another family. Rhode Island had wonderful beaches within an hour's drive that were never crowded.

Narragansett Pier became our regular destination because of the fabulous quality of its water, the white sand, and the large dunes near Narrow River. The population of the town was about 2,000 in winter but in season it must have increased to about 20,000. It attracted huge crowds of young adults from all over the East Coast because there were innumerable places with live music and dancing until the early hours of the morning.

A large dance hall on stilts extended over the water, and famous orchestras provided fabulous music. We children sat outside listening to the music, watching the couples who came out on the veranda, and imagining that as grown-ups we would dance there one day.

Many of my Providence friends also vacationed with their families at Narragansett, and we had the run of the beach. We learned to swim and body surf when the waves reached heights of five or six feet. We would run races to Narrow River and back. At 13, without the knowledge of our parents who sat in front of the bathhouse, we swam across Narrow River, making use of the swift current to navigate to the other side and back. We would also walk along the huge rocks to Scarborough and Point Judith. At night, we would stroll along Ocean Drive or sit on the hotel verandas talking and playing games.

**THE DEPRESSION**

The Great Depression caused immense suffering over a prolonged period of time. From 1933 through 1938, unemployment fluctuated between 14.3% and 25%. In actual numbers, five million to over 12 million Americans were jobless. This meant that a great number of people could no longer pay for their food and other necessities.

My father bought a very large hard-covered ledger in which he entered the names of those customers. They were allowed to pay whatever portion of their purchase that they could. When Lightman's finally closed, many people were never able to pay what they owed. But my father was happy to provide food for those who were in need. He told me that some customers who prospered never paid their debts. He said that being dishonorable was their problem, not his. The Jewish community in Providence also provided help for those in need.

We were fortunate that our family was not adversely affected by the disastrous economic chaos. The business did not suffer, and we had plenty of food as well as monetary assistance to give to any of our relatives who were in need. We moved to the second floor of 36 Harriet Street, to one of two, new three-decker houses my father bought.

It was then, I believe, that we were occasionally joined by my mother's brother, Uncle Dave Orodenker, who had gone to Palestine before coming to the United States. He took great pride in the lasting quality of the furniture he produced, especially the upholstery. At times he used our garage. I marveled at his ability to move tacks around his mouth to fasten materials to the frames of his furniture. My mother would have liked to replace some of the items after some 10 years. But how could one do that when they showed no signs of wear?

**HOLIDAYS**

The major Jewish holidays were especially welcomed by those who worked on Willard Avenue and nearby streets. It meant time off from the long hours and the
coming together of family and friends. The avenue became a pedestrian zone with the streets and synagogue filled with people. For Passover, the stores had to segregate non-Passover items from those that could be sold. Boxes of matzohs reached almost to the ceiling. My father believed that, except for a rabbi's blessing, the Passover soda was no different from what we sold during the rest of the year. We children used to run in and out of the Rusisher Shul, and we were allowed to visit the women who sat upstairs.

Seders in our family meant the opportunity to come together with relatives from cities as far away as New York and Philadelphia. My father was the patriarch at the center of these gatherings. I particularly remember a seder after we moved to the second floor of the house on Harriet Street. There must have been 40 people at the table when the time came for Elijah to sip the wine. When the door to the steps was opened, a figure covered with a white sheet suddenly appeared. The women started screaming in horror! It was obvious that Elijah was not welcomed, nor was Uncle Sam, who turned out to be his impersonator.

Seders seemed to go on forever. My father tried to introduce some shortcuts, sometimes successfully, over the watchful eyes of his mother.

**PLAY**

It may seem odd that my memories of growing up during the Depression were mostly happy ones. We lived in a community consisting primarily of Jews and Irish. The multitude of mostly three-decker houses meant that we had an endless supply of children to play with. Most relatives our own age were within walking distance, so we established close relationships with each other that endured. They seemed more like brothers and sisters than cousins.

Crime was very low, and our parents did not worry about letting us loose without their supervision. With a paucity of automobiles, we played on streets, in empty lots, school yards, and playgrounds. We organized our own activities and learned to get along and settle our disputes without adult intervention.

We children reveled in physical activity. Softball, roller skating, football, tag, hide-and-seek, races, snowball fights, and countless other activities were the norm. In winter we walked about a mile to Roger Williams Park to play ice hockey. I learned to play tennis by hitting balls against the wall of our house and then went to Roger Williams Park to use the free clay courts. We also walked there to play football and enjoy the park's beauty. Bicycles enabled us to expand the territory of our outdoor activities.

Life was much simpler without the attractions that occupy children today. We did play Monopoly and various card games, but there were no televisions, computers, cell phones or organized activities that now occupy so much of young people’s attention. Many of us collected baseball cards and stamps, including those from foreign lands, especially Africa, whose countries produced magnificent colored portraits of animals. Some of us used to meet and talk about our collections and discuss the nations that issued them.

Chestnut trees lined many of our streets. We would drill a hole in one and insert a shoe string to play a game called kinger. We would take turns hitting each other’s chestnuts. Each one destroyed was added to the number of victories. A five-kinger meant your nut had obliterated five others.

**RADIO AND MOVIES**

Our family would listen to some of the same radio programs in spite of the differences in our ages. Jack Benny and Fred Allen were our favorite comedians. I would join Rose in listening to the soap operas she liked. Radio had one advantage over TV: it required the use of one’s imagination. Of course, all of us listened to President Roosevelt’s fireside chats.

On Saturdays we children walked to the Liberty Theatre on Broad Street, where we watched two movies plus a short, which would leave a hero in a precarious position until the following week. All this for 10 cents.

During Christmas my mother took me downtown to look at the wonderful train exhibits in the department stores. Then we would go to a palatial movie house like Loew’s State Theatre, which often featured a live act. Maurice played the organ, and we would sing the lyrics displayed on the screen. Once in a while the music did not quite match the lyrics, which meant that Maurice had one drink too many.

**SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES**

Two of the greatest influences on my life were the public schools and the local free libraries. My father had instilled in me a love of learning for its own sake, but most of my teachers were dedicated and excellent instructors who cared about their students and their subject matter. These teachers conveyed their excitement to us. My favorite subjects were history, English, science (especially astronomy), music, and gym. One of my primary school teachers had us play the roles of people like Daniel
Webster, Henry Clay, and William Jennings Bryan and argue their positions. It brought history to life in a way that enhanced reading about the same material. We walked to all of our schools, which included Classical, over a mile away.

At Roger Williams Junior High on Thurbers Avenue I had a brilliant classmate, William Biederman, who shared my fascination about World War I. The war, which destroyed millions of lives, was waged by rulers who were often related and shared the same religious beliefs. Nationalism, however, was stronger than family ties and religion. Wars could occur because of leaders’ blunders. The lynching and mistreatment of African-Americans in the South, the misery so many Americans experienced during the Depression and, still later, the Nazi extermination of Jews caused us to wonder about the role God played in human affairs.

Classical High School took pride in its rigorous curriculum, high standards, and excellent teachers. It convinced me that the best foundation for enhancing and enriching one’s life was a broad liberal arts education. This included exposure to the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome, but also to Great Britain, which so influenced our own history. We read the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, and other great writers.

We were taught to write essays that were coherent and grammatically correct. An essay with a comma splice (two independent clauses joined by a comma) meant an automatic D, even if the essay was great. James Joyce would have gotten a D for Ulysses.

Jerome Fisher, who taught English, was my favorite teacher. One day he announced that he was going to see a great French movie at a downtown theater, and he would pay for any of us who would like to join him. I was one of the few who did. To this day, Jean Renoir’s Grand Illusion, made in 1937, is on my ten-best list. It is probably the greatest anti-war film ever made. The plot revolved around four French soldiers in a German prison camp during World War I. By chance, the head of the camp and the French aristocrat officer were related. They had more in common than did the aristocratic French officer and two bourgeois French officers, one of whom was Jewish. One of the prisoners said that he hoped that this would be the last such conflict. His friend replied that that was a “grand illusion,” a most prophetic statement. It brought to artistic life the conversations my friend and I had in junior high.

Although academic subjects at Classical were excellent, gym was a problem. We did not have one! So it was not surprising when we did not score a point in one basketball game. Fortunately, we excelled in track and field because we practiced in Roger Williams Park.

Public libraries provided me with an endless supply of enjoyment and information. One was just a block away, and I spent countless hours there. I loved pulling books at random off shelves to see whether they would appeal to me. I borrowed so many books that I was allowed to use the adult section, which made me feel like I was a grown-up. Later I walked over a mile each way to the Elmwood Avenue branch, which had a greater selection of books by authors I enjoyed.

ANTI-SEMITISM

In South Providence, where Jews and Irish Catholics lived and played together, I never experienced any anti-Semitism from my friends. However, boys who attended the school at St. Michael's Church, a few blocks away, sometimes uttered anti-Jewish slurs. I once got into a fight with one such boy. On another occasion, an older boy started harassing me, but an Irish neighbor who was the same age as the perpetrator, told him to leave me alone.

When I was in primary school, the singing of Christmas carols was allowed. The music was lovely, but the lyrics made me uncomfortable. I never sang them or uttered Christ's name. As an adult, however, I have had no problem singing carols with my Christian friends. I delight in listening to recordings of the great choral works by Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and others, which I have at home.

When I turned 13, my father took me on an overnight ship to New York City. I caught my first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty. We stayed at my uncle Harry’s apartment. The next day we went to the Lower East Side, a vibrant center of Jewish life. We attended a matinee performance of The Merchant of Venice in Yiddish. The famous actor Maurice Schwartz played Shylock, who became the hero with his great speech, “Hath not a Jew eyes…?” Changing the word “Jew” to the name of any oppressed people makes the speech and the play relevant today.

In histories of the United State, I read about hostility toward Jewish immigration, especially against Eastern Europeans. I knew about the lynching of Leo Frank, a Jew in Georgia, who was accused and convicted of killing a 13-year-old girl after a botched investigation pointing to the real killer. As a youngster, I already knew that many organizations and clubs, like the Dunes in Narragansett, did not accept Jews. By the time I entered high school, I was well aware of widespread discrimination in certain professions, including higher education.
Unfortunately, I became fully aware that many Jews faced discrimination. The destruction of German Jewry would be constantly discussed within our family and with friends. Newspapers, radio and filmed shorts like “The March of Time” kept us abreast of what was happening. Reports also included incidents of anti-Semitism in the United States.

**AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

At 13 years of age, I realized that there was another group in the United States that suffered far more discrimination than we did. I had learned about slavery in school and had read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Huckleberry Finn*. I was also horrified by accounts of lynchings. But my only African-American classmate was a boy in the first year of junior high. I do not remember any African-Americans at Classical.

Nevertheless, a number of African-Americans became my heroes. Jessie Owens made a mockery of Aryan superiority at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Joe Lewis knocked out Max Schmeling in the first round of their second match at Yankee Stadium on June 22, 1938. I idolized Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and other jazz giants, as well as Paul Robeson, and I listened to their recordings at home and over the radio.

I could not understand how some Jews could make disparaging remarks about others. I also began to comprehend widespread racial discrimination in housing and jobs, which has not been eliminated. The animosity now being directed at Latinos and Muslims, our fellow human beings, is further evidence of how difficult it is to eradicate discrimination.

**HURRICANE OF 1938**

The catastrophic Hurricane of 1938 came without warning. Walking home from Classical High, I saw a huge tree lying across Broad Street. I could not understand what happened because at that moment the sun was out and there was no wind. That evening we drove to the store from our house on Harriet Street. There were no lights, and rain and wind made driving very difficult. At the store we tried as best we could to protect the windows and moved some fragile items from the basement to the main floor.

The next day a few of us stood outside at the corner of Sayles Street, watching the wind uprooting a huge tree and the granite curb on Harriet Street. Of course our parents did not know that we were outside. A neighbor called for help to close his garage door. Returning to our former position, we found bricks from a chimney on the spot we had just vacated.

The aftermath of the storm was chaotic. Many areas were without electricity for weeks. A huge number of streets were blocked by fallen trees, which had also pulled up the granite curbs that were next to them.

The basements of most Willard Avenue stores were flooded, so water had to be pumped out. The lack of electricity caused an enormous run on anything that would provide light. Fortunately, we had a large amount of regular candles and, even more important, candles in glasses that were lit to remember those who had passed on. We also had some kerosene lamps and flashlights that we used in the store. For a number of weeks, we were closed at sundown until electricity was finally restored.

Houses at Conimicut were swept away, and a family with children I had played with lost their lives. At Narragansett most buildings and bathhouses facing the ocean were destroyed, as was the wall that lined Ocean Road. But the towers remained. The old Narragansett was gone forever, replaced by a family-oriented beach with diminished sand dunes. But the water was still wonderful.

**AMERICA AND ZION**

Looking back on my early years in Rhode Island, I now realize that arriving as an infant as part of an immigrant family affected me in ways that were not clear to me then. Implicit in the educational system and society was a push for one to become Americanized as quickly as possible. The way to do that was to concentrate on American history, culture, and behavior, and pay little attention to one’s past in another country.

Only when my wife Marjorie began questioning my father did I learn some of the details of my family’s life in Russia. I did not know until April 18, 1969, when Beryl Segal published “Shlome,” an article eulogizing my father in *The Jewish Herald*, that he and Alter Boyman had established a library filled with Yiddish and Hebrew literature in the old country. According to Beryl, my father brought back books by such authors as Sholom Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, and a new author, David Bergelson, from his business trips to big cities. Beryl also wrote that every evening my father and Boyman led discussions on topics that were “as far removed from our lives as the heavens were removed from the earth.” On every Sabbath they discussed the works of great Yiddish and Hebrew authors.
Beryl explained that in America, my father wrote “of the tragedy and the greatness of the Jew.” Speaking from his heart, our friend added: “He sang of the rebirth of Zion, an ideal to which he remained faithful to the last days of his life. He idolized the Chaluzim, the men and women who built Zion, and he worshiped every word spoken by Ben Gurion and by all the heads of the philosophy known as Labor Zionism.” One of the happiest moments of my parents’ lives occurred when they went to Israel. I have a photo of my father shaking hands with Ben Gurion.

Beryl Segal also explained that Shlome Lightman wrote poems and ballads that he read to his friends and almost always had a poem or two in the Poale Zion’s Passover Journal. I did know of a cantata he wrote and recorded, and he performed it on at least one occasion with a female singer.

That my father continued many of these intellectual activities during much of his working life, despite exhausting hours of hard physical labor, has never ceased to amaze me.
ignore or deny it. In 1954, for example, three declining Orthodox congregations merged to form Shaare Zedek and purchase the former Temple Beth-El on Broad Street. Either as a miracle of determination or as a mockery of progress—perhaps both—Shaare Zedek survived, even without a minyan, until two years ago. Who knows what will become of this once imposing and celebratory structure? Jewish tradition contains no provisions for burying deconsecrated buildings, and City Hall has no more dingy rooms to house dust and ashes. Indeed, the dingiest room there is the archive, a short stairway above the fifth floor, which evokes the sorrow of an abandoned cemetery.

Anne’s sleuthing reveals additional startling facts. Although many women probably worked besides their husbands or fathers, there were seven businesses on Willard Avenue that appear to have been owned by women. But there were no beauty or dress shops!

Because a blacksmith and a harness maker once did business on Willard Avenue, this bustling Jewish neighborhood seems to have belonged to a far distant era. Although streetcars and then buses became major modes of transportation throughout Providence, walking remained fundamental to daily existence. After automobiles became affordable, popular, and then essential, their gears seemed to take drivers and passengers in only one direction: away from “Down City.”

BAKERIES
200 Samuel Snell, 1917-57
207 Isador Perler, 1926-57
221 Modern Sanitary (Samuel Bazar), 1936-42

BARBERS
182 Harry Leventhal, 1920-27
182 Hyman Lapin, 1933-57
183 Louis Slavinsky, 1903, 1912
193 Harry Ackerman, 1930-55
213 Max Reisenberg, 1909-15

BAZAR FAMILY
155 Abraham Bazar Junk, 1897-1919
155 Bazar Hall, movie theatre and meeting rooms, 1908-35
155 A. Bazar Ticket Agency, 1915-28
155 A. Bazar & Sons, waste paper and metals, 1920-25

CANDY & ICE CREAM
192 Claire’s Candy (Milton Teder), 1948-57
208 Public Creamery (Louis and Sophie Spalter), 1938-45
owned by by Bert Auerbach, 1946-54

DELICATESSENS
170 Archie’s (Archie Feldman), 1947-51
owned with Nathan Rosenberg 1949-51
190 Rebecca Ackerman, 1920-35
191 Eli Horenstein, 1926-33
208 Esther Gold, 1933-37
222 Solomon Lightman, 1922-50; sold to C. Pollack, 1950

DRY GOODS
186 Hyman Epstein, 1921-44
220 Samuel Sugarman, 1913-30
251 Isaac Adelman, 1895-1905

FISH
209 Samuel Gordon, 1921-38
245 Louis Silverman, 1935-40
247 Joseph Kaufman, 1931-54

FRUIT & VEGETABLES
174 South End (Louis Berman), 1926-34
176 same as above, 1925-33
191 Anna Kroll, 1930-55
193 Harry Ackerman, 1930-55
193 Joseph Grossman, 1940-53
193 Morris Galer, 1938-43
196 Harry’s (Harry Freehof), 1946-57
251 Harry Kortick, 1940-49
259 Ruth Fishman, 1934-57

GROCERIES & MARKETS
148 Hyman Brotman, 1925-31
154 Philip Diwinsky, 1918-40; with Philip Kramer, 1922-25
185 Harry Berlinsky, 1909-57; became a meat market
188 Samuel Ackerman, 1901-20
191 Jacob Kolodoff, 1921-25
204 Rubin Bazarsky Meats, 1936-49
206 Eli Myers Live Poultry, 1928-45
207 Barnet Berman Provisions, 1898-1918
210 Barnet Feldman Provisions, 1907-30
210 Simon Friedman Provisions, 1921-24; Grocer, 1924-40
213 Fred Spigel Meat, 1942-57
213 Sugarman’s Kosher Meat Market, 1947-57
219 Frank Lury Meats, 1917-46
219 Helel Berlinsky Meats, 1921-31
219 Standard Live Poultry (William Newman), 1931-36
219 Daniel Fishman Meats, 1937-57
223 Frank Finegold Provisions, 1929-42
223 Harry Katz Meats, 1943-57
229 Jacob Bloom Provisions, 1924-40
232 Harry Berlinsky Meats, 1909-57 (a market, then a meat market)

SHOE REPAIR
185 Abraham Jacobson, 1922-35
185 Nathan Cerel, 1935-44

VARIETY STORES
170 Samuel Teller, 1922-30
182 Kaufman Brothers, 1925-39
183 Samuel Askins, 1934-39
191 Joseph Pollock, 1915-20
196 Nathan Blank, 1911-45
(began as confectionery and finally grocery store)
219 Isaac Adelman, 1895-02

HAY AND GRAIN
182 Charles Siegel, 1906-14
195 David Korn
(then David Korn & Sons, Coal), 1900-57

MEAT (PROVISIONS) & POULTRY
184 Sanitary Kosher Meat Market (Morris Gomberg), 1940-47
184 1/2 Barnet Stone Meats, 1923-39
184 1/2 Harry Keller Meats, 1948-57
191 Samuel Bernstein Meats, 1918-57
192 Isaac Forman Provisions 1929-35
198 Harry Spigel Poultry and Meat, 1918-57
204 Rubin Bazarsky Meats, 1936-49
206 Eli Myers Live Poultry, 1928-45
207 Barnet Berman Provisions, 1898-1918
210 Barnet Feldman Provisions, 1907-30
210 Simon Friedman Provisions, 1921-24; Grocer, 1924-40
213 Fred Spigel Meat, 1942-57
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219 Frank Lury Meats, 1917-46
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219 Standard Live Poultry (William Newman), 1931-36
219 Daniel Fishman Meats, 1937-57
223 Frank Finegold Provisions, 1929-42
223 Harry Katz Meats, 1943-57
229 Jacob Bloom Provisions, 1924-40
232 Harry Berlinsky Meats, 1909-57 (a market, then a meat market)

HORSES
156 Jacob Sweet, Harness maker, 1914-25
238 Samuel Goldenberg, Blacksmith, 1905-10

MISCELLANEOUS
140 Weinbaum Brothers Bottlers, 1901-20
155 Parlor Furniture (Max Resnick), 1922-25
156 Abraham Horowitz Pool Room, 1927-31
180 South End Pharmacy (Jacob Teath), 1922-25
180 Superb Cleaners (Daniel Feinstein), 1945-56
228 Willard Avenue Garage (Morris Kaufman), 1933-41
234 Harry Tannenbaum Hardware, 1939-42
257 South Providence Ice and Coal (Louis Kaufman), 1936-39;
(Samuel Sudakoff and Samuel Sklaroff), 1939-54
Sing, Dance, Act!: Photos from the Association’s Archives

JCC, 1940s

"Guys and Dolls," JCC, 1962

"Women of the Bible," Beth-El, 1910s

Thelma Winnerman ["Billy Winn"], 1920s

Golden Age Club, JCC, 1956

"Women of the Bible," Beth-El, 1910s
Beth-El Choral Society, Benjamin Primack, director, 1951

JCC, 1956

Emanu-El, Arthur Einstein, director, 1955

Brown Hillel, Rose Rosen, director, 1950s

JCC, 1955

Beth-El Choral Society, Benjamin Primack, director, 1951

Beth Israel, 1960s, Eve Tenenbaum, Adele Snyder, Vivian Beren, Louis Snyder, Edward Beren, Ben Gilstein

Emanu-El, Arthur Einstein, director, 1955

Brown Hillel, Rose Rosen, director, 1950s
JCC, 1940s

modern dance class, with Barbara Scott, JCC, 1950s

JCC, 1930s

Benjamin Primack, conductor, 1936

Jewish Orphanage, 1936
SING TWO SONGS OF RHODY, EACH BY JEWISH GUYS

JOHN BUSH JONES

If you’re a stickler for academic writing, please don’t read this article. If you are a curmudgeon, this article is not for you. If you are convinced that a high, impenetrable barrier separates entertainment and culture, then your feathers will surely be ruffled by the following tale.

But I can’t think of a more congenial or resourceful musical guide through Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, Hollywood, and New England. And who ever imagined that such an odyssey would lead to our own front doors?

Readers of this journal will easily remember JBJ’s humorous and heartfelt article about his Jewish journey on Chicago’s North Shore and beyond in our 2007 issue. Association members will also vividly recall the author’s delightful presentation on musical theatre at our 2003 annual meeting. Performance is in his blood, for he began writing songs in second grade, has directed dozens of plays for professional, community, and university theatres, and has written theatre criticism for several newspapers (if you know what those are).

Professor Jones earned undergraduate and graduate degrees at Northwestern and taught English and theatre arts for nearly 40 years at his alma mater, the University of Kansas, and Brandeis University. Nevertheless, he did not begin to hit his stride as a writer until he retired from Brandeis nearly a decade ago. Just when his life was about to get easier, he churned out a trilogy of remarkable studies for University Press of New England: Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre (2003); The Songs That Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939-1945 (2006); and All-Out for Victory! Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front (2009). A fourth study on culinary topics is close to publication.

A resident of Providence for nearly a quarter-century, JBJ can be found most days sifting through treasures at Brown’s John Hay Library. Discussing almost any scenario with him over coffee will brighten your day.

Back when the U.S. of A. consisted of the 48 contiguous states, two teams of professional writers of popular songs from the more than legendary but less than mythical Tin Pan Alley wrote a song giving a great big musical hug to the two biggest states, California and Texas. Before continuing with that thought and other thoughts more related to the tiniest state of all, Tin Pan Alley was itself a geographical place, but not always the same geographical place. It was always the place in New York City where the largest aggregate of professional songwriters and publishers, many of them Jewish, gathered in their offices and studios to crank out the voluminous numbers of songs that we collectively call popular music.¹

CALIFORNIA AND TEXAS

When I still taught courses in the history of musical theatre at Brandeis University, my students used to tell me I lectured by digression but always got back to the point, and that somehow I even made the digressions relevant. I guess old habits die hard. So here I am, back to those two great big popular songs hugging two great big states. Of course I am referring to none other than “California, Here I Come” and “Deep In The Heart Of Texas,” both of which became great big overnight hits thanks to the circumstances of their composition and performances.

Written in 1922 and interpolated into the touring production of Al Jolson’s Broadway musical Bombo, “California, Here I Come” had words by the hugely talented Portuguese-American lyricist B. G. (“Buddy”) De Sylva with Jewish Jolson putting his own two cents in as well. The music was by Joseph Myer, most likely a Jew, but it is almost impossible to verify his background. (Biographical information about most popular songwriters is sketchy at best, totally unreliable or altogether absent at worst.) Most curious, but perhaps accounting for the vibrantly sincere and enthusiastic vigor of both the song’s words and music are its writers’ California connections. Composer Myer was born in Modesto and lived there through most of his teenage years; De Sylva was born in New York City but at an early age moved with his family to Southern California and attended the University of Southern California.

Making perhaps my greatest understatement ever, Jolson’s performance of the song was electrifying. Between his voice combining the boom of a howitzer and the rasp of a box-cutter, with his capacious outstretched arms and white-gloved hands that could warmly embrace anything from his “Mammy” to that enormous West Coast state, it is no small wonder that California got the biggest possible musical hug imaginable and then some. And even without his physical presence, when Jolson recorded “California, Here I Come” in 1924, his voice alone and the
emotional fervor behind it made the song the number one seller of the year.

The tale of “Deep In The Heart Of Texas” may be more briefly told. Unlike B. G. De Sylva and Joseph Myer, whose still-familiar popular songs are legion—far too many to begin citing here—the writers of “Deep In The Heart Of Texas,” lyricist June Hershey and composer Don Swander (ethnic and/or religious backgrounds of both entirely unknown), have never been heard of again in the annals of American popular song. But then again, with the royalties that they or their heirs have been accruing from just that one tune, they probably haven’t had to! For those who remember the song (and if you ever heard it, how could you forget it?), it’s the audience participation thing praising the various virtues of Texas that requires four (to me totally aggravating) rhythmic claps between each eight bars of sung lyrics. Never associated with a single performer, it was instead recorded by a number of singers (all males) and bands, the first being Perry Como with Ted Weems’s orchestra on December 9, 1941. In rapid succession came recordings by Alvino Rey’s orchestra with vocals by Skeets Hurlurt and Bill Schallen, Bing Crosby with Woody Herman’s Woodchoppers, and Horace Heidt and his orchestra.

Thanks to all that exposure, in 1942 this loving if a bit annoying tribute to Texas wound up on radio’s Your Hit Parade for twelve weeks, in the number one spot for five of them. And “Deep In The Heart Of Texas” lives on today, if only as played at all football games by the marching band of the University of Texas Longhorns with, undoubtedly, thousands of the faithful in the stands enthusiastically clapping along.

Although professional Tin Pan Alley songwriters penned many other warm fuzzy valentines to various states (most such songs were reserved not for states but for cities like Chicago, San Francisco, and New York), few became hits of the magnitude of the two just discussed, and most remain in comparative or total obscurity. The one great exception of course is “Oklahoma!” the thrilling title song of the groundbreaking musical of the same name by Oscar Hammerstein 2nd and Richard Rodgers in 1943. It was officially adopted by that state as its state song.

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND

But as we move up to the itty-bitty states comprising New England, things begin to look pretty bleak in the popular music department, especially when we consider primarily songs by major Tin Pan Alleymen. Starting in the upper tier, considering that Maine is a pretty hefty chunk of real estate compared to the other New England states, it might be presumed that some enterprising songwriter would have paid loving attention to the State of Maine just for its comparative girth alone, not even factoring in its potatoes, lobsters, and moose. No such luck.

Of uncertain ethnic origin (though definitely not Jewish) was Brooklyn-born Walter Donaldson (1893–1947), a true powerhouse of Tin Pan Alley. Working primarily as a composer but sometimes as lyricist to his own melodies as well, Donaldson, during his comparatively brief lifetime, wrote more hit songs, many still standards today, than should probably be legal for any one human being. Such songs (in no particular order) include: Al Jolson’s trademark “My Mammy,” “Carolina In The Morning,” “Yes, Sir, That’s My Baby,” “My Blue Heaven,” “Makin’ Whoopee,” “Love Me Or Leave Me,” “You’re Driving Me Crazy,” “Little White Lies,” and “How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down On The Farm (After They’ve Seen Paree)” And that, trust me, is just the tiniest tip of Donaldson’s iceberg. That his 1922 “Away Down East In Maine,” for which Donaldson wrote both the words and music, doesn’t even show up in the extensive, though not exhaustive, catalogue of his songs compiled by the Songwriters Hall of Fame, suggests how insignificant a footnote his tribute to the State of Maine must have been, both artistically and commercially.

New Hampshire fared considerably better, but so long ago that nary anyone but those few who seriously study Tin Pan Alley or New Hampshire musicology (and they are few indeed) are apt to remember. Legend has it that the Tin Pan Alley composer Harry Von Tilzer (1872–1946) wrote the melodies (rarely the lyrics) for more popular songs than any other tunesmith, Irving Berlin included. His whopping total was over 3,000 pieces. Born Aaron Gumbinski or Guminiski in Detroit, he may be confused with his younger brother, Albert, who also became an eminent Alleyman. The family moved to Indianapolis and changed its name to Gumm. When as a young teen Aaron ran away to join the circus (trust me, I’m not making this up), this nice Jewish boy decided to Americanize his first name to Harry. By the time he started writing songs, he dropped the Gumm, adopted his mother’s maiden name of Tilzer, and gave it a bit of European flair by sticking a Von in front of it. Thus the beginning of the fabulously successful career of Harry Von Tilzer. (His younger brother followed suit as Albert Von Tilzer.) Early on Harry wrote the tunes for such a weepy ballad as “A Bird In A Gilded Cage,” but he is best remembered today for the melodies of such oldies but goodies as “I Want A Girl Just Like The Girl That Married Dear Old Dad” and “Wait Till The Sun Shines Nellie.”

What Harry Von Tilzer is not remembered for—except perhaps by the most diehard musicologist in the Granite State—was his first smash hit, “My Old New Hampshire Home.” The words were by his frequent lyricist, Andrew B. Sterling.
The partners (young naïve dummies that they were) sold the song to a publisher outright for $15.00 in 1898. When it was released that year, the sheet music sold two million copies. Although we tend to think of phonograph recordings as still only cylinders back then, flat-disc recordings had become commercially available in 1897. Thus, in 1898 George J. Gaskin’s Columbia recording of “My Old New Hampshire Home” was the number one seller. To make amends for Von Tilzer and Bernstein’s $15 mistake, the powerful Tin Pan Alley publishing house of Shapiro & Bernstein made Von Tilzer a full partner in 1899. Not too many years later, he broke off on his own to open his own successful song publishing firm. (One of Von Tilzer’s more notable claims to fame was his discovery of a teenage-aged song-plugger named Izzy Baline, who became better known as the songwriter and publisher Irving Berlin.)

But even with the early hit status of Von Tilzer’s New Hampshire piece, its subject matter and maudlin tone alone prevented any popular longevity much beyond the years in which it first attracted an audience. And, incidentally, it was only years later that Harry Von Tilzer saw the state he had written about.

When it comes to a Tin Pan Alley song totally embracing a New England state, Vermont is deliciously, gloriously, and remarkably a bundle of exceptions beyond the years in which it first attracted an audience. And, incidentally, it was only years later that Harry Von Tilzer saw the state he had written about. The first exception is that the song in question, “Moonlight In Vermont,” was written not by prominent Alleymen at all, but by two songwriters who were less than a footnote in the annals of American popular song. The lyricist John Blackburn and the composer Karl Suessdorf appear in conjunction with only this single song in all the standard reference works on American popular music. The second exception, at least in the public’s imagination, is that “Moonlight In Vermont” was an enormous hit when it was released in 1944 and continues to be a standard in popular music repertoire even though it was not written by a “big name” lyricist and composer.1

Given the exceptions continue, not just for a song paying loving tribute to a New England state, but for any song written and recorded in 1944, at the height of the Big Band Era during World War II. (And indeed the song was recorded by a big band, Billy Butterfield’s, with a vocal by a still quite young Margaret Whiting. In fact it was her million-selling recording of the song that launched Whiting’s career as a major female vocalist during the war years.) At any rate, “Moonlight In Vermont” doesn’t look like or sound like a standard romantic ballad from the time. It breaks all the rules for commercial popular songwriting and, thereby, all the rules for success. There’s no story. No boy or girl is crooning his or her heartfelt thoughts about or to his or her sweetheart or bemoaning the fact that he or she has left him or her, or puzzling over whether he or she will.

More than that, “Moonlight In Vermont” doesn’t even rhyme, and more even than that, the three stanzas are each written as a perfect haiku, the first one being:

**Pennies in a stream**

**Falling leaves, a sycamore**

**Moonlight in Vermont**

each one of them, in fragmented phrases, not complete sentences, vividly depicting images of autumn, winter, and summer in Vermont. The section known as the “bridge” or “release” following the second haiku stanza is longer, has a different rhythm, and begins with the striking year-round image of “Telegraph cables, that sing down the highway.” All the song’s images in their totality so lovingly create a picture of rural Vermont that one could cry (or at least someone who can sentimentally appreciate such beauty as I do can– and does).

**SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND**

Now, onward to the lower tier as we work our way towards the Ocean State and the point of all this. Connecticut presents a rather peculiar situation. Yes, it did have a song written by a team of quite prominent and quite wonderful songwriters in which the singer attempts to tell the world how much he adores the state. The only trouble is that the song—called simply and blandly “Connecticut”—is anything but wonderful. In fact it falls completely flat and has about as much beauty and originality as a slice of Wonder Bread, which is quite uncharacteristic of the songwriting of Ralph Blane (1914–1995) and Hugh Martin (1914–).

Granted, Blane and Martin may not be household names like Rodgers and Hammerstein or Lerner and Loewe, but they gave the American public an enormous range of vivid lyrics and tuneful melodies in their songs for Hollywood, Broadway, and simply “stand-alone” popular Tin Pan Alley tunes. “Connecticut” falls into the final category, so its banal first chorus and silly second one can’t be attributed to the rigors of fitting the song to the demands of a Hollywood producer.

Blane and Martin’s two best remembered songs—both from Judy Garland’s 1944, MGM classic, *Meet Me in St. Louis*—are without question “The Trolley Song” and “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas,” both illustrating the genius (not too strong a word) of this pair of Alleymen. In “The Trolley Song,” Blane’s melody perfectly captures the herky-jerky movement of a trolley car in 1903, while Martin’s lyrics convey the breezy narrative of the trolley ride simultaneously with the breathlessness of the young woman narrating how she fell in love with a total stranger.

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in the trolley car with her. And the remarkable thing about their Christmas song is that, while written for a story taking place in 1903, Martin deliberately packed his lyric with an edginess, even a darkness, reflective of the uncertainty and ambiguities of the World War II years: “Some day soon we all will be together if the fates allow.”

Clearly, then, Ralph Blane and Hugh Martin each possessed innate talent and the craft to turn out the kind of song the state of Connecticut deserved, not what, in the end, it got. Moreover, their song was copyrighted in 1946, so they had to have written it either in that year or perhaps in 1945, clearly having before them what today we would call the “teachable moment” of 1944’s “Moonlight In Vermont.” But maybe Blane and Martin were out of the classroom.

Whatever the case, by the time “Connecticut” was published in 1946 and recorded by the likes of the duo of Bing Crosby and Judy Garland on Decca records, this more than competent songwriting team’s love song to the state opened with the banal line “I know a spot peaceful and fair.” It continued in the same generic vein throughout the entire first chorus, with imagery—or rather non-imagery—that could reflect any, or every, state from Nebraska to Delaware. And the second chorus is nothing short of embarrassing: a semi-comic list of the places around the world the singer has been, none of which supposedly could compare favorably with Connecticut: “Lived in Attu, seemed like a year/Dropped in on Juneau/Just for a beer.” Oh, please! Are we really in the same song? Small wonder that Connecticut does not recognize “Connecticut” as even an “honorary” state song.

The situation for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ congratulatory song, simply called “Massachusetts,” is in some ways similar to the plight of Connecticut and in other ways quite interestingly different. The key difference and similarity may be summed up simply by stating that while “Massachusetts” is infinitely better in every possible way from “Connecticut” and was recorded by the likes of the duo of Bing Crosby and Judy Garland on Decca records, this more than competent songwriting team’s love song to the state opened with the banal line “I know a spot peaceful and fair.” It continued in the same generic vein throughout the entire first chorus, with imagery—or rather non-imagery—that could reflect any, or every, state from Nebraska to Delaware. And the second chorus is nothing short of embarrassing: a semi-comic list of the places around the world the singer has been, none of which supposedly could compare favorably with Connecticut: “Lived in Attu, seemed like a year/Dropped in on Juneau/Just for a beer.” Oh, please! Are we really in the same song? Small wonder that Connecticut does not recognize “Connecticut” as even an “honorary” state song.

The two writers of “Poor Little Rhode Island,” Sammy Cahn (1913–1993) and Jule Styne (1905–1994) were born an ocean apart—Samuel Cohen in New York and John Stephen Buzard in New Orleans, respectively—by the time they met and began to write together in the 1930s. Although they were not Jewish, they wrote a number of Tin Pan Alley hits, including “Moonlight In Vermont,” which was a huge hit in 1944. Cahn and Styne were also responsible for the hit song “California, Here I Come,” which was written in 1944 and became a hit the following year. They also wrote the music for the 1945 film “Lady in the Dark,” which won an Academy Award for Best Music (Original Song) for their song “My One and Only.”

Cahn and Styne were also responsible for the song “Don’t Fence Me In,” which was written in 1946 and became a hit the following year. They also wrote the music for the 1947 film “The Red Shoes,” which won an Academy Award for Best Music (Original Score) for their music. Cahn and Styne continued to write songs together for the next several decades, and their music was featured in many films and television shows. Cahn and Styne were both inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1985, and they are remembered as some of the greatest songwriters of the 20th century.
employed as a songwriter at Paramount Pictures, he met Frank Loesser. At that
time Loesser was still primarily a lyricist, before discovering his own enormous
musical talents, most notably heard in his dynamite score for *Guys and Dolls* and
his other Broadway musicals. For the 1942 Paramount picture *Sweater Girl*, Styne
and Loesser collaborated on “I Don’t Want To Walk Without You.” The number was
20 weeks on the *Lucky Strike Hit Parade*, and Styne’s reputation as a popular song-
writer was firmly established. This was just prior to Styne meeting Sammy Cahn.

After Cahn and Styne’s collaboration dissolved in 1951, they came back
together one more time to write the Oscar-winning title song for the movie *Three
Coins in the Fountain*. Subsequently, Cahn continued to find a niche in Hollywood
writing primarily with composer Jimmy Van Heusen, while Styne’s niche was
more and more on Broadway, working with various lyricists. Cahn’s successes may
be partly measured simply by his Oscar-winning songs: “All The Way” in 1957;
“High Hopes” in 1959; and “Call Me Irresponsible” in 1963. Styne composed the
musical scores for several Broadway hits, including: *Bells Are Ringing* (with lyrics
by Betty Comden and Adolph Green), *Funny Girl* (with lyrics by Bob Merrill), and
*Gypsy* (with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim). So, clearly, the creators of “Poor Little
Rhode Island” had some very fine credentials between them.

This probably explains why “Poor Little Rhode Island” is a pretty fine song,
especially for a piece of throwaway fluff from a throwaway, “big band,” wartime
movie from Columbia Pictures called *Carolina Blues*. The 1944 movie featured Kay
Kyser and his orchestra along with such members of his outfit as Sully Mason,
Ish Kabibble, and singer Harry Babbitt, all using their real names. The singer and
dancer Ann Miller and the actor Victor Moore also appeared in a stock story: Kyser,
disgruntled about wanting to go on holiday, finds that his publicist has booked him
for a series of defense-plant concerts in the South. This situation is complicated by
his female singer leaving the band to get married, but it turns out that the daughter
of the war plant’s owner sings. So she fills in for the band singer, which is not
an ideal solution for Kayser. Typical of so many movie musicals of the 1940s, a good
many songs had nothing whatsoever to do with the plot but were “performance
pieces.” In this case, the song about Rhode Island is performed by Kayser and
Company for the men and women of the defense plant. (Whether it is located in
North or South Carolina makes little difference.) Harry Babbitt and Sully Mason
performed the song, backed by a vocal quartet.

Given that *Carolina Blues* was released in movie theatres around the coun-
try, a lot of people heard “Poor Little Rhode Island.” But had those circumstances
been better, many more people would have undoubtedly enjoyed it. As ill luck

York City and Julius Kerwin Stein in London— but came to have long and produc-
tive songwriting careers both together and with others in the United States. Cahn
was always the lyricist, and Styne was always the composer. Cahn’s career started
off with a proverbial bang. In 1937 he was largely earning a living in Bar Mitzvah
and wedding bands on the Lower East Side, when Sammy and the band’s piano
player, Saul Chaplin, wrote an English version of what they thought was a Yiddish
folk tune. In fact it was a modern Yiddish theatre song by Sholom Secunda— “Bei
Mir Mist Du Shon”— for the then unknown Andrews Sisters (who, incidentally, were
Greek-American). Well, needless to say, the rest is history, and Cahn was well on
his way to songwriting success (not to mention the Andrews Sisters!). In 1940
Cahn and Chaplin went to Hollywood and wrote a number of songs together, but
soon went their separate ways.

In 1942, when Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne met in Hollywood, a collabora-
tion over nine years resulted in songs for 19 films. Their songs included such
hits as: “I’ve Heard That Song Before,” “I’ll Walk Alone,” “Saturday Night Is The
Loneliest Night Of The Week,” and “Time After Time.” Probably Cahn and Styne’s
most popular, freestanding, Tin Pan Alley collaboration was “Let It Snow, Let It
Snow, Let It Snow,” which, legend has it, they wrote in 1945 on one of Hollywood’s
hottest days. The pair also ventured once together onto the Broadway stage, with
the moderate hit musical *High Button Shoes* in 1947.

Jule Styne was able to jump-start his composing career when, already
would have it, this very conventional movie musical opened in mid-December 1944, in the major markets of Los Angeles and New York City, at almost precisely the same time and places as the innovatively delightful period musical Meet Me in St. Louis. The latter movie was a runaway box office smash, leaving Carolina Blues somewhere in the proverbial dust. By the time Carolina Blues reached the major Midwest markets a few weeks later, it would appear as if it would be similarly doomed.

By the conventional wisdom I learned from my father, who owned first-run motion picture theatres in Chicago, Christmas week and New Year’s week were traditionally death at movie theatre box offices. And yet, according to the movie theatre grosses listed in the entertainment trade paper Variety, Carolina Blues beat the odds at Chicago’s cavernous Oriental theatre during Christmas week 1944, grossing $25,000. During New Year’s week, it grossed $9,000 in both Detroit and Kansas City. These were very respectable box office receipts for the war years. All of which means that a lot of moviegoers were treated to “Poor Little Rhode Island” across the whole United States. And not only through the movie. Guy Lombardo recorded the song, and while it never hit the top of the charts, Lombardo had the kind of following in the ’40s that assured it sold very well.

Apparently lyricist Sammy Cahn chose to call the song “Poor Little Rhode Island” just because of its size (“You’re such a teentsy-weentsy”). It’s clear from the get-go that the singer adores the Ocean State: of all the Forty-Eight, “I think that you’re great.” Texans can “yip-i-ay” about the Lone Star State all they want, but the singer will take Little Rhody over the rest of the country, “And I’ll include I-o-way.” He goes on to note that songs have been written about the South, the North, and that nothing could be finer than being in Carolina “in the morning.” But “how about those nights” in Rhode Island, where a girl in Providence “stole my heart away”? And the short but definitely sweet song wraps up with a comparative tribute to yet another state, “Let the sun shine bright on your Old Kentucky Home– Rhode Island’s the place for me.” Fluff, perhaps, but ingenious, original, well-crafted fluff, and a happy valentine to Little Rhody indeed.

RHODE ISLAND: SCHWARTZ AND DIETZ
In 1948, four years after “Poor Little Rhode Island,” the prodigious and prolific Tin Pan Alley, Hollywood, and Broadway duo of Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz came up with the second bouquet to the Ocean State, “Rhode Island Is Famous For You.” It appeared in their musical revue Inside U.S.A. (suggested by the book by John Gunther), which opened on Broadway on April 30, 1948, and closed on February 19, 1949, for a run of 399 performances.

To be even more facetious than I usually tend to be, whenever I see the names “Schwartz and Dietz” in print, what first comes to my mind is an accounting firm or law office. Of all the Tin Pan Alley teams past or present, this dynamic duo’s names simply don’t sound like those of songwriters, but believe me they were, and very impressively so. In fact, both Schwartz and Dietz did have professions other than as tunsmiths, Schwartz’s only briefly, but Dietz’s definitely for the long haul.

Composer Arthur Schwartz (1900–1984) was born in Brooklyn, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from New York University, received his law degree from Columbia, and began practicing in 1924. He gave up his practice abruptly in 1928, upon meeting the lyricist Dietz. The two began writing lyrics for songs that appeared in the 1929 Broadway revue The Little Show.

Howard Dietz (1896–1983) was born in New York City, studied journalism at Columbia, and worked as a newspaper stringer and contributing columnist. He then moved into public relations for several motion picture studios. In 1924 he worked his way up to director of advertising and promotion for MGM, a position he held for 30 years. Throughout his tenure Dietz collaborated with Schwartz and other composers on songs for Hollywood, Broadway, and Tin Pan Alley. At MGM, Dietz was the creative marketing genius who came up with the familiar figure of Leo the Lion and the pseudo-Latin slogan “Ars Gratia Artis.”

One of the most curious things about Schwartz and Dietz is that, unlike other Broadway songwriters, their greatest successes came not from songs in “book shows” (musicals with a story line and characters) but in musical revues (shows made up of unrelated songs, dialogue sketches, and specialty acts). Schwartz and Dietz’s musical revues included: The Little Show, The Second Little Show, Three’s A Crowd, Flying Colors, The Band Wagon, and the previously mentioned Inside U.S.A., which introduced the world to “Rhode Island Is Famous For You.” While writing mostly for revue-format shows gave Schwartz and Dietz the latitude to write virtually every conceivable kind of song, these two writers became best known and are still best remembered for deliciously lush romantic ballads featuring what are called the “long-line” melodies of Schwartz’s musical settings. Such songs include “I Guess I’ll Have To Change My Plan,” “You And The Night And The Music,” and, most famously, “Dancing In The Dark.”

To me, this kind of Schwartz and Dietz song is best illustrated by a less-remembered number, which struck me so emotionally when I encountered it while writing my book on popular music related to World War II. Although Schwartz and
Dietz wrote “Something To Remember You By” in 1930, it was given a new meaning when it was revived in a Dinah Shore recording in 1943. Dietz and Schwartz’s opening, long-line, continuous musical phrase totally capture the song’s entire meaning for a girl back home in wartime: “Oh, give me something to remember you by when you are far away from me.” This is not to say that Schwartz and Dietz could not and did not also write upbeat, fun, and even funny songs as well. I’ll cite just two examples. After dissolving their working partnership between 1938 to 1948, they came back to write the brassy showbiz tribute “That’s Entertainment” for the movie version of The Bandwagon in 1953, and the quirky and often hilarious “Rhode Island Is Famous For You” in 1948, which we are finally getting around to talking about.

Of the 12 songs Schwartz and Dietz wrote for Inside U.S.A., “Rhode Island Is Famous For You” is the only one that every New York opening night newspaper critic mentioned consistently and also entirely favorably. They praised the song itself, the performances, or both. Even the out-of-town Philadelphia tryout reviewer for The Times gushed: “‘Rhode Island Is Famous for You,’ a lively and catchy song sung by Jack Haley and Estelle Loring, also was a big hit.” Haley, one of the show’s costars, is best remembered as the Tin Man in the 1939 classic The Wizard of Oz. (The other was the English comedienne Beatrice Lillie.) Estelle Loring was a young, comparative newcomer to Broadway, who had appeared briefly in 1945 in Lerner and Loewe’s short-lived, pre-Brigadoon show, The Day Before Spring, and in 1947 in a revival of Marc Blitzstein’s leftist musical The Cradle Will Rock. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times, whom many still call “the dean of theatre critics,” wrote, “With Estelle Loring, who is also a jaunty singer, [Haley] turns a Rhode Island romantic song into something like rag-time.”

There were other favorable opinions. Addressing the song directly, Howard Barnes noted in the Herald Tribune that Dietz got “some wonderful satiric effects with...‘Rhode Island Is Famous For You.’” Focusing on performance again, William Hawkins observed in the World-Telegram that “Mr. Haley has all the warmth and charm needed for the song about ‘Rhode Island.’” Writing in the New York Post, Richard Watts, Jr. thought his favorite song was “an enchanting number called ‘First Prize at the Fair,’” but “Rhode Island Is Famous for You is almost its equal.” Not too shabby, for a comic romantic number to be almost equal to enchantment, if you ask me! And there’s certainly nothing wrong with Ward Morehouse speaking in The Sun of the song’s musical merits alone: “‘Rhode Island’ is probably Arthur Schwartz’s best song.”

The irony about all these kudos for “Rhode Island Is Famous For You” is that the only recording was made on the original cast album on RCA Victor. No popular recording of the song was ever made in 1948, nor of any other worthy song from the show— and there were several— because one of the many recording industry strikes of the 1940s occurred just after the show opened.

And yet, while “Rhode Island Is Famous For You” may not have had a life outside of the theatre in 1948, it certainly has had one in recent decades. Thanks are due to two artists for very modish revivals of the song for young, hip, chic, and stylish music lovers. The first is the late jazz singer and piano stylist Blossom Dearie (1924-2009). The second is Michael Feinstein, the singer, pianist, and virtual archivist of American popular and theatre songs, who has performed “Rhode Island Is Famous For You” on cabaret and concert stages as well as on recordings.

This song belongs to a category I call “list songs.” These songs rattle off long strings of things to do or as attributes of one’s sweetheart. Cole Porter was especially notorious for writing such ditties: “Birds do it/Bees do it/Even educated fleas do it” and “You’re the top/You’re the Coliseum/You’re the top/You’re the Louvre Museum,” with line after line, stanza after stanza, following ad infinitum.

Well, where “Rhode Island Is Famous For You” is concerned, old Cole ain’t got nothin’ on Howard Dietz. He lists products, at first rather accurately, which come from various states. Then, as the second and third stanzas commence, he lists sillier and sillier products with sillier and sillier rhymes to match. In this boy-girl duet, the person being sung to learns that no matter what stuff comes from other states, “you come from Rhode Island,/And little old Rhode Island is famous for you!”

Some of Dietz’s lyrics are so deliberately preposterous that I’m tempted to quote the whole song, but I have no desire to pay huge fines for violation of fair use and copyright infringement. So we will have to content ourselves with some snippets to show how Dietz tailored this uproariously preposterous lyric to go from the plausible to the ridiculous. From the first stanza: “Copper comes from Arizona,/Peaches come from Georgia,/And lobsters come from Maine.” From the second stanza: “Gold comes from Nevada/Divorces also do.” From the third stanza: “Pencils come from Pencilvania,/Vests from Vest Virginia/And tents from Tents-asee.” The final stanza rewrites: “And little old Rhode Island is famous for you!” as “Don’t let them ride Rhode Island, it’s famous for you!”— a special note of boosterism for the Ocean State.
This line all by itself raises some questions that many readers may have been asking themselves. Did Sammy Cahn, Jule Styne, Arthur Schwartz, and/or Howard Dietz have any connections to Rhode Island great or small, long-term or short? Did any of them have relatives here, summer in Matunuck, or just drive through and stop for a Del’s Lemonade or a New York System Hot Weiner? After scouring all available biographical materials, scant as they are, including Howard Dietz’s own autobiography, Dancing in the Dark, in which he doesn’t even mention “Rhode Island Is Famous For You,” my answer to these and all similar questions is: I haven’t the slightest idea.

There is another question that might cross some people’s minds about such songs as these, which express strong positive feelings about the Ocean State. Are these emotions genuinely felt by the lyricist? Sadly, I would have to reply, in 99.9% of the cases of all popular songs, and most likely in 100% of all songs written for Hollywood films and Broadway musicals on any subject: probably not. We have to think of the lyrics in popular songs in the same way that we think of novels, plays, film and TV scripts—that is, as fiction. Such creative compositions are not in the same category as the writings of such a poet of the English Romantic School as William Wordsworth, who viewed poetry as a purely personal expression coming from the heart. He in fact referred to it as “the spontaneous overflow of genuine emotion.”

On the other hand, the lyric writer of popular songs and, especially those for characters in movie and stage musicals, had to express so many different and conflicting moods, feelings, attitudes, ideas, situations, and circumstances that he or she could not actually possess them all. The poor writer would be ripe for being committed forthwith to Butler Hospital. Indeed, the only purely and heart-tugging autobiographical popular song I know is the Canadian-Jewish Ruth Lowe’s 1939–40 hit, “I’ll Never Smile Again,” written after her young husband, the music publisher Harold Cohen, unexpectedly died of kidney failure during routine surgery.

But even if that other 99.9% of popular songwriters were and continue to be writers of fiction, the good ones, like Cahn and Styne, Schwartz and Dietz, still possess the gift to entertain and even move their audiences with “Poor Little Rhode Island” and “Rhode Island Is Famous For You.” If nothing else, the loving attention these two wonderful songs gave to our state proves once again that—even in inverse proportion—size does matter.

ENDNOTES
1 “The Alley’s” first location was on West 28th Street, between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, and it was there that it got its name thanks to a Jewish gentleman, Monroe H. Rosenfeld (1861–1918). Rosenfeld, born in Richmond, Virginia, traveled north to become a part-time journalist, part-time songwriter around the turn of the twentieth century, and a quite popular and prolific one indeed. His songs were mostly of the typically American-Victorian sentimental stamp, with such titles as “With All Her Faults I Love Her Still” and “Gold Will Buy Most Anything But A True Girl’s Heart,” but it’s his journalistic activities that concern us most here. In 1899, the New York Herald commissioned Rosenfeld to do a series of pieces on the flourishing popular music industry, and after visiting the offices of songwriters on 28th Street and hearing the cacophony of noise emanating from the tunesmiths’ barely in-tune upright pianos, he declared it sounded like they were all banging on tin pans. Thus the appellation Tin Pan Alley was born. Over the ensuing decades the Alley gradually meandered farther uptown until by the 1930s it was firmly ensconced in the Brill Building at 1619 Broadway and environs.

2 “My Old New Hampshire Home” typified a genre popular at the turn of the twentieth century. A young man dearly loves a young woman and sings in a heartfelt manner of that love in the first chorus as he has to leave her for a time. When he returns in the second chorus, he finds his young sweetheart has died, so their marriage can never be. Audiences apparently ate up such saccharine stuff about frail young women and their untimely demise.

3 Most people tend to think that only the songs of the Berlins, Gershwins, Porters, Johnny Mercers, and Frank Loessers of the world became and continue to be popular but that is not at all the case. Many, many songs by virtually unknown Alleymen and women rose to popularity and have remained standards. To take only one familiar example, just think of the perennial seasonal favorite “Winter Wonderland” from way back in 1934. If asked who wrote it, could you easily come up with Richard B. Smith and Felix Bernard? Probably not. But the song lives on, just like Blackburn and Suessdorf’s “Moonlight In Vermont.”

4 Andy Razaf is the only American songwriter with a legitimate claim to being related to royalty: his mother was an American, the daughter of the first black U. S. ambassador to Madagascar, but his father was a nephew of Madagascar’s Queen Ranavalona II. Indeed, Andy’s given name was Andreamentia Paul Razakeriefo.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
In 1983, the Swing Era legend Artie Shaw came out of nearly 30 years of self-imposed retirement to organize The New Artie Shaw Orchestra. Woonsocket native Daryl Sherman, then on the cusp of a successful career as a pianist and singer in Manhattan, passed the audition to be the band’s vocalist. When asked how this all came about, Daryl said, “It was the New England connection.”

In New York she’d met the noted jazz pianist Dave McKenna, also a Woonsocket native. McKenna always invited her to “sit in” on his performances. In the audience one night was Bill Curtis, the manager of Dick Johnson, the Brockton-born saxophonist/clarinetist who was lined up to lead the revived Artie Shaw big band. One year later, Curtis called Sherman to audition. She had never sung with a big band, but in addition to her vocal talent and thorough preparation (studying all the old recordings of Artie Shaw’s singers, Billie Holiday and Helen Forrest), the main asset Daryl carried into that audition was the training received from her father, Sammy Sherman.

Sammy Sherman was born in 1914 in Manhattan, the son of Russian immigrants Ben and Sonia Sherman. Early in his childhood the family moved back to Woonsocket. The 1920 census shows them living on East School Street. Ben was working as a dry goods salesman, Sonia as a housewife. Sam was five years old, and Julius was six months old. Daryl doesn't know too much about her father’s early years, but she says that he sang soprano in the choir at B’nai Israel synagogue.
recruited for an all-star big band at the Generals and Up Club in Italy.

Discharged shortly thereafter in Atlantic City, Sammy hit New York, armed with a recommendation to the jazz writer Leonard Feather, who immediately referred him to the bandleader Sonny Dunham. Within two days Sammy was on the road, performing as far away as Arizona. But after four years of travel with the Army, Sammy left the band after six months rather than spend the next two years on the West Coast.

Sammy pursued music full-time in New York, playing whatever came his way—jazz (with Buddy Morrow), “society” jobs, Latin music, and Jewish music in a band led by Sholom Secunda, the composer of “Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen.” While playing at the Catskills hotel The Nemerson, in a band that included pianist Seymour Kaufman (later known as the Broadway composer Cy Coleman), he met his soon-to-be wife, Shirley. She was a Hunter College student from the Bronx who was waiting tables for the summer. As Sammy later told daughter Daryl, “Music and marriage don’t mix.”

In 1948 the newlyweds moved to Woonsocket, where Sammy went to work in the family business, Sherman’s Restaurant (later The Winston, still later The Broaster House), joining his parents and brother Julie. “He turned in his tuxedo for an apron,” says Daryl. She remembers her father doing everything from unloading supply trucks to shredding huge vats of cole slaw, from quartering chickens (from the Lipman family, Jewish farmers in Maine) to writing catchy slogans for menu items.

But someone as passionate about music as Sammy Sherman couldn’t leave that part of his life entirely. He still played occasional jobs in New York, led bands throughout the ’50s and ’60s at the Beverly Club in Bellingham, Massachusetts, and led The Deacons at Ciro’s Restaurant in Woonsocket throughout the ’60s and ’70s. Nephew Dave Sherman remembers seeing Sammy play in July 4th parades and concerts with the AMVETS band. In 1977 he initiated the Egg Rolls and Jazz program at Chan’s Fine Oriental Dining in Woonsocket. Chan’s, next to the site of the former Winston Restaurant, has since become known as one of the country’s finest jazz venues.

Sammy also constantly experimented with techniques to achieve a newer, better sound on the trombone. Daryl laughingly talks about family members unable to take baths because Sammy’s trombone slide was soaking in the tub, or about his trying Pond’s cold cream or dishwashing liquid as lubricants. By adapting his mouthpieces with a drill, a screwdriver and sandpaper, he eventually achieved high notes rarely heard on trombone. He may also have set a new land speed record for
a trombonist playing “Clarinet Polka.”

Between 13-hour days, six days per week in the restaurant and his music jobs, Sammy somehow managed to squeeze in lessons for four students, sometimes in between dropping off and picking up his children at B’nai Israel’s religious school. Three of the four—Dave Sherman, Kevin Kane, and Don Brouillette—became professional trombonists. But without a doubt, Sammy’s most far-reaching musical influence was on his daughter Daryl.

Daryl Sherman has been told that she sang before she spoke. Possibly as early as age two or three, she sang “On Top of Old ‘Smokie.” Later in her preschool years, she added “Goodnight, Irene” and “Once in a While.” She remembers her family’s landlords, the Gelinas family, letting her play the piano and accordion in their apartment. Sammy, who believed that piano was the best source of a musical education, started teaching Daryl simple chords on their newly-purchased upright when she was six. She began formal lessons the following year. Sammy at one time had her learning the melody and chords to one song per week, taken from the vast repertoire of songs he’d performed in numerous bands and from Tune-dex, a monthly sheet music subscription service. From this period she specifically remembers singing Ray Noble’s “The Touch of Your Lips.”

At age twelve Daryl was one of six girls who together became B’nei Mitzvah at B’nai Israel and were tutored by Cantor Phillip Mackta. Around that time she sang at some services, including a song she composed for Kol Nidre. On her thirteenth birthday she sat in with her father’s band at The Beverly Club, singing “Over the Rainbow,” and soon began participating in jam sessions at bars. Sammy emphasized professionalism—always knowing which key you’re singing in and knowing exactly when to enter and exit the song. He taught Daryl the art of singing and playing piano at the same time. He encouraged her to scat sing like Ella Fitzgerald.

Despite Sammy’s intense encouragement of Daryl’s musical development, he also imparted mixed messages about music as a career. One should be proud to be a musician. Jazz was a “taste of discernment.” But he knew how challenging it was to make a good, steady living as a musician, particularly in jazz, and particularly after rock and roll became so popular. Maybe she should become a teacher and perform music on the side.

At the University of Rhode Island, Daryl took music history, theory, and piano courses, but majored in Spanish. She student-taught in preparation for a possible career as a foreign language teacher. However, she ended up teaching music for nearly two years at Ponaganset Middle School in North Scituate. That experience, as well as some private piano lessons she was giving, only reminded her that she never wanted to be a music teacher.

Meanwhile, like her father, she’d been playing steady gigs at The Gaslight and the lounge at Château de Ville dinner theater in Warwick. At the latter she met her future mentor Sylvia Syms (appearing as Dolly Levi in Hello Dolly), who told her, “Young lady, you have a nice feel for jazz.” A short while later the drummer in her band convinced her that if she wanted to move to a higher level musically, she needed to go to New York to hone her craft.

Daryl made the move to The Big Apple in 1974. Her parents didn’t discourage her. She first stayed with her aunts in the Bronx, while making “feeler trips” into Manhattan. Sammy encouraged her to look up his old band-mate from the Catskills, Cy Coleman. She sang and played some of her own compositions for Coleman and asked if he could recommend musicians. Of these, the bassist and singer Jay Leonhardt would become a frequent collaborator. Coleman’s secretary helped Daryl find her first apartment.

Though jazz bands were still finding the times challenging, the mid-’70s were actually a good time for someone with Daryl’s skills and knowledge of a large repertoire. Hotels were hiring pianists. Steak restaurants had solo pianists play during dinner. Daryl soon found herself employed at one of Frank Sinatra’s favorite spots, Jilly’s. The popularity of singer-songwriters like Carole King and Carly Simon carried over into the jazz and cabaret styles in which Daryl specialized. One could sit in with many jazz bands, and Daryl found encouragement and mentoring
“Daryl has been working nonstop in New York since she got here. That’s a hell of an accomplishment,” says Loren Schoenberg, the saxophonist and director of the Jazz Museum in Harlem. She’s had lean years but also long periods of very steady work, like six nights per week at the Sheraton Center or 14 years at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, performing on Cole Porter’s 1907 Steinway grand piano. Daryl followed Sammy’s advice to “take every gig and figure it out later.” At one point in her career she followed five hours per night, five nights per week at the Waldorf with two hours per night at the Firebird Cabaret, running from one to the other.

Daryl’s current professional life is less hectic. Her recent New York work has included the Algonquin Hotel, cabaret appearances, private parties, playing in a jazz series, playing solo piano in the atrium of an office building, substituting for colleagues at hotels, and acting as the artistic director of a tribute to Johnny Burke at the 92nd Street Y’s “Lyrics and Lyricists” series.

Over the years Daryl’s career has also taken her way beyond New York and into some very different musical directions. She’s been touring Great Britain for the past ten years in what she calls her “nooks and crannies tour,” because it includes many places even the locals don’t know. (Her typical sponsors are jazz societies, arts centers, and jazz festivals). She’s taught classes for aspiring jazz vocalists in Holland and Germany, where she sang with the WDR Jazz Orchestra. Her schedule over the past two years also lists performances in the Poconos, St. Louis, New Orleans, Cleveland, Arbor Records’ annual jazz party in Florida, and a spring 2010 Rhode Island tour, with appearances in Newport, Middletown, Portsmouth, and of course her annual homecoming concert at Chan’s in Woonsocket. While I interviewed her in Manhattan, she received a phone call about a tour to Arkansas and Texas, where her performances would include singing with a college jazz ensemble.

Because of her reputation for knowing so many different kinds of songs, Daryl was the first artist chosen as a substitute host for pianist Marian McPartland on her National Public Radio show *Piano Jazz*, which has aired since 1978. Daryl has hosted shows about Dave McKenna, Peggy Lee, and Johnny Mercer. She’s also done child-oriented projects. Every Saturday for a few years, she played the Waldorf-Astoria’s “Tea for Tots” program, doing everything from show tunes, like “Too Darned Hot” to “Tarantella” to sing-alongs of children’s songs (“I’m a Little Teapot”). Along with other jazz artists, she’s provided characters’ voices for two puppet show adaptations of children’s stories, *The Cat Who Went to Heaven* and *Maya the Bee*, which was also made into an album.
Her mentor Sylvia Syms once told Daryl, “You have to grow into these songs,” and she certainly has. In the 36th year of her career, she says, “The paint never dries.” She explains, “You evolve, in your life experience, intellect, your perceptions, your actual abilities, and in the way that you tell a story...the conviction, the editing process. As you age you cut out some of the extraneous stuff.” Modestly, she says, “I’m not the greatest pianist or singer.” She considers herself “a little quirky” in the way she blends different sounds, but in a good way. Her voice has a somewhat surprisingly girlish quality, like Ella Fitzgerald at times or Blossom Dearie. She’s proud of her ability to draw audiences in with a very conversational style, including anecdotes about her songs, something that is rare among other singers.

Unfortunately, Shirley Sherman, having died in 1975, missed her daughter’s rise to musical prominence. But Sammy Sherman was around to not only witness Daryl’s success, but also to collaborate. Throughout the years Sammy has sometimes joined Daryl on her New Year’s Eve jobs at the Waldorf-Astoria or at private parties or at the Sheraton. He would then go back to Rhode Island and proudly proclaim, “I’m still going to New York!” Daryl says, “No one worked the tables like Sammy.” Friends who heard Sammy play on those occasions in New York still talk about it years later. Of those father-daughter musical reunions, Loren Schoenberg says, “It was magic. It was a beautiful thing seeing them together.” He goes on to describe Sammy as a virtuoso with a “wonderful, well-rounded tone,” who “knew a million songs.”

In 2004, Arbor Records released the album *Sammy Sherman, a Jazz Original, Live at Chan’s*. According to Daryl, “Matt Domber (the president of Arrows) had succumbed to the Sammy charm” and considered her father a natural jazz musician. Sammy, who died in 2003, didn’t live to see the album, but he was able to hear it on his last birthday. With characteristic pride, his response was, “They managed to catch my high note... people might think that’s (the cornetist) Warren Vache, but make sure they’ll know it’s me! Imagine! All of this music with no arrangements, no reading, all made up on the spot by listening to each other! And this old man up there with those young hotshots. 89!!”

The album consists of 15 tunes recorded at Chan’s between 1994 and 1998, featuring some of the best jazz musicians from the New York area. Sammy even plays violin on four tracks. In his liner notes, Dan Morgenstern, the director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, said, “The language of jazz came naturally to Samuel Sherman; he spoke it like a native. This record at last celebrates a very special artist and man—an American original.”

The album’s final track, “Nothing to Leave But a Song,” is played by Sammy’s lifelong friend, the trumpeter Roger Devuyst, who explains that the tune was used as a theme song in Sammy’s bands. Not only did Sammy leave us his songs, but shares in the credit for the songs of Daryl Sherman.

And the Sherman legacy doesn’t end there. Daryl describes her sister Abbe as “a very serious pianist,” who teaches piano in Franklin, Massachusetts. Their brother Ben, who learned guitar, drums, piano, and trombone in high school, plays in jazz bands around the North Shore of Boston. Sammy’s nephew and student Dave Sherman, living in Matunuck after a 30-year career in engineering, now devotes himself full-time to trombone—teaching, repairing, and playing in several bands.

Who ever imagined that a small city in northern Rhode Island would produce not only the Shermans and Dave McKenna, but jazz saxophonist Greg Abate, opera diva Eileen Farrell, and bluesman Duke Robillard? Who knew that such talent flowed, like the Blackstone, through Woonsocket, that it touched the hearts and souls of so many musicians and listeners in so many places?
As a subject of historical or metaphorical inquiry, what more can be said about the Holocaust? Is not the most profound response, now as ever, utter silence?

For those unable or unwilling to search far and wide for new interpretations of Holocaust horror or heroism, a leisurely stroll down Benefit Street to the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design may be useful. Beneath a floor of enchanting paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, and Cézanne, there occasionally hangs a large and tempestuous work by Helen Frankenthaler, a distinguished American artist (born in 1928). Her abstract composition (68” high by 54” wide), employing oil paint and white enamel paint on an unprimed canvas, has belonged to RISD since 1972. It was donated by Selma Fain Pilavin Robinson (1908-1996), a prominent Jewish philanthropist, in memory of her first husband, Albert Pilavin.1

Frankenthaler’s Holocaust (sometimes called The Holocaust) was created in October 1955, years before Holocaust or Shoah became synonymous with the murder of European Jewry. Israel first observed Yom Hashoah in 1951, and the legislation creating Yad Vashem was approved two years later, but the memorial authority’s earliest buildings were not erected until 1957.2 In 1954 France designated the last Sunday in April as a memorial to deported victims and survivors of World War II. Like Paris’ Memorial to the Departed Martyrs, erected in the shadow of Notre Dame on the Île de la Cité in 1962, it did not identify Jewish victims, however.3

Elie Wiesel’s classic, Night, published in Yiddish in 1955 and in French in 1958, did not appear in English until 1960. (He was born the same year as Frankenthaler.) Moreover, the New York Times did not refer to the “Nazi Holocaust” until May 30, 1959.4 Raul Hilberg’s three-volume study, The Destruction of the European Jews, considered the cornerstone of Holocaust scholarship, was published in 1961, the same year as the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. The first major American Ho-
locust memorial, Nathan Rapoport's towering bronze sculpture, *Monument to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs*, was dedicated in Philadelphia in 1964.1

A MEASURED RESPONSE
Yet the RISD painting has never been examined against the dark curtain of Holocaust artistry.6 Likewise, Frankenthaler has seldom been profiled as an American Jewish painter and printmaker of German descent. Is the Frankenthaler painting a Holocaust tribute merely because of its title? Or does it somehow evoke an unimaginable catastrophe? By addressing the Holocaust, was Frankenthaler in some sense a visionary artist? Or did she set a precedent for using indescribable suffering for personal advantage?

Even after careful scrutiny, Holocaust does not yield clear or satisfying answers. In some of Frankenthaler’s contemporaneous paintings, which are not entirely abstract, titles help suggest land, sky, and water. But the RISD painting is devoid of clues: no blobs or splatters resembling skulls, limbs or tissues. Reds, though pervasive, do not necessarily suggest bloodshed. Black does not convey a sense of foreboding or doom. Like the Holocaust itself, this artwork remains baffling and enigmatic. It is a reminder of genocide that hardly requires a reminder.

This painting cannot be merely considered “a painting about painting,” whose daring manipulation of color, light, shape, space, texture, and scale produces a relatively charged or subdued effect. Because Frankenthaler endowed her work with exceptional importance, it demands a measured response.

FRESH PERSPECTIVES
Today, more than a half-century after its creation, Holocaust can be considered through several fresh perspectives. Indeed, if on continual display, the work could invite comparison with other important examples of Abstract Expressionist painting, such as Jackson Pollock’s *Magic Lantern of 1947* and Mark Rothko’s *Untitled* of 1954,7 which are presented within the RISD Museum's new Paula and Leonard Granoff Gallery of Twentieth-Century Art. (But the Frankenthaler’s infrequent display suggests a play on Holocaust memory by a so-called conceptual artist.)

Rothko was one of the century’s great Jewish artists, and Peggy Guggenheim, who donated the Pollock in 1954, was his dealer and one of the century’s great Jewish collectors. Indeed, the Rothko was acquired in honor of Daniel Robbins, the Museum’s first Jewish director, and the Granoffs are major Jewish benefactors. But the Frankenthaler painting has never been considered a pillar of the RISD collection (like Andy Warhol’s *Race Riot* of 1964 from the Pilavin Collection).

During the spring and summer of 2010, New York City’s Jewish Museum presented a small but notable exhibition, “Modern Art, Sacred Space: Motherwell, Ferber and Gottlieb,” which showcased a trio of semi-figurative (or mostly abstract) art works: a painting, a sculpture, and a Torah curtain. These had been commissioned by Congregation B’nai Israel for its synagogue in Milburn, New Jersey, built in 1952.8 B’nai Israel was one of the first commissions by Percival Goodman (1904-1989), a New York architect who became, during the postwar era, Judaism’s most prolific synagogue designer. The Milburn synagogue was also probably the first in America to display a Holocaust memorial.9 Through Goodman, Frankenthaler also received a double-commission for his Temple of Aaron in St. Paul, Minnesota, built in 1956.10

Within Rhode Island, there are two postwar synagogues through which Frankenthaler’s Holocaust painting and her St. Paul Torah curtains can be quite easily considered. Having originally been contacted in 1947, Percival Goodman designed the third synagogue for Providence’s Temple Beth-El, which was dedicated on Orchard Avenue in 1954.11 Frankenthaler was not among them, but Goodman’s distinguished circle of avant-garde artists who adorned the sanctuary included Herbert Ferber and Ibram Lassow (both Jews) and David Hare (a gentile). The chair of Beth-El’s building committee was none other than Norman Fain, who was Selma Fain Pilavin’s younger brother, and the sanctuary was eventually named in honor of Norman and his wife, Rosalie.

The luster of postwar synagogue art (by Jewish and gentile artists) is further displayed in commissions for Congregation B’nai Israel in Woonsocket, which was designed by the Boston architect Samuel Glaser and dedicated in 1961.12 Its most notable adornments are Avigdor Arikha’s abstract windows and Ludwig Wolpert’s metalwork. Both artists were Holocaust survivors who found refuge in Palestine. Anni Albers, a German-born Jew who fled to America with her Catholic husband, Josef, designed and wove B’nai Israel’s magnificent Torah curtain (*parokhet*). Louise Nevelson, a Russian-born Jew reared in Rockland, Maine, was the renowned sculptor who inspired the synagogue’s abstract *bimah* sculptures, which were executed by one of Samuel Glaser’s assistants.

But what is the fundamental purpose of Holocaust art? To serve as documentation? To honor victims, survivors, and liberators? To warn about the consequences of hatred and prevent future genocides? To deny reason and affirm spirituality or vice versa? To show that great art has a healing and redemptive power? Indeed, can one significant example of Holocaust art serve multiple purposes? Can it be equally meaningful to Jews and gentiles?
Perhaps the German social theorist and critic, Theodor Adorno, was correct. In 1951 he proclaimed: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”13 But some contemporary writers, less burdened by the morality (or immorality) of creating Holocaust art, have acknowledged its “sublime unrepresentability” and “impossible images.”14

At the very least, Frankenthaler’s painting reminds us how exhilarating and exasperating a discussion of one painting can be. But it may also be somewhat unfair to place so much weight on her thin, equivocal canvas.

Surely one of the best ways to begin understanding Holocaust, however, is to carefully observe it over many unhurried visits. Perhaps it is useful to consider it in some sense as a Jewish text or archaeological site, concealing numerous strata of meaning. Though presumably a tribute to martyrs, it is also alive with sensory stimulation. Without its ominous title, the Frankenthaler painting may actually be quite alluring. Because Selma Robinson and Daniel Robbins are deceased it is impossible to ask how the painting spoke to them and why they wanted it for RISD.

IN PLACE OF AN INTERVIEW

Perhaps one way to gain a better understanding of Holocaust would be to speak with Ms. Frankenthaler. So in April 2002, I wrote to her home on Contentment Island in Darien, Connecticut, and to her gallery in New York City, requesting an interview. She promptly denied my request, explaining in a three-sentence letter that the painting’s title may have only suggested to her a feeling of “turbulence.” Ms. Frankenthaler saw no need to arrange a meeting or a telephone conversation.15

Unpersuaded, I wrote again, asking her to reconsider. Emphasizing connections to Providence’s Beth-El and Woonsocket’s B’nai Israel and the artist’s unexplored American-Jewish background, I explained that there were several reasons to revisit her RISD painting. Indeed, had any of her German relatives perished in the Holocaust? We will never know. Indeed, years later, the artist would not give me permission to publish an excellent photograph of Holocaust provided by the RISD Museum without approving this article.

Thus, I had no choice but to seek other sources of information about her. Unfortunately, a Frankenthaler autobiography or biography has not yet been written. She has promised her papers to the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art, but they are not yet available. Given the profusion of feminist studies within American universities and art history departments, it seems strange that there has not yet been a dissertation about her. Consequently, it became necessary for me to examine a large body of published sources, such as newspaper and journal re-

views, exhibition catalogues, and studies of her contemporaries. My investigation, however, is not an analysis of the success or failure of abstract art. I strongly believe that such art is one of modernism’s most glorious achievements.

After examining numerous Frankenthaler publications, it occurred to me how little is known about her. Quite possibly, many other researchers have encountered her silence because the same dossier of facts has been so often repeated. Carl Belz’s flattering biographical sketch, published in 1997, is a fairly typical example.16 It resembles his sketch published for the exhibition, “Frankenthaler: The 1950s,” which he organized in 1981 for Brandeis University’s Rose Art Museum (whose fate is now uncertain). This exhibition, which included the RISD painting, was presented when she was awarded an honorary doctorate.

Born in New York City, Frankenthaler was the third child (and youngest daughter) of Alfred and Martha (Lowenstein) Frankenthaler. A successful attorney in private practice, he became a highly regarded justice of the New York State Supreme Court before succumbing to cancer in 1940 at 58 years of age.17 The Frankenthaler daughters enjoyed a privileged upbringing on Park Avenue. Helen attended Horace Mann and Brearley Schools before graduating from Dalton in 1945. Her teachers included two promising painters: Rufino Tamayo, a Mexican artist at Dalton, and Paul Feely, a Californian on the faculty of Bennington College.18

In 1949, having completed her undergraduate studies in three years, Frankenthaler returned to Manhattan to launch her artistic career. Supported by her inheritance, she worked in her studio, took graduate courses in art history at Columbia University, and studied painting with the charismatic German-born abstractionist, Hans Hofmann, at his school in Provincetown. In the spring of 1950, displaying an entrepreneurial spirit, Frankenthaler organized an exhibition of Bennington alumnae artists at Manhattan’s Jacques Seligmann Gallery.

This exhibition led to a close relationship—intellectual and romantic—with Clement Greenberg, a divorced father, 19 years her senior, who was gaining renown as one of America’s most insightful and temperamental art critics. His essays revealed both a deep admiration for individual Jewish artists and a considerable disdain for American Jewry, particularly its bourgeois taste. He wrote about Jewish self-hatred, including his own.19

In the summer of 1954 Frankenthaler and Greenberg traveled together in Europe, and then continued to socialize in New York City and in the Hamptons. Their entourage included such giants of the Abstract Expressionism movement as Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, Lee Krasner, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and David Smith. (Gottlieb, Krasner, Newman, and
Rothko were Jews.) Frankenthaler’s intense relationship with Greenberg lasted through much of 1955, the year she painted *Holocaust*. Three years later she married Robert Motherwell, an urbane abstract painter, who was also a financially independent writer, editor, and teacher.²⁰

Frankenthaler’s artistic success, as recounted by Belz, was nothing less than amazing. Foregoing years of stylistic experimentation and a frustrating personal struggle, she speedily nurtured her own sensibility. Thunder struck on October 26, 1952, when, following a summer painting trip to Nova Scotia with Greenberg, she created *Mountains and Sea*, an enormous “stained” canvas (approximately seven feet high by ten feet wide).²¹ It was made by pouring oil paint over an unprimed canvas. This sudden breakthrough led to her own pivotal influence as a founder of the Color Field movement.²² Through several group and solo exhibitions, Frankenthaler, who also worked with acrylic paint, won increasing praise for her panoramic abstractions (both horizontal and vertical).²³ These were not merely ambitious paintings, but accomplished reveries: subtle, sensual, and stunning.

By 1969, having shown work at many international exhibitions, and having received a retrospective at New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art, Frankenthaler’s reputation was firmly established within the postwar pantheon.²⁴ Although she received the National Medal of Art in 2002, little of her work in recent decades has matched her audacious debut. Two generations of younger artists, moving farther beyond the Western tradition of easel painting, have either stolen or ignored much of her rhapsodic brilliance. It is easy to imagine, however, that Frankenthaler lost interest in the fads, fashions, and politics of the contemporary art “scene.” What serious artist needs them?

### A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Frankenthaler never sought recognition solely as a woman artist nor solely as a Jewish artist. It was never necessary or desirable for her to do so. She has measured her own success simply as an artist, as would any male.²⁵

Nevertheless, feminist art historians and critics have eagerly claimed Frankenthaler for their cause. In June 1971, Linda Nochlin, a prominent Jewish art historian, published a provocative article in *Art News*, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” Frankenthaler was indeed mentioned, but as proof against the existence of a feminine style.²⁶ Nevertheless, Nochlin’s article helped ignite a feminist revolution, both inside and outside the art academy, which has never subsided.

In 1978, for example, Elsa Fine conscripted Frankenthaler for her study of women artists spanning five centuries.²⁷ In 1979 Eleanor Munro positioned Frankenthaler within the second of four “waves” of American women artists, following such “matriarchs” as Mary Cassatt and Georgia O’Keefe.²⁸ She also pointed out that Frankenthaler and Louise Nevelson were Jews, but concluded that every woman artist belongs to a minority group.

It is difficult for me to argue, however, that feminist art history and criticism have grown more perceptive and persuasive since the 1970s. For example, in 1997 Mira Schor described a new sculpture, *Right*, by Suzanne McClelland. If devoid of its excremental imagery, she remarked, the object would resemble “the vast emptiness of a late Helen Frankenthaler.”²⁹ In 2005 Lisa Staltzman published an article, “Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender and the Body in Helen Frankenthaler’s Painting” (in which she cited only two examples). Explaining in a serious manner that a stained canvas represented menstrual fluids, the art historian remarked that Frankenthaler metaphorically “bled on raw linen” and “stained the sheets.”³⁰

Pardon my chauvinism, feminist historians and critics, but is it totally insensitive and unfair for me to point out something obvious? Frankenthaler was a beautiful woman, which surely contributed to her considerable success.

### A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Although New York City’s Jewish Museum would surely covet a major Frankenthaler painting for its collection, some art historians, Jews among them, have dealt inconsistently or even arbitrarily with Frankenthaler’s Jewish background. Consider, for example, the catalogue of the Cincinnati Art Museum’s 1989 exhibition, “Making Their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-1985.” An appendix of “Individual Milestones” was intended to demonstrate the late professional acceptance of 14 artists born between 1900 and 1940. Though none was identified by ethnicity or religion, six of these artists (including Frankenthaler) are Jews. This finding leads me to conclude that Jewish women artists have been unusually talented, confident, and determined.

In my opinion, Frankenthaler stands out as one of the last century’s most successful women artists. She was the youngest, at age 22, to be included in a gallery exhibition; she was the second youngest, at age 24, to have her own gallery exhibition; and she was the youngest, at age 32, to have a solo museum exhibition (at the Jewish Museum). This was precisely the opposite experience of Louise Bourgeois, an American sculptor also represented in the RISD collection, who died in 2010 at 98 years of age.

retrospective. Although the article included a small reproduction of Holocaust, there was no discussion of the painting’s title or meaning. That Frankenthaler was Jewish could be assumed, but was of no particular importance. Strangely, Wagner selected the RISD painting to illustrate the artist’s “explosive intensities” and her “procedures.”[3] So many other paintings would have sufficed.

Fortunately, Frankenthaler’s relationship to an older generation of Jewish artists can be ascertained through the Jewish Museum’s landmark exhibition, “Painting a Place in America: Jewish Artists in New York, 1900-1945.” Organized by Norman Kleeblatt and Susan Chevlove in 1991, this exhibition featured 49 artists, including six women. (Nevelson was the most significant.) The exhibition catalogue portrayed a world in which Frankenthaler would have been a relative oddity, if not a complete stranger, but also a ravishing addition.

Most Jewish artists working in New York City during the first half of the twentieth century were immigrants or children of immigrants. Many spoke Yiddish. Most were reared amidst hardship, and many rejected their religious upbringing or were deeply conflicted about their Jewish identities. Although few of these artists attended college, most acquired traditional, representational skills by studying the human figure, from models, in local art schools.

During the Great Depression, despite their attraction to radical political causes, many Jewish artists, such as Peter Blume, Philip Evergood, William Gropper, and Ben Shahn, were grateful to obtain government employment, which often included the decoration of public buildings. Whether evident in heroic murals or in vicious cartoons and caricatures, many of these Jewish artists used the human figure as a forceful vehicle for social protest (though not necessarily to protest the persecution of Jews). Rather than endeavoring to repair the world, they were determined to save it. Indeed, many Jewish artists banded together not only to show their work but to issue manifestos. In 1935, for instance, Ilya Bolotowsky, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko helped organize “The Ten,” which exhibited together for five years.

I believe that Matthew Baigell’s book, Jewish Artists in New York: The Holocaust Years, has the best discussion of Holocaust-related art made by Jews who were European émigrés or American-born. The wide range of pictorial and sculptural responses included: Max Weber’s and Hyman Bloom’s nostalgic scenes of synagogue and shtetl life; Marc Chagall’s transformation of Christianity’s central image, the crucifixion, as an emblem of Jewish suffering; and Jacques Lipchitz’s enlistment of gods, heroes, and beasts from classical mythology to evoke superhuman powers.

Baigell argued, moreover, that the Holocaust had a “quite powerful” and “extensive”[34] impact on an emerging generation of abstract painters, such as Gottlieb, Rothko and Barnet Newman, all of whom abandoned biblical imagery or Jewish symbolism to a universal past and future. This became a deeply spiritual realm, but one unknown to any religion. Baigell’s coverage ended in 1949, however, so he made no mention of Frankenthaler, Nevelson or Anni Albers.

CIRCA 1955
Frankenthaler was surely energized and propelled by New York City’s abstract and Jewish zeitgeist, but was there anything in particular around 1955 that led to her creation of the RISD painting? Jewish efforts to erect a Holocaust memorial sculpture in Riverside Park, begun in 1946, came to naught by 1953.[35] On October 5, 1955, however, “The Diary of Anne Frank” opened on Broadway.[36] Anne was exactly six months older than Helen.

Nevertheless, Frankenthaler’s painting may not have been an evocation of the Shoah. Quite possibly it referred more generically to Hiroshima, Nagasaki or Korea. Holocaust could also have been a lament for, or a curse against, an entire century.

Or there may have been a more personal explanation. In 1954 the artist’s mother, Martha, had died from an accidental or suicidal fall from her fourteenth-floor apartment.[37] On October 4, 1955, moreover, Clement Greenberg struck Frankenthaler while both were at a party, but he proposed marriage the next day.[38]
or transcend human experience. Unable to provide comfort, relief or catharsis, too much Holocaust art may look and feel profoundly artless.

Granted, these are highly subjective conclusions, which suggest that Holocaust art offers no common ground or reduces every analysis to strident, personal opinions. Thus, it may make some sense to avoid using the term “Holocaust art” and scrutinize every painting or sculpture for its individual merits (and demerits). But such a restrained and studied approach denies the necessity and inevitability of a far larger task. Can Holocaust art measure up to art’s highest achievements? Or, perhaps as Theodor Adorno implied, can art transcend the Holocaust?

Unlike World War I, the Holocaust did not create a crisis of meaning or style for most artists. Regrettably, an argument can be made that the Holocaust was, at best, a peripheral issue for artists during and shortly after World War II. Indeed, how much great visual art was created within or in response to that conflagration?

Art made by Holocaust victims and survivors is especially daunting and perplexing. Resisting evaluation, it cannot be subjected to normal qualitative or comparative judgments. Words do not suffice. More than voyeurs, Holocaust artists were witnesses. Whatever they were able to create seems sacrosanct. Art made by children of the Holocaust seems even more pitiful and precious.

“Post-Holocaust” artists, particularly Germans, seem relegated to another inescapable fate. Perhaps unqualified or unfit to pass judgments, such artists may resemble poseurs or pedants who glory in their self-importance. But younger artists may also have no choice but to confront the Holocaust. They would seem cavalier or cowardly to avoid such a reckoning.

Have major artists– Jews and gentiles– been presented with still another extraordinary burden or mandate? Based on superior achievements, have they been granted greater license or latitude to interpret the Holocaust and other unspeakable acts? Alas, most European and American masters have ignored or declined this challenge. In my opinion, even Picasso, who displayed Olympian genius in his transfigurations and reconceptualizations of the Spanish Civil War, stumbled badly with The Charnel House of 1944-45. He did so again with Massacre in Korea of 1957. What if it were entitled Buddha’s Court, it did not mean that she had become a Buddhist. Three years later, when she painted Flood, it did not mean that she had become transfixed by Noah’s story or that she was contemplating baptism.

Every thoughtful viewer must determine for himself or herself whether these grandiose titles facilitate or impede an understanding of Frankenthaler’s art. All that can be said for certain is that the artist deliberately searched for evocative and clever titles, even maintaining a list for new works.

Perhaps sister abstract paintings in the RISD collection can be summoned to justify Frankenthaler’s use of Holocaust as a title. What if Rothko’s luminous and imposing painting (93 inches high by 56 inches wide) were called Transcendence or Sholom or Shema? Do these titles bestow a deeper and richer meaning than Untitled? Perhaps they too sound contrived.

Consider another RISD canvas, Ad Reinhardt’s Number 18, a huge rectangular oil painting (80 inches high by 30 inches wide) made in 1956. Somber but elegant, it consists of two barely perceptible blue rectangles set against or within a black field. What if it were entitled Holocaust? This seems a better fit than with Frankenthaler’s painting, but it also sounds presumptuous and melodramatic.

Perhaps I should face up to the fact that any painting or sculpture with that title would offend me. But could Reinhardt’s Number 18 actually be a veiled reference to Chai? This would strike me as a bit too clever, especially for a gentile artist. I would find Kaddish slightly more acceptable, but Reinhardt’s painting does not convey to me any of the resonance of that prayer.

Would Frankenthaler’s RISD painting have a different meaning if it had been commissioned by and displayed within a synagogue? If it were seen as Jewish
art, which is fundamentally hopeful, rather than as Holocaust art, which is not? Would it glow within a space of its own or illuminate other pieces around it?

I do believe that Frankenthaler is a gifted artist, and I am grateful for her best paintings. Ultimately, however, Holocaust disappoints and confounds me. Despite my belabored efforts, I have been unable to find a key to unlock its tantric message.

ENDNOTES

1 Albert Pilavin (1902-1964), a founder of Apex Tire and Rubber and a member of Temple Beth-El, was an amateur painter who enjoyed visiting museums. The Pilavin Collection, assembled in his memory, was based on recommendations by the Museum’s young director, Daniel Robbins, who served from 1965 to 1971. When exhibited as an ensemble in the fall of 1969, it included 19 paintings and sculptures, the earliest from 1917. This was the first substantial collection of modern American art presented to RISD since 1913. See the exhibition catalogue, The Albert Pilavin Collection: Twentieth-Century American Art, reprinted by RISD in 1973.

The Frankenthaler painting was originally exhibited at the Tibor De Nagy Gallery at 206 East 53rd Street in 1956. It belonged to several collectors before being purchased by RISD at an auction in Los Angeles in 1972. Holocaust probably cost less than $10,000, then a considerable amount for a contemporary work. Stephen E. Ostrow, RISD’s senior curator at the time and a member of Beth-El, recalled that the purchase price was equivalent to his annual salary. Telephone interview with Ostrow on May 31, 2002 in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

The first Frankenthaler to enter the RISD collection was a lithograph, Variation I on ‘Mauve Comer,’ number six in an edition of eight, made in 1967. This small print was purchased in 1969 through membership dues. See “Selection III: Contemporary Graphics from the Museum’s Collection,” Museum Notes, LX (April, 1973), illustration 16.

For additional studies of Jews and art collecting, see the author’s “Jewish Leadership of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design,” Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, XII (November 1997), 408-21; and “A New Jewish Elite: Curators, Directors, and Benefactors of American Art Museums,” Modern Judaism, XVIII (February 1998), 47-79; XVIII (May 1998), 119-52.

I am grateful to Leonard Moss, my predecessor as editor of The Notes, for a critique of an earlier version of this article.


4 This reference, mentioned by Cole 5, occurred in The Times’ brief article, “Shrine Honors Victims.”

5 When holding its first convention outside the United States, B’nai B’rith International dedicated a memorial in the Martyrs’ Forest, in the Judean Hills southwest of Jerusalem. The article quoted a bronze inscription: “This shrine and remembrance to the memory of our six million brothers and sisters who perished in the Nazi holocaust in the years from 1933-1945.”

5 Rapoport (1911-1987), a Polish survivor who settled in New York in 1960, created the Warsaw Ghetto Monument. It was dedicated in 1948, on the fifth anniversary of the uprising. A cast of this enormous relief sculpture was installed at Yad Vashem in 1967. Rapoport’s sculpture, Job, another bronze Holocaust memorial, was dedicated at Brandeis University, near the Jewish Chapel, in 1967. His last heroic sculpture, a bronze monument to American liberators of the concentration camps, was erected at New Jersey’s Liberty State Park in 1985. For a detailed discussion of Rapoport’s Warsaw Memorial, see James E. Young, The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Young’s study, At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), is also highly useful, but my study does not address Holocaust museums.

6 This study focuses on the visual arts. Even more extensive studies exist for Holocaust literature, photography, and cinema.

7 Milton Avery’s whimsical portrait of Rothko, painted in 1933, was the first work acquired for the Pilavin Collection. Shortly thereafter, Avery’s widow, Sally, presented RISD with a small etching, also a portrait of Rothko smoking a pipe, which was made in 1936. Sally Avery was a Jew.


9 The sanctuary contained a “memorial niche” in which two small marble cornerstones were displayed. These were fragments from two synagogues in Mannheim destroyed by the Nazis. An inscription read: “To the heroes and martyrs, the known and the unknown who died for the sanctification of the Divine Name.” B’nai Israel’s rabbi was Max Gruenewald, a former president of Mannheim’s Jewish Council, who obtained the synagogue cornerstones through American authorities. After hearing him lecture, Rabbi Gruenewald selected Goodman as B’nai Israel’s architect in 1946. Gruenewald’s obituaries were published in the New York Times, December 29, 1952, 12; and Vol. XCIV of the American Jewish Yearbook, 575.

10 Frankenthaler created two Torah curtains depicting “Pillar of Fire” and “Pillar of Cloud” from Exodus. One curtain, with a white background, is used only during the High Holy Days. The other curtain, with a red background, is used the rest of the year. In addition to images of fire and cloud, which are red, brown, and white, each curtain portrays two silver trumpets. These represent the sounds used to summon Jews during their desert sojourn. Rabbi Bernard Raskas, who collaborated with Goodman in St. Paul, provided this description in a letter to the author on June 25, 2002. For a small, black-and-white illustration, see Avram Kampf, Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945-1965 (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1966), 161.

Frankenthaler’s St. Paul Torah curtains were featured in “Art for Two Synagogues,” an exhibition held at the Kootz Gallery in October 1956. Percival Goodman patronized many of Kootz’s artists. The second synagogue was Cleveland’s Anshe Chesed, which was not Goodman’s design. See Arts & Architecture (January 1957), 28-9.

“Pillar of Fire” and “Pillar of Cloud” were the same images portrayed by Ibram Lassaw in sculptures flanking the ark at Providence’s Beth-El. Rabbi William G. Braude suggested the pillars imagery. Coincidentally, Lassaw had sailed to New York in 1921 on the SS Providence. See Cynthia J. McCabe, The Golden Door: Artist-Immigrants of America, 1876-1976 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 419.


FRANKENTHALER


Perhaps the artist felt inundated with requests. By the time of her retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969, the bibliography about her included 213 references. By 1991 her bibliography had grown to 125 pages, approximately twice the length of any of her peers. See: Françoise S. Prinetti and Halina R. Rusak, Abstract Expressionist Women Painters: An Annotated Bibliography (Landham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995).


Born in New York City in 1881, Alfred Frankenthaler attended public schools and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from City College, where his classmate and lifelong friend was Felix Frankfurter, the associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. A 1902 graduate of Columbia Law School as well as a licensed teacher, Frankenthaler was active in Democratic politics and served on various reform committees at the municipal and state level. As a specialist in real estate law before his appointment to the bench in 1927, he supervised the reorganization and rehabilitation of guaranteed mortgages. Frankenthaler was a member of Temple Emanu-El, where his body lay in state a day before his funeral. His honorary pall-bearers included numerous judges, Governor Herbert Lehman, and Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. See: A. Frankenthaler, Jurist, Dies at 68, New York Times, January 8, 1940, 15; John Simons, ed., Who’s Who in American Jewry (New York: National News Association, 1939), 292; American Jewish Year Book (Vol. XII; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1941), 478.

Perhaps the Frankenthaler family was acquainted with Margaret Seligman Lewisohn (1885-1954), a New Yorker who was a Bennington trustee from 1939 until 1946 and whose two daughters attended the college. See Hyman and Moore, 844. Margaret’s husband was Samuel, a prominent collector of modern art, who was a founding trustee of the Museum of Modern Art and later a trustee of the Metropolitn Museum of Art. Lewisohn was friendly with Tamayo and collected his paintings. See Emily Genauer, Rufino Tamayo (New York: Abrams, 1974), 44. Many European refugees, such as Peter Drucker and Erich Fromm, taught at Bennington. Another was Alexander Dorner, a gentile, who had led the RISD Museum from 1938 to 1941. A specialist in Renaissance and contemporary art, he arrived at Bennington by the time of Frankenthaler’s senior year. See: Bennington College Bulletin, 1948-9. As a senior, Frankenthaler was editor of the college newspaper. See Current Biography, XXVII (April 1966), 12. She served as a Bennington trustee from 1967 to 1982.


Greenberg and the critic Harold Rosenberg, who also championed abstract art, were intense rivals. Their differing philosophies were the basis of a major exhibition, “Action/ Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976,” organized in 2008 by the Jewish Museum. The small but magnificent presentation included only 66 paintings and sculptures. Frankenthaler was represented by Mountains and Sea. The exhibition catalogue, edited by Norman L. Kleeblatt, included Mark Godfrey’s stimulating essay, “That Oldtime Jewish Sect Called American Art Criticism.” He noted ironically Greenberg’s “failure to comment on the question of Jewishness in relation to the work” of many Jewish abstract artists, including Frankenthaler, p. 254.


The art historian Alison Rowley believes that a Cézanne exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was highly influential in its evolution and that the painting reflects the arrest, trial, and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Helen Frankenthaler. Painting History, Writing Painting (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

22 Mountains and Sea, Frankenthaler’s most famous painting, was first exhibited at New York City’s Stable Gallery in 1955. Its price was about $100, but it did not sell. E. A Carmean, Jr., Helen Frankenthaler: A Paintings Retrospective (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 12. Always owned by the artist, it had been lent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and is now on loan to the National Gallery of Art. Carmean wrote that Frankenthaler’s creation of a “whole school of painting” was “a first” for a woman. See “Frankenthaler” in Gaze, 558. Three of her most significant followers were Morris Louis, Kenneth Nolann, and Jules Olitski. (Louis and Olitski were Jews.) Olitski’s Sensory, an acrylic on canvas painted in 1968, was acquired for the inaugural presentation of RISD’s Pilavin Collection in 1969.

Grace Hartigan, another emerging abstract painter, exhibited at Stable Gallery in 1955. Her large and exuberant canvas, Homage to Matisse, painted that year, was donated anonymously to RISD the following year. Frequently exhibited, it can be viewed diagonally from Matisse’s delightful oil, The Green Pumpkin, ca. 1920.

The 40th Carnegie International, held at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Institute of Art in 1955, was particularly notable. This major museum exhibition of contemporary art, featuring 328 paintings, was the first to include Frankenthaler. Her entry, Façade, was mentioned and illustrated in Thomas Hess’ review in Art News (November 1955), 49, 55. Among such leading abstractionists as de Kooning, Gottlieb, Kline, Motherwell, and Pollock were three women abstract painters: Elaine de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Sue Mitchell. The artist honored with the Carnegie’s second prize was none other than Frankenthaler’s teacher, Tamayo. In 1944 he had been included in a RISD Museum exhibition, “A Selection of American Painters of the Present Day.” Gordon Washburn, who was the Carnegie’s director and organizer of the 40th Carnegie International, had been the RISD Museum director from 1942 until 1949.

24 The Whitney exhibition included 46 paintings, but not Holocaust.

In 1958 the Guggenheim Museum presented a highly focused exhibition, “After Mountains and Sea: Frankenthaler, 1956-1959,” which included 15 paintings. She was asked in an interview, published in the exhibition’s catalogue, whether she thought of herself as a young woman working in a man’s world. Her reply: “Then and now, my concern was and is for good art: not female art, or French art, or black art, or Jewish art, but good art.” This was the only Jewish reference in the interview.

26 This article was anthologized in Linda Nochlin, Women, Art, Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1988). She wrote on p. 149: “Certainly, if daintiness, delicacy, and preciousness are to be counted as earmarks of a feminine style, there is nothing fragile about Rosa Bonheur’s The Horse Fair nor dainty and introverted about Helen Frankenthaler’s giant canvases.”

Ordinary People, Turbulent Times, Part I

Alice Dreifuss Goldstein

 Having published her first article in The Notes in 1979, Alice’s voice has become not only familiar but also reassuring to our readers. She gets her facts straight, but they are enveloped with compassion.

In a sense, her current article serves as a prologue to many others. It was selected from her family saga, Ordinary People, Turbulent Times, which was published by AuthorHouse two years ago and is available through Amazon.com. The book’s title is significant because it neither contains the word “Holocaust” nor dwells on the catastrophe. Indeed, this book is almost equally a story of her family’s survival and adaptation in America, which was also marked by currents of turbulence. As Alice explained in her forward, the book’s purpose was not to portray Jewish suffering or even German despotism. Rather, it was to “raise young people’s awareness of human rights and civil liberties, and the need to be vigilant in their defense.”

This essay, originally titled “No Place to Raise a Child,” is the seventh of 14 chapters. Alice was able to trace her family’s origins to Alsace, but they became more perceptible during the early eighteenth century, when Dreifuss ancestors moved across the Rhine to the Margraviate (later Grand Duchy) of Baden. Her great-great-grandfather, Isaak, settled in the town of Altdorf, and her great-grandfather, Abraham, was the first Dreifuss child born in the nearby village of Kenzigen. Several generations were anchored to a structure on Brotstrasse, which served as a store at street level and as a home above. Though observant in their daily lives, the Dreifusses were tethered to a far larger Jewish community in Freiburg. The Notes was published by AuthorHouse two years ago and is available through Amazon.com.

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Having published her first article in The Notes in 1979, Alice’s voice has become not only familiar but also reassuring to our readers. She gets her facts straight, but they are enveloped with compassion.

In a sense, her current article serves as a prologue to many others. It was selected from her family saga, Ordinary People, Turbulent Times, which was published by AuthorHouse two years ago and is available through Amazon.com. The book’s title is significant because it neither contains the word “Holocaust” nor dwells on the catastrophe. Indeed, this book is almost equally a story of her family’s survival and adaptation in America, which was also marked by currents of turbulence. As Alice explained in her forward, the book’s purpose was not to portray Jewish suffering or even German despotism. Rather, it was to “raise young people’s awareness of human rights and civil liberties, and the need to be vigilant in their defense.”

This essay, originally titled “No Place to Raise a Child,” is the seventh of 14 chapters. Alice was able to trace her family’s origins to Alsace, but they became more perceptible during the early eighteenth century, when Dreifuss ancestors moved across the Rhine to the Margraviate (later Grand Duchy) of Baden. Her great-great-grandfather, Isaak, settled in the town of Altdorf, and her great-grandfather, Abraham, was the first Dreifuss child born in the nearby village of Kenzigen. Several generations were anchored to a structure on Brotstrasse, which served as a store at street level and as a home above. Though observant in their daily lives, the Dreifusses were tethered to a far larger Jewish community in Freiburg. Alice’s father, Siegfried, served an apprenticeship there, but after his marriage to Gretel Valfer in 1930, the couple settled in Kenzigen to expand the family business. Alice, the first Dreifuss and Valfer grandchild, was born there on September 25, 1931. Her parents looked forward to continuing years of social acceptance, financial comfort, and political stability.
As Alice demonstrates, however, that halcyon era began to “unravel” in 1933, with Hitler’s rise to power. Although the changes were slow at first, they arrived with “increasing speed and menace.” By 1935, with the imposition of the Nuremberg Laws, the Dreifuss family began to struggle for its survival. German Jews were expelled from public schools, but Alice was kept at home until the spring of 1938, when she was sent to live with her Valfer grandparents (Oma and Opa) in Freiburg so she could attend a Jewish school.

The Dreifuss and Valfer families’ harrowing efforts to leave Germany and gain asylum in America began after Kristallnacht (November 8, 1938). Indeed, Alice’s father and grandfathers were released after a month’s imprisonment in Dachau with the understanding that they would flee their homeland.

This chapter of Ordinary People, Turbulent Times begins with a reference to Ilse Mayer. She was Gretel’s cousin, later known as Elsie, who had the foresight to leave Germany for New York in 1936.

As life became increasingly difficult in Kenzingen, as it did for Jews everywhere in Germany, my parents began to think seriously about leaving. The image of Ilse on the train to Hamburg, the bouquet of roses she had tossed Mama, and the mail we received from her since her arrival in New York were powerful prods to emigrate to America. Ilse’s experience seemed so positive. She had been able to obtain a post as a children’s nanny for a very wealthy, well-placed family in New York, even though she had had little use for small children, including me. She seemed content with the position, liked the family, and made friends with other young women in similar positions. Summers were spent with her employer family at beaches in New Jersey, and vacations in nearby mountain resorts.

So the United States seemed to us like a logical choice. The possibility was reinforced by a stream of news clippings that Ilse sent to keep us informed about life in America, which was not always positive, as the stories about the 1938 hurricane indicated; she also sent me books starring Shirley Temple that I adored having, even though I couldn’t read a word in them. But seeing a cute, curly haired young girl in dreamy, fantasy stories made America seem like a very wonderful place to me.
But there were powerful reasons to remain in Kenzingen, not the least of which were two sets of elderly parents who were terrified at the thought of going to a foreign country, where they neither knew the language nor had friends. Besides, they were so sure that Hitler was just a passing phenomenon, and that the madness would soon be over and order restored. And leaving Germany and getting into the United States was no easy task. Germany had to issue passports, which involved a complex process in which the applicants had to prove that no taxes were owed and that they had no criminal record. The Nuremberg Laws provided a further complication since they deprived Jews of their German citizenship, making it difficult for Jews to obtain passports if they didn’t already have them. We had also heard how very difficult it was to obtain the proper documents to be admitted into the United States. Throughout 1937, Mama and Papa thought long and hard about their prospects. They were especially concerned about my own future, and concluded that Germany was no place in which to raise a child. This was also the reason why, by 1937, they had not had more children. By the end of the year, Papa and Mama determined to apply for immigration to America.

By the beginning of 1938, Papa sent an inquiry to the US Consulate in Stuttgart, requesting information about needed documents. The reply was a page covered by miniscule print, detailing all the documents that would be required before a visa could be issued. These included the not surprising requests for birth and marriage certificates— in duplicate, plus four photos per person, as well as passports if possible. Most important, a sponsor had to be found in America who could guarantee the refugees’ financial well being for a reasonable time after their arrival. A $10 fee (or its equivalent in Reichsmark) was charged for the application, and this had to accompany a short questionnaire providing information for each member of the family seeking to emigrate. A separate document from the consulate warned that, because of the high volume of applications, duplicate submissions of the personal questionnaire might result in extra delays. If the forms were not received by the end of July 1938 (by which time they were likely to be assigned a waiting number of 7,700 or higher), then the affidavit guaranteeing financial aid in the U.S. was not to be filed until after that date. Papa sent the forms, documents, and funds off on April 23, 1938.

Fortunately, obtaining an affidavit was not difficult. Ilse—now Elsie—was able to contact a very distant relative in New York, Harry Hyman, who was financially able and morally committed to issuing affidavits for as many German Jewish refugees as possible. The document stipulated that he would be responsible for our welfare—housing and work—once we arrived in the US, so that we would not be a burden on the government. The affidavit, notarized by an attorney in New York, arrived in Kenzingen within a month and on April 15 was forwarded to the consulate; a genealogical document indicating our relation to Harry Hyman was also sent.

Thereupon a series of exchanges took place between the consulate and Papa: The consulate informed him that the guarantee statement was not sufficient; so on June 7, an additional guarantee was sent from New York. Two weeks later, the consulate notified Papa that better, official proof of our guarantor’s income and assets were needed. This was finally sent in on July 30. Over the next two weeks, each mail delivery brought with it the slight hope of an answer from the consulate, and each mail delivery brought further disappointment. Papa finally traveled in person to Stuttgart to make inquiries, only to be told that the consulate had no records of his application! Returning home in great frustration, he wrote a letter to the consulate asking for clarification and for a definite waiting number. Our family was disappointed again and again, with each futile trip to the mailbox. Finally, on October 18, Papa again traveled to Stuttgart; this time he was told that our waiting number had been assigned as 1,141. The number was considerably lower than we might have hoped and provided a tiny bit of good news.

Our experience in 1938 with the US Consulate illustrates clearly what US policy was with regard to German Jewish refugees. The United States, particularly the State Department, was not eager to welcome thousands of German Jews; anti-Semitism was widespread, as was anti-immigration in general. The quotas that had been set in the 1920s were strictly enforced, and the quota for Germany was soon declared filled. Consular officials were instructed to make the immigration process as arduous as possible, and to delay as long as they could.

The little optimism raised by the low wait-
ing number was shattered by Kristallnacht and by the consulate’s decision not to process visas in ascending order of waiting number from low to high, but rather be more haphazard and process some of the higher numbers first. With Papa in Dachau and the promised release if we could prove we wished to leave Germany, Mama desperately telegrammed the US consulate inquiring about the status of our application. In answer, she was told that Hyman’s “tax payment receipt” was missing. She immediately cabled Hyman in New York, asking him to supply the missing document. The consulate sent no confirmation, but Papa was released from Dachau on the basis of the documentation we had accumulated.

The consulate remained silent about our prospects for emigration. Papa again went to Stuttgart in January 1939, and was stonewalled again. A month later, in desperation, he even tried to write a letter in English and sent it via registered mail:

Dear Sir!
Why don’t I get any answer? I have the low number of 1141. I was there— in Stuttgart— about three weeks ago without having got any information. A lot of letters, I sent, were not answered. My papers are, as I know, all-right. Therefore I beg the Honorable Consul to give me that answer I have to wait for.
I am most respectfully yours

The answer to this letter was also silence. Weeks of agonizing waiting went by. On April 7 another letter— in German— followed, again to the consulate. It detailed the entire process and timetable to that point and again begged for information in case more documents were needed. Return postage was included to encourage an answer. Like all the previous letters, it generated no reply.

Life in Kenzingen became ever more difficult. Since Jews were no longer allowed to own real property, the family house had to be sold considerably below its value. The family was able to continue living in it by paying monthly rent to its new owners. The store, which was forced to close in December of 1938, was finally sold in March 1939. By then, its value had fallen from over 50,000 Mark to only 2,000 Mark, and it carried an outstanding debt of 5,000 Mark. The Nazis also assessed fines on all Jews after Kristallnacht (Judenvermögensabgabe) to help pay for the clean up after the damage created by the pogroms. Papa sold twelve silver serving pieces for 8.40 Mark to raise the cash. Additional cash for daily living expenses was obtained through the sale of various household items. First to go were baby furnishings and clothing— crib, changing table, crib sheets and blankets. Then some other household items, including the piano, were sold. Savings accounts were frozen by the Nazis, and, in any case, were being carefully protected by Papa and Mama against future emergencies and to use for our potential emigration.

Our social life became nonexistent. Villagers mostly turned away if we were in the street. They certainly feared to invite us into their homes, even if they might have been willing to be seen with Jews. It became dangerous for me to play in the street in front of the house, and I relied almost completely on my parents and grandparents for entertainment. Books were read over and over, and I often played Mensch Aergere Dich Nicht (Parchesi) with Mama. Problem was, I cried when I lost, but I also cried when I won since then Mama lost! The adults played cards with each other— a substitute for the popular card games that Opa and Papa had played so often with friends in the village. After Kristallnacht, the piano in our living room stood silent and, as noted, was eventually sold. One of the few contacts in Kenzingen outside the immediate family was Fraulein Roederer, who had lived for a time in England and was hired by my parents to teach them some English. She must have been a brave soul to continue into the late 1930s her contacts with the denounced Jews. I assume that these contacts were discreetly undertaken after dark. She even gave them a farewell gift as a souvenir, a small German/English dictionary, which proved a valuable aid in the first years in America.

In February of 1939, the Nazis decreed that every Jew must obtain an identity card. This act was partly a way of then allowing Germany to issue passports to its stateless Jews, and partly at the urging of the Swiss government, which hoped to use the ID cards as a way of identifying and discriminating against Jews trying to cross over its borders. At the same time, the ID cards indicated most prominently another Nazi form of harassment of Germany’s Jews. All Jewish men had had to adopt “Israel” as their middle name, and all women to use “Sarah.” After all, the Nazi reasoning was, all Jews are alike so there is no need for them to have distinctive names. Papa, as his ID card attests, became Siegfried Israel Dreifuss, Mama was Gretel Sarah Dreifuss, and I, Alice Sarah Dreifuss. We each had our own card, with a large yellow “J” imprinted on the cover. Each card included a picture of the individual, photographs carefully taken according to regulations, with backlighting and three-quarter view— to make each person’s nose as prominent as possible. As one observer pointed out, the ID cards were hardly necessary; one had only to...
look at the haunted, terrorized look on the faces of these people to realize that they were Jews. I have a very distinct memory of that photo session. When I went before the camera, I behaved as I’d been taught— I smiled. The photographer promptly scolded me, “This is no time for smiling!”

Although Jews were certainly singled out for extraordinary persecution, life under the Nazi regime was difficult for many of the villagers. They lived in fear of being reported to authorities for the slightest infringement of the law, especially if that involved helping Jews. Spies were everywhere and any disrespect for Nazis was quickly noted and sooner or later punished. Moreover, into the spring and summer of 1939 the villagers had the added fear of impending war. Propaganda prepared the way, as did air raid drills during which tear gas bombs were exploded in the streets to assure that all took shelter. Even we few Jews in the village were expected to go to an air raid shelter, and I can still remember the smell of the tear gas as we hurried across the street into the Englers’ basement.

Because of restrictions on when and where we could shop, food became scarce, and we were grateful to the few neighbors who occasionally came to the back door with a basket of fruit or vegetables or some eggs. We were still able to buy basic necessities, but had little money for anything else. Kosher meat became unobtainable, so our diet was basically vegetarian. Very occasionally, a wandering schochet (Jew trained in proper ritual slaughter of fowl and animals) would appear in Kenzingen. We would find a chicken to be slaughtered and thus have meat for a day. Chicken remains a treat for me to this day.

Somehow, Oma also managed to continue to raise a goose in our courtyard. It was properly killed for the last Passach ever to be held in our Kenzingen home—in April of 1939. As usual, we expected that Uncle Max and Aunt Gretel from Berlin and Uncle Julius and Aunt Meta from Dusseldorf would join us for the Seder. Fortunately, travel for Jews was still relatively unrestricted at the time. By then, Uncle Adolf had fled to France, since his outspoken opposition to Hitler made it much too dangerous for him to remain in Germany. Imagine our astonishment when, that night, after all had assembled and prepared to begin the Seder, Uncle Adolf climbed over the back fence to join us for the festivities! I wonder how many of those sitting around that Seder table recognized that it might be the last time that we would all be together or even see each other.

Shortly after Passach and Easter, the new school year began. By now, Jewish children were forbidden in any public school, even in separate rooms. So the Jewish School in Freiburg was forced to leave the Lessing Schule to find new quarters in the small Jewish community building that was located near the synagogue but had escaped the flames of Kristallnacht. I was happy to return to school after a very long unwanted vacation from November 1938 to April 1939. Our teachers tried very hard to continue our lessons as if we were on a normal schedule. And somehow, my grandparents managed to create a semblance of normalcy at their apartment as well.

I went home for summer vacation in July, not realizing that I wouldn’t return in a few weeks. In June, the mail had finally brought the letter that had been awaited for so long. My parents were notified that their visa number had finally been cleared, that they were to appear before the consulate in Stuttgart on July 12 prior to being authorized for immigration to America. We traveled to Stuttgart for the consular review and physical examinations, an excursion I remember well since I had never been so far from home.

The appearance at the consulate necessitated a spate of paper work. Papa immediately wrote to the US Steamship Co. to inquire about the availability of space on ships going to America. The quick reply indicated that space was plentiful on the USS Harding, sailing from Hamburg on August 15. Tickets were 111.50 Mark for third class passage per adult (the exchange rate at the time was 2.5 Mark to the $1); children were free if in the same stateroom. Taxes, boarding fees, and meal costs added another 72 Mark per person. That passage was so easily available suggests the difficulty Jews had in obtaining permission to immigrate to America. The number of Jews eagerly trying to leave Germany at the time should have made tickets very hard to get; but American officials did their utmost to slow the process.

We applied for passports and were issued them on August 1, good for one year, and not renewable. Our leaving was, after all, helping fulfill Hitler’s plan to make Germany Judenrein. But before all was set, Papa was notified that he still owed some taxes, even though he had already paid his annual tax and assessment...
and had no income from the store. There was no appeal, and he paid the additional tax. Other expenses in the amount of 450 Mark included travel costs to Stuttgart and Hamburg (where we were to board the ship) and a foreign exchange fee in the amount of 160 Mark assessed of Jews leaving Germany. All of these funds had to be requested from officials in charge of Papa’s frozen bank account, like all Jewish accounts, and required countless paperwork, at least in triplicate.

Final preparations for departure began as early as June, and included selling more household items and then arranging to have basic furniture, clothing, and goods packed for shipping. A large wooden crate— a “lift”— was erected in the back courtyard, and everything we planned to ship was packed into it— the art deco bedroom furniture, the heavily carved dining table and chairs, a sideboard, dishes, cooking utensils, winter clothing, and pictures. Transportation for the lift, from Kenzingen to Rotterdam and then eventually to New York, cost 1,200 Mark, paid in advance, for a cargo valued at about 10,000 Mark. Everything in the lift was carefully inventoried, with copies sent to the office in charge of foreign dealings in Karlsruhe. Rules regarding what could be taken overseas were carefully spelled out and had to be followed. Nothing of real value could be shipped, including gold and silver jewelry, diamonds and pearls; exceptions were wedding rings and watches for personal use.

We were allowed to take only one steamer trunk with us on board the ship, no valuables, and the equivalent of $5 in cash per person. The trunk was packed with the clothing most necessary for the trip, but also included a packet of documents that my parents thought might be useful in their new lives in America, a very few items of sentimental value, and a small silver sugar spoon (that apparently escaped official notice) and heavy iron food mill overlooked when the lift was packed. From among all my toys, I was allowed to take along only a stuffed animal and a tiny doll in a wicker basket.

The entire process of leaving entailed an immense number of letters to the bank where assets were frozen, to the foreign affairs officials, to the shipping company in charge of sending items by freighter, and to the shipping line to arrange our own transportation. Requests and decisions often took several exchanges and often entailed detailed sets of regulations from officials in Kenzingen and several cities in the area. Enormous patience was required at a time when speed seemed essential and life in Kenzingen became daily more difficult. Hitler may have wanted to rid Germany of its Jews, but the Nazis in no way made the process of leaving easy.

In preparation for our leaving, both sets of grandparents had their pictures taken, for who knew when the Hitler madness would pass and we would be reunited. It was especially important for them to feel that Alicele (little Alice) would not forget what they looked like. We boarded the train for Hamburg, from where we subsequently sailed on August 15, 1939. The final trauma of parting is hard to imagine. Our little family was the lynchpin of both the Freiburg and Kenzingen grandparents. We left them with slim hope of reunion and great fear about the future, both for them in Nazi Germany and for us in an unknown land.
In his musings below, “Mr. RISD” claims that he is not a sentimentalist but an ironist. But why are the two categories mutually exclusive? Indeed, when it comes to my friend and colleague, I think that there is nothing exclusive about him. Nearly everybody has much to learn from him, and many would enjoy getting to know him better.

This past summer Mike received Providence’s second annual George M. Cohan Award. He has a medallion to prove it. What a fitting honor for both the city and the recipient! I’ve never heard Mike sing nor seen him dance, but so much of what he says and writes reverberates musically. If he doesn’t actually create songs, he’s still something of a lyricist.

If Mike had been a seventeenth-century Dutch painter, he could have specialized in portraiture, landscape, seascape or even allegory. Huge canvases, for telling Bible stories or glorifying battles, would have been totally unnecessary, however. Mike reminds me a lot of a miniaturist, who could evoke an entire universe by depicting light and shadow falling across the wall of an empty interior. He also could have represented the world through still life, though he often has a problem sitting still and he might give you that apple to munch on.
Since my first contribution to The Notes a couple of decades ago, I have tried to be true to its custom that “history” requires a look backward through, at the very least, half a century. I also believe that our Notes must be local, rooted in Rhode Island. The background of this report does indeed have its tap in the original Rhode Island, the city by the sea. In Newport, Sephardic Jews planted their community: a burial ground and a congregation known as Jeshuat Israel (Remnant of Israel) and later as Touro.

In June 1988, more than three centuries after the consecration of the burial ground, a group of Portuguese and Jewish Americans from Rhode Island and nearby southeastern Massachusetts launched a joint venture to the Azores to research the common heritage of both immigrant groups. The first Jews in that colony were Portuguese refugees, and they often hid, even from themselves, hints of their own Jewish legacy. I followed this tour of the Azores and its abandoned synagogue to explore Jewish remnants in mainland Portugal— in both Lisbon and Belmonte. I reported my discoveries on the English page of Providence’s own Portuguese newspaper published by Carolina Matos.

We then named our new organization “The Sousa Mendes Society” in memory of the Portuguese consul who is the main focus of this article.

In June 1989 our group of Portuguese and Jewish Americans brought President Mário Soares to Touro Synagogue and gave him the privilege and honor of the bench that George Washington had sat in during the first reading of his renowned pledge, which included the famous phrases “to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” Also present were President Soares’ wife, the Portuguese ambassador to the United States and his wife, and the Portuguese secretary of state for immigration and his wife. It seemed to us that Roger Williams, John Clarke, George Washington and Aristides de Sousa Mendes held the same values.

In 1990 we formed guidelines for our society to bring the Portuguese and Jewish peoples together and dedicated our journal to investigations of the career and life of the remarkable “Righteous Gentile,” the subject of this story. Aristides de Sousa Mendes do Amaral e Abranches (1885-1954).

Five years later, Dr. Maria de Jesus Barroso Soares, the First Lady of Portugal and the president of the Fundação Pro-Dignidade, invited our society as her guests to the dedication of plaques and the posthumous restoration to rank of the Consul who, in June of 1940, in defiance of the Salazar regime in Lisbon, had signed his name to documents that saved about 10,000 Jewish lives, at the brink of World War II. I served as editor of the Providence scholarly journal, Reunir (Reunion), which covered many interpretations of that elegant event in Portugal as well as a northward journey to Cabanas de Viriato, the birthplace, hometown, and grave of Aristides de Sousa Mendes.

The main thrust of the following account tells the tale of the second voyage to the site of Sousa Mendes’ achievement, and the pilgrimage and homage to his accomplishment. It happened in June 2010, and the place was not Portugal, but France, and the cities included Paris, Bordeaux, Bayonne, Anglet, and Hendaye.

In Paris we concentrated on the quarter near the Hôtel de Ville called Le Marais, where the Holocaust Memorial Museum received us. Bordeaux was the site of the career of Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and of the marvelous vineyards whose masterpieces we were to taste at its ornate City Hall. Bordeaux was also the closest port from which escape was possible. Bayonne was the alternate consulate where Sousa Mendes could operate as a beneficial presence and influence.

I went to France, with my wife Michael, to represent the Portuguese and Jewish communities of Rhode Island, and to inform the relatives of the Consul and those of the souls he had saved of the participation of the people of Providence and Newport in the events that led to the honors heaped upon the name “Sousa Mendes” in the decades after his death.

This Just Man, what did he do? By now, many among us may know, but some among us may not. He was a seasoned diplomat, who, since 1938, had been the Portuguese envoy in Bordeaux. In June 1940, he encountered the worst traffic jam in human history. Defying orders both from his own government and the Vichy custom and code, he signed his name—30,000 times— in only a few days. And with his autograph on passports and illegal visas, he saved that many lives from fates worse than death. Deportation, devastation, destruction, disappearance into mass graves.

Now, you’ve got the who, what, when and where. But not the why. Why would a man with 14 children, a secure home, job, and social position, not to mention a mistress on the side, risk all these comforts and gamble away his future, in order to rescue the rabble? Well, they weren’t all what were barely disguised euphemistically as “undesirables.” Only a third of the desperate refugees were Jews. Others were fighters against fascism in Spain, political opponents of the Nazi regime, artists whose instincts for love of liberty and kindness offended the Nazi mentality.
Aristides de Sousa Mendes was a conservative monarchist, a staunchly faithful Catholic (possibly with some Jewish ancestry), and a devoted father.

Like so many other heroes of the Resistance movements of Europe, he was by no means rewarded for deeds of gentle courage. Indeed, it was the opposite. He lost everything, including his law license and his health. His children were scattered among the continents. His noble home in Cabanas de Viriato fell into ruin. Though he received a tiny stipend from a Jewish agency, he died in poverty and was forgotten.

Until his grandchildren began to discover the grandeur of their moral inheritance. They brought the cousins, who had never met one another, to the sites of that remarkable, desperate, brief few days in which Sousa Mendes made his “existential” choice, acted upon it, vanished into the void, but left behind life, hope, gratitude, and a trail of tears.

In June 2010, among the endless speeches in city halls, where the audience was expected to stand and listen before the presentation of excellent wines and hors d'oeuvres, I took the opportunity in the town hall of Anglet to remind the gathering both in English and in French of the connection to and with our smallest state. I claimed that in our public schools, the descendants of whalers and masons were classmates of the Ashkenazic heirs to the settlers of Sephardic descent. It was here, in this part of France, where the once promising French republic witnessed its start.

It was also during those very days in 1940, in the region of that same border spot, that Charles de Gaulle likewise consulted his conscience and moral honor and agreed that to disobey is sometimes to obey a higher authority. While the conventions of conduct were lowering the standards of human behavior, these most unusual, even unique, individuals were raising the bar.

There are many museums and memorials to the Resistance, each one paying respect to a different concept. In 1962 the French government erected its Memorial to the Departed Martyrs in Paris. In 1966 Sousa Mendes was named “A Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, and a tree was planted in his memory in its Garden of the Righteous.

It became a great privilege in the wake of that recognition of the Portuguese Consul for others to be so honored, but the particulars of that early choice are worth mentioning. First, the Portuguese consul did not come to the aid and succor of the victims of Hitler’s regime years after Germany had locked horns with America and Russia. He did not join others who sensed that the allies would win. He was perhaps the first “just” who intuited the absolute necessity of immediate refusal, defiance and bravery. And of making no distinction between king and beggar! Perhaps next, he made no priority list of who was more worthy of help and who, less worthy. He wrote his name until his hands and wrists were sore. His magnetism attracted others to come to his support. His role in history was confirmed and celebrated in the handsome halls of France on the seventieth anniversary of those days.

There were concerts in synagogues with opera singers, cantors, and boy sopranos singing prayers and anthems, Hatikvah and La Marseillaise. There were cocktails-dinatoires galore, meaning, marvelous stemware filled with the delights of the soil and sun of the area and accompanied by exquisite dainty and tasty treats. And there were tears galore among the smiles.

Lissy Jarvik, presently an American and a Californian, a woman in her late eighties, told us her tale. She was 16, traveling from her native Germany to Holland, from Belgium into France, and thence toward Lisbon. She shared the triumph of her life as a physician and a scholar, a mother and a grandmother, and toasted Aristides de Sousa Mendes as her savior. Her grandson bears his name in memory and gratitude.

Here, in this portion of France, where the once promising French republic had surrendered all its best traditions, another republic was born, the republic founded by Aristides de Sousa Mendes. And, blessedly, there is no political agenda, no opinion and propaganda attached to the legacy he has left. Only, when you have a choice, take the chance to do a class act.

If Humphrey Bogart said “You’ve got class” in one of his movies, he didn’t mean how you looked or where you were from. It meant, you’ve got the right instinct. The instant response of helping those in dire need.

We have a monument in Newport, at Breton State Park, overlooking Narragansett Bay, which celebrates the Great Discoveries of the early Portuguese sailors and explorers, who used their astrolabes (a Jewish invention) and their knowledge of the tides’ secrets.

The plaques in Portugal and France on the other hand declare the Great Discoveries of the spirit, those of the Consul. “If you save one life, you have recreated humankind,” is the succinct biblical “bumper sticker.” It was quoted again and again with the number 30,000 attached to it.

“How did you find out about our forebear?” asked one of the grandchildren. “Oh,” I explained, “I saw that sepia snapshot of Sousa Mendes with a bearded

orphans...and, astonishingly, kings, dukes, and assorted royals! Aristides de Sousa Mendes was a conservative monarchist, a staunchly faithful Catholic (possibly with some Jewish ancestry), and a devoted father.

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There are many museums and memorials to the Resistance, each one paying respect to a different concept. In 1962 the French government erected its Memorial to the Departed Martyrs in Paris. In 1966 Sousa Mendes was named “A Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, and a tree was planted in his memory in its Garden of the Righteous.

It became a great privilege in the wake of that recognition of the Portuguese Consul for others to be so honored, but the particulars of that early choice are worth mentioning. First, the Portuguese consul did not come to the aid and succor of the victims of Hitler’s regime years after Germany had locked horns with America and Russia. He did not join others who sensed that the allies would win. He was perhaps the first “just” who intuited the absolute necessity of immediate refusal, defiance and bravery. And of making no distinction between king and beggar! Perhaps next, he made no priority list of who was more worthy of help and who, less worthy. He wrote his name until his hands and wrists were sore. His magnetism attracted others to come to his support. His role in history was confirmed and celebrated in the handsome halls of France on the seventieth anniversary of those days.

There were concerts in synagogues with opera singers, cantors, and boy sopranos singing prayers and anthems, Hatikvah and La Marseillaise. There were cocktails-dinatoires galore, meaning, marvelous stemware filled with the delights of the soil and sun of the area and accompanied by exquisite dainty and tasty treats. And there were tears galore among the smiles.

Lissy Jarvik, presently an American and a Californian, a woman in her late eighties, told us her tale. She was 16, traveling from her native Germany to Holland, from Belgium into France, and thence toward Lisbon. She shared the triumph of her life as a physician and a scholar, a mother and a grandmother, and toasted Aristides de Sousa Mendes as her savior. Her grandson bears his name in memory and gratitude.

Here, in this portion of France, where the once promising French republic had surrendered all its best traditions, another republic was born, the republic founded by Aristides de Sousa Mendes. And, blessedly, there is no political agenda, no opinion and propaganda attached to the legacy he has left. Only, when you have a choice, take the chance to do a class act.

If Humphrey Bogart said “You’ve got class” in one of his movies, he didn’t mean how you looked or where you were from. It meant, you’ve got the right instinct. The instant response of helping those in dire need.

We have a monument in Newport, at Breton State Park, overlooking Narragansett Bay, which celebrates the Great Discoveries of the early Portuguese sailors and explorers, who used their astrolabes (a Jewish invention) and their knowledge of the tides’ secrets.

The plaques in Portugal and France on the other hand declare the Great Discoveries of the spirit, those of the Consul. “If you save one life, you have recreated humankind,” is the succinct biblical “bumper sticker.” It was quoted again and again with the number 30,000 attached to it.

“How did you find out about our forebear?” asked one of the grandchildren. “Oh,” I explained, “I saw that sepia snapshot of Sousa Mendes with a bearded
rabbii, Chaim Kruger of Bordeaux, whom he had helped. It was a strange candid shot, blurred and out of focus. I explored it, decades ago, and it brought me here to join you.”

In Rhode Island, where the sea washes our region, we name rocks and streets and bridges for our founders. We have our Roger Williams who wanted to rescue those “troubled in conscience.” We have Touro Synagogue, where Jews could be safe and open, not hidden. All through public schools I met Portuguese-speaking classmates with the same names as those I had read on the list of founders of Touro. These names dated to when we were just a colony.

Of course, it is of prime importance to remember the fallen, not just the raised. And, the dignity of those who came through alive, not only through those who helped, but by their own ingenuity and strength. But the beauty of a class act reassures us that we live not only on the surface level of life, but within the spiritual domain so perfectly defined by the Consul from Portugal. His was a zen and/or Hasidic enlightenment that occurred on a few days at the start of a fateful summer seven decades ago.

Among the details of our pilgrimage that I will remember for a long time was the singing of Hatikvah in the great synagogue of Bordeaux. As an antisentimentialist, an ironist, I avoid the show of emotion, but I was suddenly moved to tears. “Why?” I asked lady Michael. “Because of the context,” she replied. “It’s not a likely land for the singing of Israel’s national anthem.”

And then, I will recall meeting Blima and Moshe, the French survivors who joined us as observers of these celebrations. Those are the names of my late parents, and the couple had been hidden children during the war.

Blima told me a remarkable story. “My father was murdered in Treblinka. I actually went there and found the exact spot where he was incinerated. I said Kaddish for him there, and I returned to do it again a year later. Zachor, we Jews never forget: the souls who saved or hid us, and the recognition of the evil done to us.”

In 2008 Temple Emanu-El commissioned a new Torah in honor of Lea Eliash (1916-2006)—beloved member of the Temple Emanu-El and greater Rhode Island communities for over 50 years, mother, teacher, public witness, colleague, and friend—and called the project Lea’s Letters—a new Torah for our Temple. On Sunday, September 26, 2010, to great (Jewish) fanfare, the new Torah was dedicated. Among those present were Temple congregants (including those who had contributed financially as well as those who had contributed their time and talent to the project) and clergy. Special guests were Asya, Ted, and Jonathan Berger, Lea’s cherished daughter, son-in-law, and grandson, who live in New York City.

On the same date, a companion “teaching wall” (to use Asya Berger’s
On the second day of the occupation, Jews were ordered to line up, men on one side, women and children on the other. The men, including Shleime, were taken away—Shleime, Lea would later find out, to Dachau. The women and children were allowed to return to their homes. On the third day, Nazi soldiers went apartment-to-apartment, forcibly confiscating all Jewish-owned valuables.

In July the Nazis ordered all Jews in Kovno to relocate to a ghetto. The Ghetto was surrounded by an electrified, barbed-wire fence. Nazi soldiers and menacing dogs guarded the gates. The area set aside for the Kovno Ghetto, barely adequate for its 12,000 residents before the war, had to accommodate 30,000 Jews.

Everyone not too old or too young to work was conscripted into forced labor on behalf of Hitler’s war effort: Jews of the Kovno Ghetto worked in factories, built roads, and constructed an airport. Lea was assigned to a brigade of 36 Jews who worked in a fur factory manufacturing sheepskin vests and gloves for German soldiers fighting near Stalingrad.

Guarded by German soldiers with guns and dogs, Lea’s brigade had to line up every morning at 5:00 and stand motionless and silent while the Germans counted and recounted them. Anyone caught moving was beaten. All were subject to verbal abuse.

Counting was a part of the Germans’ strategy to deter attempts to escape. If 36 Jews left the Ghetto for work in the morning, 36 had to return in the evening. If the brigade returned to the Ghetto with even one fewer than 36, they were told that the rest of the brigade would be shot.

Lea knew these were not idle threats. In the fall of 1941, she got word that her father, mother, and sister, all of whom lived in Marijampole, Lithuania (where Lea was born and grew up), were, together with the town’s other Jews, rounded up by the Nazis, taken to the bank of the Shesupe River, and ordered to dig ditches. They were then systematically shot and covered with earth—many of them still alive.

Lea and her brigade worked at the fur factory from 7:00 AM to 7 PM. To prevent them from smuggling anything into the Ghetto, the workers were searched in the evening before reentering. They were not, however, searched before marching the two miles to the factory in the morning. This would be critical to Lea’s plan to save Asya.

In 1942 rumor spread within the Ghetto that the Nazis were planning a Kinder Aktion, or deportation of children to death camps. Lea was determined to do whatever she could so that Asya would survive. The opportunity presented itself through Berta Schmulowitz.
Lea had met Berta and her husband on August 14, 1941, the day before the Kovno Ghetto was officially sealed off. As Lea walked toward the Ghetto she saw a man and a woman standing in the road crying bitterly. Other Jews, immersed in their own thoughts and fears, passed by the despondent couple, but Lea stopped and asked if she could help. Berta told her that she and her husband had left their small town just two days earlier to come to Kovno for a business conference. They had left their two young sons with their grandparents. When Lea saw the Schmulowitzes on the road, Berta had just received word from a non-Jewish neighbor that Nazis had invaded their town and slaughtered all the Jews, including Berta’s two sons and their grandparents. Berta and her husband were distraught. They knew no one in Kovno and did not know where to turn.

Lea consoled them as well as she could and took them to her meager home– a room “not much bigger than a pantry”– in the Ghetto. Lea found them a bed and shared her food. The three adults and one child became a family. Berta was so grateful to Lea that, when the opportunity arose, Berta’s response to her own loss was to help save Asya. As Lea said, “Survival was their only revenge on Hitler–survival in a peaceful way.”

Berta had a childhood friend, Vale Marciulionis, who lived with her husband Jurgis just outside the Kovno Ghetto. Vale, a nurse and head of an orphanage, was Catholic and had no children. After a secret meeting with Berta, Vale and her husband agreed to hide Asya on three conditions: Asya’s name would be changed to the Lithuanian Aldute; Asya would be brought up Catholic; and only Lea or Shleime could claim Asya after the war. If neither Lea nor Shleime survived, Asya would become Vale and Jurgis’ daughter. Lea agreed.

Even though Asya was blonde and blue-eyed and could easily pass for Lithuanian, Vale and Jurgis were taking a tremendous risk: an inquisitive neighbor or a careless remark could lead to discovery and death for all three. But, as Vale told Lea, she wanted to show the world “that not all human beings had turned into beasts–there was still some humanity left.”

On the agreed-upon day, Lea, carrying a cloth sack in which Asya was hidden, lined up with her brigade. Because Lea did not want to sedate Asya, she explained to the child that she had to be very, very quiet. Somehow Asya complied and the work brigade passed through the gates of the Ghetto without being stopped. When the brigade was beyond the guards’ sight, Lea slipped away and brought Asya to Vale’s home. Choking back tears, Lea hugged and kissed Asya goodbye and ran to the factory.

The Lithuanians who worked in the factory– especially a Christian woman chemist– were kind and sympathetic to the Jews. Because of the prohibition on radios and newspapers in the Ghetto, the Kovno Jews had no official access to information about world events. The chemist, however, kept the Jews in the factory informed by telling them the news she heard on the radio in her home. The chemist felt that if Lea did not escape she faced certain death. She repeatedly urged Lea to try to escape. As much as Lea yearned to be with Asya, she could not do this knowing that her escape meant certain death for the rest of her brigade. In mid-1944, however, the chemist relayed alarming news to Lea and the other factory workers: the Nazis were losing the war and were planning to liquidate the Kovno Ghetto.

So it was that on July 8, 1944, Nazi soldiers arrived at the factory at midday and told the Jews that work was over for the day and they were to return to the Ghetto– a portentous sign. The chemist called Lea to her office and begged her not to return to the Ghetto. Once again Lea answered that she could not save her own life at the cost of 35 other lives. The chemist then pressed her gold watch on Lea saying, “Please, Lea, take it. It might help you escape and be reunited with your daughter.”

Soon after Lea and her brigade returned to the Ghetto, the Germans set fire to its four corners and began shooting. Because of the fire, the barbed wire fence was no longer electrified. Lea saw her chance; she ran towards the fence and begged a young guard to let her out. “What will you give me?” he responded. “I have a date tonight.” Lea offered him all she had– the gold watch. The guard lifted the wire and Lea crawled under it and ran for freedom and Asya.

When Lea arrived at the Marciulionis’ house no one was there, but she found a hidden note from Vale: because of the chaos, she and Jurgis had taken Asya to stay with relatives in a safer village. Not knowing where else to go, Leah ran to the factory, but the many Nazi soldiers in the area made it too dangerous to remain. One sympathetic Lithuanian worker from the factory let Lea hide in his pigsty for a few days. Another allowed Lea to stay in an underground bunker near his house.
When the Nazis were finally driven out of Lithuania and the war ended, Lea returned to Kovno and lived in an abandoned building with some Jewish friends from her work brigade. Lea ultimately made contact with Vale, and although it was difficult for Vale and Jurgis— they had, of course, grown to love Asya as a daughter—they honored their promise to Lea and relinquished the child.

Not long after, thanks to the efforts of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Lea and Asya learned that Shleime was alive. The two then traveled to Munich, a gathering place for survivors that was also near Dachau. They were reunited with Shleime, who, though a shadow of himself, had somehow also survived.

LEA IN AMERICA

Lea, Shleime, and Asya began to rebuild their lives in Munich. With her consummate Hebrew language skills, Lea found work— first as a Hebrew teacher and then, in 1948, when Israel became an independent nation, as a staff member at the newly established Israeli consulate in Munich. Ultimately, however, Lea and Shleime saw no future for themselves in postwar Europe. A future seemed possible either in Israel or America; they chose America.

All “displaced persons” wanting to settle in the United States after the war had to be sponsored by a company or family that would take financial responsibility for them. Lea and her family were sponsored by the Hassenfeld family and arrived in Providence on November 30, 1951. The Joint Distribution Committee made all arrangements and paid all their expenses.

Lea immediately found work as a Hebrew teacher. She taught briefly at Providence Hebrew Day School, then at Temple Emanu-El’s Religious School (a better fit for Lea, religiously) until her retirement in 1998, and finally, post-retirement, she taught children and adults in the community— for a total of over 50 years. When asked why she chose to teach Hebrew— and Lea was asked the question many times over her long career— Lea invariably answered: to keep the Hebrew language alive— to keep Judaism alive.

As a teacher, Lea made a unique impact on three generations of Rhode Island Jews. With her warm, caring manner she transmitted (inside as well as outside the classroom) both her love of Yiddishkeit and her respect for all people. Lea never, NEVER, forgot a student’s Hebrew name. She had a kind word for even the most wayward of Hebrew students— students who loved Lea and whose children often studied Hebrew in Lea’s classroom in their turn.

Lea often invited students who needed special help with Hebrew to her home on Morris Avenue (just a few yards from the Temple) where she tutored them at no cost, serving them cookies and milk to boot. Even well into her eighties, Lea taught Hebrew to Russian students new to America and to our community, to adults (in Temple Emanu-El’s Institute of Jewish Studies), and to converts and prospective converts to Judaism.

Like all the best teachers, Lea herself was a lifelong learner. Until no longer physically able, Lea met each week with friends and colleagues to study and discuss Tanakh and Bialik’s Sefer Aggadah entirely in Hebrew.

But Lea was not only a stellar Hebrew teacher. During the infamous bliz-
zard of 1978, Shleime took ill. Unable to get to a hospital and on his deathbed, Shleime made Lea promise that she would tell her story— their story— to the community. So Lea’s life of publicly bearing witness to the Holocaust began.

Lea kept her promise to Shleime: until her death in 2006, Lea traveled from one end of Rhode Island to the other speaking about her wartime experience. She spoke to groups of adults and groups of children, to Jews and non-Jews, in public and in private gatherings. For these efforts in 1997 Rhode Island College awarded Lea an honorary doctor of public service degree.

Each story from the darkness that was the Holocaust is remarkable in its own way, Lea’s story was remarkable for its message of hope. Rather than seeing the whole non-Jewish world in Europe as evil, she invariably spoke of her appreciation for the kindness, the humanity, of people— often non-Jews— who put themselves at risk to help her and her daughter. When she told her story to Jews and non-Jews in the community, she made sure to tell about her coworker in the factory who gave her the watch that, as a bribe to a guard, allowed her to escape the Ghetto. She talked about her reunion with Asya and how difficult it was for Vale and Jurgis Marciluionis, the Catholic couple who sheltered Asya during the war years, to give Asya up— but they did so because they had given their word. At Yom HaShoah Planning Committee meetings, Lea’s was invariably the voice urging the community to remember not only the terrible losses, but also the people who helped Jews despite danger to themselves. As she said in her interview with the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, “In a world full of fighting and hatred, there were still human beings.”

Lea was a master Hebrew teacher. She was a compelling witness to the horrors she experienced during the Holocaust. Perhaps more than anything, though, Lea is remembered for the person she was. As Asya said at Lea’s funeral, “In every phase of her life there were always choices— and always she pushed away the curses, the giving in to sadness and despair, the fear and uncertainty, and sought the good, the hopeful, the positive, the possible.” Lea gave all who knew her (again in Asya’s words) a “precious gift— a way of seeing, a way of choosing, that moves one forward, that transforms painful circumstances to positive actions, that makes curses into blessings.” In her life Lea embodied God’s injunction to the Jewish people in Deuteronomy (30:19): “I have put before you life and death...Choose life.” For this we remember her.

Postscript: In 2007 Vale and Jurgis Marciulionis were designated Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem.

ENDNOTES
1 Kathryn de Boer designed, and I wrote the text for, the panels.
2 A note on a name: as the introductory panel to the Lea’s Letters teaching wall explains, a decision was made early on in the Lea’s Letters project to call it Lea’s Letters and to refer to Lea Eliash as Lea. While some in the community were close enough to Lea Eliash to call her Lea, others, no matter what age, once introduced to her as Mrs. Eliash (as I was; she taught my three sons Hebrew at Temple Emanu-El Religious School) will always think of her as Mrs. Eliash. I have decided to follow the original editorial decision and, in affection and respect, refer to Lea Eliash in this article as Lea.
3 In addition to sources specified in the text, information about Lea’s life is derived from Lea’s own writings, interviews with Lea, and writings about her by her daughter Asya Berger and members of the Temple Emanu-El community. Information was also gleaned from speaking with others in the community who were eager to share their memories of Lea. Information about organizations is derived from their Websites.
4 Part of Russia in the nineteenth century, Lithuania established its independence in 1918 after the collapse of the czarist regime. Kovno was a center of Jewish cultural, educational, and economic life. The Kovno Jewish community was lively, colorful, and well-organized, and enjoyed a special status in the Jewish world. In 1935 there were four daily Yiddish newspapers published in Kovno, both Hebrew and Jewish schools, and 16 synagogues. The Slobodker Yeshiva, famous throughout Russian and Eastern European Jewry, was across the river in Slobodka. In the wider society, Jews were prominent as doctors, dentists, and educators. They held important positions in commerce and industry. Yet, there was some anti-Semitism; there were limits to what Jews could aspire to— very few held government positions or judgehips— but on the whole, before the invasion by Stalin in 1940 and then Hitler in 1941, Jews enjoyed relative security and a good life.
5 Much of the information about Lea’s experiences during the war and immediately after comes from the interview she gave to a representative of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. Inspired by his experience making “Schindler’s List,” Steven Spielberg established the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in 1994 to gather video testimonies from survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust. While most of those who gave testimony were Jewish survivors, the Foundation also interviewed homosexual survivors, Jehovah’s Witness survivors, liberators and liberation witnesses, political prisoners, rescuers and aid providers, Roma and Sinti (Gypsy) survivors, survivors of eugenics policies, and war crimes trials participants. Within several years, the Foundation’s Visual History Archive held nearly 52,000 video testimonies in 32 languages, representing 56 countries; it is the largest archive of its kind in the world, exceeding Yad Vashem’s.

In January 2006, the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation became part of the College of Letters, Arts & Sciences at the University of Southern California, where the testimonies in the
I REMEMBER KLEIN’S FARM IN REHOBOTH

PEARL BRAUDE

Pearl Finkelstein Braude (1917-1995) is fondly remembered as Temple Beth-El’s longest-serving rebbezetin (from 1938 to 1974). But she was far more than a silent helpmate.

Born in Providence, she was the youngest child of Joseph M. and Rose Levy Finkelstein, both Russian immigrants. Pearl’s brother was A. Archie, and her sister was Marian. The family was affiliated with Temple Beth Israel.

Pearl attended Hope High School and in 1937 became a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Pembroke College. As a major in biblical history and the history of religions, she studied Hebrew at Brown with Rabbi William G. Braude, who had been called to the pulpit of Temple Beth-El, on Broad Street, in 1932. They were married in 1938 by a trio of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform rabbis in the garden of the Finkelstein home in Johnston. Pearl’s Hebrew name was Peninnah (precious gem), but she was known widely as Pen, the nickname bestowed by her husband.

While the mother of three sons (Joel Isaac, born in 1940; Benjamin Meir, born in 1945; and Daniel, born in 1948), Pearl participated actively in Temple life. She was particularly devoted to the arts. For example, in 1952, having studied modern dance at Connecticut College, she began teaching classes to Beth-El teenagers. She was highly influential in espousing a modern design for the new Temple constructed on Orchard Avenue in 1954. Indeed, after meeting the architect Percival Goodman at a conference in New York, she recommended him to the board of trustees’ building committee. She designed draperies and other accoutrements for her husband’s study and made lectern covers out of Indian saris for the sanctuary and chapel.

In their respect for Jewish tradition and to provide hospitality for all kinds of guests, the Braudes kept a kosher home at 93 Arlington Avenue. Pearl decorated it in intriguing and colorful ways. In a parlor, for example, she placed broken bottles over windows to simulate stained glass. Her sense of style and playfulness was also expressed in her selection and design of hats, which she often paraded at services. Perhaps another indication of her sense of humor was displayed in response to a questionnaire sent to Brown alumni in 1959. She explained that the “nature of her spouse’s business”
THE KLEINS’ HOUSE AND CAMPUS
The Kleins lived in a large, three-story, frame house. The clapboards were painted white. (There might have been green trim, but I’m not sure.) On the left side of the house, facing front, there was a cellar to which we descended through a bulkhead with large doors lying flat as a protective cover. The doors leading into the cellar seemed to be open all the time except, I imagine, when there were heavy rains. When we walked down the three stone steps into the cellar, a heavy, musty, moldy smell hit our nostrils, and we felt as if we were entering a dark and mysterious cave. It was always cold there. The Kleins used the cellar as a storehouse. I think they stored everything there, from their homemade beer, sauerkraut, and pickles to Mrs. Klein’s preserves. In the cellar, the guest families, too, must have stored some of their provisions.

The Klein house was perched on a slight incline overlooking an open space—a sort of campus. Facing the back of the house at about 50 feet stood cabins grouped haphazardly in a semicircle.

Facing the back of the house, the barn and barnyard stood to the left. Barley, feeding grain for the chickens and ducks, and hay for the horses were stored in the barn. There was a hayloft where the Klein boys climbed up to hoist and pitch the hay for the horses. Below were stalls for the horses and cows. I can’t remember where the wagon was kept, but I would think during inclement weather there must have been space for it inside. To the left of the barn was the chicken coop, where one heard the cackling of hens all day long. They laid their eggs in the coop but were free to roam around the barnyard. Outside the coop were long, narrow feeding and watering troughs. Often, we helped the Klein girls throw feed in the troughs and watched the chickens run to satisfy their hunger. Not far was a well from which water was pumped. Attached to the well was a huge metal dipper. We all used the same dipper to drink the icy liquid, which jetted in fits and starts and then came gushing out of the well.

Behind the barn and away from everything else was the “swill dump.” There the pigs oinked away in their enclosed sty. That was one area I avoided. After my initial viewing, I held my nose. The stench and the ugliness of those animals wallowing in their filth repelled me. When I was able to read, sometime later, and saw illustrations of the cute, little pink “piggies” going to market and eating roast beef, I looked incredulously. “Pink,” I exclaimed. “Pink!” I saw only the black, mud-caked, ugly bodies of the pigs at Klein’s Farm. Nor could I ever bring myself to eat pig’s flesh.

I remember the names of some of the families who lived there those summers. The Schwartzes lived closest to the barnyard area. They had two boys, Leo and Philip. Then there was the Silverman family. I believe that they, too, had two sons, and a daughter, Madeleine. Somewhere not far from them in the imperfect semicircle lived the Cohens. I don’t remember how many children they had. But
one boy’s name was Sydney. He wrote, years later, for the Jewish Herald. Farther down to the right (facing the back of the Kleins’ house) lived the Goldbergs, a childless couple who sort of adopted me. They were our closest neighbors. And finally came the Finklestein area, where we lived.

OUR CABINS AND TENT
We occupied three cabins. (My parents always referred to them as “shacks.”) My brother, Archie, had one by himself. I believe any extra space was used to store coats and other necessities. Next was the shack where my older sister, Marian, and I slept. Finally came the shack for my mother and father.

These jerry-built constructions were only large enough for one bed and a curtained, makeshift closet for our clothing. There was one window, and I slept next to it, always sticking my nose close to the screen. I’m not sure, but I think we stayed there two or possibly three summers. In addition to the three shacks we had a huge Army and Navy surplus tent, which my father bought after the First World War.

We came to Klein’s Farm as soon as my brother and sister’s summer vacations began. I guess we came by streetcar because at that time, about 1921 or 1922, we did not yet own an automobile. We loaded all our belongings in large bundles and wicker baskets and made the eight-and-a-half mile journey to Klein’s Farm. We got off at the stop at Sheldon’s Corner in Rehoboth, and Mr. Klein and/or his sons would be there to meet us with the wagon and take us down the dirt road to the farm site.

The first order of business was to set up the tent. The men of the Klein family and any other male summer residents my father could press into service helped to put up the main staves and drive the pegs into the ground, stabilizing the heavy canvas. To my four (or five-year) old eyes, the tent was enormous and seemed to reach the sky! It served as my mother’s makeshift kitchen. Pots and utensils were hung on the canvas walls. My mother prepared her family’s meals on a small table and sometimes we ate there. But most often we ate outside, sitting down on benches around a huge community table.

I suppose one of the reasons we didn’t eat inside the tent was because, as one entered, there was always the odor of kerosene. My mother cooked on little kerosene burners. They had mica windows, which were always black and had to be constantly cleaned. (Years later, in 1953, during the first time my husband and I visited Israel, we went to our cousin’s home in Herzliyya. On a stone-slabbed counter, above a white-tiled floor, my eyes met the same kind of primitive cooking units, and the same odor of kerosene permeated the kitchen.)

FATHER
My father and, I suppose, all the other fathers and husbands came to Klein’s Farm only on weekends. For my father the weekend was very short. He ran a grocery store on the corner of Hope and John Streets, across from St. Joseph’s Catholic Church and School. Most of the other men arrived Friday night. My father did manage to get a helper but usually did not arrive until Saturday afternoon. He came by streetcar laden with goodies. Sometimes, I was permitted to walk down the dirt road with my brother and sister to meet him at Sheldon’s Corner. I think it was almost a mile. Well, perhaps it was half a mile but it seemed longer because there were signposts indicating the border between Rehoboth and Seekonk. Then, along the same dirt road a short distance later, there were other signs revealing that Seekonk had ended and once again Rehoboth began. (Years later, when I made my periodic visits to the area and saw those same border signs, I wondered whether there had been a feud between two families whose animosity caused this strange patchwork of borders.)

Among my greatest joys during the summers at Klein’s Farm were the Sundays my father made ice cream. The act of making that homemade ice cream was an impressive display of will. He would prepare the cream sugar and flavor in the receptacle, pack around the rock salt and the ice he had chipped from a huge block, and then he churned and churned and churned. My father’s patience was prodigious. We children would ask, “Is it ready yet?” Then five minutes later, “Is it ready yet?” It took a long, long time to produce. But what results! Never, never had ice cream tasted so good. (Nor was it ever as cholesterol laden!)

FRUIT TREES, VEGETABLES, AND MEADOWS
One of the fruits my father flavored his ice cream with was peach. The tree-ripened peaches were picked from the orchard behind the cabins. There were apple, peach, pear, and cherry trees. I believe in that stand of trees there was no more than one of each kind. The pear tree was by far the most delicately limbed. There was a younger pear tree inside the campus. In the two or three years that we summered at Klein’s Farm, I watched it grow.

When the fruit trees ripened, all the boys—the Kleins and boarders alike—would climb the branches to pick their quotas. We girls, gazing up, longed to climb too, but were never allowed to do so. We had to content ourselves with the fruit dropped down in baskets.
I have asked myself why it is that I remember the Goldbergs so much more vividly than the others. I suppose it is because of our mutual affection. It was Mrs. Goldberg who called me “Little Miss Mulberry” when I ran around the mulberry bush popping those luscious black berries into my mouth. It was Mr. and Mrs. Goldberg who noticed that an adorable, fluffy, yellow duckling seemed to follow me wherever I went. They named it “The Pearly Duck.”

HOROVITZ FAMILY
There was one other woman whose face I could not forget. She was the mother of the Horovitz family. The Horovitzes were the only ones who did not live in a cabin. They were allowed to rent rooms on the first floor of the Kleins’ house. There was a valid reason for the exception made for this family. Mr. and Mrs. Horovitz had two children: a daughter, Lillian, a lovely blonde a few years older than I, and a son, Beryl.

I don’t know how old Beryl was when I first saw him, perhaps three or four, but he was stricken with an illness. He could neither walk nor even sit up without being propped. Every day Mrs. Horovitz carried him out of the house and spread out a blanket on the campus area in front of the back door and propped him up. There he sat, a good part of the day. He had to be fed and constantly watched. Mrs. Horovitz had the usual, wifely chores to do and also the burden of Beryl’s constant care. Lillian helped her mother a great deal. She was very attentive to her brother. I often sat on the blanket and watched the boy. He was very infantile and could not talk. He did say something that sounded like “Lily,” but that was all. Mrs. Horovitz’s face bore her sorrow. She was quite young when she died. Her son survived her and had to be institutionalized. Mr. Horovitz lived until his nineties. And Lillian (Mrs. Milton Leavitt) was quite surprised that I remembered her brother’s name. Not only do I remember his name, but I remember his face, his close, cropped, dark hair, his black eyes, and much more.

RED SHOES
One Sunday a family came to visit their relatives, who were boarders. They were the greene cousines, recently arrived from Russia. The father was the younger brother of James Goldman of Providence. His name was Yankel Smuel. They brought their daughter, a little girl about my age with short, blonde, straight hair, and she wore what she called her roiteh shichelech— red shoes. They made me gasp admiringly and wish I had a pair.

She was told to play with us while her parents visited with their relatives.
She ran after us as we ran and jumped here and there. Of course, we were barefoot and thought nothing of running into the duck puddle. We splashed in the mud and squished our feet about, and the little blonde girl with the new red shoes did exactly what we did.

Quite soon she had ruined her shoes. We didn't hear the end of the wailing and scolding. Oh, those roiteh shichelech! For years I wanted red shoes but somehow never did buy them.

Recently, I found out the name of that little blonde girl. I located her, still living in Providence. Her name is Lillian Tolman. When she answered the phone I asked if she remembered her roiteh schichelech. We had not seen each other in 68 years, and she was stunned to find that someone else remembered the incident at Klein's Farm. She confessed that all her life she had longed for another pair of red shoes, and every time she passes a shoe store she thinks she might buy some. But so far, neither of us has succeeded.

EGGS AND MILK
Another memory of Klein's Farm was my bout with my mother, who insisted every day I eat a raw egg. It was fresh all right, taken from the coop, but eating it raw! It was torture. To this day I can't eat even a soft-boiled egg, or if I do, the whites have to be completely cooked.

But drinking the milk taken right from the cow was another matter. When the Klein boys milked the cows we would run in, dip their metal dippers into the milk, and guzzle up the warm milk. I always had a huge white mustache all around my face. It was full of the foam that always topped the fresh milk.

The last year we were at Klein's Farm my father forbade our drinking that wonderful warm milk. He had been reading about the process of pasteurization. He wasn't sure the Kleins' cows were tested for tuberculosis. Down the road, the Kinne Farm had a newly built pasteurizing plant. So my father walked and purchased pasteurized milk from Mr. Kinne. The switch to the Kinnes' ice-cold milk took some getting used to. And it wasn't anywhere near as much fun to drink!

NUTS AND JELLY
Toward the end of summer, two events overshadowed all others. One was looking for ripened nut trees, and the second was picking Mrs. Klein's roses for her rose jelly.

The older boys with rakes and other farm implements would walk down the road towards Kinne's Farm looking for the nut trees. The younger boys and we girls would follow behind. I think the big boys didn't want to be bothered with us little kids, but we weren't easily dissuaded and tagged along anyway. We had to walk through thick growth and it wasn't always easy, but we managed to sneak in and under before the branches slapped us in the face.

When the nut trees were finally spotted, the older boys climbed up and hit the upper branches with their implements. After the nuts fell to the ground, we little ones picked them up and put them in baskets. The trees yielded their green clusters. The nuts were encased within a thick, soft green covering.

Of course before long we had to test the ripening of our pick by biting into the surrounding cortex to get at the nut. Not only was the fibrous outer layer bitter, but it was also difficult to bite through. When we reached the inner coating, again we had to bite through to the center. They were never really ripe. They had to be put aside and be allowed to ripen. But the first taste was always the sweetest. In retrospect, I think they were hazelnuts. It wasn't until weeks later, after their outer coat grew brown, that we could eat them. That we did back home.

Years later I brought my husband to Rehoboth to see Klein's Farm and to look for the nut trees. The farm and the three summer shacks were gone, and never, even after an exhaustive search, could we find the nut trees.

Each summer we picked all kinds of wild berries. We picked strawberries, blueberries, mulberries, blackberries, and raspberries, which my mother made into jam or sauce for ice cream. But no jam made from these berries compared to Mrs. Klein's rose jelly.

We girls were allowed to pick the petals from the full-grown roses, which lined the fence flanking the Kleins' house. I guess they were a special species of roses. I don't believe one can make rose jam or jelly from any garden variety of rose. In any case, we picked them diligently, often pricking our fingers in the process. No matter, for no damage, no hardship, no pain to our tender hands was too much to suffer for the final result.

How Mrs. Klein prepared the petals I can't remember, but during the cooking the aroma permeated the kitchen, the entire upstairs, and downstairs. Even those walking outside the house were aware that she was making her famous rose jelly. Later, not waiting until it cooled and before Mrs. Klein poured its rose-colored sweetness into her glass jars, soon to be sealed, we dipped spoons into the big kettle and spread the jelly over our slices of bread. Ah! How perfumed were our young nostrils as we bit into the glowing sweetness. How that perfume still lingers in the memory of this septuagenarian!
THE UNDOING OF OUR SUMMERS

Our shack, the one my sister and I slept in, developed a leaking roof. It took a long time before it was fixed. So when we had a particularly severe rainstorm, my sister and I were forced to sleep in another shack. We shared beds with the Kleins’ little girls, Rosie, Jeannie, and Clara. Needless to say, amid giggles and wiggles, with scary thunder and lightning overhead, and other girls telling ghost stories, we had little sleep on those nights. I believe it was those very nights that eventually proved the undoing of our summers at Klein’s Farm.

It turned out that our bed partners harbored head lice, and it wasn’t long before those little migrant creatures took up residence in my own hospitable head. Although I was given frequent baths and hair washings, the infestation was not discovered until that fall when I was enrolled in kindergarten.

After the first week, a school nurse visited our class and examined our mouths for cavities, listened to our heartbeats for rheumatic fever, took our pulses, injected us with TB tests, and very carefully examined our hair. And there they were! A colony of full-grown lice that had even hatched their progeny all over my head. Can you imagine my mother’s humiliation! I was sent home with a note for my mother with instructions.

Then began the special washings and combings until my “squatters” were finally evicted. My poor mother had to wash my hair in kerosene, scrub it with tar soap, and then after it was rinsed, she had to go over the entire head with a fine-tooth comb. And believe me I know what a fine-tooth comb can do to snarls in thickly-grown hair! And there was no escape from the odor I was emitting! After a while the lice finally disappeared.

Some months later, as we kindergarten children sat clustered around our teacher, she showed us pictures of cows, horses, hens, and chickens. She then announced that she was going to read us a story about a farm. And did we know what a farm was? I piped out triumphantly, “A farm, oh yes, that’s where I got the lice in my hair!”

I’m afraid my lice story was the final straw. My long suffering mother, who had worked so hard, who had scrubbed all the mulberry stains and raspberry stains and cherry stains, who had cooked so creatively in her tent kitchen, who did so much to keep us clean and healthy, now put her foot down. And so ended our glorious and carefree summers at Klein’s Farm.

ENDNOTES

1 The only Kleins listed in the Annual Reports of the Town Officers and School Committee of the Town of Rehoboth during the early decades of the twentieth century were Josef and his wife Bertha. Indeed, the couple owned real estate in the first assessors’ district between 1918 and 1929. Its initial value was $1,350, and its final value was $2,900. (Thus the tax grew from $38.35 to $98.60.) No addresses were listed in the Annual Reports, so it is impossible to determine precisely where the Kleins lived in Rehoboth. But the town’s population in 1920 was only 2,065. Needless to say, Josef and Bertha had not been married in Rehoboth, and none of their children was born (or died) there. According to Providence vital records, two of the Kleins’ daughters were born there: Sally on March 16, 1914 and Rose on August 15, 1916.

2 Three streetcar companies served Rehoboth. The first, the Providence & Taunton Street Railway, which began in 1898, had 17.5 miles of track. A ride from one end to the other took an hour and a half. The Providence & Fall River Street Railway, which opened in 1901, was also known as the Snake Line and the Short Line. The third company, the Taunton & Pawtucket Street Railway, began service in 1904. All streetcar service ended in 1927, which surely limited access to Klein’s Farm. See the illustrated booklet, 325th Anniversary of the Town of Rehoboth (published by the town in 1968), 72-4.

3 This spot cannot be found on maps of Rehoboth. There does not appear to have been a Sheldon Farm or Dairy, and streetcar maps are no longer extant.

4 The grocery was located at 100 Hope Street. In 1920 the Finkelsteins resided at 159 Dudley Street. By 1925 they were living at 16 Gay Street (in South Providence). By 1928 Joseph became the president of Atlantic Knitting Company. Archie, who studied at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and was a veteran of World War II, succeeded his father in the business, which specialized in woolen, worsted, and rayon fabrics.

5 In 1920 Harris Goldberg had a crockery shop and a home at 424 North Main.

6 In 1914 Isaac and Lillian Horvitz were married in Providence. Their daughter, Lillian, was born the following year.

7 Ruthanna C. Davis, the genealogy librarian of the Blanding Public Library in Rehoboth, determined that the Kinne Farm was located at the corner of Blanding Road and Summer Street. Although a herd of 135 cows survived, the farm buildings were destroyed by fire in July 1953. Benjamin Kinne, Sr., who built a new house on Blanding Road, died in 1959. Benjamin Kinne, Jr. moved to Vermont, and the former farm became the Sun Valley Golf Course.

This article appeared in the June 1, 2005 issue of Foodservice Equipment & Supplies, an online publication of Reed Business Information, and is used with its permission. After David passed away in 2009, Bobbie Friedman, his niece by marriage and our graphic designer, thought that the article would be of interest to our readers. Regrettably, however, there was no recognition of his life as a Jew. Fortunately, David’s daughter, Diane Ducoff, has provided a loving postscript.

When visitors enter the reception area of Paramount Restaurant Supply in Warren, Rhode Island, on one side of the walls they see a plaque recognizing the annual recipient of the dealership’s Unsung Hero Award. Paramount’s associates select the winner from among their ranks based on the individual or department that went to the greatest lengths but received the least amount of acknowledgement in helping the company achieve its success over the past year.

If the foodservice equipment and supplies industry had such a designation, it would go to Paramount Chairman David Friedman, Foodservice Equipment & Supplies’ 2005 Hall of Fame inductee. If you have never met or heard of Friedman, you are not alone but there is little doubt that you are familiar with his work for it has touched virtually all corners of the foodservice industry.

David Friedman was born in 1922 in New York City and his family moved to Providence two years later. Like many from that era, Friedman began learning the lessons of the business world at a very young age. His father was an auctioneer, liquidator and owner of dry goods stores. As a way of contributing to the family business, a 14-year-old Friedman began making trips to New York City via steamship to buy for his father’s stores.

Oddly enough, it was the auction portion of the family business that had
significant impact on Friedman. “In the auction business one learns a lot about why people go out of business,” Friedman says. “You hear the same excuses about why it was not their fault and soon learn that people never tell you the whole story. Ninety-nine percent of the time it was not their fault, which was a good first lesson for me as a businessman and is why we are always accountable to our customers.

“There is an old saying out there that goes, ‘The one who will put you out of business is your customer,’” Friedman says.

In 1940 at age 18, Friedman quit his job at National Paper Company and gave in to his entrepreneurial spirit. “I knew a little something about the auction business so I bought a few lots of items and sold them,” he recalls. “I made more money doing that than I did in five weeks at National Paper.”

At the same time Friedman was testing the entrepreneurial waters, Eli Feingold was struggling to hire and retain a salesperson for Paramount Fountain and Restaurant Supply, a fledging company that distributed whipped cream machines to ice cream fountains in New England. After watching her husband hire nine different salespeople, none of whom stuck with the company for longer than a cup of coffee, Feingold’s wife suggested he meet with Friedman, whom she had come to know while the two worked at National Paper.

Feingold hired Friedman in September, paying him $22.50 per week. Friedman was given the farthest flung regions of the company’s territory and had to provide his own car and gas, which in 1940 cost $1 for eight gallons.

The relationship between the two men grew stronger by the day and paid immediate dividends as the dealership generated $80,000 in sales during their first year together. From that point, Friedman’s natural business and customer-service instincts kicked into high gear as he started adding paper goods and china items to the company’s fast-growing line of products.

“Everyone thought we were brothers so you could tell how closely we were working together,” Friedman recalls.

THE MOVE TO EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

About seven years after Feingold and Friedman began working together, Paramount made its initial foray into the equipment and supplies industry, which proved to be the turning point for the young company. Feingold traveled to New York City’s famous Mott Street, near the Bowery, to purchase some booths for State Lunch, a Paramount customer that operated a luncheonette. Unfortunately, the transaction did not go as planned.

“When the booths were delivered they were such junk,” Friedman says. “I told the customer they could come see the booths but I was not going to sell them. Instead, we promised to build new booths.”

State Lunch’s owners insisted on seeing the booths, so they visited the Paramount warehouse. During inspection Friedman pointed out that the booths’ bottoms were made from wooden orange crates, so it was obvious that they would not withstand the wear and tear of a typical restaurant.

“After conferring amongst themselves, they turned to me and said, ‘give us a whole new restaurant,’” Friedman says with a smile. “And once we built the first one, people started coming to us.”

With Friedman continuing to serve as Paramount’s lone salesman, the company continued its pattern of rapid growth. To help ensure the operation kept running smoothly, which in this case meant that customers received their orders in a timely and accurate fashion, Leon Nahigian joined Paramount as its first office manager in 1948 and remains active within the company to this day, serving as vice president.

“David would go out and get the accounts and I would make sure things got done,” Nahigian says. “We used to work out of a kitchen and the subsequent order on the back of a placemat and hand it over to Nahigian, who would take it from there.”

As Paramount’s equipment and supplies business grew, the company started to maintain a decent inventory. And in 1949 when the company moved into a foundry building, which was considerably larger than the previous home, Paramount put the newfound space to use by creating its first-ever showroom. “People thought our new facilities and the move cost a fortune but it cost us almost nothing,” Friedman says.
services. As part of its scope, Industrial Catering sold plenty of sandwiches and pastries to workers at factories and other large companies in the Boston area. Two of Rosenberg’s largest-selling items were coffee and donuts. With Paramount as one of New England’s largest paper cup distributors at the time, Friedman and Rosenberg had gotten to know each other well.

Rosenberg had hired someone to design his donut shop and asked its long-time vendor Paramount to provide the equipment and supplies. With his company having designed and equipped other similar businesses in the area, including an operation known as Donut Kettle, Friedman suggested to Rosenberg that Paramount might fill both roles. And after showing him some of Paramount’s completed projects, Rosenberg went along with the program.

According to Friedman, he received a phone call from Rosenberg at 3 a.m. on the day he was opening his first shop, called Open Kettle. The baker had shown up intoxicated and was not able to light the fryers. So Friedman contacted the manufacturers’ rep for the line of fryers. Luckily, he lived not far from Rosenberg’s shop and was able to help fire up a business that is now known as Dunkin Donuts, a Paramount customer for more than 55 years.

Dunkin Donuts was also the customer that helped Friedman realize that his business opportunities were not limited by geography. At the time the chain got started, most dealerships throughout the United States did business within a radius of 200 miles or fewer from their offices. But when Rosenberg asked if Friedman knew any dealers who could design and equip a store they planned to open in Long Island, New York, Foodservice Equipment & Supplies’ 2005 Hall of Famer said his company was up to the task.

“In those days, almost nobody crossed the state line,” Friedman recalls. “And those companies that did were usually good-sized and were working on hotels. The restaurant equipment business was entirely different.”

So as Dunkin Donuts grew, so too did Paramount, which led to the dealership offering to tackle its customers’ projects from concept to completion, regardless of location. Paramount and its related companies could design, construct, equip and even finance any foodservice operation most anywhere in the country, making it a pioneer in this aspect of the business.

“For me, it might have been the adventure of doing a job away from home,” Friedman says. “Here was a company that was a good customer that was looking to grow. So I thought, ‘Why shouldn’t we grow with it?’ It is better to be lucky than smart.”

Of course the learning curve for this was not without its setbacks. Figuring out the proper way to price a job that was taking place outside of your primary market can be more complex when compared to other similar projects. Friedman and Paramount learned this lesson the hard way after taking a loss on a pair of Dunkin Donuts shops it built in Indiana. “We finished them but quickly changed our approach,” Friedman says.

STARTING NEW VENTURES

Over the years, Paramount has operated a series of related companies, the number of which has expanded and contracted as opportunities inside the foodservice industry have evolved. All of this was part of Friedman’s unflinching commitment to servicing Paramount’s customers and his willingness to take a chance in doing so. Anything Paramount tried— from financing to construction— was done with the intent of supporting the company’s customers.

Two such examples are Crown Mortgage Company and Regency Financial, which made Paramount one of the few dealerships in the country to finance equipment purchases and construction for its customers thus creating additional revenue.
Like any business venture, some finance deals worked out better than others. Situations like this made Friedman and Feingold a little wary that some of the ancillary businesses, like financing, could drag down Paramount. To help alleviate this concern, the partners agreed that Friedman would take responsibility for or ownership of the other companies. That way if the worst happened, Paramount and Feingold would be safe.

For example, one customer Paramount financially backed opened 62 snack bars from Maine to Colorado in the 1950s. Unfortunately, the company did not do very well and Paramount wound up taking ownership of the struggling foodservice provider. “We never made five cents on the deal,” Friedman recalls.

The 1964 World’s Fair in the New York City borough of Queens represented another opportunity for Friedman and Paramount, one that yielded better dividends for Paramount and the industry as a whole. The company, which Friedman took full ownership of in 1962 when Feingold retired, built many of the restaurants on the fairgrounds, shipping trailer after trailer of equipment and supplies from its Rhode Island operations. Once the fair was over, though, the operators were required to have the equipment and furnishings removed at their cost.

Naturally, many of them were not interested in or unable to incorporate the equipment into their operations. So Friedman offered to have Paramount move the items at no cost to the operators, so long as the dealership could assume ownership of the individual pieces. Most of the operators agreed and Friedman used the items to open what is now known as Buy Rite, the dealership’s used equipment arm. Little did Friedman realize at the time that he would leverage the used equipment company as a springboard for a bigger initiative, one that would impact the entire foodservice community.

AN INDUSTRY-SHAPING INVESTMENT

In 1971 Paramount owned acres of used foodservice equipment and an empty building adjacent to a shipyard in Providence, now known as Harborside Park. The company also possessed the ability to design and build a state-of-the-art foodservice environment. At the same time, the foodservice community was enjoying a period of growth and there was a need for new people across all segments, specifically chefs.

Feeling that the foodservice industry had been good to him and it was time to give something back to it, Friedman approached Morris Gaebe, then president of Johnson & Wales, a small business school in downtown Providence. Friedman proposed that Paramount would build and equip a culinary and restaurant management school and lease it back to Johnson & Wales for $5 a square-foot. All Johnson & Wales had to do was recruit the students and run the school.

“I told Mr. Gaebe that I could see there was a need for all types of jobs in
Throughout his 65 years in the foodservice industry, Friedman and Paramount have had to weather their fair share of economic booms and busts. Fortunately for them, the good times have outnumbered the bad. “Every time the economy went down we did better and I think it is because when that happened our people worked harder,” Friedman says. “It was almost as if we did not want to hear that the economy was bad.”

Friedman feels that one reason Paramount has weathered the turbulent times well is due to the fact that it has a sound business infrastructure. “You have to build a strong organization and that runs the business,” he says. “You don’t run the business. If you did, you would need to be in 20 different seats at once and that’s not possible. You build a big business by letting your people know they can build a method of business they can depend on.”

And if a business is successful, its wins come in quantities greater than the losses. “A good businessman makes six right decisions out of 10,” Friedman says. “Anyone who does not take chances does not get anywhere. But you have to be lucky, too.”

Another reason for Paramount’s sustained success is Friedman’s ability to listen to others’ ideas and look beyond today. This has allowed the company to adapt to the changing landscape of the foodservice industry. “You can learn a lot by listening to smart people,” Friedman says.

For example, when the company first started out, its primary customer base consisted of small, independently run ice cream fountains. Today, the majority of Paramount’s business comes from large, multi-unit operators like Dunkin Donuts, Panera Bread and others.

“you are dealing with a different caliber of person,” says Nahigian, who continues to ride the waves of business with Friedman. “Now, you just get 20 orders by dealing with one person. So you adapt your organization to meet their needs.”
Clients’ profiles may have changed, but the formula for keeping them happy remains the same. “We give our customers value and that can be more important than price,” Friedman says. “Things are a lot different than they were, but a customer still wants value.”

Doing this is easier said than done, so it is up to management to work with its customers to manage their expectations accordingly. And in those occurrences when problems do arise, Friedman feels it is important to own up to them quickly, not wasting any time. “You don’t hit the mark all the time,” Friedman says.

As he readily admits, Friedman’s 65-year career in the foodservice industry is a testimony to hard work and perseverance, which he knows is not for everyone. But at 83 years old he shows no signs of slowing down and continues to work closely with Paramount President and CEO Steve McGarry about plans for the company’s future. “We run at a very good pace around here and not everyone can handle it,” Friedman says.

But apparently Paramount’s pace suits McGarry, who has been with the company for more than 30 years, including 14 as president and CEO. McGarry closely follows Friedman’s credo of “the customer is king” and leverages his unwavering dedication to it in growing Paramount. “This will be our best year,” Friedman says of 2005.

And thanks to the organization Friedman has built, Paramount will continue to maintain a good pace for generations to come.
My father, who was born on the Lower East Side in 1922, told us that he began working in his parents' retail business when he was about eight years old. My grandfather Benjamin had been born in Russia and my grandmother Rebecca had been born in Romania, but before moving to New York City they had lived in Milwaukee. Their oldest children, Saul and Jennie, had been born there. Their youngest child, Murray, who also became a successful businessman, was born in Providence.

Benjamin opened a dry goods business, Ben's Bargain Store, on Atwells Avenue. My Dad was very proud of the trips he took with his father to New York to buy merchandise. My father remarked, “In those days there was no television or radio (which came a bit later) so there was more time to absorb some good thoughts that my father and mother had of how to run a business.”

David Friedman was a man who never forgot his roots. He grew up on Willard Avenue and graduated from Hope High School in 1939. Proud of his school, he always helped plan reunions.

My Dad's grandmother lived with Ben, Rebecca, and their children. He was often chosen to stay with her. He once explained: “She was a very smart woman. I took her to synagogue on Saturdays and holidays, and I ate with her. Many of the things I was taught still govern some of my decisions today.”

During World War II, David was stationed in Florida. Introduced by mutual friends in Providence, my parents were married at Temple Emanu-El in 1944.

My Dad loved being an entrepreneur. He certainly took pride in his successes. However, he never ceased to remind all of us that “in the end” all we really have is our name.

I was often reminded while growing up – and even as an adult – that it was so very important to be honest. Dad taught: “If you borrow money or if you buy something, you don’t find excuses for why you don’t have to pay. If you make a deal, you stick by it. If you want to change it, sit down with your lender or partner and work out a new deal. You just don’t change in the middle of a deal because it came out better for the other party after you got started.”

Dad was most grateful to the people who worked with him and for him as he grew his businesses. He aimed to treat his employees with respect.

What disappointed him the most was when someone did not reach his or her potential.

My father never retired from running his businesses. He loved his work. Golf, for example, meant little to him. He did enjoy furnishing our home and, when traveling, shopping for art. But one could say that his vocation was also his avocation.

Paramount and Monarch Industries are still family-owned. My younger brother, Larry, worked closely with Dad until his sudden death at 45 years in 1997. Larry’s son, Michael, has subsequently assumed a leadership position. I too worked in Paramount’s administration for about 15 years.

After Larry’s passing, my parents felt buttressed by their loving family. They continued to feel very close to Marilyn, his widow. My Dad and my husband, Bob, were always very close. I think that Bob quotes him more often than any relative.

David Friedman’s visionary qualities helped inspire the creation of Johnson and Wales’ Culinary Arts School, which gave opportunities to so many young people. Dad was also proud to have played an active role in Rhode Island’s Jewish community.

In his darkest moments, when he was very ill, my Dad would often remark that he really could not complain. He felt blessed to have had such a good life, including eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. The sixth, named for him, was born after his death in 2009. When all is said and done, I think that my Dad would want to be remembered as a mensch.
Jerry and Mel have been friends since their teenage years as camp counselors at the Jewish Community Center, and both have been friends of our Association for decades. Jerry’s byline has appeared regularly in these pages, but Mel has also contributed many articles. Who could forget the story about his cousin, Mark Twain, in our 1981 issue?

Since its founding by David C. Adelman nearly 60 years ago, several lawyers have played prominent roles in RIJHA. Unfortunately, however, there have been relatively few articles in The Notes by or about these wordsmiths. Knowing that there are enough stories about Rhode Island’s Jewish lawyers and judges to fill an entire issue, Mel has often urged his colleagues to avoid further delays and reach a magnanimous settlement between the past and present.

Jerry’s vivid profile of Mel was completed late in the summer, before his and Janet’s son, Sam, a lawyer and a seasoned community activist, declared his candidacy for a seat on the Providence City Council. His victory in November places many of the following observation’s in a fascinating new context.

I never really had the ambition or the outlook to become involved in either political or communal leadership roles. There may have been others better suited to those roles. I fit into the counselor role. Like a staff officer, I served as executive counsel to Governor Notte.

I advise people. There have been times when I have become involved in leadership roles, but not out of enjoyment so much as out of obligation.
This is the hallmark of Melvin L. Zurier’s distinguished career as a lawyer. While still in high school, Zurier, who became a nearly lifelong resident of Rhode Island, knew he wanted to be a lawyer. His interest in the law was coupled with an interest in politics as the science of government. He wanted to know how law could improve the institutions of government, and how government through law could improve the lives of its citizens. This article will trace his early decades—his childhood, education, military and governmental service, private practice, and Jewish communal involvement.

**FAMILY AND EDUCATION**

Melvin L. Zurier was born on April 30, 1929 in Providence. He was the youngest child (and only son) born to Louis and Frances (Cohen) Zurier, both immigrants. Louis, who came to America with his parents and six siblings in 1889, worked as a laborer in the hardening room at Brown & Sharpe in Providence. Frances and her older sister, Rose, settled in Providence prior to World War I to be near their Gabrilowitz relatives. The young women opened a dry goods shop on Constitution Hill on North Main Street, next door to Cohen’s Delicatessen (no relation).

According to family lore, Louis came into the sisters’ shop to buy a handkerchief. He returned the next day and for several days. Frances, who had been waiting on him, suspected that the handsome gentleman had something other than collecting handkerchiefs on his mind. Each time she raised the price of the handkerchief, Louis paid without protest. When she increased the price tenfold, which represented a goodly amount of his daily wage, and he did not balk, she knew it had to be love. They were married in 1921 at Sons of Zion Synagogue.†

After Rose married and moved to New York City, Louis joined the dry goods business, which became known as L. Zurier and relocated to Chalkstone Avenue. In his old car he would visit farms in the areas surrounding Providence to take orders. Accompanying his father was a treat for Melvin.

Although they had had little opportunity themselves, Louis and Frances wanted their children to have the best education possible. So when Melvin was three years old, the family moved to Mulberry Street in the North End of Providence. Families living beyond this neighborhood had to pay tuition for their children to attend Henry Barnard, the excellent laboratory school within Rhode Island College of Education. (RICE, now Rhode Island College, was located on Park Street, south of the State House, where Providence Place Mall now stands.)

At the age of six, Melvin entered the Talmud Torah at Sons of Zion Synagogue, where his father was a trustee. His grandfather, Nathan Zurier, had already taught him the *aleph-bet* (Yiddish for Hebrew alphabet). Decades later Melvin recalled the experience:

> We went to Talmud Torah four days a week after school from 4:00 to 6:00 and on Sunday mornings. We had to walk through a tough neighborhood, passing through the territory of the so-called State Street Gang. I recall on more than one occasion going home by a very circuitous route to avoid State Street.

Zurier’s formal Jewish education ended with his becoming a bar mitzvah and delivering his speech in both English and Yiddish. A dinner at Weinstein’s Restaurant on Weybosset Street was held for friends and family. Mrs. Zurier later took her son to a studio where a record was made of his voice and words. Around this time the family purchased a home on Radcliffe Avenue in the North End.

When Melvin was 15, his parents died within eight months of each other. He returned to Sons of Zion to say *Kaddish* twice a day, seven days a week, during the period of mourning. He found solace in the solicitude shown him by the other members of the minyan. He and his younger sister, Rosalind, a graduate of Hope High School, continued to live in the Radcliffe Avenue house. She was employed as secretary at Bernard Goodman’s wholesale business, Stadium Hosiery, where Melvin also worked part-time. Their older sister, Hilda, was married and living out of state. Melvin’s uncle Harry Fisher, who had married Ida Zurier, became his guardian.

**CLASSICAL HIGH AND HARVARD**

After graduating from Henry Barnard, Zurier entered Classical High School. During his years there, two people greatly influenced the course of his life. One was a
Although it was a foregone conclusion that Governor Thomas E. Dewey of New York would win the nomination, he was opposed by Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, former Governor Harold Stassen of Minnesota, General Douglas MacArthur, and Governor Earl Warren of California. By contrast, the Democratic National Convention, also held in Philadelphia but later that summer, promised little in the way of conflict. President Harry S. Truman would receive the nomination.

Acconpanied by his friend from Harvard, Melvin Colman, Zurier arrived in Philadelphia the Sunday before the start of the convention. He planned to visit his sister, Rosalind, and her husband who lived there. Zurier came armed with a vague promise of tickets to the sessions from Frank Lazarus, who was a national committeeman from Providence, a city councilman from the second ward, and also a Jew.

When the hoped-for tickets were not forthcoming, Zurier and Colman went out on their own to canvass all the candidates’ headquarters. Their efforts produced a pair of tickets to one evening session. However, “good old Uncle Max Zurier, the guy who knows all the angles,” was able to procure an “Honorary-Assistant Sergeant-At-Arms” pass. Rosalind, through her employer, brought home an “official aide” badge, which allowed Zurier to roam at will throughout the Convention.

In summary he wrote:

I think the actual experience has done a lot for me as an individual. I was able to watch firsthand the bargaining and the dreadful hypocrisy that goes on in choosing our national leaders. Most of my near mythical regard which I had for names such as Stassen, Dewey, Martin, etc., fell away as I saw these birds in action willing to forfeit almost any ethic to gain their ambition of pomp and power. The convention itself was a wonderful show, and I, along with the others who came from all over to pack the Convention Center, was well entertained.

Zurier’s experience and his musings about man and society informed a later comment in his journal. He wrote that government, when it must be institutionalized in a formal sense, is a rational problem and must be met by serious thought.
MILK STUDY COMMISSION

In 1949, The Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin began an investigative series of articles exposing the unsanitary conditions of the milk supply in Rhode Island as well as the high prices paid by consumers. The newspapers hired a lab to take samples and found a high chloroform count as well as other impurities in the milk.

Governor John O. Pastore appointed Christopher DelSesto, also at that time a Democrat, to head a Milk Study Commission. That summer while living again with Ida and Harry Fisher on Lloyd Avenue, Zurier wrote in his journal:

I have been fortunate in lining up a job with a special commission to study the milk problems. The Chairman and my boss is Christopher DelSesto... a friend of Abe Percelay. The job is terrific—being able to investigate the milk situation and see what can be done to bring down the very high price. I shall have to make trips to see how prices are elsewhere. Here in Rhode Island we have a Milk Control Board which, by public hearings, sets the price at which milk can be sold to the consumer. As a result, the producer and dealer are guaranteed their profit ‘in the interests of stabilizing the milk situation,’ while the consumer gets a screwing.

Although he was in his own words a “gofer,” Zurier did more than run errands.

So far, I’ve gathered background material in the milk situation. I spent several days going through back files in The Journal “morgue” as well as a few hours in the library. I’ve had a few chats with Mr. Hull, executive officer of the Milk Control Board, and have done some reading in our office.... What is even more fortunate is that this work provides an excellent source of material for my senior honors thesis next year.

Despite the work of the commission, the disproportionate influence of the rural areas in the makeup of the legislature prevented true reform from taking place. Governor Pastore’s bill to abolish the Milk Control Board’s price-fixing authority was defeated.

Zurier used his experience as the basis for his senior thesis, for which he received high honors in government. The thesis, “The Rhode Island Milk Control Study Committee,” was dedicated to Christopher DelSesto. A further honor awaited him. His recommendations for improving the quality and quantity of Rhode Island’s milk supply and protecting consumers became law in 1962, as will be explained later.

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

1950 was a very good year for Zurier in other respects. He and a partner, John Sutter, won the annual Coolidge Debate Prize. Selected by Professor Packard to give the Class Oration at Senior Class Day, Zurier, speaking on “Attitudes and Platitudes,” counseled against cynicism and for the intellect as an expression of individualism. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude. His uncle Sam Cohen, the Fishers, and Mary Thorpe, principal of Henry Barnard, witnessed the ceremony. For Ms. Thorpe, it was a very proud moment to see three of her former students, who had kept in touch with her through the years, receive their degrees.

Zurier was offered a scholarship to attend Yale Law School, but chose to remain at Harvard. He was allowed to extend his Smith Scholarship, as were his two close friends: Burke also in the Law School and Bornstein in the Medical School.

Zurier believes that the most significant meeting in his life occurred on July 4, 1950, when he happened to be in the custodian’s office when Janet Rosen walked in to ask about her room for the summer session at Harvard. He had a job as a resident assistant in Matthew Hall; she had just completed her junior year at Pennsylvania State University. They were married a year later at Temple Beth El in Allentown, Janet’s hometown. After a honeymoon in New Hampshire, they rented a one-room apartment (at $70 per month) near Harvard. Janet, who had a degree in psychology, worked at the Lincoln Laboratories at M.I.T. She later earned a master’s degree at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education.

During his second year of law school, Zurier was chosen to become a member of the Harvard Voluntary Defenders, who worked with the Boston Voluntary Defenders Committee in providing legal counsel to “worthy and Indigent persons accused of a crime.” He was also president of the Casner Club, the study group of Professor James Casner.

Zurier invited Jacob Kossman, a Jewish criminal defense lawyer and friend
Judge Advocate General’s School in Montgomery, Alabama, where he trained with 68 lawyers. Janet found an apartment near the base. The small Jewish community was very welcoming to Jewish servicemen, and they were invited to use the facilities of their sparsely attended golf club. It was the only time in his life when Zurier played golf.

Although invited to remain at the school and teach, Zurier wanted to try cases. He spent six months at Langley Field, Virginia, to “warm up and try court martial cases,” and was then sent overseas to Sondrestrom Air Force Base in Greenland. As a Distant Early Warning base, it guarded against a Soviet missile attack. Zurier was the only lawyer on a very isolated installation, where he spent a year.

There were eight or nine Jewish airmen stationed there. Zurier had been there only two or three days when his clerk, Rosenberg, asked, “You’re Jewish, aren’t you?” He wanted his superior to lead Friday night services for them. There was also another motive. The Jewish Welfare Board made certain that each base had a supply of kosher wine for sacramental purposes because only officers could get wine or spirits. Thus Zurier became “rabbi” and held services, while the enlisted men enjoyed both spiritual nourishment and the wine that came with it.

For Rosh Hashanah, they were able to go to services led by a chaplain at Thule Air Force Base. However, Yom Kippur services would be held in Goose Bay, Labrador, which approximated Miami Beach to the service personnel in Greenland. Zurier asked the base commander to allow the enlisted men to come as well because of the importance of the Holy Day. He agreed, and a notice was posted. Those who wished were allowed to go. Zurier received some odd requests for quickie conversions from airmen anxious to get off the base for even a day or two. A civilian attendee was a Holocaust survivor who had a little store in Happy Valley, a village north of Goose Bay. Populated only by Canada’s indigenous people, he sold ice cream to the Eskimos.

After his return to the United States and a stint at Mitchel Air Force Base in New York, Zurier received an assignment he very much wanted and for which he was willing to spend extra time in the service. He was sent to Hamilton Air Force Base, north of San Francisco. Janet was able to relocate nearby. Zurier was assigned what he considered his most fascinating case in the Air Force, if not his entire legal career.

The defendant was a poor, young private from Alabama named Blanken-
ship. With barely a sixth-grade education, he had had several scrapes with the law in civilian life. A judge gave him an option: go to jail or go into the service. He chose the latter. Blankenship was beginning to straighten out in the Air Force, but one night, while cleaning the mess hall at Itami Air Force Base near Nagoya, Japan, two older sergeants came in, began talking to him, and plied him with liquor. After several hours of drinking and the threatening display of a hunting knife by one of the older men, the private suddenly removed his belt, swung it at his assailant, and then began stabbing him. The private was convicted of murder at a court martial in Japan. The judgment was upheld by a Military Board of Review.

As is mandatory in capital cases of murder in the first degree, the conviction had to be reviewed yet again, this time by a civilian court, the Court of Military Appeals. The court reversed the conviction because one of the original members of the court martial, a colonel, was permitted by the law officer or judge, a captain, to ask questions of witnesses during the trial. Under military law, members of a court martial were not permitted to participate in any way except to ask questions through the judge. By coincidence, the chief justice of the Court of Military Appeals was Robert Quinn, a former Democratic governor of Rhode Island. Judge Quinn ordered a new trial.

To the credit of the Air Force, a great deal of money was spent on the new trial at Hamilton Air Force Base. Zurier traveled to Japan to interview witnesses. To follow up on something he read in the transcript, he had to travel to Boston to interview a doctor who had examined the accused shortly after the incident. Zurier also brought in three psychiatrists to testify as to the mental state of the defendant. Blankenship was acquitted on the basis of temporary insanity due to pathological intoxication and the stress of being attacked. Zurier remained in touch with the private until his natural death eight years later.

RETURN TO PROVIDENCE
On his way back from his trip to Boston during preparation for the trial, Zurier stopped off in Providence to visit Ida and Harry Fisher. While there he spoke with a law school classmate whom he heard was ill. She suggested that he interview with Weller, Johnson & Reynolds, the firm where she worked. After his discharge he might be able to clerk there and begin his practice. (He did remain in the Air Force Reserves, retiring as a colonel in 1979.) Zurier had considered settling in California, but he missed his relatives in Providence and preferred a smaller city over Boston or New York.

The Zuriers, now three in number after the birth of Rebecca in 1956 in San Francisco, returned to Rhode Island in 1957. He went to work for the Weller firm in the Industrial Bank Building (111 Westminster Street). Although he was guaranteed 20 hours of work per month (at $5 per hour) and was given a telephone, secretarial help, and the use of the law library, he was also required to pay $100 per month for the rental of a room. Zurier initially signed documents as a member of the Massachusetts Bar, but after serving a six-month clerkship he was sworn in as a member of the Rhode Island Bar. Only after he had begun working for the firm did he happen to discover in the files that the partners had surveyed their clients to determine if a Jewish clerk would be acceptable to them.

The Zuriers rented a second-floor flat at 107 Elmgrove Avenue and joined Temple Beth-El on September 9, 1957. Based on his projected income of $6,000 per year, they pledged $50 for dues. They were drawn to Temple Beth-El by Rabbi William G. Braude’s towering intellect and Zurier’s friendship with Irving J. Fain. A year later, under Fain’s presidency, Zurier was appointed to the board of trustees. He took special interest in the social action committee, a program very important to Fain.

That same year the Zuriers purchased a house in Pawtucket with the aid of a mortgage from the GI Bill.

COMMISSION ON UNIFORM STATE LAWS
One day in August 1958, while working for $5 an hour and having little to do, Zurier received a phone call from Eugene Gallant, a law school classmate, who was executive counsel to Governor Dennis Roberts, a Democrat. “What are you doing next week?” he asked. A vacancy needed to be filled on an obscure agency called the Rhode Island Commission on Uniform State Laws, part of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. The need was urgent because the national group had threatened to expel Rhode Island unless someone was sent to its conference in Los Angeles that year. One commissioner was ill, a second had died, and the whereabouts of third was unknown. The position was unpaid; an appointee served at the pleasure of the governor.

“I jumped into it hammer and tongs,” Zurier stated. “I became interested in the group intellectually, legally, and socially. I met some very interesting people, heard some important scholars speak, and I brought back some very important information.”
Roberts, the Democrat, lost the election of 1958 to Christopher DelSesto, who had become a Republican. He remembered Zurier from their work on the Milk Study Commission in 1949 and reappointed him to the National Conference. While Zurier was still in law school, the National Conference had recommended that there be a total recodification of nine categories of state laws, such as sales and negotiable instruments. Massachusetts was the first state to adopt the Uniform Commercial Code, and Connecticut was the second. At the Conference it was pointed out that Rhode Island would have difficulty operating if it had commercial laws differing from its neighbor states.

Zurier returned from the National Conference in 1959 “all charged up” and convinced Governor DelSesto that this was the wave of the future. DelSesto appointed a commission to study how Rhode Island would be affected. Stuart Tucker, a distinguished Rhode Island attorney who was counsel to Rhode Island National Bank, was selected to head the commission, and Zurier was selected as secretary. Tasked with recruiting its members, Zurier contacted several lawyers—acquaintances and strangers—to examine sections of the Uniform Commercial Code and determine their impact on Rhode Island’s laws. One lawyer was Amedeo Merolla, who was a year behind him at Harvard Law. Another was George Graboys, later president of Citizens Bank.

Zurier coordinated the lawyers’ activities and findings, which were then published in a large volume and sent to all Rhode Island lawyers. Governor DelSesto spoke in favor of adopting the Uniform Code and promised to introduce it. The members of the commission persuaded all the lawyers in the House and Senate to cosponsor the bill. It was introduced in the House of Representatives. Speaker Harry Curvin called the calendar and said, “I have here a bill to unify, codify, and simplify the commercial law of Rhode Island.” He picked up this heavy tome and said sarcastically, “Simplify!” He sent it to the Judiciary Committee and it was reported out. After some political infighting the bill passed unanimously. Zurier continued to serve on the Commission under a third governor, John Notte, a Democrat, but he was dismissed by the next governor, John Chafee, a Republican.

Zurier had received an earlier appointment under Governor Notte, whom he had met in 1960 through his lifelong friend, Edward Burke, who had also begun practicing in Providence. Rather than rivals, Zurier and Burke saw each other as offering challenges and incentives to one another. Zurier was interested in politics on a more theoretical level. Burke, who would run for mayor, eventually chaired the state’s Public Utilities Commission for several years. Zurier was persuaded by Burke to join the Rhode Island Young Democrats, and Notte requested him to form a committee of young lawyers to work on his campaign and campaign issues. After winning the governorship, Notte asked Zurier to become his executive counsel and establish an office in the State House.

Zurier’s first jobs were writing Notte’s inaugural address and making suggestions for a program. “At that time,” Zurier said, “the big elephant in the room was the fair housing movement, of which Irving J. Fain was a driving force.” “He came to our house in Pawtucket, and we worked together on the speech.” Zurier drafted a fair housing bill to promote racial integration, but the law was not passed until 1965.

Zurier’s position as executive counsel, which paid $9,600 per year, was supposed to be part-time. It would allow him to practice law when the legislature was not in session and have an income to support his growing family. The governmental position remained more than full-time, however, and it involved more than advising on legal matters. “I had responsibilities I never dreamed of,” Zurier explained. “I was writing speeches for him, going onto the floor of the House trying to explain the budget, and telling the governor who was for a piece of legislation and who was against it. It was heady in a way, and I compliment myself on not becoming more self-important.”

Zurier drafted a number of important pieces of legislation enacted during the Notte administration. One of his major accomplishments was the legislation passed in 1962 that had been based on his senior honors thesis. Centralizing responsibility for inspection of milk in the Health Department, it eliminated the previous Milk Control Board. Zurier also drafted the Escheat Law (the Unclaimed Property Law), which required the general treasurer to advertise all unclaimed property before it could be turned over to the general treasury. This law, like the State Administrative Procedure Act, grew out of Zurier’s regular attendance at the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws.

Governor Notte’s term was very difficult. Looming large was the need for a state income tax. In 1961, shortly after Notte was inaugurated, the Rhode Island Supreme Court invalidated a tax on intangible property, enacted in 1960. It would
have comprised 10% of the state’s budgeted revenue. Faced with a fiscal emergency, the governor asked Zurier to draft an income tax law. Zurier consulted a former classmate, then a professor at Harvard Law School and an expert in state and local taxation. The two completed the task, but the governor was besieged by Democratic leaders of the legislature, who advised him that they would all lose the next election if he pursued an income tax. Notte instead called for “austerity.”

In 1961 the National Governors’ Conference was held in Honolulu, the first year of Hawaii’s statehood. The entourage accompanying Rhode Island’s chief executive included Zurier and Leonard Holland, the adjutant general of the Rhode Island National Guard who was also a Jew. The Providence Journal, which did not disguise its dislike of the governor, ran a cartoon showing him wearing a Hawaiian shirt and riding a surfboard, under the headline: “Far from the Madding Austerity.”

In October 1962, the Cold War could have been turned into a nuclear war when American surveillance revealed the construction of Soviet ballistic missile bases in Cuba. The missile crisis was tentatively resolved on October 28, when Premier Khruschev acceded to President Kennedy’s demand to dismantle offensive weapons, but the American blockade of Cuba did not end until November 20. Fears remained.

One week before state and local elections on November 6, Zurier received an early morning phone call from Governor Notte. Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, had sent a telegram asking that Notte attend an important meeting to brief state officials about the current crisis. A limousine would arrive at 6:00 AM at Zurier’s Pawtucket home to take him and the governor to this urgent gathering in Manhattan.

The auditorium was filled with governors, state troopers, and police. Senators Claiborne Pell and John O. Pastore were also there, awaiting the latest information. It was announced that Dean Rusk could not come. The briefing consisted of old news rehearsed. Perhaps its real purpose was to heighten the sense of crisis. After the meeting, Senator Pell invited the Rhode Islanders to lunch at his club. It was, Zurier noted, the only good thing to come out of the meeting.

**PARTNERSHIP**

More than a year before Notte’s defeat in 1962, Zurier needed to find new opportunities for private practice. At that time, Zurier, Amedeo Merolla, and Martin Temkin began discussions about forming a partnership. Zurier knew Temkin socially and Merolla from their work on the Uniform Commercial Code study commission. Both Merolla and Temkin had been associates at Temkin & Temkin, the firm of Martin’s uncles.

The new partnership was announced in January 1962. Ironically, it moved into the quarters vacated by Weller, Johnson & Reynolds, after the dissolution of their partnership. Harvey Reynolds, with whom Zurier had maintained cordial relations, became “of counsel.” The new partners later moved to a suite at 40 Westminster Street.

Based on the drawing of straws, the new firm was known as Temkin, Merolla & Zurier. Zurier believed that it thrived because of a combination of talents. Temkin was highly effective in attracting clients; Merolla was an excellent litigator; and Zurier developed special expertise in zoning and real estate law.

**JEWISH COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS**

As executive counsel to Governor Notte, Zurier, a rookie, could seek advice from many Jewish lawyers who worked part-time in government. For example, Maurice Hendel was the state law revision assistant, and Archie Smith was director of the legislative council. Smith played a particular role in burnishing Notte’s image among members of the Jewish community. In 1961, when the governor was asked to speak at the dedication of the Providence Hebrew Day School building on Elmgrove Avenue, he asked Zurier to write something appropriate. Zurier believed it would be nice if Notte said something in Hebrew. But what? Smith suggested the Mah Tovu, which they transliterated for the governor and coached him in the proper pronunciation. When he recited his lines at the dedication, Zurier said, it was a “WOW” experience.

Zurier’s selection as Governor Notte’s executive counsel was considered a feather in the cap of the Jewish community, and he received a host of appointments to the boards of trustees of many Jewish organizations. For example, he was by far the youngest member of the board of the Jewish Home (and has joked about it ever since). He enjoyed participating and still enjoys being active in the Jewish community. Zurier explained, “Often I was the new kid on the block, but I enjoyed working with those who came before me in organizations in which I took a special interest, with people I respected.” His sense of community was shaped by his grandfather, Nathan Zurier, who was a collector for numerous Jewish or-
Zurier has felt deeply honored to be asked to serve as president of Federation and other Jewish communal organizations. But he has served as president of only one, Temple Beth-El (1985-88). Rabbi William G. Braude, Irving J. Fain, and Arthur Levy deeply influenced him, but he has been particularly close to Rabbi Leslie Y. Gutterman.

SUBSEQUENT YEARS
After 20 years of successful practice, Temkin, Merolla, and Zurier dissolved their partnership. In 1981 Zurier joined Levy, Goodman, Semonoff & Gorin as a senior partner. In 1989 this firm became Licht & Semonoff, and in 1996 it merged with Tillinghast, Collins & Graham (and was later known as Tillinghast, Licht & Semonoff).

Zurier was asked to continue as a senior partner, but he preferred a smaller practice, so he became “of counsel” to Winograd, Shine & Zacks. He was always more interested in the craft of a learned profession than in growing an even larger business.

As previously mentioned, throughout his college years, Zurier kept a journal called “Dribbles.” It contained all kinds of entries: what he did or whom he met, an interesting lecture by a nervous professor or a dull party given for a dull couple. He also set down his musings on religion, reason, the individual, and society. Reflecting on the meaning of Labor Day, he once used this phrase: “...respect for law with government as an agency that is the prerogative of a democracy...”

Although taken out of context, these words became descriptive of Zurier’s career in law, government, and public service. They reflected his deep and abiding respect for the law and the rule of law and his belief that government can better people’s lives as a function of a democratic society. These words also prefigured Zurier’s role as the Counselor.
ENDNOTES

1 Research for this article was based on a series of interviews with Mr. Zurier. These occurred on May 13, May 28, and June 25, 2009 and on April 21, April 24, and June 17, 2010.


4 At his death in 1959, Harry was treasurer of Crescent Realty. Originally a member of Sons of Zion, he and his wife affiliated with Temple Emanu-El. He was a former president of Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence.

5 While in college, Zurier kept a journal he called “Dribbles.” The remark about Uncle Max was written on July 28, 1948.

6 Same reference as above.

7 “Dribbles,” August 1948.

8 Percelay was married to Zurier’s cousin, Natalie Fisher.

9 After winning the prize, Zurier was interviewed by a Harvard Crimson reporter in his dormitory room. The names of his roommates, Edward Burke and Donald Bornstein, were also listed on the door. The headline in the following day’s article stated that Bornstein and Sutter won the debate prize.

10 The commission was modeled after the federal government’s. President Truman had appointed former President Herbert Hoover to chair a study of agencies’ overlapping services.


12 In 1957 more than 800 attorneys were listed in the Providence city directory. Perhaps 80 had Jewish-sounding surnames. The vast majority of Providence attorneys hung out their own shingles. The largest firms were Edwards & Angell, which consisted of 26 partners and associates, and Hinckley, Alllen, Salsibury & Parsons, which consisted of 21. Neither firm began hiring Catholics and Jews until the mid-1960s. In 1957 more than 111 attorneys or firms rented space in the Industrial Bank Building. Approximately 22 of these had Jewish-sounding surnames.

13 For many years Zurier maintained his bond with Sons of Zion, celebrating the second day of Rosh Hashanah there.


16 Zurier and Notte had in fact met briefly in 1946. At that time, Zurier was a baseball player at Classical High, and Notte had played on Classical’s championship baseball team in 1926. The champions, who challenged the current players, won handily.

17 The position had always been a political appointment. Although Holland was fully qualified, he was a controversial choice because he was not as well known as several Democratic politicians who coveted the job. Holland was retained by Notte’s successor, Governor John Chafee, a Republican, even though Holland’s predecessor, a Republican, wanted to serve again. A nonpartisan group of National Guard officers threatened to resign if Holland were not reappointed. Ultimately, Holland served 22 years, the longest tenure of any adjutant general in the country.

18 Chafee, who defeated Notte, dubbed him “Mr. Income Tax.” Ironically, when Chafee proposed a state income tax six years later, he was defeated by Frank Licht, a Democrat who became the state’s first Jewish governor. After Licht was reelected in 1970, he and the Democratic legislature enacted an income tax. Licht announced that he would not seek a third term.

19 On their return from Manhattan, Notte and Zurier made a scheduled campaign stop at a labor union rally in West Warwick. Referring to Rusk’s conference in New York, the governor emphasized the importance of maintaining leadership during a crisis. Notte lost the election by fewer than 500 votes, partially due to unions’ opposition to the income tax.

20 Several small Jewish firms in Providence were formed by relatives. Consider, for example: Thomas and Nathan Pearlman, Judah and Ralph Semonoff, Walter and Bruce Sundlun, Maxwell and Morris Waldman, and Max and Irving Winograd.

21 Partnerships among Jews and gentiles in Providence had not been uncommon. Consider, for example: Rosenfeld & Hagan; Baker, Spicer & Sundlun; Atwood, Remington, Thomas & Levy; Cunningham, Semonoff & Kelly; Letts, Quinn & Licht; and Adler, Pollock & Sheehan.

22 One of the most important, written with Jeremiah J. Gorin, was “Early Rhode Island Jewish Lawyers,” XII (November 1996), 233-7.
SURELY GOD WAS IN THIS PLACE

RABBI LAURA GELLER

Born in Boston in 1950, the author became a Bat Mitzvah and a Confirmand at Temple Ohabei Sholom in Brookline. Having moved with her family to New York City at 15 years of age, she graduated from The Dalton School. Following in her father’s footsteps to Brown University, she entered Pembroke College with the Class of 1970. Both on and off campus, Geller was active in the civil rights movement. After her sophomore year, she worked on a kibbutz. As a religious studies major, she wrote her senior honors thesis on “Hegel’s Image of Judaism.” In 1971 she was one of two Brown students who addressed seniors during commencement exercises at the First Baptist Meetinghouse in America. Hers was the last class of Pembroke alumnae.

In 1971, when Geller entered Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, Sally Priesand, who would become America’s first woman rabbi, was still a year from ordination. Geller was the only woman in a class of 50 students. After her first year in Israel, she studied at HUC’s Los Angeles campus and completed her degree at the New York City campus. Upon her ordination in 1976, Geller became the Reform movement’s third woman rabbi (and the fourth in America). HUC has subsequently ordained 579 women.

Geller had not become active at Brown/RISD Hillel until her senior year, when she helped interview prospective rabbi-directors. As a rabbinic student, however, she served internships at two Hillel houses: Vassar and the University of California at Los Angeles. Her first professional position was Hillel director at the University of Southern California (adjacent to HUC), where she served until 1986. She was also the West Coast’s first woman rabbi.

Rabbi Geller next served as the executive director of the American Jewish Congress’ Pacific Southwest Region, where she created a Jewish Urban Center and a Jewish Feminist Center. As senior rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Beverly Hills since 1994, she has been one of a few women rabbis to lead a large congregation. Rabbi Geller has continued to teach at many Jewish institutions and to write for Jewish publications (often on feminist themes). As a highly regarded
It is an incredible honor to be invited to speak here this afternoon, in a gathering of so many distinguished alumni. Such an honor, in fact, that I didn’t even wince when my daughter pointed out that if I’m one of the people who made a difference in the past century, that must mean I am really old!

I don’t usually feel old. But in preparing for today, I did notice how fast the time has gone. I searched through my files and found the very first sermon I ever gave, in the Baptist Meetinghouse down the hill from the Van Wickle Gates. It was 1971, my graduation from Brown; I had been elected by my class to give one of the commencement addresses. I didn’t know at the time that it was a sermon, but in retrospect that is exactly what it was. And not a very good one. It was written with the audacity of a very young person with little life experience. It ended with these words:

When women demand to be treated as human beings they are threatening the fabric of a society which objectifies all of its people. It is not sufficient to ‘liberate’ women into such a society; in fact, true liberation, in those terms, is impossible. The women’s movement, the black movement, and the anti-war movement are all part of the same struggle— the struggle to reshape our society so as to make people whole. This is the world we are graduating into; this is the world we have to change.

I went out from Brown those thirty years ago convinced that we, my friends and fellow graduates, would reshape our society so as to make people whole. It seemed so simple then, to change the world.

A teacher in seminary once told me that a rabbi only gives one sermon in his or her life— and I guess it’s true. I’ve been giving versions of the same sermon ever since, trying to figure out what it means to make people whole. What changes is the way those sermons begin. In rabbinical school I was taught to begin with a text, and to find that text in the weekly Torah portion. So let’s turn to the Torah portion that is read this afternoon all over the world:

Jacob went out from Beersheva heading toward Haran. He came upon a certain place, and since the sun had set, he spent the night there. He took one of the stones from the place, put it under his head, and lay down there in that place. He dreamed. And behold: a ladder, standing on earth, its top reaching the heavens. And behold: messengers of God, going up and going down on it. And behold: God is standing on it and says… I am with you and I will take care of you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land… And Jacob woke up from his sleep and said: Surely God was in this place and I, I did not even know!

Looking back at my experience at Brown, I can say with Jacob: “Surely God was in this place, and I, I didn’t even know.” There were so many messengers of God here, people who were my first spiritual guides. My teachers, Don Colenbach (of blessed memory) who taught Christian Ethics, and other professors like Wendel Dietrich, Ernest Frerichs, and Jacob Neusner. At Brown I was deeply influenced by two Protestant Ministers, Charlie Baldwin and Dick Dannenfelser, who taught through their example that religious commitment required engagement in the broken world. Another teacher was John Reynolds, a community organizer who took me with a group of local activists to a SCLC Convention in Memphis. I learned from students like Ira Magaziner and Elliot Maxwell that we could change the university. I learned from other students who spent summers doing community organizing in Providence that we could work to change our community.

And it was at Brown that I first understood the connection between social justice and ritual. In the spring of my freshman year, I joined a protest against segregation in housing. It happened to take place during the week of Passover, the holy season when Jews refrain from eating any kind of leavening to remind us of the matza, the flatbread that symbolizes both poverty and freedom. Scores of students and faculty were sitting-in at the State House. After a while I began to get hungry, so when someone showed up with bags of donuts, I reached for one— and then remembered it was Passover— so I put it back. At that moment I understood that being part of that sit-in and eating matzah were both important ways to reexperience the struggle for liberation, that the ethical and the ritual were both important dimensions of a religious life.

God was in this place— at Brown. It was in this place that I learned to care about the struggle to reshape our society so as to make people whole. And it was at
Brown that I learned to believe that I could make a difference.

Thirty years ago I went out from Brown. My spiritual awakening wasn’t as dramatic as Jacob’s. There were no dreams of ladders reaching toward heaven, no visions of angels descending and ascending. But still, there was a journey that the Torah might be able to illuminate.

Rashi, the 11th century commentator, asks about the angels on Jacob’s ladder. Why does the text say the angels are going up and going down? If angels live in heaven, one would expect the opposite— they would first go down, and then go up. One interpretation is that angels come from within us— they represent the courage it takes to step onto the ladder. So angels first ascend— from us.

The angels I met at Brown gave me the courage to step onto the ladder. When I began rabbinical school, no woman in America had yet been ordained a rabbi. I was the third woman ordained in the Reform Movement, the fourth in America. (Until recently I would have said the fourth ever, but recent scholarship has uncovered the history of a woman named Regina Jonas, independently ordained in Germany in 1935. Little is known about her life and work— which ended with her murder in Auschwitz in 1944.)

When I was ordained in 1976, I became part of a very small sorority that signaled a major revolution. Just as liberal Judaism was ordaining its first women as rabbis, other religious communities were wrestling with the ordination of women. The first women to be Episcopal priests were ordained, without the sanction of the entire church, in 1972. The movement toward the empowerment and maybe even the eventual ordination of Catholic women began to gather steam in the early ’70s. The feminist issues of the ’70s were issues of equal access. In the secular world, the questions focused on equal pay for equal work, access to professional schools, jobs and positions of power and influence that had previously been closed to women. The religious spin on these questions was only slightly different: Can women be counted in the minyan, the basic quorum necessary for public prayer? Can women be rabbis, cantors, and priests? Can girls and women celebrate their bar mitzvah, for example? Over the next several decades, these issues were discussed, often fought about, but eventually answered more or less in the affirmative. In 2000, there are well over 300 women who are rabbis in America, Europe, and Israel, and even a handful of women studying for private ordination in the Orthodox community.

As these questions of equal access were answered, a second, even more important series of questions emerged, questions that are more revolutionary. Now that women can be counted in a prayer quorum, we can step back and ask: How do women pray? Is women’s experience in prayer the same as the experience of men? Or, to push even further, to whom are we praying? Is the God who is often described through male metaphors like “father” and “king,” the God that women experience? And of course, once that question can be articulated, it raises the obvious question: Is the God we call “father” and “king” really the God that men experience? These questions not only challenge traditional liturgy; they push the boundaries of theology, ritual, and religious community for both women and men.

One of the interesting challenges of being a rabbi is that people approach you in inappropriate places to tell you they don’t believe in God. With me, it usually happens in the market. Depending on how much sleep I got the night before, I will either engage the seeker or try to deflect the whole encounter. But if I engage, the conversation will usually go like this. “Rabbi, I don’t believe in God.” “Oh, how interesting,” I might reply. “Tell me about the God you don’t believe in.” Invariably the God is the God we first met in childhood, in illustrated Bible stories, an old man who looks a little like a skinny Santa Claus with a grey beard. He sits in a throne in the sky and he knows if you’ve been bad or good. He is also all-powerful, so often the break with this God occurred at a moment of crisis, usually when a loved one died even though people prayed for him or her. I’ll respond that I don’t believe in that God either; that most adults don’t. And even though that image appears to be reinforced in our liturgy and in our sacred texts, it is a kind of idol worship. Idolatry is, of course, defined as limiting God, who by definition can’t be limited. We need to uncover other images of God that are part of our traditions, images that could expand our consciousness of Divinity.

For example, the Hebrew phase that is usually translated as “Father of Mercy” (Av Harachamim) might better be translated as “source of motherly love,” because Rachamim might come from the word Rachem, which means “womb.” Thinking of God as the source of motherly love might go a long way in shattering the idol of the old man with the beard in the sky.

Or, consider another example. The euphemism “Lord” which Jews use for the unpronounceable four-letter name of God obscures the powerful possibility...
that unpronounceable name might simply be the sound of breathing... that with every breath we are speaking God's name. The task of the religious person, then, is simply to notice, to notice that with every breath we praise the divinity that is all around us and that connects us to every other living being.

As images of God change, spirituality changes. And our understanding of what it means to live in the presence of God changes as well. Theology matters. A transcendent patriarchal god supports a vision of a political order in which power is concentrated at the top; a God who can be experienced through breathing links us to each other and calls on us to create a world in which every human being can live as though he or she shares in this divinity, in which every human being can live as if he or she were created in the image of God.

Ritual matters, too. In seminary I studied rituals connected to the Jewish life cycle. I learned that the Jewish tradition teaches that one is to say one hundred blessings a day. One hundred times you are to stop and notice the divinity that is present in your life. One hundred times a day... before you eat, after you eat, as you put on new clothes, when you see a friend you haven’t seen for a while, when you experience an earthquake. (Since I had no idea I would ever live in Los Angeles, I didn’t realize at the time that this last blessing would come in handy!) These blessings signify that God is present at every moment in our lives– and that we can acknowledge that presence through blessing and ritual.

But as I studied the major life cycle events— Brit Milah (covenant of circumcision), Pidyon ha Ben (redemption of the first born son), Bar and Bat Mitzvah, marriage and death, I began to notice what was missing from that image of a life— me!

How should we mark a girl’s entrance into the covenant between God and the Jewish people? The ritual of circumcision obviously excludes women; what should take its place for girls? And what about all the other moments of a woman’s life that are missing from that life cycle? What about a ceremony when a girl first gets her period, an important moment of transition, for sure. What about the silent losses of our lives, miscarriage, infertility, abortion? How could ritual help us connect to the divinity that could be present in helping us heal? And changes attendant to becoming older, menopause, for example... what might the spiritual dimensions of this stage of life offer us if we learned to notice?

As women notice our own absence from traditional rituals, we can begin to notice who and what else is missing. And so the tradition begins to change for men as well. What about rituals for becoming parents or grandparents, for retire-
to us all—family conflict, anger, and betrayal. Finally, he's ready to go home. The

That same night Jacob... was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said: “Let me go for dawn is breaking.” But he answered, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Said the other, “What is your name?” He replied, “Jacob.” Said he, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel, for you have wrestled with beings divine and human and have prevailed...”

With whom is Jacob wrestling? The text is very unclear. All we know for sure is that Jacob's name is changed to Israel— one who wrestles with God. And it is from this that Jews take their name: B'nai Yisrael, the children of this God wrestler. To be Israel means to be one who wrestles with God.

My God-wrestling started at Brown. Here it is, thirty years later, and I’m still wrestling with the same question— what is my role in the struggle to reshape society so as to make people whole? Over the years, I have learned that wrestling is dangerous and intimate. Jacob is wounded— but also blessed.

The text continues: (33:18) "Jacob arrived shalem— whole." How is this possible? We know he was wounded; he walks with a limp. What does it mean to say Jacob arrived whole?

I’m learning the answer from all those congregants who have shared their lives with me... from the parents whose only child died in an airplane crash and went on to adopt other children, from the single woman who lost her breast to cancer and finally faced her fear of beginning a relationship, from the men and women who have survived divorces, or the loss of businesses, or the deaths of people they loved. I’m learning from all those congregants whose lives didn't work out exactly as they had planned... or hoped. I’m learning that you are never really whole, until, like Jacob, you go through that long night of wrestling, and yet go on to continue your journey— limping and wounded, maybe, but finally whole. And therefore blessed.

I feel very blessed. And very grateful to Brown. Brown gave me the intellectual tools to ask the questions, provided me with some wonderful angels along the way, and helped me discover the courage to step on the ladder. And finally, and most important, Brown helped me understand that God is in this place— and every place, if we, we, can learn to notice.
ADLER, ELEANOR, born in Lynn, Massachusetts, was the daughter of the late Jacob and Sadie (Horvitz) Kramer and the wife of the late Irving H. Adler.

Having graduated from Beth Israel School of Nursing, she served as an Army nurse in Europe during World War II. She rose to the rank of lieutenant and received two Battle Stars. In 1950 she earned her bachelor’s degree in nursing at Boston University. She later served at the Miriam Hospital and Jane Brown Hospital.

She was a life member of the Association.

Mrs. Adler is survived by her sons Jacob and Harry and daughter Kayla Campbell.

Died in Cranston on March 6, 2010 at the age of 88.

BOROD, RICHARD, born in Providence, was a son of the late Esmond and Lena (Levin) Borod. He graduated from Brown University in 1950 and Yale University Law School in 1962.

Mr. Borod practiced with Edwards & Angell for 31 years and resided in East Greenwich. He was a volunteer for the Legal Aid Society and was a board member of Temple Beth-El.

Mr. Borod is survived by his wife Gail (Cohen) Borod.

Died in Providence on June 9, 2010 at the age of 77.

BRAUNSTEIN, BELLA HALPERT, born in Providence, was the wife of the late Murry Halpert, a president of Temple Beth-El. With her second husband, the late Harold Braunstein, she continued her Temple membership.

A gifted musician since childhood, Mrs. Braunstein studied piano at the Vienna Conservatory and with master teachers in Boston. She performed as a soloist or as an accompanist with several musical groups, including the Schubert Club and the Chopin Club. She also taught piano to children and adults.

Mrs. Braunstein is survived by her son Samuel Halpert, daughters Jonis Davis and Ruth Hamann, and stepchildren Harvey and Susan Braunstein.

Died in Seattle on August 19, 2010 at the age of 96.

CHORNEY, IRVING ("Sonny"), born in Providence, was a son of the late Harry and Evelyn (Rutman) Chorney. He attended Dartmouth College and served in the Navy during World War II.

Mr. Chorney was the owner of Alga Plastics. A resident of Cranston, he later lived in Boynton Beach, Florida.

A past president of Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence, he was also a member of Touro Fraternal Association, Jewish War Veterans, and the Masons.

Mr. Chorney is survived by his wife Anita (Shore) Chorney, son Alan, and daughter Dr. Gail Chorney.

Died in Bethesda, Maryland, on May 22, 2009 at the age of 82.

FRADIN, JACK, born in Providence, was a son of the late Sarah and Charles Fradin. He graduated with a Phi Beta Kappa key from Rhode Island State College in 1949. He also received the Outstanding Platoon Leader Award in the College’s ROTC program. During the Korean Conflict, while serving as a first lieutenant in the Army’s Second Infantry Division, Mr. Fradin survived fierce battles. He earned commendations for meritorious service, which exemplified his entire life.

In 1959 Mr. Fradin founded his own accounting practice, and over the years he held numerous leadership positions in professional boards and organizations. He also shared his expertise with more than 3,000 accounting students at the University of Rhode Island, where he taught for 34 years. He taught far more than his subject matter, however. Mr. Fradin offered guidance and took a personal interest in his students. The excellence of his teaching and mentorship earned him many honors, including several Teacher of the Year Awards. When he retired from URI, Rhode Island’s House of Representatives declared April 26, 1996 as “Jack Fradin Day.” Mr. Fradin established a scholarship for accounting students at URI, and a classroom in the new business school was named in his honor.

His name first appeared on the roster of the Association’s officers in 1996. He served 14 years as treasurer, watching over our finances with great care and devotion. Coming directly from his office, without pausing for dinner, Jack seldom missed a board meeting. His was a calm and encouraging voice, always striving to build consensus. His financial reports at annual meetings were a model of clarity and concision.

Many nonprofit organizations, such as the Rhode Island Opera Company and Big Brothers, also benefitted from Mr. Fradin’s kindness and wisdom. Never too busy to respond to a question or a problem, he gave each his personal attention. For instance, Mr. Fradin urged many companies to develop an accounting program suitable for small nonprofits. Finally, when one company heeded his call, the program could not be installed in the Association’s antiquated computer. So Jack and his wife Estelle provided the organization with a new one.

We are grateful for his unwavering commitment to and faith in our organization.
Jack is survived by his wife Estelle (Goldsmith) Fradin, sons Neil and Charles, and daughter Ruth Singer. 
 Died on April 2, 2010 at the age of 81.

GORIN, ROSALIND, born in Portland, Maine, was a daughter of the late Julius and Lillian Abramson. She was the wife of the late Jeremiah J. Gorin. 
 Mrs. Gorin graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1973 and was employed in the public relations and alumni offices at Brown University. 
 Active in many religious and civic organizations, she also taught English to Russian-speaking students. She was a member of Temple Emanu-El and a life member of the Association. 
 Mrs. Gorin is survived by her sons Stephen and David. She was predeceased by her son Lawrence. 
 Died in Providence on June 6, 2010 at the age of 88.

KESSLER, IRVING, born in Somerville, Massachusetts, was a radar technician in Europe with the “Pathfinders” unit of the Army Air Corps during World War II. He graduated from Tufts University in 1946 and pursued graduate studies in government at Columbia University with the goal of serving as an American diplomat in Palestine. He was present at the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York on May 14, 1948, when America’s recognition of Israel was declared. 
 Mr. Kessler, a passionate Zionist since childhood, became a distinguished professional leader of world Jewry. Early in his career, he worked for Israel Bonds, the Labor Zionist movement, and Histadrut in New York and in Boston. While serving as the director of the women’s division of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, he earned a master’s degree in social work at Boston University. Mr. Kessler was executive director of the Hartford Jewish Federation from 1967 to 1974. 
 As executive vice chairman of United Israel Appeal in New York, he was instrumental in obtaining funds from federal authorities for the settlement of Soviet and Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Upon his retirement from UIA in 1988, he became executive vice president emeritus, but continued to serve as a senior advisor to Mendel Kaplan, the chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel. 
 Mr. Kessler’s first visit to Israel was in 1949. Many years later, while working on various projects, he and his wife Greta lived for several summers in Jerusalem. They considered making aliya, but he determined that he could be a stronger advocate for Israel by remaining in the United States. 
 Mr. Kessler served on numerous boards and committees, including those for the schools of Jewish communal service at Hebrew Union College and Brandeis University. He was also actively involved with the Association of Jewish Community Organization Professionals and received its Ben Mandelkorn Award. 
 The Kesslers retired to Stamford, Connecticut, but in 2001 they moved to Newport so he could help develop Touro Synagogue as a national educational resource. He faithfully participated in its minyan and volunteered at Newport Hospital and at the Veterans Administration in Middletown. He also wrote his memoirs, which include portraits of many Israeli leaders. 
 Mr. Kessler is survived by his wife Greta, a Newport native, sons Seth and Alex, and daughters Susan Schwartzman and Deena Sarvet. 
 Died in Newport on October 2, 2010 at the age of 88.
LEWIS, RABBI THEODORE, born in Dublin, was the son of the late Israel Joseph and Minnie Rose Lewis. He studied at Etz Chaim Yeshiva in London and at the remote but renowned Mir Yeshiva in Poland from 1935 to 1938. He considered his years at Mir the happiest of his life. He later earned a philosophy degree at the University of Dublin. 

Rabbi Lewis served as rabbi of the Adelaide Road Synagogue, Dublin’s largest, before immigrating to America. He visited Touro Synagogue in 1949 and faithfully served it until his retirement in 1985. (His tenure of 36 years has been exceeded in Rhode Island only by Rabbis William Braude and Leslie Guterman of Temple Beth-El. Rabbi Marc Jagolinzer of Temple Shalom in Middletown, who was Rabbi Lewis’s colleague at the United Hebrew School, has also served 36 years. Cantor Ely Katz served Touro for 42 years, all but six beside Rabbi Lewis.)

Rabbi Lewis was well known for his thick Irish brogue, sparkling eyes, regal bearing, quick wit, and learned sermons. The first volume of his sermons was published in 1980, the second in 1989. Rabbi Lewis hosted countless visitors to Touro, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1958.

Rabbi Lewis was at times a celebrity. When he appeared on the television show “To Tell the Truth” in 1959, he was recognized as America’s only Irish-born rabbi (and one who spoke Gaelic). One of Newport’s most beloved citizens, he was the recipient of many honors, including a doctorate of sacred theology from Salve Regina College in 1971. He was once the honorary grand marshall of the local St. Patrick’s Day parade.

Rabbi Lewis treasured Touro as an American Jewish shrine. He helped lead the efforts to restore the structure in 1963. His quarter-century dream of having a postage stamp honoring Touro (and President Washington) was realized in 1982.

Following his retirement, Rabbi Lewis lived briefly in Israel, where he visited his childhood friend, Chaim Herzog, the nation’s president (1983-93). Herzog’s father, Isaac, who was Palestine and Israel’s chief Ashkenazi rabbi (1937-59), had been Rabbi Lewis's mentor in Dublin. Touro's rabbi spent his final years in Brooklyn, New York, enjoying the bonds of the Mir Yeshiva community. His closest surviving relative is a nephew in Ireland.

Died in Brooklyn on October 5, 2010 at the age of 95. He was buried in Israel, and a joyous memorial service was held at Touro on October 31.

LITCHMAN, DR. HENRY M., born in Providence, was the son of the late David and May (Caslowitz) Litchman. He graduated from Brown University in 1951.

After completing his studies at Tufts University Medical School, he trained as an orthopedic surgeon at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in New York City. Dr. Litchman was a founding physician of the Orthopedic Group in Providence, and many of his patients were children with cerebral palsy.

Active in the leadership of Temple Beth-El, he served as a vice president and then as an honorary life member of its board.

Dr. Litchman is survived by his wife Judith (Melnik) Litchman, sons Michael and Jonathan, and daughter Janet DuBose.

Died in Providence on February 3, 2010 at the age of 80.

NEMTZOW, DR. AARON R., born in Newport, was the son of the late Morris and Sadie Nemtzow. He studied at Brown University and graduated from Pennsylvania College of Optometry.

Dr. Nemtzow practiced optometry in Providence and Newport and served as vice president of the Rhode Island Optometric Association. He was a member of Temple Emanu-El.

Dr. Nemtzow is survived by his wife Helene (Rottenberg) Nemtzow, son Ted, and daughters Tema Steffen and Marci Nemtzow.

Died in Pawtucket on June 9, 2010 at the age of 89.

RESNICK, CHAYA, born in Milwaukee, was the daughter of the late Rose and William Becker. She studied at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Mrs. Resnick, who had a lifelong association with Habonim, the Labor Zionist youth group, was devoted to Israel. In the summer of 1956 she met her future husband, another volunteer, at kibbutz Gesher Haziv. After they were married, the Resnicks lived in Rhode Island, where she taught Hebrew in synagogues and as a private tutor. She was a member of Temple Emanu-El, Na’Amat, Hug Ivrit, and a life member of the Association.

In 1970 the family made aliya and settled in Haifa. She was the director of English texts at the University of Haifa bookstore.

Mrs. Resnick is survived by her husband Kenneth of Haifa, son Dr. Murray Resnick, and daughters Shira Rosenfeld and Tami Erez, both of Haifa.

Died in Haifa on May 27, 2010 at the age of 76.

ROSEN, BEVERLY, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Samuel and Nancy (Kapland) Starr and the wife of the late Benton Rosen, a president of the Association. She graduated from Pembroke College in 1943.

Mrs. Rosen was a member of Temple Beth-El and a life member of the Association. She was also active in the Wedgwood Society of Boston.

Mrs. Rosen is survived by her daughter Susan Hirsch. She was predeceased by her son John.

Died in Providence on July 20, 2010 at the age of 89.
ROSS, HENRY, born in Providence, was a son of the late Israel and Annie Sarah (Bernstein) Ross. During World War II, he served in the South Pacific with the Merchant Marines. During the Korean Conflict, he served in the Army.

A truck driver for Trans-American Freight Company, Mr. Ross retired in 1990. He was a member of the Teamsters Union.

Mr. Ross was active in the Masons, Shriners, and Jewish War Veterans.

He is survived by his wife Enid (Gold) Ross. They had resided in Delray Beach, Florida, for many years.

Died in Boynton Beach, Florida, on September 4, 2009 at the age of 84.

SHEIN, PEARL, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Abraham Horvitz and Rose (Gershkoff) Horvitz. She graduated from Boston University in 1959.

Mrs. Shein taught at Johnson & Wales University. She owned and operated a needlepoint shop specializing in custom designs.

She was instrumental in creating the Rhode Island Heritage Rug for the Providence Preservation Society and was a docent at the RISD Museum and the State House. She was also active in the Handicraft Club and two book clubs.

Mrs. Shein is survived by her husband F. Richard Shein and daughters Rachel Shein and Jane Noel.

Died in Providence on July 21, 2010 at the age of 72.

TESLER, MARVIN G., born in Providence, was the son of the late Harry and Evelyn Nan (Halperin) Tesler and was the husband of the late Marilyn Lynne (Schaffer) Tesler. A devoted graduate of Attelboro High School, he served on the Class of 1945 reunion committee for no less than 65 years.

An Army medic during World War II, he served with the “Blue Devils” unit in Italy.

He was president of the Tower Club at Brown University from which he graduated in 1949.

Mr. Tesler owned the Charles Package Store, “The House of Good Spirits,” in Attleboro for 45 years. A gregarious person, he often referred to friends as well as strangers as “Cousin.” They called him “Cousin Marvin.”

He happily led Temple Beth-El’s ushers for 45 years and served as an honorary life trustee. He was a member of the University Club, the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, Shriners International, and was a 32nd Degree Mason.

Mr. Tesler is survived by his wife Joyce (Cohen) Schreiber Tesler, son Dr. Peter Tesler, daughter Pamela Howitt, and stepchildren Jill, Kenneth, and Bruce Schreiber and Judith Rowland.

Died in Boca Raton, Florida, on April 2, 2010 at the age of 83.

WHITE, BERNICE T., born in Brooklyn, New York, was the daughter of the late Samuel and Lillian (Seigler) Turner and was the wife of the late Sanford White and the late H. Berrick White.

Mrs. White was a member of Temple Beth-El and its Sisterhood, ORT., Hadassah, and the Miriam Hospital Women’s Association.

She is survived by her son Steven. She was predeceased by daughter Marjorie W. Parness. She is also survived by her stepchildren, Steven and Neal White and Lynn Aaronson.

Died on Providence on January 13, 2010 at the age of 87.

WOLF, RUTH, born in Worcester, was the daughter of the late Samuel and Dorothy Harris. Student body president of Pembroke College, she graduated in 1941. A social worker by nature, Mrs. Wolf began her career with the Girl Scouts of America. During World War II, while a civilian employee of the Army in Georgia, she demonstrated her commitment to civil rights. At 55 years of age, she received a master’s degree in teaching from Rhode Island College.

Mrs. Wolf championed Pembroke and Brown University. An indefatigable fundraiser, she was also a member of the Brown Corporation from 1972 to 1977 and was instrumental in the creation of the Nancy Duke Lewis Chair for outstanding female professors. She established the Ruth Harris Wolf Scholarship for academically gifted individuals of modest means. In 1981, in recognition of her exemplary service, Mrs. Wolf received an honorary doctor of letters degree from Brown. A decade later she was honored by being named the grand marshall of Brown’s commencement.

Mrs. Wolf’s dynamism and political savvy benefitted several organizations. At the state level she served on the Title III Educational Advisory Committee and was a volunteer for nonviolent offenders in the Attorney General’s office. Mrs. Wolf was president of the Pawtucket Arts Council and volunteered at children’s concerts of the Rhode Island Philharmonic. She also established the Laurelmead Employees Education Fund.

Mrs. Wolf is survived by her husband W. Irving Wolf, Jr. and son Scott. She was predeceased by her son David.

Died in Providence on August 29, 2010 at the age of 91.
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Milton Stanzler on left