

*Rhode Island Jewish Historical*

# Notes



Volume 18 Number 3 November 2021

The Association is grateful to the  
**Harold A. Winstead Charitable Foundation Trust**  
for its generous support of *The Notes*

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DESIGN

**Logowitz and Company Newton, Massachusetts**

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Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association  
Printed in the USA

The Library of Congress National Serials Data  
Program (NSDP), Washington, DC 20540, which  
operates the US Serials Data System, has assigned  
the following International Standard Serial Number  
(ISSN) to *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*,  
a publication of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical  
Association: ISSN 0556-8609

OUTSIDE FRONT COVER:

Mexican folk art candelabra  
from the collections of  
Prof. Gitlitz & Davidson

INSIDE COVERS:

The family of Dr. Marvin S.  
& Ellie Wasser, 2019

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## Editor's Comments



Once again, our journal presents a potpourri of perspectives on the ever-surprising topic of Rhode Island Jewish history. I dare say that, in the process of gathering and helping polish some of these articles, I learn more than most readers.

Of course placing these articles in some kind of logical order is a further challenge. The easiest arrangements would be chronological or perhaps geographical, but I also think that a topical approach makes sense.

As always, I am delighted to welcome the return of many writers to these pages. Mike Fink still holds the record for contributing the highest consecutive number, 17, but I am delighted that four authors – Bob Jacobson, Stephen Logowitz, Tony Silvia, and Harris Weiner- have contributed to three or more issues. Is geography necessarily a factor? One of our new authors never lived in Rhode Island, but four no longer live here.

The current issue may also be notable for new writers' ages. While the youngest, Peter Stein, is 51, the eldest, Adele Espo, is 97. I happened to have noticed that my age falls almost exactly

[above] **The editor's Confirmation Class at Wilshire Blvd. Temple, Los Angeles, 1964**

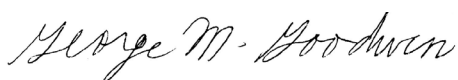
between theirs. But I'd also like to suggest that Adele may be one of the youngest ever – if measured by her alertness and spirit.

With this issue, I too celebrate a milestone – my 18th as editor – thereby surpassing Seebert Goldowsky's record. In 2003, I did not consider myself qualified or worthy of this position, but our dear departed friend, Stan Abrams, who chaired the publications committee, persuaded me to give it a try. I'm still trying!

Thanks are also due to our friend and past Association president, Mel Topf, who has ably chaired our talented publications committee for a decade. I so much depend on and appreciate the help provided by all of our committee members!

I would also like to proudly mention that my editorship of *The Notes* has been recognized indirectly by my undergraduate alma mater, Lake Forest College, through an award that I was supposed to receive at my 50th class reunion in 2020, but was presented this year. I feel extremely fortunate to be the recipient of the Prof. Richard W. Hankte Award for Lifelong Learning, which has been presented to alumni on only an occasional basis. Yes, Prof. Hankte taught history and I focused on art history, but my strong liberal arts education enabled me to follow my curiosity and journey in numerous directions. I'd also like to point out that this is the seventh year that my LFC classmate and dear friend, Stephen Logowitz, a Providence native, has served as our journal's gifted and devoted graphic designer.

Thank you once again, Association members and readers, for your continuing interest in and support of our distinguished homemade journal, which began publication, with high expectations and considerable hope in 1954. This was the year that the third Temple Beth-El was dedicated and during celebrations of the American Jewish Tercentenary.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George M. Goodwin". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Mit "Normandie"  
oder  
"Bremeren"



Herrn

Adolf Feibelmann,

Camden / Ark  
-----  
U.S. A.

Siegfried Feibelmann  
Berlin SO 16  
Köpenickerstr. 73



## Feibelmaenner: A Chronicle, Part II

H. Jack Feibelman

Although this second installment of the author's memoirs covers only two years, from August 1936 to September 1938, it feels like an epic. It's a story of how Hans-Joachim became H. Jack and how a boy took on adult responsibilities while longing for reunification with his parents. But he also constantly worried about how he could father them.

Fortunately, while traveling vast distances on his own, Jack was always encouraged and supported by his far-flung, German-born family. After sailing from Europe, he met *mishpocha* in New York City, another cousin on his rail journey across America, and was then embraced when he reached cotton country in the Deep South. Yes, by providing love, encouragement, and learning – even a pet pooch – Jack's Uncle Adolf and Aunt Adeline remind me of L. Frank Baum's Dorothy and her Aunty Em and Uncle Henry. But Jack was also forced to confront a world of racial segregation. Yet, he felt a lowly servant's affection and uplifted by gospel music's refrains.

Jack soon journeyed alone to another small town – not so far from Kansas – where he received the rudiments of a practical education. But this experience led to his heightened yearning for life in a great metropolis, something akin to his native Berlin. So, during the depths of the Depression, the teenager returned to New York City to search almost quixotically for employment. If unsuccessful, he would have been forced to return to a safe but isolated world.

Jack does in fact quote Dickens, but he does not dwell on his hardships or privations. Indeed, even when struggling to survive from day-to-day, he somehow remained hopeful. His life, which would last nearly a century, had just begun.

Once again, I'd like to thank Jack's daughter, Barbara Feibelman, for making his memoirs available to readers. During his lifetime, Jack was too darn modest.

1936

On the morning of August 12, I traveled from Paris to the docks at Le Havre to sail for America. The S. S. *Normandie* stopped in Southampton, where it picked up more passengers, and headed in beautiful weather for America. At 15 years of age I was embarking on a great adventure, starting on this colossal ship, which had so many things to offer.

I was traveling “tourist” class, called “second” class on other ships, and through an introduction by a family member was invited by Mr. Otto Kahn from San Francisco<sup>1</sup> to join him and his family for dinner in the first-class dining room. I had several more invitations from him, including some to join him in the movie theatre, which made my trip even more enjoyable. My biggest pleasure on being allowed entry to the first-class deck was going to the front bridge, just below the captain’s bridge, where, pressed by headwinds against the ship’s hull, I stood for hours watching the gigantic bow cut into the Atlantic Ocean, forging forward towards America.

Very early on the morning of August 17, I was out on deck to watch the ship glide by the Statue of Liberty and rendezvous with the harbor pilot, who climbed aboard and took over the maneuvers to bring the *Normandie* into her berth on the Hudson River.

Sailing for the first time into New York harbor generated in me overwhelming excitement and emotion. I was not alone in this response. The first sight of America has had the same impact on all the immigrants I have spoken with, including those who arrived in the 1920s and were not escaping to the United States to avoid potential harm, as I was.

There is magic in this moment, which is almost always in the early hours of the morning, the time of arrival preferred by steamship lines, the dock workers, and the authorities. This magic comes from the huge expanse of the harbor giving the impression of an all-embracing welcome, reinforced by the outstretched arm of Miss Liberty and the magnetism of a cluster of glistening towers on the top of the land that you see first.

At first glance, that bit of land appeared to be the far-off shining city on the hill straight from *Pilgrim’s Progress*. I have ar-

rived! I have finally arrived. This picture I will always carry in my heart. Then and there I pledged to be forever grateful to be allowed entrance into this haven and resolved to make the most of this opportunity.

The next 48 hours passed liked a whirlwind. I cleared immigration and customs and walked ashore onto American soil. Cousin Walter Feibelman<sup>2</sup>, 28, and his cousin Herbert Kronfeld<sup>3</sup>, 45, located me on the pier and took charge of me. Herbert, who worked at the Brooklyn Superior Court, had taken the day off to show me Manhattan and Brooklyn sites, including Coney Island, and Radio City Music Hall.

The next day they delivered me to a Pullman sleeping car at Pennsylvania Station to travel to Arkansas. On August 20, the train pulled into Indianapolis, Indiana, where cousin Isadore Feibelman<sup>4</sup>, my benefactor in the matter of my immigration visa, met me at the railroad station. He and his sister showed me great hospitality with a wonderful luncheon and a chance to get away from the monotony of the train ride, and saw me off at 4 p.m. on the train to St. Louis.

After a four-hour layover, I continued at midnight on the St. Louis Southwestern Railroad, known as the Cotton Belt Line, as it coursed through the cotton states of Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas, and ended in Dallas.

The countryside that we traversed was the America that I had heard about- this was heartland country. Very early on the morning of August 21, I enjoyed the luxuries of a Pullman sleeper and porter, such as washing up with starched white linen, shoe shines, and the bright observation car at the end of the train to see America pass by.

We were south of St. Louis and completely surrounded by water. At some stretches the water extended to the left and right of the tracks for a mile or more to the fields on the horizon. The Mississippi, flooded that spring, had not yet dried up. No dikes were built as yet – they were to come later – and, as I could see in looking out the last car, only the rails and the rail bed were safely above the waterline.

As we crossed the country, the clickety-clack of the wheels

on the steel rails was interrupted only when the train blew its wailing whistle, to warn all comers off the tracks. For those deaf cows that did not leave the track in time, the locomotive had a scoop that would not so gently lift the animal and drop it to the side of the track.

This train made frequent stops at small towns along the way, dropping off a few passengers, picking up two or three new ones, dropping off and picking up mail and packages, and leaving the daily paper behind. It was a slow journey that took us through cotton fields, forests, and by little communities sometimes consisting of only five or six houses. Along the track we waved to farm hands, children, and wives in doorways of shacks, and then for miles saw nothing but open fields.

On August 21 at 2 p.m., I arrived in Camden, Arkansas. It was 108 degrees as I left the air-conditioned club car. I felt as if a ton of bricks had hit me.

At the station Uncle Adolf and Aunt Adeline met me.<sup>5</sup> They were waiting with a huge Studebaker touring car, with truck-sized wheels for country travel. These cars, unique to that period, are not around any more; I recall that they made my eyes pop. A new world was opening up for me.

Camden is about 150 miles north of the Louisiana state line and about 75 miles north of Smackover, Arkansas, where oil was first discovered in the South. At that time Camden had about 8,000 residents. There were two railroads serving the town: the Cotton Belt (connecting St. Louis to Dallas) and the Kansas-Missouri (connecting Kansas City to New Orleans). Each railroad had only one train per day going north and south.

Camden was in the middle of cotton country. Its population had just as many whites as blacks. To my surprise, all of its facilities were duplicated. This means that at the station, there were colored and white waiting rooms, toilets, and water bubblers. On the east side of the tracks was a city for whites, and the west side, towards Chidester, was where the colored lived. There were also two schools and two churches for each of many denominations. The exceptions were two banks and one county courthouse that everybody used.



The courthouse again had all its facilities in duplicate. When I arrived schools were of course closed, which gave me time to get acclimated.

I was fascinated to hear that on the Friday preceding my arrival, the Chapman brothers had struck one of the banks in Camden. My limited knowledge of English

made me ask twice what had happened. The Chapman brothers, a hold-up team operating in Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, had indeed struck Camden's Citizens Bank and made their getaway with several bags of money. That was the stuff I had read about as a boy at home in Zane Grey and Western novels; the incident confirmed to me that I was in the America I had read about.

My uncle and aunt lived in a very nice house on the main street.<sup>6</sup> Originally this home must have been at the edge of town, but by 1936 the town had expanded considerably beyond the Feibelman home. This one-story house had six huge, antebellum columns in front, which supported the overhang of a porch. There were enough rocking chairs for the family and extensive company. Only the bedrooms had air-conditioning, but other rooms had huge ceiling fans. There were also palm fans to hold in your hand to cool yourself.

There were many other novelties for me. The state-of-the-art G. E. refrigerator, which was not commonly seen in Europe, had a huge condenser coil on top. There was a large floor-model radio, which, I soon found out, provided core entertainment. Then I met Bingo, the Boston bulldog, and it became my constant companion.

Most importantly, I met Jinsey, a colored woman in her late sixties. (Of course the term “black” was unheard of in those days.) Jinsey was part of the family. Her mother had been a slave who worked for Uncle Adolf’s uncles, the Levy<sup>7</sup> and Hirsch<sup>8</sup> families, during the early 1860s. Jinsey inherited a house in the “colored town” from these families, where she returned at night.

She soon took to me and saw a novelty in me just as I saw one in her. Jinsey was indispensable. She cleaned the house, did the laundry, oversaw the part-time gardener, and saw to any need that my aunt, uncle or I had.

Since Aunt Adeline was on a fowl diet, Jinsey maintained a chicken coop in the backyard. It furnished not only a daily ration of eggs, but also an almost daily chicken or turkey for the family. I watched amazed as Jinsey killed the daily victim with a quick twist of her hands. It was my good fortune that she adopted me as her protégé.

My aunt had given my arrival a lot of loving thought. Within a few days she commenced a program for my Americaniza-

GRADE 10

### PUPIL'S REPORT CARD

CAMDEN, ARK., HIGH SCHOOL

Name Feibelman, Hans-J. 1936 Semester 1936

SUBJECT	Period	1st Six Weeks	2nd Six Weeks	3rd Six Weeks	Exam. Grade	Sem. Grade	ATTENDANCE AND DEPT.			TEACHER	
							1st Six Weeks	2nd Six Weeks	3rd Six Weeks		
<u>Library</u>	<u>1st</u>						Days Absent	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		<u>Thakrey</u>
							Department	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B-</u>	
<u>U.S. History</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	Days Absent	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Galster</u>
							Department	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	
<u>Am. Govt.</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>F</u>	Days Absent	<u>A</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>B+</u>	<u>Harsh</u>
							Department	<u>A</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>B+</u>	
<u>Study Hall</u>	<u>5</u>						Days Absent				<u>Shoemaker</u>
							Department	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	
<u>English IV</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>B</u>	Days Absent	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>Thakrey</u>
							Department	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	
<u>S. H.</u>	<u>7</u>						Days Absent	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>Galster</u>
							Department	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	
<u>Chem</u>	<u>7-8</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>B+</u>	Days Absent	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>R. J. Thoms</u>
							Department	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>A</u>	

EXPLANATION OF MARKS USED

A—Very superior: excellent prospects for advanced training.  
 B—Superior: very good prospects for advanced training.  
 C—Among middle group of class: nearly fifty per cent of class rank here.  
 D—Work inferior: danger of failing: parent should confer with teacher and principal.  
 F—Failing work: necessary to repeat unless work is improved.

(©Vaz)  
2

tion. I appreciated her effort and used well the few weeks before school started.

A retired school principal coached me daily and intensively in English. That coaching continued after school began and involved primarily vocabulary-building and the study of American history and government. I was taught to see the world through Southern eyes, to understand that the South has distinct problems, which, unfortunately, were not understood by the rest of the nation. The problem of states' rights, for example, existed because of the unwillingness of Yankees and the federal government to accept that life is different in the South; it needed to be governed by local authorities. Furthermore, I was taught that the "darkies" represented a challenge to no other region, and only Southern whites could manage it. Among other facts of life explained to me were the two political parties, although Camden did not have any Republicans.

I was enrolled at Camden High School for the coming semester. I took the necessary tests and was accepted as a senior.

Next my aunt arranged for me to meet a number of my future classmates from all walks of life and to spend some time with them. The kids were working on summer jobs but graciously spent after-work hours with me. They were patient to talk slowly and took pains to initiate me, the city boy, into their activities, such as the swimming hole on the Ouachita River in the woods, fishing on the river, and barbecues at the country club.

Once school started, I had a ball. I enjoyed studies and did quite well; I made a lot of friends. At first it was a bit intimidating, as most kids in my class were 17 or 18. I was one of only two 16-year-olds. The other was Josey, a Jewish girl who had moved to Camden that fall. We were close friends, which meant that I had a date for school affairs. More than that, since she had the use of her family's Pontiac, I was in the enviable position of having rides when needed.

Besides me there were five Jewish kids in town. Camden had a beautiful, small temple that seated about 40 persons, but since the

[opp.] **author's report card from Camden  
High School, 1936**

Jewish population had dwindled to about a dozen adults, formal services had been discontinued.<sup>9</sup>

Caring friends asked me to join them for their Methodist worship on Sunday mornings. Not wanting to ignore their efforts totally, I joined them for a couple of services. I assume that they eventually understood that my commitment lay elsewhere.

During the next three months, I was deeply immersed in schoolwork and many activities, including traveling with the football team on out-of-town trips. Christmas vacation came and passed; before I knew it, I was in my second semester.

Whenever time permitted, I joined my uncle at his office, and here too I found a new world. He was a cotton broker, which involved buying cotton crops from tenant farmers and reselling them to international cotton dealers in New Orleans. He negotiated with cotton growers at his office or visited them in the field. The slogan on the office door read: "Always in the market." That meant two things. He was prepared at any time to make an offer to buy cotton, and at all hours of the business day he was able to quote the current price on the New Orleans Cotton Exchange. The quotes were updated every 15 minutes by a fantastic device: a piece of string with a metal clip hanging out of his second-story office. Every 15 minutes, as arranged by subscription, a Western Union messenger delivered telegrams with the latest quote and attached it to the string. The cotton was quoted in "bits" and cents, based on a fiber's length and its quality.

The visits that my uncle made to tenant farmers all over Ouachita County were fascinating. In 1936 and 1937, economic conditions were terrible. I did not realize then how hard it was for families in the fields to survive. Many lived in tiny hamlets of five or six houses near their acreage or even in a shack in a corner of a field. When rainfall was poor, it reduced their crop to a minimum.

The farmers were always in need of funds for seeds and labor. So they had to rely on advances from the bank or to pre-sell the future crop to my uncle, who would advance a conservative amount of its future value. The living conditions on farms were depressing to me, but this had been going on for decades and was generally



accepted as inevitable.

As much as there was segregation between white and colored in various walks of life, there was no distinction in the fields. Life was hard for everybody. Many whites turned to tenant farming or cotton-picking for a season, especially during the Great Depression, when there was no work to come by.

Many times I accompanied Uncle Adolf into the fields to look at crops. We traveled occasionally on Sunday mornings for miles on rough country roads, when everybody would be home from the fields and all was quiet. We heard only crickets, the occasional mooing of cows, and singing coming from somewhere far away. Several miles later, as we approached the sound, it would reach the volume of a whole choir. It came from colored churches scattered throughout the fields. Their choirs gave forth the most melodic gospel hymns, at times accompanied by loud tapping or dancing. We always stopped at a respectful distance and listened, moved by the emotion-packed and joyful singing. This impressed me as a remnant of Southern plantation life.

In the meantime, I received almost daily airmail from my parents; I too wrote them almost every day. Conditions were deteriorating for them as persecutions of Jews accelerated in Germany. Since Jews were not allowed employment nor to conduct business, their economic situation was worsening.

I was hoping daily to have news that my parents had made arrangements to leave Germany. They were still exploring all avenues that might lead to emigration but had not found any suitable arrangement.

My mother's brother, Willi, and his wife, Minka, managed to leave for Melbourne, Australia. They sailed in early 1937 via Cape Town and the Indian Oceana on a seven-week journey to reach their new home. Cousin Fritz Rose and his wife, Ilse, went to Colombia, as had Cousin Paul a few years earlier.

But there was no decision from my parents, which I found worrisome. In May 1937 my father would be 60; he could not see starting life all over again in a new country without speaking its language.

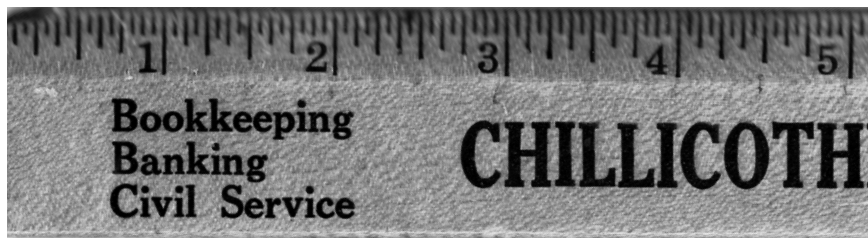
1937

In March, as my high school graduation approached, my uncle and aunt tried to guide me as to what I could do for a career. They offered to help me go to a four-year college, which I rejected, gratefully, as I wanted to do something that would enable me to soon earn my way to support my parents on their arrival in America. My uncle and aunt considered starting a career a very difficult challenge in the midst of this Great Depression, which had paralyzed not only the South but the entire country.

Attending college was not an option for most kids, unless they received appointments to West Point or Annapolis. My friend, Tom Goodgame, went to Annapolis, served in the war as a submarine captain, and then was a professor in environmental sciences for years at the University of Chicago.<sup>10</sup>

President Roosevelt had activated the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps), the NYA (National Youth Administration), the WPA (Works Progress Administration), and the PWA (Public Works Administration) – all as a means to give employment and hope to youth, to artists, and to all those who wanted to work but could not find jobs. FDR’s so-called “alphabet” agencies were lifesavers. Many of my classmates depended on the CCC and the NYA for employment after graduation. Some of the work, such as sweeping leaves and streets or producing murals, was not urgent, but that was not the point.

Sadly, many of these agencies benefitted whites only; the colored hardly had any access because of the social structure practiced in the South. The “old boy” network also excluded colored men from all opportunities. As for colored women, it was hopeless to get



any benefits from government institutions.

Where was I to find employment? After many visits and discussions with friends and a neighbor who was a CPA<sup>11</sup>, I concluded that this occupation was challenging work that I could learn. Since it called for an education from a two-year business school, I was inspired to follow that path.

There were two prominent business schools in the South: one in Tyler, Texas, the other in Chillicothe, Missouri, near Kansas City. I opted for the latter and enrolled during the summer semester of 1937.

But first I enjoyed the remainder of my school year. I made a last-ditch effort to graduate with good grades. I scrambled to party and enjoy the last weeks of irresponsible high school life, and I watched most of my classmates look for jobs. We had a burst of social activities, the class barbecue, the prom, and the graduation exercises.

I was sixteen when I graduated and remember the finale when everybody joined in singing, “Let me call you sweetheart,” but I had nobody to sing it to. I always felt too young and immature to keep up with classmates (and now I am complaining about being too old).

I had about ten days after graduating to get everything together for my trip to business school, where I arrived in time for the summer session, which started in the second week of June.<sup>12</sup> Chillicothe Business College was the major industry for this little town about 125 miles northeast of Kansas City.<sup>13</sup> It was founded early in the 20th century to serve Southern and Midwestern states. Its curriculum clearly dates the institution, reflecting the employment market



of the 1920s and '30s. In addition to the basics of English, writing, mathematics, and commercial law, which were mandatory, we studied telegraphy, stenography, speed typing, penmanship, bookkeeping – particularly for auto dealerships – and accounting. I completed all these courses except telegraphy, which I felt I could pass up.

Telegraphy did fill a great need particularly in the vast area of the Midwest, Southwest, and South. Telegraphers were stationed at each major railroad crossing to report with Morse code messages the status and progress of trains and their freight. Think of such railroads as the Union Pacific, the Southern Pacific, the Burlington & Northern, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. Telegraphers often served as the only means of communication for some isolated hamlets or houses. As hard as it is to visualize now, there were many thousands of telegraphers on duty 24 hours a day to serve the railroad networks.

Recognizing the need for operators, the school equipped each dormitory and public room with telegraphy keys so that students at all times could tap out messages to each other until they could send communications in their sleep- so to speak. Little did I realize how obsolete telegraphy would become in my lifetime.

The other subject that now appears antiquated was the Palmer handwriting system. Fundamentally it called for the movement of the lower arm from the elbow toward the hand to form uniform movement and consistent script at a perfect angle. The learning process required a few weeks of penmanship exercises before even learning or relearning the actual script and working the alphabet.

The college was as unique an experience for me as I was unique for it. As a European refugee, I was treated very kindly and asked to speak before Rotarians and at a class assembly about what was going on in Europe. I was surprised that there was this demand for my report. In retrospect, I understand that people had not paid attention to Hitler and what was going on in Europe. Now they wanted to hear details about life there, where many of them had served in the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) during the Great War 18 years earlier.

As for schoolwork, I took advantage of the opportunity to

accelerate my studies. Since my uncle had paid my tuition for the 24-month course, I was allowed to take as many courses at a time as I wanted or could handle. After six months, by the end of December 1937, I had completed all required courses for the diploma except for a passing mark in penmanship. I returned to school in January 1938, completed my last credit, and was awarded my diploma.

During Christmas vacation of 1937, which I spent in Camden, I had my first paid job. I assisted as a sales clerk in a department store, reporting for work at 8 AM and staying until closing at 7 PM. I was paid \$1 per day. Holding a job gave me a great deal of satisfaction, but it was very exhausting.

During the holidays I had lengthy conversations with my aunt and uncle about my future. Uncle Adolf suggested that I visit five or six of his business friends for job interviews. My thoughts were to go to New York City to look for a job there. No doubt Uncle Adolf thought that this idea was preposterous, even outrageous, although he never let on to his feelings.

What motivated me was my feeling that I was living in God-forsaken territory. The throbbing life of a metropolis, like the city I grew up in, would only be found in New York City. I also thought that if and when my parents came to America, they could be much more easily acclimated in New York.

My aunt and uncle decided that they would finance my travel to New York and give me start-up money of \$50. If I found a job and supported myself, I could stay there. If I could not, then I could return to Camden. They would send me a ticket for the return trip, but they would not send any funds to support me in New York beyond this offer. So off I was to New York.<sup>14</sup>

### **1938**

I recall arriving at the Baltimore & Ohio terminal in Newark, New Jersey, at the end of January on a snowy, sleety day and taking a bus to Manhattan, then a taxi to Cousin Walter's home, a one-room apartment on the Brooklyn waterfront. He lived in a rooming house, which was once a patrician, one-family brownstone, located in a run-down section of the borough.

Walter's cousin, Herbert Kronfeld, who had met me at the boat on my arrival in the USA, again came to my rescue. He got me settled in a one-room apartment and helped me get oriented in the big city. Finding a job was a challenge, for there were close to a million unemployed in a city of millions, and so many were much more qualified than I. I must be forever grateful to Herbert for his fatherly advice, his patience in educating me on the practical end of getting a job, and then on holding on to it. Above all I am grateful to him for soliciting help from his boss in finding a job for me.

Herbert worked at the Superior Court in downtown Brooklyn as a lawyer and a clerk for Justice Mitchell May, an elected judge under New York State law. Justice May, a man with a distinguished appearance somewhat like President Woodrow Wilson's, was willing to help me, a young immigrant with letters of introduction to a circle of his friends. I ultimately visited them and blush now to think of the nerve I had.

These were some of Justice May's friends: Mr. Grover Whalen, New York City Tourist and Park commissioner, who became president of the 1939 World's Fair; Mr. S. D. Leidesdorf of the international accounting firm that bore his name; Mr. Bear of the brokerage firm, Bear Stearns; Mr. N. Katz, controller of R. H. Macy & Co.; David Schwarz, president of Paragon Oil Co.; Mr. S. Seidman of Seidman & Seidman, who could become Internal Revenue commissioner; and the president of Bloomingdale's, whose name I do not recall.

I presented my letters of introduction to the officials' secretaries with the hope of something happening. All these men promised to see what opportunities there might be for me and to write me. In Dickens's words, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." I had a lot of competition from unemployed, married men with families and from Harvard graduates with MBAs.

Nothing in the way of a job materialized. My two weeks were up, and I did not have a job. Again Cousin Herbert stepped in. Justice May called the president of Martin's department store in downtown Brooklyn, which was across the street from Abraham & Strauss, a landmark. The next day, Mr. Fred Zeits, the store's

president, interviewed me.

I was hired to work in the bookkeeping department, and my pay was \$15 for a five-and-a-half day week. I was delighted.

The work that I was given was relatively simple: to keep unit control of inventory records in the accessories departments, which included gloves, costume jewelry, scarves, belts, handkerchiefs, millinery, and neckwear. The last three departments are no longer around, and few people will recall that a neckwear department had beautiful crocheted or embroidered white collars and cuffs that ladies attached to their dresses, jackets, and other garments. As I was certainly not the greatest or fastest bookkeeper they had, it came as no surprise in late May that I received a pink slip. As my replacement, Martin's hired a recent Harvard Business School graduate as an executive trainee. My savings were very limited, about \$35, and so was the likelihood of my finding another job quickly.

In anticipation of this calamity, I arranged a barter with the maître d' at the dining room at the Standish Arms, a hotel across the street from my rooming house. I received breakfast priced at 30 cents, lunch priced at 25 cents, and dinner priced at 55 cents. In exchange, I would arrive at the hotel office every morning shortly after 7, type their menus, and then run them off on a mimeograph machine. It was a wonderful deal for me. Breakfast and lunch were ample, and dinner was great. It consisted of a small cup of soup, a small plate of salad, a meat entre, potatoes and a vegetable, a desert (usually a mold of Jell-O), and a cup of coffee.

Now I had the challenge of finding a job. It was very, very difficult.

I was out of the house early each day dressed in the one good suit that I owned, waiting in employment offices and visiting a lot of people to whom I had been referred.

I had a few stints as a temp at B. Altman & Co. until I found a sympathetic personnel manager at Bloomingdale's. She found a job for me to affix "New York State Tobacco Tax Paid" stamps on cigarette packs. It was very monotonous work, but gave me an income, and that was what counted. I had to check at the end of the day to see if there was work for me the next day. Thus I worked between

three to five days a week and was paid \$2.50 per day. I understood the cliché that it was not enough money to live on, but too much money to let you starve. If I did not get a break in employment, I would not be able to afford my rent and meet extraneous expenses. I would not die of starvation but hard times were in the offing.

In the meantime I had good news from my parents. I received a cable on March 25 that they had arrived in Brussels and were staying in a small apartment near the home of my father's niece and nephew, the Fisches. The letter that followed explained that this was a sudden development of which they could not write me earlier in fear that the mail might be censored by German authorities.

My mother had pushed my father to make this move in view of all the news leaks about the deportation and extermination of Jews and even some Catholics in concentration camps. The fact that I was in New York gave them comfort and courage. It was therefore arranged for all essential personal items, household linen, and other articles to be shipped ahead as if merchandise to a customer and friend in Amsterdam.

In March my parents arranged for a German holiday visa, ostensibly to visit the beaches in Belgium, but knowing that they would find temporary refuge with the Fisches in Antwerp. They left all other belongings, furniture, and furnishings in our seven-room apartment, with the family car parked curbside in front of the house. A taxi took them to the train for their last opportunity to leave. Having arranged to smuggle several thousand dollars to Belgium, that was all they had with which to start a new life.

In Brussels, after notifying me by cable of their arrival, my parents' first move was to visit the American consul to file a visa application. I soon had the necessary affidavits from three American guarantors in their hands. To our great surprise and delight, the processing in Belgium took only four months.

In July my parents received their American immigration visas, and they sailed on August 25 on the S.S. *Île de France* from Le Havre for New York City, where I met them at the pier just before Labor Day on September 1. It was a day of great jubilation.

As events would prove very shortly, this move was made in



the nick of time. November 8 was *Kristallnacht*, the night when all forces in Germany were let loose to beat Jews and smash their properties. This would signal the end of all emigration.

Then the reality of the economics of survival hit us. We arranged a frugal suite at the Standish Arms, the hotel across the street from me. My father was 61 and my mother was 48 years old. As neither spoke English they enrolled in classes for immigrants.

Next we contacted a New York cousin, Carl Rosenberger, a native of Ruelzheim, whose grandmother was the sister of my great-grandmother.<sup>15</sup> Carl had been my father's classmate in grammar school and knew all of the Feibelmans of an older generation as well. His father had also been my father's teacher in the small school that he had attended in Ruelzheim.

We received a most gracious welcome and were invited to the Rosh Hashanah dinner in the second week of September. We felt that there are some times in life when wonderful events come about. This was it. Carl expressed great concern about my parents' and my welfare and wondered how we could support ourselves.

As a result of that conversation, an appointment was made for my father to visit Carl at his office. Neither of us had realized that he was the owner of Cohn & Rosenberger.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, he was the "ro" of "Coro" Jewelry, which would become the largest costume jewelry manufacturer in the post-World War II world. While no specific work was discussed, I was hired to start on September 25 in Coro's offices on Herald Square. My parents' arrival in America had put life on track for me.

The employment manager at Coro, conscious of anti-German sentiment in this country, asked me to change my first name from the very popular Hans-Joachim (the name of an 18th-century military hero) to a real American name. Thus I was thereafter known as H. Jack and was in due course naturalized as Hans Jack.

I was assigned to handle jewelry repairs and returns, an entry-level job that gave me an opportunity to observe all aspects of the business. My work location adjoined the accounting department, so I had constant access to the sales offices and showroom. My desk was near the export manager, and I had to deal with complaints and

defective goods with the factory manager, who came weekly from Providence to New York.

All these connections proved to be important in my career, and all these people eventually became my coworkers and close friends.

#### Editor's Notes

1

This Otto Kahn was clearly not the great American Jewish investment banker, who had been born in Germany in 1867 and made his fortune with Kuhn, Loeb in New York City. That Otto Kahn, who became president of the Metropolitan Opera and resided in a palatial townhouse at 1 East 91st Street and in Oheka Castle on Long Island, died in 1934. Various German-born Otto Kahns living in San Francisco are identifiable through the census, but these included a clerk and an electrician. So the identity of the author's onboard acquaintance remains a mystery (or an impostor).

2

In 1942, a Walter L. Feibelman and his wife, Isle, were living at 617 West 164th Street in Washington Heights. Born in Munich in 1912, he had immigrated to the United States in 1935. Also a Munich native, she had immigrated in 1939.

A far more likely candidate for the author's cousin was Walter J. Feibelman (1911-1974), who lived for a few years in New York City before moving to Danville, Virginia, where he was naturalized in 1939. His race on the American form was listed as "Hebrew." His birthplace was Ruelzheim, Germany, which was where the author's father, Siegfried, had been born. This Walter Feibelman had sailed from Cherbourg to New York on the *S. S. Majestic* on July 4, 1934. He spent his career with Dibrell Brothers Tobacco Company, eventually becoming senior vice president.

Walter's grave in Danville's Green Hill Cemetery states that he was born in Ruelzheim and that he served as a captain in the quartermaster corps during World War II. Nearby are markers for his parents, Moritz (1876-1937) and Fanny (1884-1935), which state that they were buried in Ruelzheim. Walter's younger brother, Fred Siegfried (1914-1985), and his wife, Alice (1922-1992), are buried close by. Walter was married several times.

3

Herbert E. Kronfeld had been born in St. Louis in 1899 and died in Brooklyn in 1985. He is buried at Beth David Cemetery in Elmont, New York. According to his draft registration card for World War II, he and his wife, Rea, lived at 1480 East 45th Street in Brooklyn. He was employed at New York's Supreme Court in Brooklyn.

4

Isadore Feibelman (1873-1954), who was born in and spent his life in Indianapolis, was discussed in the first part of the author's article. He had two sisters, Gertrude and Ruth. See endnote 9.

5

The author's uncle and aunt were mentioned in the first part of his article as having visited the Feibelman family in Germany in 1927. Passenger records show that the couple had actually sailed from Cherbourg to New York on the *S. S. Columbus* and arrived on August 30, 1926. These records also show that Adolf, 57 years of age, had been naturalized in the Circuit Court of Arkansas' Ouachita County on November 23, 1889. His address was listed as P.O. Box 368 in Camden. Adeline, 47 years of age, had been born in Donaldson, Louisiana, on November 26, 1878.

Adolf Feibelman died on June 3, 1953 and was buried in Camden's Beth El Emet Cemetery. Adeline's nearby grave shows that she died on June 4, 1964. According to her Camden death certificate, her last residence was 422 Washington Street.

The 1880 census shows that Adeline's maiden name was Hemendinger. Both her parents had been born in Louisiana: her father, Leon, in 1838, her mother, Mathilde, in 1850.

Louisiana naturalization and marriage records document that Adolf Feibelman, who arrived in the United States in 1889 (at about 21 years of age), wed Adeline in New Orleans in August 1916. He was about 47, and she was about 32. His occupation was "cotton buyer."

But there was an earlier generation of Feibelmans living in Camden. For example, two Feibelman children, Eugenia Henrietta and Calidonia Octavia, were buried there in 1862 and 1868. Each lived less than a year. Most likely, these girls' father was Edward Feibelman, who was one of six trustees who founded Camden's Reform congregation, Beth El Emet, in 1869. Records of Edward's property tax payments date from 1866.

(There was another Edward Feibelman, possibly one who bought property in Washington County, in northwest Arkansas, in 1857. Born in Bavaria in 1842, he died in 1867 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.)

The 1900 census shows that Adolph Feibelman, 31, a "merchant hand," was living with his uncle, Moses Levy, a merchant, who had been born in Germany in 1845 and immigrated in 1860. Moses was married to Barbetta, who had been born in Germany in 1834. Also living in this home at 405 Jackson Street was Moses's cousin, A. Hirsch, who had been born in Germany in 1844.

Since the late 1870s, two generations of Feibelmans were living in New Orleans. These included Edward and his sons, David, Jacob, Leopold, and Thomas, as well as Bernard. The maiden name of Edward's wife, Fannie, was Hirsch. So she could have been related to A. Hirsch or Moses Levy. It would be fascinating to know if any of these Feibelmans arranged for Adolph to meet his future wife, Adeline.

In 1920, Bernard and his brother, Leon, purchased Leon Fellman's department store at 800 Canal Street and opened Feibleman's. Eleven years later they moved the store to Baronne Street and in 1931 sold it to Sears, Roebuck. Meanwhile, the Feibleman brothers had opened a department store on Louisiana Street in downtown Shreveport but in 1930 sold it to Sears, Roebuck.

6

The home stood at 405 Washington Street.

7

Moses Levy had been born in France in 1845 and, according to the 1880 census, was living in Camden. He was listed as a "merchant." His wife, listed as Babette, had been born in Bavaria, and was 28. According to the Feibelman family tree, she was the relative also known as Barbara Feibelman. Living with the couple was a cousin, A. Hirsch, 24, who worked as a "clerk in a store." Again according to the family tree, his wife was Rachel Feibelman.

A clipping in a Little Rock newspaper published on May 9, 1909, shows that Moses, once known as Moise and Mose, had served in the Confederate Army. His wife found him murdered in his grocery store the previous day. He had been slashed in the neck, probably during a robbery. Moses is buried in Congregation Beth El Emet's cemetery in Camden, as is presumably Rachel.

According to the 1870 census, Sol Levy, 41 and a native of Prussia, was living with his family in Camden. It is not known if he too was related to the Feibelman clan.

8

A. Hirsch, mentioned above, was surely Abraham Hirsch, who was also buried in Camden's Jewish cemetery in 1916. According to his passport application filed on

May 18, 1894, Abraham had been born in Alsace in 1856 and sailed from Bremen to the United States on August 15, 1872. He had lived in Wisconsin for five years before moving to Arkansas in 1877. A merchant, he had been naturalized in Ouachita County on November 28, 1889. Abraham's witness for his passport application was none other than Adolf Feibelman.

But there were other immigrants named Hirsch who had lived in Camden. Lazar died in 1919. Marx Hirsch, who had been born in Alsace in 1852, worked as a "clerk in store" and died in Camden in 1878. He was buried in the town's Jewish cemetery.

According to the 1870 census, Marx's neighbor was E. Feibelman, 41, a merchant, who had been born in Bavaria. His wife, Fannie, 28, had been born in Louisiana. They had three children: Thomas, 9; born in Arkansas; Jacob, 5, and Henrietta, 3 months, had been born in Louisiana. B. Feibelman, a woman aged 25 and also born in Bavaria, lived in this household. This presumably was Babette or Barbara.

9

According to Carolyn G. LeMaster's highly detailed study, *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas: 1820s-1990s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), at least two dozen Jews lived in Camden before the Civil War. E. Feibelman was one of the founding trustees of Congregation Beth El Emet, which was organized in 1869 and soon affiliated with the Reform movement. In 1873 a synagogue was built, and a full-time rabbi, M. Sukenheimer, served briefly. Camden's Elah Lodge of the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith was established in 1877. Unfortunately, congregational records from 1880 to the 1920s have not survived. The first synagogue, having been demolished in 1927, and a second was erected.

Additional information about Camden's Jewish community is found on the website of the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life in Jackson, Mississippi. See: [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org). A Hebrew Benevolent Society had been organized in 1865. The community's first synagogue was located at the corner of Adams Avenue and Jackson Street. It cost \$8,000 and seated 150 worshippers. A religious school and Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society were organized in 1887. When the first synagogue was sold in 1927, a third of the proceeds were devoted to the congregational cemetery's perpetual care.

During the 1930s, a second synagogue, built on Clifton Street, was seldom used. It was sold, became a private residence, and was still standing in 1975.

In 1937, according to the *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* ([www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net)), 6,510 Jews lived in 72 towns. Only 37 of these towns had as many as 10 Jews. Little Rock's Jewish community, with a population of 2,500, was by far the largest. Presently, there are only five communities with 50 or more Jews. As of 2008, there were only two congregations with full-time rabbis: Little Rock and Bentonville.

10

In 1940, according to the census, Thomas H. Goodgame (1921-1997) lived at 404 Washington Street. His father, J. H., was a deputy sheriff, and his mother, Ruby, was a music teacher. His older brother was Hamilton. Thomas graduated from Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, in Ruston, with a degree in chemical engineering in 1942. A Navy captain during World War II, he is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

11

According to the 1940 census, this must have been W. J. Reynolds, 53 years old, who lived at 403 Washington Street.

12

Chillicothe, once accessible by railroads, is about 500 miles north of Camden.

13

Founded as a normal school in 1890, Chillicothe changed its emphasis around 1900. By the 1930s, the College enrolled about 1,200 students (when the town's population was about 10,000). During World War II, Chillicothe trained thousands of Army personnel,

but it closed its doors in 1952. All but one of the former buildings were demolished in 2009.

14

After departing for New York, the author did not sever his ties with Arkansas. Indeed, they were embellished in later years.

When Jack's parents arrived in New York City in 1938, they brought a Torah from the destroyed synagogue in the Feibelmans' ancestral home of Ruelzheim. It had belonged to the synagogue in Nievern, which closed in 1933.

Jack's parents donated the Torah to Beth El Emet in Camden, but when it closed the Feibelmans decided to give it to Congregation Beth Israel in El Dorado, Arkansas, which is southeast of Camden and Smackover. It had been founded in 1955, following the demise of an older congregation, Ohev Zedek, which had served the town's entire Jewish community.

By 2004, however, Beth Israel's tiny membership decided that it no longer needed two Torahs, so one was donated to a new congregation, Etz Chaim, which had been established in Bentonville, Arkansas, the international headquarters of Wal-Mart.

On June 21, 2006, Jack Feibelman read an article in that day's issue of *The New York Times* about this nascent congregation. So on the same day he wrote to its leadership to explain the Torah's provenance and convey his delight and best wishes.

See also: Marjorie Rosen, *Boom Town: How Wal-Mart Transformed an All-American Town* (Chicago Review Press, 2009), 68.

15

Rosenberg's passport applications of 1901 and 1922 show that he had been born in Ruelzheim in 1872 and immigrated in 1886. He was naturalized eight years later. He died in 1957 at his home in the Waldorf Astoria and received a prominent obituary in *The New York Times* on October 9.

Further genealogical research on Ancestry.com shows that Rosenberg's parents were Gottlieb and Rosina. Carl was the sixth of seven children. Gottlieb's mother was Sara Feibelman (1796-1887). Sara's father was Leon Feibelman (1760-1820). Leon's father was Jacob Feibelman (1732-1796). And Jacob's father, Jakob, had been born in 1700.

16

Cohn & Rosenberger, founded in 1902, evolved from Emanuel Cohn's jewelry business. Cohn had probably been born in New York City in 1859, the son of Hyman and Hanna. He died in 1910. A year later, the company's jewelry factory was established on Chestnut Street in Providence. The factory at 167 Point Street opened in 1929, expanded in 1947, and closed in 1979. (Redeveloped as offices in 1990, it currently houses Lifespan health care.) Eventually, Coro had offices or factories in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami, Toronto, England, and Mexico.

The "Coro" name was not used until 1943, however. Following Carl Rosenberger's death in 1957, his son, Gerald, ran the company. After his death a decade later, a conglomerate purchased the company.

For more detailed information about Coro, see: [www.costumejewelrycollectors.com](http://www.costumejewelrycollectors.com).

For information about the company's Providence operations, see the archival collection belonging to the Rhode Island Historical Society, which covers 1925 through 1958. Though Coro is not mentioned by name, a highly useful article is Richard A. Meckel's "The Jewelry Industry, Industrial Development, and Immigration in Providence, 1790-1993," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* (November 2000), 244-58. This article was also anthologized in George M. Goodwin and Ellen Smith, eds., *The Jews of Rhode Island* (Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, 2004), 83-88.





Olympic Club, on steps of JCC,  
Benefit Street, 1932.  
William Gates [center], leader

## The Olympic Club at the JCC: *A Second Look at a 1932 Photo*

Bob Jacobson

The author's first look at the Olympic Club appeared in our 2009 issue. His article included nine group photos, some snippets from letters and a telegram, and many loving reminiscences.

Bob was in some sense a second-generation member, for his late father, Jack, was not only a founder but a proud and grateful member for decades. Having stayed in touch with some of his Dad's buddies, Bob became in effect the club's historian.

This is actually the author's third article in *The Notes*. His second, in our 2010 issue, profiling Sammy Sherman and his children, was "That Jazz Family from Woonsocket."

Bob spent his earliest years on Colonial Road on the East Side but most of his youth in Cranston. He was a bar mitzvah and a Confirmand at the Cranston Jewish Center (which became Congregation Torat Yisrael) and graduated from Cranston High East in 1968. He earned his bachelor's degree at Clark University and a master's in social work at the University of Maryland. He has lived in Baltimore since 1973 and still counsels elderly clients (those considerably older than he!).

Bob enjoys numerous pastimes. For example, as a saxophonist and clarinetist since childhood, he leads Jazz for Kids, a program he created in 2006. He also leads walking tours in Baltimore's historic neighborhoods and writes occasional articles for the city's *Jewish Times*. Additionally, Bob is vice president of Baltimore's Jewish Cultural Havurah and is active in the Jewish Genealogy Society of Maryland. Of course he and his wife, Judy, enjoy visiting their son, daughter-in-law, and grandson, who live in Forest Hills, Queens. Bob and Judy also enjoy occasional visits home to Little Rhody.

**P**lease take a look at this 1932 photo of boys who belonged to the Olympic Club at the old Providence Jewish Community Center, which was located at 65 Benefit Street. What is your first impression? I'll tell you mine. The photo was taken when the country was

in the depths of the Great Depression, yet these boys – none of them well-off – were so well-dressed. All of them wore ties, and the vast majority wore sports jackets or suits. At least one boy was also wearing a vest, and a few boys in the front row wore knickers. All the boys were handsomely groomed, and many flashed smiles. Yet, this photo made me curious about what was going on demographically with the Olympic Club members and their families.

I wondered what the federal census from 1930 – more than 90 years ago – could tell us about the boys standing and seated on the steps of the old Providence JCC. The answer, in one word, was “plenty.” I was able to find information about 26 of these 33 Olympic Club members and their families.

Sixteen of these boys lived on the East Side, and nine lived in the North End, which included Providence’s North Main Street and Smith Hill neighborhoods. My father often jokingly referred to the North End as “the Lower East Side.” Leon Ackerman, the tall, smiling boy on the lower left of the photograph, traveled to Olympic Club activities on Benefit Street all the way from Adelaide Avenue in the Elmwood section of South Providence. Among the East Side residents, two lived at the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island at 164 Summit Avenue, which housed 47 children in 1930. Sam Rose, the tallest boy in the second row from the bottom, arrived in the U.S. at age two or three from Russia.

Virtually all the boys’ parents were immigrants from Russia who had arrived in the United States between 1895 and 1921. (Before World War I, “Russia” generally referred to the Russian Empire, which encompassed Lithuania and part of Poland). Only seven of the boys’ 52 living parents were born elsewhere: three in Poland, one in Hungary, one in Romania, one at sea (!) and three in the United States. Only one set of parents had been born in this country. Of the immigrant parents, all but 15 had become citizens by 1930, and another seven had filed papers to become naturalized.

None of the boys in the Olympic Club photo was an only child. According to the 1930 census, they averaged three siblings per family, but ranged from one to five siblings. This was also true of the boys at the Jewish Orphanage, both of whom had siblings there.



Although census enumerators reported everyone living in a household, I know from my own family that some siblings were not counted. Some, particularly those who were married, had already established their own homes. My father, Jack Jacobson, was the youngest of ten children. By 1930, one of his siblings had died in childhood, and five others had married and moved out. Therefore the census shows him living with his parents and only three brothers.

I was impressed by the degree of home ownership, 37.5 percent, among these mostly immigrant parents. I learned, however, that this figure was actually slightly lower than the rate of home ownership in Rhode Island at the time, 41.2 percent, and considerably lower than the national average of 47.8 percent. Home values of the nine home-owning families ranged from \$4,000 to \$15,000. Parents who rented paid from \$20 to \$40 per month.

The 1930 census was taken six months after the stock market crash that brought on the Great Depression. By year's end the national unemployment rate was 8.7 percent. When the 1930 census takers asked parents of Olympic Club members if they were employed, all but one, a widow, answered "yes." (Her oldest son was the family breadwinner). No information was available about the employment status of the parents whose two boys lived at the Jewish Orphanage. A large number of Jewish children living there were not in fact orphans. These kids were placed there only temporarily until their parents' lives improved.

The diversity of parents' occupations was striking. Eight were skilled tradesmen (tinsmith, cobbler, weaver, carpenter, house painter, tailor, truck driver, and plumber). Six parents were salesmen (insurance, wholesale meat, baked goods, leather, groceries, and hardware). Five owned their own businesses (collection agency, clothing store, tailor shop, provision store, and coal and ice). Two parents were semi-skilled (houseman in a hotel and peddler). Only one parent, a woman, had a clerical occupation (that of collection agent). But she was also the only mother working outside her home, though apparently with her husband.

On a personal note, I also discovered from this census that my father was already working part-time at age 12, as an errand boy

at a “glass works.” He had previously told me that at age 13 he had started working on weekday mornings before school, making deliveries for a bakery. Evidently, he forgot or suppressed the memory of working at an even younger age.

The 1930 census also revealed a surprising degree of ethnic diversity in the East Side, North End, and Elmwood neighborhoods where Olympic Club members lived.

I already had some inkling of this heterogeneity from a 1980 interview with my father, who remembered Irish and Polish neighbors in the predominantly Jewish area surrounding his home at 612 North Main Street. The 1930 census showed that his neighbors also hailed from Cape Verde, Barbados, and Armenia. Another Jewish family on his block came from Palestine.

Each page of the census listed approximately 100 individuals. Thus it is evident that many families of Olympic Club members lived predominantly among Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants. This was true on Benefit Street near the JCC, for example. Lou Yosinoff’s family, at 77 Carrington Avenue on the East Side, was also surrounded by immigrants from Portugal, Ireland, Honduras, and Scotland. There were several American “Negro” families as well.

Irving Levine (second row from the bottom, second from left) lived at 193 Jewett Street in the North End. His immediate neighbors were mostly Russian Jews but several others were from Ireland and Italy. On Adelaide Avenue in Elmwood, Leon Ackerman’s neighbors included many native-born Americans but also immigrants from Ireland, Sweden, Scotland, France, Germany, Armenia, and New Zealand. Other Olympic Club members had neighbors from England, French Canada, Turkey, Greece, Northern Ireland, and Finland.

By 1940 the country was still in the throes of the Great Depression. The economy had improved somewhat, mostly from federal government intervention, but the situation was still dire. This was reflected in questions asked in the 1940 census, which had a significantly different focus from its predecessor. The question about citizenship was still asked, but that about country of birth was gone. The focus was much more on employment status: how many weeks

one had worked (or not worked) during the past year; how many hours per week; and how much he or she had earned during the previous year.

By 1940 the boys portrayed in the 1932 photo of the Olympic Club were now young men. I was able to find 27 of them, including one who had not lived in Providence in 1930 but returned. I also found three others who had left Providence after 1932 but were now living in Boston, Hartford, and the Bronx. Most young men were still single and living with their parents or other relatives. One apparent consequence of the Depression was the steep decline in home ownership. Among families of former Olympic Club members, the rate fell from 37.5% in 1930 to only 23% in 1940.

The Olympic Club members' levels of education varied widely. Three (11%) had left school after eighth grade. Five (18%) had left high school before completion. For example, Ira Stone, had dropped out of school at 13, following his father's death, in order to help support his mother and sisters. But his daughter, Freda Lehrer, told me in a 2009 letter that he eventually earned his GED when he was 50 (before she graduated from high school).

Twelve Olympic Club members (43%) had graduated from high school on time. Seven (25%) had completed some level of college, and one earned a bachelor's degree. The Olympic Club members averaged twelve years of education while 58.5% of Americans had completed only eight years.

For the most part, employment in skilled trades, so prevalent among their fathers in the 1930 census, had vanished. Only one Club member, Sam Rose, had followed in his father's footsteps as a house painter. Eight Olympic Club members – the majority for whom employment information was recorded – were now working as clerks. They were found across a wide spectrum of settings: retail tires, a fruit store, a jewelry factory, a wholesale tobacco, a chain store, a hardware store, and a meat market. Five members were working in sales within a variety of businesses: furniture, beverages, men's clothing, baked goods, and restaurant supplies.

Additional Olympic Club members worked as a laboratory assistant, a bill collector, and as a waiter. Another was a machine op-

erator in a factory. Another four Club members were listed as “new worker,” with no specifics about their employment.

One Club member, Lou Yosinoff, attended Rhode Island College of Education, which, following its move in 1958 from downtown to Mt. Pleasant, would become Rhode Island College. He received assistance from the National Youth Administration (NYA), which was part of the New Deal’s Works Progress Administration (WPA). He once told me that he wanted to quit after one year so he could get a job and contribute to his family’s income. His mother, who was illiterate, was vehemently opposed to his leaving school. Following his graduation, Lou enjoyed a long and successful career as a teacher and a guidance counselor in Providence public schools.

The 1940 census offered stark evidence of the Depression’s



harsh effects on the employment of some Olympic Club members and their families. After 35 weeks of unemployment, Sylvan Simons became employed as a laboratory assistant through the NYA. His father, Simon, who had owned a collection agency in 1930, worked only three weeks in 1939 before finding employment as a language tutor. Fortunately, his wife, Pearl, worked full-time during 1939 as a sales clerk in a department store.

Leon Ackerman's father, who had been listed as an insurance salesman in the 1930 census, had been unemployed for 76 weeks before finding work as a clothing cutter through the WPA. Albert Miller's father, Harry, unemployed for 41 weeks during 1939, found work as a laborer through the WPA. Albert, who had worked for 52 weeks in 1939 but was unemployed for eight weeks 1940,



Olympic Club  
reunion party,  
date unknown

found work as a retail clerk. His sister was employed through the NYA.

Sam Rose and his father, both house painters, had been unemployed for 17 weeks. Harvey Blake's father, David, who had owned a coal and ice business, was listed as "unable to work." Marshall Broomfield was unemployed.

Fortunately, there were also some relatively bright spots among families of Olympic Club members. For example, Irving Levine's father, Jacob, despite seven weeks of unemployment in 1939, reported earning \$2,500 that year as a carpenter. Syd Cohen's father, Robert, worked all of 1939, earning \$2,000 through sales of wholesale groceries. Harry Rosenberg's father, Jacob, who had been a salesman for a baking company in 1930, now owned a bakery.

Most of the 27 young men I found in the census were working. At a time when the median income for males was \$956 per year, they earned an average of \$862 in 1939. Their income ranged from \$364 to \$2,500, but only one of the 14 young men for whom such information was available earned over \$950. He was David Lecht, who worked 60 hours per week and must have been quite a furniture salesman.

The lowest earner was Sid Green, who actually made less than the minimum wage of 30 cents per hour as a hardware store clerk. Perhaps his father was paying him more under the table. The country's first minimum wage, established under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, had been 25 cents per hour.

My father, Jack Jacobson, was making \$675 per year, though he worked 42 hours per week as a foot press operator in a jewelry factory. He had been working at Genser Manufacturing for at least five years but was still making minimum wage.

The results of every census are kept confidential for 72 years, so data for the 1950 census will not be released until 2022. Hopefully, I will be able to report on what happened to many Olympic Club members during World War II and the early postwar years.

It is surely astonishing to many of their children and grandchildren how extraordinarily difficult it was for so many of these Jewish families to survive. Yet, as I mentioned, they are so

well dressed and cheerful looking. Many Jewish families were surely strengthened by the fact that they had recently escaped European poverty and persecution. There was also an organized Jewish community in Providence that sought to maintain and deepen communal bonds. The federal government was also providing more reassurance and assistance. And Jews, whatever their degree of synagogue affiliation or level of ritual observance, are taught to be thankful and express gratitude for life's blessings.

Presumably the boys in the 1932 photo were still young enough to be optimists and enjoyed playing and fraternizing with one another. Despite the horror and perils of World War II, a great many Olympic Club members would enjoy bonds of brotherhood for decades to come.



Olympic Club reunion party,  
date unknown  
Bob's father, Jack [top row, rt.]



**Woolf Jacobson and family,  
Providence, ca. 1912.**

[He is bearded fellow in front row,  
seated next to his wife, Jenny.]



## Woolf Jacobson's Minute Book

Gerald S. Goldstein

Last year's issue included Gerry's wonderful article, "Praying for Survival," about the struggling minyan of South Providence's Congregation Shaare Zedek, which had originally appeared in *The Providence Journal's Sunday Magazine* in 1985. Though officially retired from his distinguished career as a *ProJo* bureau chief and columnist, he remains a regular contributor to the newspaper's "Commentary" page.

Gerry and his wife, Ann, have been longtime members of Temple Beth-El. If they participate in a daily minyan, however, it is dedicated to four-legged and flying creatures residing on the Goldsteins' hobby farm in Greenville.

Gerry's new article was quite revealing to me because it raises the possibility that he and I are *mispocha*. My paternal grandfather, Israel M. Goldstein (later anglicized to Isadore), was, like Gerry's grandfather, Jacob Goldstein, a native of Jassy, Romania. My grandfather also lived briefly in New York City before settling in New England and finding his spouse there.

Of course writing also binds the distant branches of our family. And here I'm not referring to Gerry's calling as a journalist or mine as a historian. Rather, as readers will learn below, Gerry's great-grandfather, Woolf, became a scribe for an unknown fraternal organization. Having learned his craft as an apprentice, my grandfather, Isadore, was an engraver, who eventually specialized in making industrial seals. Indeed, he also made initialed rings for my father, uncles, brother, and male cousins. I've worn mine for nearly 60 years.

**L**ike many Jewish immigrants early in the last century, Providence's Woolf Jacobson joined a lodge- for comradeship, help in understanding his adopted land and language, and to assure himself a cemetery plot.

As his daughter, Etta Goldstein – my late grandmother – would recall years later, Woolf's lodge mates bestowed on him what

she viewed as a notable honor: They named him recording secretary, entrusted to set down in English longhand the minutes of their monthly meetings.

Wrestling mightily with his new language, often tugging it in directions it did not wish to go, Woolf spelled words as they sounded to him on the lips of his Yiddish-oriented *landsleit* – countrymen whose accents in English were as exotic as his own.

His sensitive ear produced a record in which spelling and syntax were more than a *bissel* unorthodox, but which unerringly reconstructed what was said, the way it was said.

After Woolf's death, Romanian-born Etta – who had her own quarrels with English – opened a book of minutes he had laboriously created and made a sorrowful entry of her own, directed at future generations: "Please do not destroy thous pages written from my father's handwriting. With sorrow and unforgotten which diet April 14 1928 and the last day in passeh."

Etta protected the fraying notebook until her own death 40 years later, and it subsequently found its way to me.

Family accounts say 47-year-old Woolf Jacobson, who was known in Jassy, Romania as Velvel Yankelovitch, emigrated to America in 1906 and anglicized his birth name- "Velvel" meaning wolf in English and "Yankelovitch" translating to "son of Jacob."<sup>1</sup>

Preceding him by a year was his protective 21-year-old daughter, Etta, who came with her brothers, Sam and Jacob.<sup>2</sup>

Their desire to leave was understandable, in a country where, like in much of Europe, anti-Semitism was deeply rooted. In Romania, dozens of laws curtailed Jewish rights.

Etta and Sam took a cold-water flat together in New York City, she sewing garments and he learning upholstery.

They saved for a year and then sent for their father, their mother Jenny (Baratz), and Woolf's brothers, Joe, Max, Dave, and Matthew.

The family moved to Providence in 1906, where Woolf, an accountant in his native land, also became an upholsterer.

They joined a growing Jewish community that by then had grown to several thousand. Daughter Etta spent her young married years in the North End's vibrant Jewish community before moving to

a similar one in South Providence, and it's assumed that Woolf had settled in the North End as well.

In her brief history of Rhode Island's Jews, published in 1985, Geraldine S. Foster described the neighborhood as: "A bustling business and residential area. Homes and shops coexisted in the same block, in the same tenement house. It was a busy and congested place. Particularly on Thursday nights, when the women began their preparations for the Sabbath, throngs of shoppers streamed in and out of the shops and gathered around the pushcarts and horse-drawn wagons, while the peddlers hawked their wares."<sup>3</sup>

The North End was also described by a person who had grown up there. The following quotation is found in Eleanor F. Horvitz's article, which appeared in the 1979 issue of our journal:

"Starting on a Thursday or before a Jewish holiday – pushcarts, people buying chickens right off the wagon, and taking them in to the *shochet*. For three cents he would slaughter the chicken and for another nickel would "flick" the chicken.

"And, of course, there were the baker shops. There was Kessler's Bakery Shop and the people would knead their own challah... and Kessler and the Lorbers who also had a bakery shop would allow the Jewish women to come in with their challah and bake it so they would have it for the Shabbat.

"At the corner of Shawmut Street and Chalkstone Avenue there was...a sort of delicatessen store. They also had a side window, and I remember as a youngster, my mother would send me with a pitcher, and you would either buy for two cents plain or he would put some syrup in for a nickel and fill up the pitcher – so-called soda. People would sell all sorts of things, and even fish, out of pushcarts. On a Thursday all day until night the pushcarts would be lined up, one behind the other."<sup>4</sup>

This was the stage for Woolf Jacobson's minute-taking, in an unidentified lodge more than a century ago, with surviving entries dated 1920 and '21.

His "Yinglish" requires a bit of concentration, but excerpts bring alive the flavor of language that he and his lodge mates were struggling to master.

*Feb 1, 1920:*

The President Bro Berman has cull op the lodge to give a tank to Bro Becker for Bringing the sum of 25 dolars helping for the familio of the sick Broder grossman.

*March 7, 1920:*

Vice P. miller Recommandat a man, Ely Cohn, for our lodge and vas Rejected. With this vos the meeting clousth.

*July 4, 1920:*

Last numination and Electian for president, vice president and tresury. Four president vos Elected B. Backar, vice P. Magilaver. Tresury Realetod (re-elected) B. Flink. For The officers sam day vos instolation and instolat by past President Bro. Louis Berman.

*Aug, 1, 1920:*

the meteeng vos opened by president Bro. Becker. the minets vos reading and exeptat. a lettat vos readeng from Broder K. abash that he is sick and vishes to have doneited an Kvorder dewes and after a moushan and second vos aprovet to make him good for 1 kvorder dewes. four broder members vos pute in suspection by order of president, B. Marcu, Benny axles, Lean grinberg, abraham finklestein.

*September, 1920:*

no meeting vos hald in acant of Hollidays.

*Oct. 11, 1920:*

A moution vos pest to take 2 tickets from so. Providence talmud torah in velu for 1 Dollar.

a comete vos apuontet to look over the finacal boocks and bringing Report to neckst meeting if is right.

A comeete of 2 broders vos apointed for geting information for how we can bought a lott for semetry.

Broder sam & dora grosman vas stricken for non paing dewes and moving from tan without living hes adres.

To these entries Woolf's daughter, Etta, bursting with pride over his standing among his peers, added her own postscript: "This is my fathers writing. joined this lodge soon after he arived in this country and already was shousen the rec secretary."

### Author's note:

*How did "Goldstein" become a name in the Woolf Jacobson family? In 1910, Woolf's daughter, Etta, married a Jassy native, Jacob Goldstein. In 1858, Jacob's father, Russian-born Mayer Koslofsky, had been smuggled into Romania to escape a pogrom. An infant, he had been carried in the skirts of a family friend. A family named Goldstein adopted him, and Mayer changed his last name to theirs. Later, he married a sister of Woolf Jacobson and fathered Jacob Goldstein.*

*As any genealogist will quickly perceive, this meant Etta Jacobson and Jacob Goldstein exchanged marriage vows as first cousins, a circumstance that down the generations has variously chagrined and amused other members of our family.*

### Editor's Notes

1

Mr. Jacobson's name was commonly spelled "Woolf," as found, for example, in his declaration of intention to become an American citizen, which was filed in Providence's District Court on April 19, 1911. This document states that he was born on April 21, 1862 in Jassy, Romania, and that he sailed from Rotterdam on the S. S. *Potsdam* on August 18, 1906 and arrived in New York City on April 29. Both Woolf and his wife, Jennie, who resided in Rhode Island since August 29, 1906, renounced their "allegiance and fidelity" to Charles, King of Romania.

Through Woolf's declaration, Jennie and their six children also sought naturalization. Except for Marco, the second youngest, all the Jacobsons had been born in Jassy. He had been born in Bucharest. The children's birth years were: the twins, Yetta and Jacob, 1882; Samuel, 1885; Joseph, 1891; Marco, 1898; and David, 1901. Samuel and Joseph served as their father's witnesses at this proceeding. The family's naturalization was approved on June 19, 1913.

2

The 1910 federal census shows that the entire Jacobson family resided at 121 Charles Street in Providence. The census also documents that some of the Jacobson children had arrived earlier than their parents. Jacob was first in 1902. Etta, 23, a "tailoress," arrived in 1904, as did Samuel. Evidently, the other children, Joseph, Marco, and David, arrived with their parents. The 1910 census states that Woolf was retired from his upholstery business, but his three older sons were working there.

3

Geraldine S. Foster, *The Jews in Rhode Island: A Brief History* (Providence: Rhode Island Heritage Foundation and the Rhode Island Publications Society, 1985), 13.

4

Horvitz, "Pushcarts, Surreys with Fringe on Top, The Story of the Jews of the North End," 16.

Moses Brown yearbook, 1959



E. G. ESPO  
Principal and PrePrimary  
of Rhode Island

# Moses Brown's First Jewish Teacher

Adele G. Espo

It's usually a pleasure to receive phone calls, emails or letters from readers, particularly when they clarify somewhat murky points or add insights to recent articles. Adele's letter, sent from her home in West Palm Beach and reproduced below, also seemed amazing because of its sharp focus. In fact, she had remembered meeting me about 25 years ago, when she was only 72, which is about my age now. She was born a year before my mother, Madeline, who passed away in 2013. Of course Adele clearly typed her letter and signed it more legibly than I ever could or will.

June 17, 2021

*Dear George,*

*I just finished reading the November 2020 issue of The Notes. I read with great interest the article that you and Ruth Breindel wrote about Moses Brown. I guess that I paved the way for her and other Jews to teach there. I was the very first Jewish person ever hired at Moses Brown. I began in 1948 and taught there until 1984. I left only because my husband, Harlan, was transferred with Hospital Trust as a trust administrator and an estate planner to Palm Beach, Florida. I believe that he was one of the first Jews hired in the estate planning department. Yes, they had Jewish tellers but not in other parts of the bank.*

*When I began teaching at Moses Brown, there were two teachers in a classroom. Because I was an assistant at the time, I had the pleasure of teaching with many teachers, such as Osla Woodbury, Eleanor Eastman, Harriet Wilson, and Fran Bachman, who are now long gone.*

*Yes, I taught Ruth's older child, Josh, as well, and I do remember her. She would bring in some wonderful desserts for us to share. Say hello for me.*

*In my years at Moses Brown, at one time or another, I taught*

*all grades from kindergarten through sixth grade. For two years, I taught science and social studies to fourth and sixth graders in the L. Ralston Thomas Building. Most of my teaching was in the old Lower School, except for two years in the small room next to the locker room on the first floor of the main building. I also taught in a small room on the third floor.*

*I also remember walking up many flights of stairs with kindergarten children at the end of the year to show them the cupola. I continued taking my class, whichever grade, through the rest of my days there.*

*Yes, I taught three of my own children. David, the eldest, who was in the Class of 1967, ignored me. Instead, he always called on Miss Wilson. Harold, in the Class of 1971, called me “Mrs. Espo,” while his classmates called me “Mom.” He too mostly ignored me. Our middle child, Caryn, graduated from Lincoln School. Our youngest child, Joe, attended Moses Brown but graduated from School One.*

*During my first year at Moses Brown, Rosh Hashanah came three days after the beginning of the semester. When I told an administrator that I wouldn’t be there during the next two days, you can just imagine what went on. The next year wasn’t so difficult because the administration was used to me.*

**Espo Family: Harlan, Adele, David;  
[front]: Caryn, Joe, Harold**





*I also remember that that there was a Lower School open house on the first night of Pesach. I suggested that they change it, but no, they didn't. I was told when I went to school the day after Yom Tov, I would not have to do that again.*

*Changes were also made when Greg Harrison, a religion teacher, came to Moses Brown. He was a Quaker and made sure that no football games were held on Jewish holidays.*

*Yes, in my early days there was a quota for Jewish students. How many depended on the size of an entering class. Often only two were accepted.*

*I could go on and on with many stories about "the first time." But enough for today.*

*I enjoyed my years at Moses Brown, and it was a happy time. I missed it when I moved.*

*Yes, you and I have met. You interviewed my mother, Eve Medoff Goldberg, when my cousin, Arthur Robbins, requested a series of tape recordings. I was visiting her during your first interview. She lived to be 104, and my children want me to follow. I am trying.*

*Continue with The Notes. I read it slowly but I do enjoy reading it from cover to cover.*

*Sincerely,*

*Adele*

**A**s soon as I received her letter, I had to learn more about Adele, so I gathered some basic information on the Web. The daughter of Alfred J. (1894-1957) and Eve M. Goldberg (1898-2002), she was born in Pawtucket, but spent some of her early years in Springfield, Massachusetts. Her sister, Sybil, was born there in 1927. Sybil spent her final years in Rhode Island and was buried in 2020 with her husband, Dr. Isadore Shapiro, and her parents in Woonsocket's B'nai Israel Cemetery.

Adele graduated from Pawtucket West High School in 1942 and from Rhode Island State College (later known as URI) four years later. This was the same year that she married Harlan, a Pawtucket native and fellow graduate of Pawtucket West. They met at a beach in Barrington when she was eight years old. Harlan had

served as an ensign in the Pacific during World War II.

Adele began her teaching career in Pawtucket schools while he was completing his bachelor's degree through the G.I. Bill at Brown. He graduated in 1948, the year she began her career at Moses Brown. Sadly, Harlan, who once served as president of Providence's Jewish Community Center and Brown Hillel, died in 1990, only six years after the couple moved to Palm Beach. He too is buried in Woonsocket.

Of course I wanted to learn more about Adele, so I called her in West Palm Beach on June 23. We chatted for nearly an hour – before I got tired.

One of her most vivid memories of Moses Brown was that little boys were required to wear dress shirts and ties. (Coeducation did not occur until 1977.)

Adele, who belonged to Temple Emanu-El, could not explain why she became MB's first Jewish faculty member. She quite clearly remembers that during her teaching career, which lasted more than four decades, she never earned as much as \$20,000 annually. Part of the reason was that MB faculty members received waivers for their children's tuition. Later, beginning teachers would earn more.

Adele has remained in touch with several of her former colleagues. In August, when she returns to Rhode Island for a visit and Sybil's unveiling, she plans to have lunch with three of them. She also pointed out that she never retired. Indeed, she would have happily continued teaching but for Harlan's transfer.

Though it took Adele a few years to adjust to her new life in Florida, she eventually decided that it was a good move. She enjoys living with other seniors, but readily points out that her apartment is not in an assisted living facility. She also walks along her corridor at least four times per day. Adele enjoys making selections from a quite ample dinner menu. "About this," she confided, "I can't complain."

Only a few months ago Adele accepted her children's pleas and decided to give up driving. They told her that she had to live as long as their grandmother. Adele acknowledged that other drivers could cause an accident. But three years remain on her license. So now she takes a van to go shopping, run errands, and visit her beauty shop.

Genetics aside, I had to ask Adele what were the keys to her lon-

gevity and alertness. She happily recommended a nightly glass of bourbon. Her preferred labels are Maker's Mark and Wild Turkey. If these are not available, she'll settle for a glass of champagne.

It turns out that Adele had a lot more to say, so she sent me another typewritten letter on June 28. Among other points, she wanted to clarify that "teaching at Moses Brown was a delight for me." She also explained, "I was very happy getting to know so many fine educators and students." Then Adele pointed out that, following our phone conversation, "I thought of so many things to say."

Knowing too that there was much more for me to learn, I called Adele on July 8, and we enjoyed another lengthy conversation. She clarified many important points.

Perhaps the most startling was that, as a child, she "hated" school and thought of herself as an academic "failure." Thus, when she thought of forgoing college, her father, Alfred, seemed pleased with the idea of having her work in his business. But her mother, Eve, insisted that she enroll at Rhode Island State, so that's what she did. Ultimately so grateful for this demand, Adele presented her diploma to her mother.

But attending Rhode Island State was not necessarily an easy or pleasurable experience. Without a car, she, unlike many students, could seldom return home on weekends. And most men were serving in the military, so there wasn't much of a social life. Of course trying to keep kosher was quite difficult. Having eventually realized that she was putting her health at risk, she accepted some compromises.

Perhaps Adele's greatest realization came, however, when she began working in a nursery school that primarily served professors' children. She loved this experience and could see herself becoming a teacher.

Adele then explained some of the details that led to her lengthy and fertile career at Moses Brown. She began teaching kindergarten at Providence's Jewish Community Center, when it was still located at the northern end of Benefit Street. Because she and Harlan were living in Providence while he attended Brown, she was allowed to apply for teaching positions only in this city's schools. But her first position at Windmill Street School, east of Charles Street, was only for morning hours, and she and her husband needed additional income. Thus, her principal, Robert Peabody, suggested that she apply for an afternoon position

**Adele with teachers she mentored:  
[l-r] Dan Johnsen, Dennis Dobbyn,  
Dr. David Duhaime, Providence, 2021**

at St. Joseph, a Catholic school in West Warwick, or at Moses Brown. Given her continuing loyalty to Orthodox tradition, however, she was reluctant to apply to either. But Harlan thought that MB would be more welcoming, so she applied there. Not having been asked to explain her religious background, she did not mention her kosher diet. And she did not explain that after only a few days on the job, she planned to observe Rosh Hashanah.

Fortunately, by her second year, Adele obtained a full-time position at MB. For a few years she team-taught, but eventually obtained full responsibility for her own students. When I asked Adele to explain some of the ingredients of her classroom success, she did not hesitate. I was "strict but fair." It was of course unnecessary for her to dwell on kindness.

Then Adele explained why, upon relocating to Florida in 1984, she did not consider herself a retiree. In fact, she taught for six years at St. Joseph's, an Episcopal school in Boynton Beach, about a half hour's drive each way from her home in Palm Beach. This was not nearly as satisfying an experience as teaching at MB, however. And the problem had nothing to do with the fact that there were few Jewish boys and girls or that chapel attendance was required almost daily. Rather, Adele thought that teachers were less demanding and students were, accordingly, less motivated. Thus, following Harlan's passing in 1990 and a career spanning more than four decades, she decided to retire.

Before closing our second phone conversation, Adele added a few salient facts about the consequences of her sons' Moses Brown education. Both attended Quaker colleges. David graduated from Haverford in 1971, Harold from Earlham in 1975. Though Caryn had graduated from Lincoln, which also observed Quaker traditions, she chose UCLA and also graduated from its law school.

By the way, Adele still keeps a kosher home. And given the fact that she is still so eager to give instruction, perhaps she considers me a student. How perceptive! Long ago, education became my lifelong calling.





relief sculpture of a student  
and Mike rowing by a student,  
hanging in backyard

## *Chez Moi*

Michael Fink

Of course Mike needs no introduction. During my editorship alone, he has written articles for 16 issues of our journal. But he is probably better known for his countless contributions to many other publications – Jewish and secular – throughout the Ocean State. Writing for Mike is like breathing: just throw him a topic or give him a moment to discover his own.

Fortunately, I have known Mike for more than 15 years within another context. With the late Bernie Bell and Mel Blake, we have gathered almost weekly to discuss nothing in particular or just about everything. It depends on where we begin. While seldom disagreeing, we may not actually resolve anything. So we adjourn quite happily until the following week's symposium.

Because we often meet early on Saturday mornings, our discussions frequently raise spiritual issues. Indeed, I have often described our meetings as a "mini-*havurah*." But the texts we study are, for the most part, nonliterary. Rather, they flow from our experiences, memories, and imagination, and our search for beauty, humor, and wisdom. All this is sacred too!

Mike has taught at RISD for no fewer than 64 years. He remains in touch with generations of curious and grateful alumni, who live in Rhode Island, across America, and around the world. Indeed, for many, he exemplifies a liberal and an artistic education – perhaps a spiritual one as well. Though never having been privileged to sit in Mike's classroom, I consider myself one of his most devoted acolytes. Yes, I have the chutzpah to also consider myself a protégé. Thanks, Mike, for just about everything- except the flashy footwear fashions.

**T**here is a line in my 1986 documentary film, "Here, We Live Again," in which a Holocaust survivor asks her survivor husband, "Where is your home?" This is a perplexing but also a provocative question. Our excellent editor, George Goodwin, has put the same inquiry to me. Do I have one home or have I had others –

philosophically as well as geographically? Within the borders of our little state or maybe beyond? So I rise to his challenge or invitation, but do not seek to write an autobiography or even a simple memoir. Rather, this is a salute both to nests and flights.

### **Creston Way**

I can claim that watching the “tapestry brick” chimney of “my” house going upward was one of my earliest memories. My view was from the back seat of my family’s grey Dodge sedan, which was filled with the fragrance of nicotine and endless cigarette smoke from my father’s pack of Camels.

My family drove to the site of our new home on the East Side from our apartment at 67 Verndale Avenue in Washington Park, which was a short stroll or roll in a wicker carriage into Roger Williams Park. This was where the Zoo’s “wild” beasts and the Natural History Museum’s statues and stuffed specimens introduced me to the world’s species.

My mother, Betty, used to claim that “house” was the very first word I clearly enunciated. Not until 1936, when I was three years old, did my family move to 12 Creston Way. This was, however, a notable year – the tercentenary of Roger Williams’ move to Providence and his foundation of freedom from fear and of faith.

I’m not sure, however, when my brother Chick, 16 months my elder, and I were laid on the maple kitchen table to have our tonsils out! Our dad, Moe, went up to Rigney’s ice cream parlor, across Hope Street from the Rochambeau Library, and brought back vanilla ice cream for our post-operative recovery.

I was in kindergarten in 1938, when the Great New England Hurricane struck our house. The gale wind somehow broke the front window, knocking over a lamp. Whenever I had a childhood fever, I would hallucinate that scene of a broken glass pane and a falling floor lamp. The parlor had elaborate draperies of maroon mohair with gold backing, an American-made “Oriental” rug, a number of elaborate tables, and a brick hearth with the same multicolor bricks as the chimney and gable.

Our mother would take down a red volume of the Harvard





Roosevelt's "Fireside Chat,"  
1934

Classics from the built-in shelves and read fairy tales to us on Sunday evenings, after our weekly

bath. The fire and the upholstery softened the terrors of the tales of the Grimm brothers, Hans Andersen, and Aesop's fables, and the radio opposite the reassuringly contained flames produced an odd mixture with the laughs evoked by Jack Benny and Fred Allen.

Then there were the anxieties created by the fireside chats of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Each year of that spell of the 1930s and '40s – during the Depression, Duration, and Repression – the house managed to cope with local, national, and global conditions. But this is a story about having a house but also having nowhere else to go upon this planet.

Moe Fink, my late father, had been born in London, but upon the death of his mother, was sent to Harlem, in Manhattan, to live with a paternal aunt. Betty Cohen Fink, my late mother, was born in Romania but raised in Montreal. Providence became their house and home together, but later they had to apply for passports as naturalized citizens.

Well, the Jews have always been a wandering people (as have all our human ancestors!). There was an image in a book I had acquired, of the "Wandering Jew" as a wise elder, traveling under the moon in a cape of silken but tattered velvet. I studied at Brown under Prof. George Anderson, whose specialty was research into the various interpretations of the literary symbol of that figure. He appeared even in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a man under the curse of living forever, tapping the earth with his cane and quietly sighing, "Mother, let me in!"

After both my parents sometimes left me to my own de-



vices, to settle into their roles within their business, Wayside Furniture in East Providence, and after my two older brothers had established their routines with their classmates at our local public schools, I would often explore by myself all the spaces within 12 Creston Way. The attic held boxes of memorabilia along with the special

dishes, pots, and pans for Passover. The cellar held the devices for heating water for showers or baths, the “Vulcan,” as well as the coal bin, or later, the oil tank, decorated to resemble a pirate’s treasure chest, and to fit in with the buccaneer murals painted on the walls by my Uncle Herb, a youthful artist.

There was a pantry – “ye den” – that held the jars for a jelly event, when late in the autumn we three boys would fetch crabapples from the abandoned orchard in the wild pastureland behind our property, not far from North Main Street. They would be transformed by means of an elaborate ceremony into superb and splendid treats to spread over toast before we left home to climb the hillside to Summit Avenue School.

The basement also had several spinet or upright pianos, a fiddle, and a double stone sink for laundry – on Thursdays – a memorable ritual. My Dad, Moe, also later constructed a little booth, under the stairs, to hold my collection of bird nests, an indulgence for my interest in ornithology and evolution.

I was thus a spy throughout my boyhood, studying books and exploring the attic and underground tunnels for their secrets. The “cat-o’-nine-tails” was a basket of whips, as though we might perhaps be punished for major crimes against the rules of the house

[above] **12 Creston Way**

upstairs. And those boxing gloves: three sets of them, to teach us to defend ourselves against the inevitable bullies of boyhood.

There was once a back porch, used to cool pies or to house a variety of pets- dogs or bunny rabbits. But immediately after the war, veterans created a knotty pine enclosure to welcome that then new gadget: television.

This house was mine – perhaps even then more than the house of either parent or either brother – because I had pored over it in my solitude. I did so rather than playing outdoors or mowing the lawn, shoveling the snow or making creative use of those chances to learn useful skills.

Yet 12 Creston Way was like a birdcage – both a safe space yet also a prison cell. I longed to see the wide world and migrate with the monarch butterflies or the seasonable robins.

I could run away from home simply by stepping out the side door into the “lots,” where such exotic people as gypsies, circus clowns, acrobats, hobos, and tramps could be found. There were also



bad boys with BB guns. Or I could gather weeds, leftover vegetables, and herbs from abandoned farms, pastures, and rodeo and parade grounds from not long ago. I could in fact spend a few hours there and come home for supper with briars stuck on my clothes. I might also have to pull them out from my hair as well.

No, it was not a conventionally happy boyhood, often even a depressing chapter in the story of my life. In my grammar school choir, I was reduced to the status



**painting of pirates  
by Uncle Herb,  
in basement**



painting of birds  
by Uncle Herb  
[left] in in kitchen



of a “listener.” Compared to my brother Chick and my youngest uncle, Herb, I had little true talent among the arts and crafts.

Sports? Hardly. I wore glasses and even then squinted uncertainly at an oncoming ball.

What did I have? Only a friendly – maybe kindly – soul and a genuine love of animals. I was labeled “Nature Boy.” Maybe even before 1948, when Nat “King” Cole’s song came along with its Yiddish tone and flavor.

I always felt that for the sake of my intimate sense of self, I should in good time bring all my important companions to my Creston Avenue abode, this American Dream. Girls and guys, guests of distinction and fellow wanderers. In due time, students and visiting artists.

My mother died in this house. I left it for a few years upon my marriage, although the wedding ceremony was indeed held at this address. Before this very fireplace.

And then, upon my father’s passing, while my two brothers already had families and domiciles of their own, I took over this residence but with some changes. I added a deck and a true double-door in the back. I brought items of furniture from my bride’s house as well as souvenirs of her parents’ past. Most notably, these include the bolts of silk her mother had brought back from her military service as an entertainer with the U.S.O. during the final chapters of World War II. I had them cut and framed to be a motif throughout the house.

Still, I wanted our children to be free from the confines of my purely personal heritage. So I moved my books and papers into



the garage, which I designed as a writer's retreat with a wood-burning stove, a pair of large trunks to hold mementos, and a desk.

### **Beach Homes**

Yes, the first place I considered "my house," with snapshot souvenirs to sustain and maintain the memory, was on Wilson Avenue in Oakland Beach, within the boundaries of Warwick, from 1935 to 1942. That little, one-level summer retreat had the memorable charm of its Depression era. Ice would be delivered via a horse-drawn wagon for the box in the kitchen. The Victrola had to be wound up to play its few Decca records, such as a 1925 hit, "Just a Cottage Small (By a Waterfall)" or, later, "Der Führer's Face"—a favorite recorded by Spike Jones and his City

Slickers. One apple tree in the yard furnished fruit to keep the doctor away, but there was also a swing on its lower branches. Guests and relatives were frozen in time by an ancient camera and also upon the society pages of *The Providence Journal* of long ago.

During the actual war years, we three boys were sent to summer camp in Maine. But by late in the Duration, during the summer of 1944, right after D-Day, we were installed in a July-to-August historic home, at 53 Teed Avenue, on Hundred Acre Cove in Barrington. It was reached over the White Bridge and down Mason Road to the shore. We Finks stayed seven (biblical) summers, until 1951. When the soldiers came marching home again, they settled the area with new families.

I have made my own pilgrimages to that house... until one day it vanished into the void! It was sold and put on skates and moved to a new location, along with the mermaid, toy soldier, and wild rose murals that my mother had painted!

From 1951 and until 1957, my parents spent much of their spare time house-hunting for another Eden in a lovely green Ca-

dillac convertible, which they had acquired in a swap of furniture from their shop. Between 1957 and 1965, Moe and Betty owned still another vacation home, on Narrow River in South County.

In 1977, I purchased a place of my own, our own, on Harcourt Avenue, at the border between Narragansett and South Kings-town, a few steps from that Narrow River. We managed to raise our three children in that miniature chalet and should have outgrown it long ago. And yet, I haven't been able to let it go. It has survived flood and fire, a hurricane, and the invasion of a squirrel that chewed at the windowpanes, knocked over the shelves, and curled up and died in the attic's garret loft.

This country home also welcomed the new grandchildren, and the resumption of the usual guests, from cousins to my own very first students at RISD. Canoes and sailboats, speedboats and mere lifeboats, and water skis and surfing were continuing voyages of discovery, along with the local lore.

Treaty Rock, which is found nearby, was dedicated to research about the mixed history of this Middlebridge community. Yes, there were wars between the intruders and the indigenous peoples, but Roger Williams had a dream of accord and mutual respect right there on the top of that mini-mountain, a tiny United Nations of the 17th century!

### **Academic Homes**

Was Yale ever my home? I do attend our Class of 1955 reunions and enjoy them vigorously, but no, those rooms in Wright Hall or Silliman College are mine only in my own mind and but briefly and quickly among my hikes around the campus.

Paris during my junior year at the Sorbonne? Again, no longer, except on the Turner Classic Movie channel, occasionally when they choose to show a mid-century Cocteau cinematic experiment or something by the Ophuls, father Max or son Marcel.

When I guide RISD students during a winter session to my 6th arrondissement quarter in the heart of the "existential" movement, it is not now the Paris of 1953. I had been there in the generation of Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Elie Wiesel. We live in time as well as

space – in memory as well as the moment.

Thanks to RISD's European Honors Program in the Palazzo Cenci, Rome has also been my temporary home. My family spent the 1978-79 year there. In fact, our daughter, Lily, began her life in Rome on 7/9/79! I continue to serve on the faculty committee that oversees this campus within the old ghetto. In my elective course on film history, I screen *Oro di Roma* ("The Gold of Rome"), a late neorealist review about Gentile neighbors' hopeless efforts to rescue Jews.

Yes, I have taught at RISD since 1957, so it too has played a role as a residence, housing my past, present, and a plethora of souvenirs. In 2011 an alcove in the school's attic library was dedicated to me with a formal ceremony. A year later, a gallery of Carr House, which I had fought to preserve, was named in my honor. I am proud to have received additional RISD honors, but perhaps none outshines his role as the creator of the Pigeon Club.

#### studio behind the home



### **Additional Homes**

Was I going forward or homeward bound when I went to Romania in 1967, shortly after the death in 1965 of my mother, who had been born in Podul Illoiaie? Or to Whitechapel London, where my father was born in 1904?

Have I been seeking a wider concept of the Jewish homeland in the Caribbean, among whose islands I have visited Curaçao and St. Martin, Guadeloupe and Puerto Rico, St. Eustatius and St. Thomas, or even Surinam and French Guyana? My first visit to Israel, as far back as 1961, during its bar mitzvah year, may well have been a search for another kind of home, a national nostalgia and an odd odyssey. What about trips in '67 or '79 or '85 or 2001? All my classes have specific dates on the calendar of my career.

Our editor asked about intimate places in Providence. George mentioned the Avon Cinema and proposed that movie houses might also constitute a sort of refuge, but I would prefer to substitute the Hope Theatre. Because it was in walking distance of 12 Creston Way and represents an earlier chapter in my life. I rather enjoy the more poetic concept of blurring that long-ago past so that its phantoms can emerge from the fog of forgetting. Yes, a bar or bistro, a pub or a café might also be, however briefly, a home away from your house, a journey, a journal. I subtitle my journalism class "Writing with Your Feet" as a way to encourage such jaunts away from dorms or campus. Here comes my salute to those who have no anchor, no firm farm.

### **Homelessness**

"Jolivette" is a Jewish lady who lived on a bench at the corner of Rochambeau Avenue and Hope Street. She is the author of a quite remarkable, illustrated book I purchased and cherish about Sephardic Judaism.

"Jolivette" has been warmly welcomed by the shopkeepers of those few blocks. She leaves her shopping cart of possessions at the corner or by the sidewalk and sets up her private space – at least for a while. After a spell of various durations, she is asked to move along. And she has on occasion been invited by kindly folks to move



in on a temporary basis, if the weather is too extreme for the homeless to endure. She has even lived, dwelt, in empty cars – for which she may pay a minimal amount of rent. I have had numerous conversations and encounters with “Mme. Jolivette.”

In our wee summer residence between South Kingstown and Narragansett, there was a strange and wondrous person named Seamus. He was a sailor who fathered an Israeli child. But when dismissed by her mother, he sought to reclaim paternity. He studied Judaism under the guidance of a rabbi at Touro Synagogue, to which he would hike over the bridges, dressed up nicely for the Sabbath, quite sincerely! We asked him to celebrate a Shabbat supper at our table, and he blessed the wine and challah in excellent Hebrew! We even invited him to the bar mitzvah of our son, Reuben. Where did he live? In a garden shed with nothing but a shelf to serve as a cot or a table, in the backyard space of a neighbor – possibly his relative.

Judith Bloom Sugarman, my former student who became an alumna friend, phoned me from Maine and told me that another of my former students was living homelessly on the banks of the Seekonk River. Sure enough, this classmate, a former painting major, received me cordially and even permitted me to take a few snapshots of the inventive and tax-free world he had created- one to which he invited the entire local homeless community.

I have had many wise and wondrous conversations, philosophical and poetical, with the “best friends” of a few moments along the rivers of our town. Who knew that swans and ducks are individuals, who, far from being losers in need of pity, help, and relief, are sometimes honorable seekers of their own truths and paths.

Noah Schwartz has been living in a homeless shelter, after seeking shelter elsewhere, notably among the shuls and congregations that provide for Chassidic wandering souls. And this Noah is scholarly, fluent in Hebrew and in prayer, and creative in many ways. I have invited him into my classes for his knowledge of architecture, industrial design, and the pursuit of local history. He wears a charm bracelet with the design of all the animals mentioned in the biblical account of Noah’s voyage after the great flood. My Noah lost it during a bout with a serious illness, through which he survived (thanks

to the rescue by his late friend and ally, Sy Dill) and also recovered that bracelet.

Oh, I have numerous other anecdotal adventures with the homeless who cross my paths on my campus journeys. There was a recent companion for a conversation with an elder who feeds the swans and ducks but knows them as individuals. He tells me about migrating shorebirds blown off course who stay for a season before rejoining their flock.

Another homeless person sought a safe space himself and his gear for a brief escape from a storm, in a temporary arcade structure outside RISD's architecture building. "That cormorant," he explained, "had a dispute over a fish with an eagle, and in the battle, they both died." He tells me this startling drama, and I listen with respect and deep interest.

Still another pilgrim was an ebony figure with a regal posture and a princely gait, who would reach the steps of the Rochambeau Library and await its opening. Inside, he would install himself in the children's section to read the encyclopedia for youngsters. When I would arrive on the RISD campus to enter the liberal arts building on North Main Street, he would call out to me to greet him as he continued his trek on the trail toward knowledge. I saluted him warmly and proudly.

My theme here is that there is a folkloric quality about the searcher, "*le voyageur sans bagages*." I had played that role in the play by Jean Anouilh in the autumn of 1958, while I was working on a master's thesis at Brown.

### **Home**

For the artist and the poet, the concept of "home" is the image of the old man on top of a lonely mountain with a youngster coming along to visit and to learn. Maybe with my white beard and thin torso that is what I am turning into with this account and contrast.

For me, my home has ever and always been a compromise between the roof and the firmament above, a boy's idealistic hope that there might be a safe haven somewhere upon the Earth. Not

only for human beings but for all life, all cells, all souls.

Among the many distinguished scholars, poets, painters, and renowned guests sponsored by each department of RISD, there was one Holocaust survivor, Roman Vishniac. He claimed that we – every living thing from single cells to orangutans – are all cousins who share the very same emotions, from hunger and thirst to fear and hope. Therefore, we must in our very genes have in common a memory of the very beginning of life itself! Something wild and wondrous like that! And so, maybe wherever we go, we are always “home.”

You can't go home again. And yet you can't leave home either. And that's the only wisdom you can acquire, the recognition of the contradictions within all things.

A house is a book. It tells tales and leaves in its wake the history of a family, the chronicle of childhoods, and upon the walls the illustrations of our endless wanderings.



## Dynamics of Jewish Communal Associations:

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Herb feels like an old friend, though we have not yet met in person. We began an email conversation in June 2020 thanks to Jonathan D. Sarna, the dean of American Jewish historians who is both a University Professor and the Braun Professor at Brandeis.

Of course Jonathan has been helpful to our Association in numerous ways. In 1994, for example, he spoke to us on "What's the Use of Local Jewish History?" and his remarks were published in our journal the following year. Jonathan was even more helpful in 2003 when he invited us to publish our anthology, *The Jews of Rhode Island*, through his distinguished Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life, which was cosponsored for many years by University Press of New England.

Jonathan thought that I could give Herb some ideas about the renovation of Temple Emmanuel in Chelsea, one of two where he actively participates. (The second is Temple B'nai Abraham, near his home in Beverly.) Could I recommend some architects with synagogue experience who might be helpful? Perhaps this was like asking a Providence resident if there are any good restaurants in town.

After discussing many theories and practicalities of synagogue architecture, Herb and I naturally turned to other topics related to Jewish history. I then learned that for decades he served as secretary of the Jewish Heritage Center of the North Shore, which had been located in Marblehead before its merger with the New England branch of the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham. Subsequently, this organization became the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. In June 2021, in recognition of his significant involvement, which included

## *An Interview with Herb Selesnick*

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the donation of his family's extensive papers, Herb received its Volunteer Leadership Award.

But his interests in organizational dynamics extend far beyond Jewish or historical realms. Indeed, since 1981 he has been president of Sterling & Selesnick, Inc., a consulting firm that has advised more than 200 government agencies, businesses, and not-for-profit organizations around the country. Herb's particular interests include: strategic planning, leadership development, and executive coaching. But he has also written books on rent control and on the effects of condominium conversions. He's currently working on a novel with more than a few Jewish characters.

Herb grew up in Chelsea, where for 30 years his father, Syd, owned and operated a popular haberdashery. Herb earned three degrees at MIT: a bachelor's in physics in 1959, a master's in management from its Sloan School, and a doctorate in political science from its Center for International Studies in 1970. Of architectural note, Herb and his wife Hinda were married in MIT's Chapel, which was designed by the important modernist Eero Saarinen and built in 1955, a year after Providence's Beth-El.

By the way, Herb created this interview based on our email conversations.

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**G:** *Herb, how did you become involved with Jewish communal associations?*

**S:** At an Eastern European-style *cheder* in an Orthodox shul in Chelsea, I learned to read Hebrew and master Jewish behavioral rules that have evolved since biblical times. These included, for example, grasping palm, willow and myrtle branches and a citron and waving this handful properly on each of the first seven days of Sukkoth. For bar mitzvah training, my father enrolled me in a private tutorial for 18 Sundays with one of his more erudite cousins. I learned about Jewish history, culture, and ethics. These two very different formative experiences prompted my adult involvement in synagogues and Jewish historical societies.

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**G:** *What has kept you involved in these Jewish communal associations?*

**S:** A management-consulting career spanning half a century has taught me that organizations can always do a better job of setting and achieving goals. Professional experience facilitating this type of improvement has shaped my relationships with religious and heritage entities. I typically start out as a board's secretary, get "promoted" to serve as its meeting facilitator, and progress to a trust-level where the board asks me to facilitate the development of a strategic plan for its organization.

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**G:** *What have you been able to accomplish?*

**S:** One of my earliest accomplishments was in the area of fundraising for a local Jewish historical society. For the past several years, it had been running three fundraisers a year that raised between \$10,000 and \$12,000 and exhausted their volunteers. I proposed a single large fundraiser annually. With loans from three board members, we purchased half the seats in a local summer theater for an evening concert by a Jewish opera star, Roberta Peters. Posters in local storefront windows sold all our tickets in two weeks. We reimbursed the three lenders and cleared \$15,000.

As the only member of the historical society well under the age of 70, I was selected to present the forty-ish, beautiful Ms. Peters

with two-dozen roses while she was taking her post-performance bows. The theater manager told me that sometimes the talented coloratura expects a kiss on the cheek to accompany the bouquet, but other times she will bristle at such an overture, depending on her mood. I asked him how I would know her preference. He said I should use my manly intuition. So I handed her the flowers. She smiled and winked. I kissed her.

As an officer of Temple B'nai Abraham in Beverly and one of the lay leaders at Temple Emmanuel in Chelsea, I facilitated a series of board and committee meetings that produced a five-year strategic plan for each synagogue. I also facilitated the collaborative development of strategic plans for the Jewish Heritage Center of the North Shore (JHCNS), as its secretary, and the Jewish Heritage Center (JHC) at New England Historic Genealogy Society (NEHGS), as a member of its Advisory Council. In addition, I facilitated a merger of the JHCNS with the JHC at NEHGS.

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**G:** *What remains to be accomplished?*

**S:** Temple B'nai Abraham in Beverly has accomplished the priorities in its strategic plan, formulated in 2007-09.

Temple Emmanuel's five-year strategic plan, drafted in 2019-2020, has the following strategic priorities: acquire resource development and financial management skills, add new members from nearby communities, and use Emmanuel's facilities to build community engagement and increase operating income.

Fortunately, the JHCNS has realized the priorities in its strategic plan, developed in 2012-13.

The JHC at NEHGS's five-year strategic plan, drafted in 2019-2020, includes the following strategic priorities: use communication technology to the JHC's advantage, validate the JHC's archive through scholarship, and make a value-added case for its resources.

We also plan to raise money for a communal organization by selling tickets to a Renée Fleming concert at the Met, presenting her with flowers at the end of her performance. Planting a kiss on the sixty-ish diva's beautiful face would, at my age, be an accomplishment.

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**G:** *From your management consulting experience, what usually works?*

**S:** What invariably secures communal association members' buy-in to the plan that emerges from its strategic planning process is the members' meaningful, up-front, predecisional involvement in that process. An experienced group facilitator can make this level of ongoing involvement happen. What most often ensures effective execution of a communal association's strategic plan is a time-based, goal-centered, internally consistent document that is sufficiently concrete to be actionable. In addition, several of the organization's members involved in formulating the strategic plan should also participate in monitoring, assessing, and adjusting its execution.

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**G:** *So what never works?*

**S:** That's an easy one. Or, I should say, an easy three. Firefighting from one crisis to the next creates the kind of burnout that discourages members from stepping forward to accept ongoing leadership responsibilities.

Excessive reliance on philanthropy is the second bugaboo. You can only dip into the well of generosity filled by an organization's founders, descendants, and current members so many times before these sources dry up or die off.

Strike three is dependence on a do-it-myself temple president or historical society director. Two heads are often better than one, and several heads are always more effective than two. Organizational leaders who resist delegating responsibilities while they're in charge also are likely to block or undermine well-intentioned succession planning efforts.

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**G:** *Do strong organizations get stronger and do weak organizations get weaker? What hope is there for others?*

**S:** George, I am a realist. I know how difficult it is to institutionalize an organization's strengths. Its assets and advantages are usually embodied in current members and their ability to influence future members. That is why our Jewish liturgy emphasizes and even pleads for *l'dor v'dor*. Strong organizations do not inevitably grow



stronger any more than organized religions or vibrant civilizations do. I am also an optimist. Weak organizations can get stronger with new, action-oriented members, better plans and policies, imaginative partnering initiatives, and the like. Hope without a plan is not a strategy, and a plan without hope lacks the necessary commitment.

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**G:** *How has your family history influenced your communal involvement?*

**S:** Both my grandfathers settled in Chelsea during the first quarter of the 20th century because Jews from the same town or village were living there. My paternal grandfather, Harry Selesnick, his wife Flora, and their firstborn child, my Aunt Rose, immigrated here from Anyksciai, a suburb of Vilnius, Lithuania. They had five more children in this country. Fourteen years later, my maternal grandfather, Samuel Segal, his wife Eva, and their four children, plus a fifth in utero, immigrated to the U.S. from Kyiv, Ukraine.

My parents celebrated my bar mitzvah in a Chelsea shul, Shomrei Linas, founded by my maternal grandfather's friends from the old country. On the shul's front porch wall, an ancient sign in faded gold lettering read, "*Shomrei Linas Hatzedek Anshei Volyn*, Observers of the Custom of Visiting the Sick People of Volynski," a province in northwest Ukraine. My mother was born in Novohrad, the capital of Volynski, which is 140 miles west of Kyiv. One of Shomrei Linas's pews bore a brass plaque that my paternal grandfather purchased and placed there as a gesture of friendship toward his son's father-in-law, a recent-immigrant.

My parents were forthcoming and facetious about the cultural differences between their families. Dad explained that Mom's family members (except for her) were emotional, illogical *Russiches*. Mom described Dad's family (except for him) as impersonal, cold Litvaks. My mother's preoccupation with her family's turbulent history and travails, along with my father's colorful characterizations of Jewish immigrants' aspirations and affectations, undoubtedly influenced my subsequent communal involvement.

Mom's grandfather was a Hassidic *rebbe* of wide renown in northwest Ukraine. Dad's father was a self-taught architect who

designed and supervised the construction of one of Boston's earliest high-rise office buildings that didn't implode. He also designed from memory a Russian Orthodox church that still stands proudly in Chelsea, albeit with its spires wildly out-of-context in that now largely Hispanic community.

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**G:** *Who set examples for you?*

**S:** My father said, "Don't treat your synagogue membership as a consumer shopping experience. Join the Temple closest to your home and support it!" That's probably why I joined the Peabody Temple in easy walking distance from my first home and then the Beverly Temple just around the corner from my second home. Long before expressions like "giving back" and "paying forward" were in vogue, Dad explained his synagogue activism and B'nai B'rith fundraising as ways of expressing his gratitude to "the man upstairs" for his good fortune in life.

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**G:** *What have been some of your disappointments, struggles, and setbacks?*

**S:** A disappointment I've learned to live with is the substantial cost of temple membership, which has skyrocketed since the 1950s. Many Jewish families expend exorbitant amounts annually on temple dues and donations to advertise their financial "arrival." American materialism has virtually obliterated the intimate *havurot* and modest shuls our immigrant ancestors created to facilitate Shabbat and holiday prayer services, share communal experiences, and promote Jewish learning. American assimilation, I believe, has been a mixed blessing for us Jews.

A disappointment I still struggle with is the narrow-mindedness of a small number of Conservative Jews toward interfaith couples. At one ritual committee meeting I attended, the traditionalist anchor complained bitterly about "mixed-marriage" couples and their "hijacking" of Shabbat morning services, especially for a bar or bat mitzvah. He expressed outrage that a bar mitzvah boy's Gentile father was not only allowed to stand on the *bimah* but also joined his wife in dual recitation of an *aliyah*. I asked him what he found

so troubling about that scenario. He shouted angrily at me that I sounded like a management consultant. I told him that was a terrible name to call someone, and that I would never refer to him as a retired sweater salesman. On Yom Kippur morning, a month later, he apologized to me for his outburst. Nevertheless, I'm sure that he still thinks that this interfaith family's bar mitzvah impaired his Shabbat worship experience.

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**G:** *What obstacles have you encountered in your volunteer work with communal organizations?*

**S:** An ongoing struggle working with Jewish history and heritage organizations is the diverse nature of their constituencies and potential partners. For example, from a programming standpoint, a local Jewish historical association's target audiences might include historians, genealogists, and students as well as major repositories of Jewish archives, Jewish historical and genealogical societies, other New England Jewish communities, Jewish houses of worship, and Jewish day and private schools.

The challenge is to segment this association's varied audiences, tailor its messaging to each segment, and demonstrate its value in ways that persuade users to become supporters, and persuade supporters to engage with the association's programs and resources. Another challenge is to help Jewish historical associations make the difficult choices involved in prioritizing their strategic issues.

For example, the issues typically confronting a major repository of Jewish archives might include using communication technology to its advantage, establishing itself as a trusted resource, increasing its genealogical programming, validating its archive through scholarship, ensuring that its in-person programs are not perceived as a health risk, attracting younger audiences, making a value-added case for its resources, monetizing its resources, securing ongoing support from its content contributors, and retaining donor commitment despite competing priorities.

Progress on a few of these issues could move the association forward on all the rest. The prioritization challenge is to help the association identify the smallest number of issues on which progress

would make the largest amount of positive difference.

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**G:** *What message do you have for your grandkids or future generations?*

**S:** Before abandoning your Jewish identity in the name of Americanism, cosmopolitanism or some misunderstanding of egalitarianism, learn about Jewish history and your family's Jewish heritage! I was fortunate to have my interest in the former stimulated by an articulate bar mitzvah tutor and my curiosity about the latter heightened by colorful family stories that my parents and paternal grandfather told me.

Grandpa was a cavalry officer in Czar Nicholas's army, where he experienced harrowing adventures, a couple of which were nearly fatal. Later, he designed the shafts of diamond mines ringing Johannesburg, South Africa, so that he could save enough money to bring his wife and baby daughter to America. He arrived in this country after the great Chelsea fire of 1908.

A self-taught architect who charged lower prices than American-born ones, he received commissions to put up scores of buildings in Chelsea, including the houses of two Chelsea mayors. During the Great Depression, he lost everything and left his wife. After World War II, while in his seventies, he made a modest comeback. When Massachusetts began licensing architects, Grandpa became licensee number three, based on the blueprints of buildings he had designed during his local career. Grandpa had a fifth-grade education and could only add, subtract, multiply, and divide, but he had no trouble designing structurally sound eight-story office buildings, bowling alleys, and Byzantine-style houses of worship.

My maternal grandfather studied to be a Hassidic *rebbe* until his grandmother convinced him to avoid depending for his daily bread on the kindness of the *rebbe's* followers and go into the business world instead. Before he was thirty, he owned a large hardware store. The Bolshevik uprising that led to the Russian Revolution destroyed his business and seized his home. He and his family had to flee for their lives, sleeping in cemeteries and barns and selling trinkets on roadsides. It took them five years to make their way to

a seaport in Germany, where, with funds provided by U.S. relatives, they were able to make their voyage.

Sadly, my maternal grandfather's first wife never recovered from the family's reversal of fortune, and she took her life after their first-born daughter married. Grief-stricken and conscience-driven because he had schlepped his fragile young wife to America, my maternal grandfather then used funds from an injury settlement he had sequestered to buy his first wife the largest granite headstone in the cemetery where she is buried.

Bittersweet stories like these can inspire inquiring young minds to take a larger, more empathic interest in their family's history and heritage.

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**G:** *What is worth saving, perpetuating, honoring, and why?*

**S:** The behavioral tenets of ethical monotheism are well-worth honoring, regardless of whether one believes in a personal God or any God. But first, one has to know what these tenets are. Judaism is a religion of deed or action, in contrast with Christianity, which is a religion of creed or faith. For many of us, what you do and how you do it is more important than what you believe and why you believe it.

I wish that every Jewish American's college education included reading translations of Maimonides, Rashi, Spinoza, Hirsch, Rosenzweig, Schneerson, Soloveitchik, Buber, Kaplan, Heschel, and Fackenheim. Maybe a well-taught survey course could also help fill a cultural void.

Most Jewish Americans are descendants of Eastern European Jews. The Ashkenazic concept of *Yiddishkeit* or Jewishness is worth saving and perpetuating. The JHCNS's collections and the much larger collections of the JHC at NEHGS preserve many Ashkenazic manners, mores and memories within the context of family, business, and institutional histories and papers.

The expressive Yiddish language is still an important cultural preservation vehicle. For example, whenever my middle daughter, Julie, and I drive by an impressive Christmas light show on a Gentile's lawn, she will exclaim, "*Aroisgevorfene gelt!*" (a waste of money).

When my youngest daughter, Erica, trips, she often says, “I’m such a klutz.” If I sneeze, my eldest daughter, Marcy, sometimes says, “*Zei gezunt!*” (be healthy). Glimpsing linguistic fragments of Jewishness in my daughters is more rewarding than any of my accomplishments as a communal volunteer. One consequence of living in a pluralistic society is the layered identity we all have. Perhaps what is most worth saving among those many layers is the Jewish stratum. Perpetuating it requires self-awareness and verbal assertiveness. An example arose more than 40 years ago in a conversation with my executive client, who traced his American lineage back to the mid-17th century.

He remarked that eradication of the State of Israel by Arabs would extinguish what little was left of my Jewish identity. I pushed back, telling him that we Diaspora Jews identified ourselves as Jews long before the State of Israel’s existence and would continue doing so if, horribly, Israel went away. My client had assumed that I considered myself largely assimilated. I told him that I could not as long as my Jewish heritage was the only reason why I did certain things. He looked nervous, so I added that none of my traditional Jewish practices diminished nor diluted my acculturation to American civic manners and norms. That must have pleased him, because he offered to sponsor me as the first Jewish member of his elite men’s luncheon club.

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**G:** *Within the realm of saving, perpetuating, and honoring, what matters less?*

**S:** I believe that many *halakhic* prescriptions and proscriptions handed down through the ages via the Talmud have little to do with basic ethical behavior. Jewish dietary laws, known as *kashrut*, are a case in point. I understand how a binary food regimen comprising “this I shall permit myself” and “this I shall deny myself” can inculcate self-discipline. But it’s hard to see any behavioral connection between appetite control and the core Jewish values of righteous giving and tender mercies.

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**G:** *But how can saving, perpetuating, and honoring goals be accomplished?*

**S:** Certainly, one way is through historical associations, with or without digital archives. Another way is by telling compelling stories. Nothing else is as memorable and potentially moving as a good human-interest story.

Once I began sharing anecdotes with my grandchildren about my life at their age, they never failed to ask me for another story as soon as were alone together. They would not settle for just one story at a sitting. If I hesitated while thinking of another story, one of them would ask me to reprise a story I had told months or even years earlier. My grandchild would summarize just enough to show that he or she remembered the narrative.

When the JHCNS hired a high school student with tech savvy to stitch together videos of 45 oral history interviews that I had conducted, he commented to me at length about just one small subset of interviews: vignettes about grandparents' idiosyncrasies. As a grandparent, I found that encouraging.

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**G:** *Finally, Herb, has your involvement in Jewish communal affairs taken you to Little Rhody?*

**S:** My middle daughter, Julie, who lives in Maryland and works in D.C., had a destination wedding at the Newport Marriott. So my wife and I went to Newport a couple of days in advance. With half a dozen tourist couples, we visited the storied Touro Synagogue. A volunteer docent, an older Jewish man, greeted our group with the following spiritual advice:

“Gentlemen, God’s countenance will shine upon you and life will be good for you if, each morning when you awaken, before doing another thing, you turn toward that lovely creature resting beside you and sweetly tell her, ‘Darling, you’re right!’”



school dance, Ed in  
light suit on right



## How Classical High Began to Change My Life: *Making Jewish Friends*

Edward A. Iannuccilli

I first encountered the author around 2008 in a doctor's office. No, I was not seeking his expertise in gastroenterology. While sitting nervously in my internist's waiting room, I was reading Dr. Iannuccilli's recently published book, *Growing Up Italian: Grandfather's Fig Tree and Other Stories*. It was delightful, and I relaxed a bit. Within a decade, he published two more volumes of memoirs about his upbringing in Rhode Island. You can learn more about them at: [www.edwrites.com](http://www.edwrites.com).

Ed and I met in 2012, when he joined the board of the Rhode Island Historical Society, where I had been a trustee for four years. Ed eventually chaired the collections committee, and I became his successor. But beyond Rhode Island history and the preservation of historic architecture (including our own homes), we enjoyed discussing Italian travel, language, cooking, and costume.

Ed is of course a renowned physician. For example, he is a clinical professor emeritus at Brown's Warren Alpert Medical School. He is a former chair of Rhode Island Hospital's board and a former chair of Ocean State Physicians Health Plan, which became United Health Care. Accordingly, he has also been recognized as a distinguished alumnus of Classical High School.

I'm not sure why, but I sensed that Ed also had a few Jewish stories to tell. Though initially reluctant to write an article for our journal, he eventually agreed. I think that, as a result, you'll gain some sense of his deep humanitarian spirit.

**I**t was a long time before I was introduced to Jews, Judaism and Jewish culture, and an even longer time to understand what they meant to me. Why so long?

I grew up in a multi-ethnic neighborhood in the Mt. Pleasant section of Providence that harbored a potpourri of immigrants and first-generation Irish, Italians, Poles, and British. Save for the food, I thought little of any distinction that might exist between our

neighborhood families. When I was invited to a friend's home for dinner, I might see a difference in what was served, but that was it. Then again, only another Italian home could resemble my family's cooking. No matter. I was a kid, and happy. We were, after all, linked to place.

I was a second-generation American-Italian. My grandparents immigrated to America in the early 1900s and settled in the Federal Hill section of Providence, where they joined relatives and friends from the same town, Pollutri in Abruzzo, and work was guaranteed. It was a typical chain of migration, as there was an enclave of Italians here who spoke their dialect and started familiar stores carrying goods like those they might find in Italy.

After a few years, my mother's parents, Vincenzo and Domenica Baccala Troiano, left the unacceptable living conditions of Federal Hill and moved to the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood, not far away, but much more comfortable. There, my grandfather purchased a three-family home at 64 Wealth Avenue and an adjacent plot of land for his garden. Our former home still stands near Health and Wisdom and not far from LaSalle High School.

The Italian language was not spoken in our home because my grandparents believed that in America they should speak only English. In addition, they had some hesitation in being identified as Italian because of Mussolini's declaration of war against the United States. They were now in America and wished to be appreciated as Americans.

After my parents, Peter and Anna, married in 1935, they moved to the third floor. I was their firstborn child, on Christmas Eve, 1939; my brother, Peter, was born six years later. After my mother's sister married, she and her family, eventually with three children, settled on the first floor. My grandparents moved to the second floor. I was the only child in that three-decker for six years, so I had lots of attention from three "mothers."

My Dad worked in the supply department at Quonset Point Naval Air Station, driving his Chevrolet 26 miles daily and transporting passengers who helped pay for his car's maintenance. My mother worked at U.S. Rubber Company on Valley Street in Providence. She

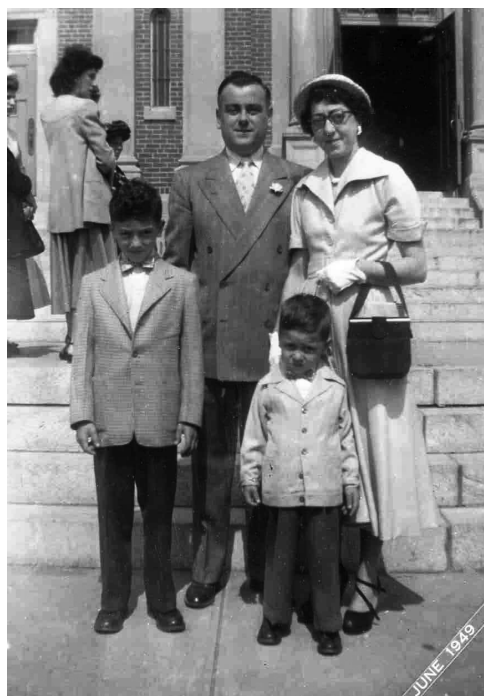
**Ed, brother  
Peter &  
parents at  
church**

wound golf balls on the 3 PM to 11 PM shift. Though she worked to help pay the bills, she also did it because she loved to work while at the same time enjoying the social aspect of being with friends and coworkers.

Our family enjoyed family outings and feasts, especially on those summer Sundays when we traveled to Lido Beach in Narragansett, bringing dinner to the shore. It was a moveable feast indeed. There were a few years when we rented a cottage for a month in the summer. I have fond memories of those days at the beach.

In the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood, we played together, schooled together, laughed together, and learned together. I gave little thought to sometimes being called “the Italian kid from around the corner.” I was young and innocent for my years, never leaving, and never wanting to leave that community.

At the end of Academy Avenue was Abe’s variety store, a favorite destination because he had a pinball machine, a gumball machine, and lots of penny candy. I knew that Abe was Jewish because my father told me. His last name may have been Salk. I believe he was the only Jewish storeowner in our neighborhood. A kind, gentle, and tolerant man, Abe had all he could do to handle the stream of kids who jammed his store during recess and after school.





**Academy Avenue Elementary  
School** [Ed, standing at right]

My family ventured little. We sometimes left the state to visit relatives in Massachusetts. One year, the four of us set out on a weekend car trip to New York City, where we saw the Rockettes, Gary Moore, and Dave Garroway and even stopped by Jack Dempsey’s restaurant.

There were no Jewish children in our neighborhood, nor do I remember any at my public schools, Putnam Street Primary, Academy Avenue Elementary, and George J. West Junior High. I gave little thought to it in those innocent Fifties.

There were no “us” and “them” except for the tough kids, two of whom asked for “protection money.” (They got a nickel from me). Some years later, one of them was jailed for murder and the other blew his fingers off when holding a cherry bomb a bit too long. They were clearly the “them.”

When I dusted off my 1954 yearbook from junior year,

none of the hundred graduates called out that he or she was a Jew. No reason. Recent conversations with classmates corroborated my memory. I lunch with approximately 15 of those classmates at least three times a year in a nostalgic trip down memory lane, as we repeat, repeat, and repeat the stories of the good old days.

I assumed everyone was Catholic. I never attended a Catholic school but received the sacraments at Blessed Sacrament Church after attending religion classes. One Sunday morning, as Dad was driving along Academy Avenue toward our home, I saw one of my Italian friends exiting the Baptist church with his family. “Dad” I asked, “Brian is a Baptist?”

“Yes, Edward, but don’t give it a thought. He just practices a different religion.”

“But his family is Italian. I thought all Italians were Catholics.”

Dad smiled. “Well, I guess not.” Another example of sequestration from my youth.

At the urging of a friend, I enrolled at Classical High School on Pond Street in Providence and there, for the first time, I met Jewish kids. I took a bus to school every day, exiting a mile away. Then I walked the rest of the way. I left my insulated world to one that expanded that first year.

Classical High was diverse and academically rigorous. It was diversity not of color, race or religion, but of culture, ethnicity, and neighborhood. I thought little of it. The only difference was that they were new classmates who soon became new friends. The kids were not tough; the class work was. It was the perfect school for me, because I knew I wanted to go to college, and I knew I wanted to be a physician like my doctor, Frank Fratantuono, whose office was on Vinton Street. He was an astute, dignified gentleman whom



[above] family vacation,  
Narragansett

I admired greatly and to whom I dedicated my junior high school career book. I still have the letter and Cross pen that he sent me in appreciation.

There was one thing I realized early on. My new friends – Mayer, Judy, Barbara, Diane, David, Alan, Al, Phil, and so many others – were a bright, hardworking, goal-oriented group. I thought I was smart enough until I went to Classical. I thought I worked as hard as I could at school, but I quickly realized it was not so. I was lifted to another level because of my peers, and I had much more work to do.

I needed to catch up. Where once I was near the top of the class, this was no longer the case. In addition, many of the kids were at Classical since ninth grade. I started there in the tenth. I had to transform myself, to learn from classmates, to appreciate, and participate in the rigor necessary to succeed in the atmosphere of a college prep public school.

I learned a lot and fast, not the least of which was how to prepare for each class. Classmates helped with advice and patience. It was not unusual for me to call a fellow student in the evening to discuss a test or homework. My father would say, “If you want to be smart, you need to get close to smart people.” I was.

The teachers were wonderful, demanding, capable, energetic, fun, and most helpful. Our guidance counselor, Mr. Max Flaxman, steered me on the road to college. I probably knew that he was Jewish because I was acquainted with his daughter. As a matter of fact, my classmate, Rhoda Levin, would marry Mr. Flaxman’s son, Stephen. It took a while, however, before I marched to the inexorable rhythm of the school.

At Classical I made friends for life. As the class president, and with an enthusiastic committee, I have helped arrange many reunions over the years.

It was in that venerable, musty old building of creaky, oiled, wooden floors and boxy classrooms where knowledge prevailed. It was there where I grew. It was there, for the first time, that my eyes were opened to the world of Jews and Judaism. At first I made only a modest attempt to understand.

As I reflect on those days, there are things I contemplate today that I did not think much of then. For example, our varied groups never gathered on weekends. How come my Jewish friends disappeared on weekends? No, they did not disappear, nor did we.

The Jewish kids stuck together because that's who and what they knew. I do not remember hanging out or going to a party with any of my Jewish classmates. So I called a Jewish friend of those years and asked, "Why did we not interact with each other save for school days? Was it a religious thing?"

He replied, "No, not at all. We just didn't. The Jewish kids hung with each other because we knew each other for years, and you Italian kids hung out for the same reasons. Nothing bad. That's just the way it was." That was comforting. Nothing bad. Just the way it was. We were just kids comfortable with familiarity.

The same happened in the school cafeterias. At Classical, there was one for boys and another for girls. Goodness, what would have happened if we were seen eating together? In the boys' cafeteria, there was further separation. The Italian kids, sporting ethnic sandwiches like meatball torpedoes and lunchmeat-stuffed grinders, and playing them like harmonicas from one end to the other as they ate, dined together. I never thought anything of it. I was comfortable in my world, so I sat with the same guys – Richie, Tony, Nick, Al, and Benny – American Italians.

And then came another awakening, one much more graphic, and today more vivid because, with this essay, the memories have rushed forward. As a junior, I had a huge crush on one of the girls, J., in the freshman class. Then one day, with newfound confidence, I stopped her to ask her for a date. She agreed. I never gave a thought to anything but going on a date. Why would I?

That Saturday, I parked my Dad's '56 Pontiac (his first deviation from a Chevy) in front of her house on the city's East Side, brushed my hair back, ambled up the walk with some confidence, and rang the bell. I was wearing my usual khaki pants and my best white short-sleeved shirt. That's what I always wore.

Her father opened the door. She was standing a tad behind his shoulder. "Please come in," he said. I entered a solemn house and

stood in place, never invited beyond the foyer. “I think we need to chat,” he said. A little shiver went through me, my heart was thrumming in my throat, and an achy knot grew in my stomach. I shuffled and shifted my weight. I assumed he was angry because he was brusque, too serious. In typical fashion, I believed I had done something wrong. I looked at J., who was looking at the floor. I looked at the floor. On the lonely road of adolescence comes the fear of not being accepted.

He tackled the issue. “I will allow it tonight, but this will be the last time you date my daughter. We don’t want her to date anyone who is not Jewish.” It was then that I realized she was Jewish.

I was perplexed but knew at that moment, though with some confusion, that there was an issue. As I took a step back, her thoughtful father, now with a wisp of a smile that I noted with a glance, reassured me that it had nothing to do with me. Not knowing what to do or say, I felt a stab of annoyance. I was still the shy, sulky kid from Mt. Pleasant, now in a new and different area of big homes and wide streets, facing someone who told me there was something I could not do.

I replied, “Yes, Sir. OK. Nice to meet you. Thank you. I will have her home early.” We walked down the steps, uncomfortably distanced. I felt eyes upon me.

We had a fun date at the Cranston Lanes bowling alley, where I fell in love watching her fluid skills and her blond ponytail swing like a pendulum. We did not speak of her father’s directive, but I do recall how unhappy we felt when I took her home. It was over. Though too brief, it was a relationship that lingered for some time.

Now that I write this, I realize how much I thought of J. for years thereafter, as one does with unrequited love, wondering what had happened to her, believing I was ever in love though hardly knew what that meant. Save for a passing chat in the corridor, we continued no further. “She won’t be allowed,” stuck in my head.

Years later, I tried to find her, to see how she was, how things turned out for her and to tell her how I was doing. I learned that she was not in good health. That was it. I regret not pursuing it further.

Over the years, I began to understand her dad’s reasoning,





Classical High  
prom,  
[Ed, in middle]

the importance of his religion and culture. The experience affected my relation to religion in a positive way, for it was then I began to think of the importance of faith and culture in a family. It was then I began to read about Jewish culture. For example, I read the Old Testament! Well, to be honest, not a lot.

“Well, she’s Jewish,” Dad said, chuckling a bit at my innocence. He understood. As a descendant of Italian immigrants and a Catholic, I began to appreciate my identity. Until then, I was surprised that I never thought about who or what I was or was not. Today, I am surprised that I thought little of that incident until now. I am surprised at my surprise.

In preparation for this essay, I dusted off my 1957 Classical yearbook and looked for J.’s picture. I found her in a classroom photo where she hardly showed, as if the photographer’s flash had not exploded. As I thumbed through the yearbook, I was surprised to find something on the last page that she had written. She was disappointed that we had not seen each other, and she wanted her gift to me (which I do not remember) to be a token of a friendship. A boatload of memories surfaced.

I commuted to Providence College, an all-male Catholic school, where, as a premed student, I was again sequestered to earn good grades and a medical school acceptance. I dated, especially in the summer, but did not have a steady girlfriend until my senior year.

I made friends with some professors. Bob Krasner, a biologist who was among the College's first Jewish faculty members, was one. I met him again some years later when I was a physician at Yawgoog Boy Scout Camp and he was a counselor. He too was an alumnus, so we shared our Providence College experiences.

While at PC, I worked part-time driving a grocery truck on weekends. I also had a summer job at Taco Heaters, where I learned how to run a turret lathe and an overhead drill. Dorothy Kramer, the personnel director, had hired me. In later years, when I was in the practice of medicine, she became a good friend, and we often spoke of those wonderful days at Taco.

I went to Albany Medical College because a PC upperclassman whom I had admired went there, and he said that it was a great school. I became good friends with almost all of my 60 classmates. It was just so damn hard that we needed to share and needed to commiserate.

Sixty years later, one classmate has remained one of my dearest friends. Alan and Sue were married on a Sunday within the sanctuary at Vassar Temple, a Reform congregation in Poughkeepsie. Alan invited me to be an usher. Not only was it the first Jewish wed-



Ed & family at Providence College graduation, 1961

ding I attended, but I was also an integral part of it. It was also the first time I wore a yarmulke.

Two rabbis conducted the service under a marriage canopy of square cloth. As the ceremony came to an end, Alan was invited to step on a glass wrapped within a cloth bag. He smashed it. I learned that breaking the glass can have several meanings, for it can represent the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem or a couple's commitment to stand by one another even in challenging times. The cloth holding the shards of glass was collected after the ceremony, and many were made into a memento of the wedding day. Nice.

The celebratory dance at the reception was entertaining. The guests danced in a circle, and I heard the words "Mazel Tov" often. I liked that.

I treasure my relationships with my Jewish friends that continue to this day. Among my closest are those I met in high school. We dine together, play golf together, and share family stories. I have attended bar and bat mitzvahs for friends' children and funerals for their parents. Sadly, I have also attended friends' funerals.

My mentor at Rhode Island Hospital was Milton Hamolsky, who served as chief of medicine from 1965 until I retired from gastroenterology in 2000. He was one of the brightest and kindest people I ever met. Once he said to me, "Ed, do you realize how close the Italian culture is to the Jewish? Family is paramount. Friends are critical. Religion is essential. And when speaking of food, did your mother say, 'Better we should have too much than not enough?'"

"Yes, you bet she did, Dr. Hamolsky." He smiled.

I admired him for so many reasons. He asked me to become his first medical intern in 1965, just after he came to Brown Medical School and Rhode Island Hospital. He developed a first-class academic medical staff, and I was fortunate to be in the middle of that evolution. He recruited so many great teachers like Jordan Cohen and Joseph Chazan, a close friend today. I'm proud to point out that I became the first clinical professor at Brown Medical School.

Dr. Hamolsky remained a dear for friend for life, and when I needed medical advice, especially with my career and personal choices, he was always there to help.

My education continues. I learned something on a golf trip when I roomed with some Jewish friends. It was nearing Passover, and one said, “Ed, you need to learn about *matzah brei*.”

“What is it?”

“It’s matzah with fried eggs, a traditional Passover dish. If you’d like to try it, we’ll cook for you.” And they did. Though my friends seemed a bit indifferent to the dish, perhaps from a lifetime of indulgence, I enjoyed it.

Over the years, I have learned some Jewish words like chutzpah, klutz, kvetch, and schlep. My favorite, schmutz, is one my golfing friend Larry taught me. “Ed, you hit your ball in the schmutz.” I knew immediately what he meant, as the ball was long lost in its new home, schmutz. I guess that I became a putz.

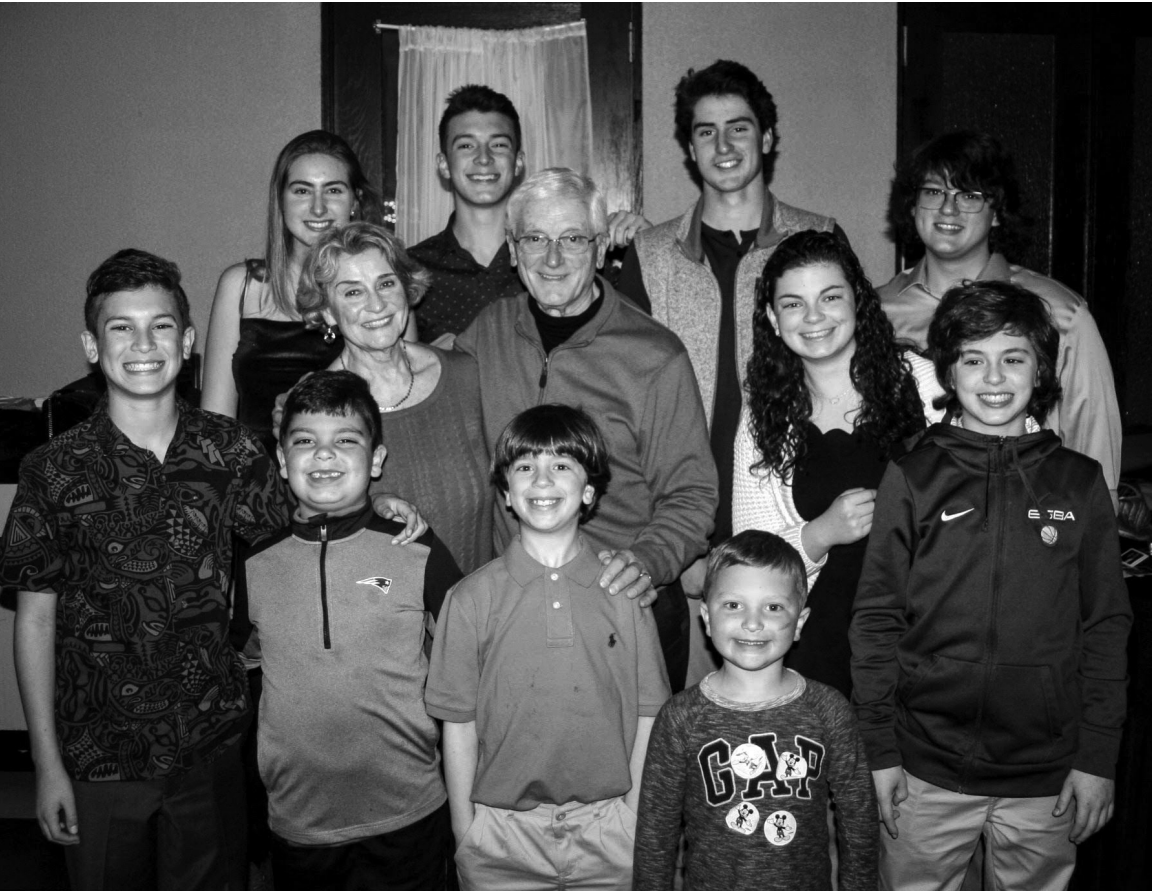
Over the years, I have delved more into Jewish culture, reading the Hebrew Bible, and participating in seders at friends’ homes. A seder’s similarities to Italian feasts are palpable: a home ritual around a dinner table, blending religion, food, wine, song, and storytelling. A seder brings alive the importance of history and tradition, suffering and joy, and deference to a Higher Being. So much of the same transpired at our family celebrations.

“Why did you take on this assignment, Ed?” one Jewish friend asked me. “Might you not be concerned that someone might find your piece a touch biased?” My goodness. I never gave that a thought. Nonetheless, the remark gave me pause, because what I usually write is noncontroversial, “vanilla” if you will. And that’s the way I want it. I paused, again.

I sought advice from loved ones and friends and decided, “Yes, I can write this piece. It is genuine, from the heart, valuable for me to remember and to appreciate my friendships, my education, and my good fortunes.” The writing helped me rekindle layers of good memories, knapsacks full of education, profound emotions, and a lifetime of friendships.

There is power in diversity. There is power in solidarity. It helped shape me and make me better. We’re not separate; we’re the same. We’re all human beings.

Ed, Diane & grandkids





**Marvin today with  
patient & mother**

## Bountiful Blessings: *Boy Scouts, Brown, Bologna and Ba'al Tekiah*

Marvin S. Wasser

I am acquainted with many of our journal's authors – either personally or through their prominence or expertise. Surely Marvin, once known as Marvino, is highly regarded by his patients and peers, but our acquaintance occurred in a most unpredictable manner.

After receiving the last issue of our journal, he sent me an email. As a nearly lifelong musician, he wondered if the photo of Lynn Rakatansky playing a cello was printed backwards. She would have been holding her bow with the wrong hand!

I explained that the photo had in fact been intentionally reversed so that she faced the first page of text. As a former woodwind player, I was not aware of such a musical implausibility, however.

It turned out that Marvin and I have much in common – primarily our love of Italy, which of course includes history, language, and music, but especially food and wine. Both of us are also quite fond of northern cities and towns. Bologna was his home for six years; I studied briefly in Firenze but have also been privileged to travel widely up and down the peninsula and to a few islands.

This being Little Rhody, I happened to ask an East Side neighbor-physician if he was acquainted with Marvin. "Of course," he answered. "He took care of our four kids. While attending the same *Oneg*, Marvin's mother-in-law had given Barbara and me a wonderful referral." *Buona salute!*

**“W**hy do I have to practice every day?” I whined to my parents, Edward and Evelyn. Thus began my lifelong love affair with music.

In 1957, when I was eight years old and in the third grade at Broad Street School in Providence, violin was my first instrument. Before the year was over, I had performed a solo for the school recital. It was supposed to be a duet, but the girl who was my musical partner developed German measles and stayed home. You know what

they say: “The show must go on!”

### **Washington Park and Cranston**

I had several Jewish friends at Broad Street School, including identical twins, Harvey and Steven Rappoport, and Richard Spivack and Eric Stein. A few other Jewish families lived on our street, Washington Avenue, in the Washington Park neighborhood, east of Roger Williams Park. Charles Strauss and his sister Avis were my babysitters for a few years, and I later encountered Charles when I enrolled at Brown. He was a professor of applied mathematics and computers.

Growing up in Washington Park during the 1950s was a mostly idyllic experience for a young Jewish boy who was studious but also interested in sports. In those days, a baseball game at nearby Columbia Park, between Vermont and California Avenues and east of Narragansett Boulevard, was always ready to start as soon as enough guys showed up. There was no organization or adult leadership, just spontaneous play from like-minded youngsters. However, there was often an undercurrent of anti-Semitism, which I will describe shortly.

I didn't want to continue playing violin. So, after pleading with my parents for a change, they acquired a used clarinet from my cousin, Richard Aron, who had used it briefly. This clarinet had been made in Providence by Pruefer Company, a well-known manufacturer. It would serve me well in high school and college bands.

Meanwhile, my sister, Ann, a year younger than I, inherited my violin and played it through high school. And our younger brother, Bruce, played trumpet through high school and then in the Ram Band at the University of Rhode Island.

But having grown up in Providence, how did I end up in Cranston when I was 12? In addition to sporadic, minor physical assaults in elementary school, there were also verbal ones, such as “Christ killer” and “dirty Jew.” So I asked my mother, “What is a Christ, and why did they accuse me of killing it?”

My Jewish life had been full of all the usual holiday celebrations and Sunday school and Hebrew school at Sons of Abraham,



an Orthodox congregation in South Providence. My family's home was kept strictly kosher, with its four sets of dishes and utensils, the product of my mother's Orthodox upbringing. Our *Shabbos* days were spent at the home of my maternal grandparents, Samuel and Bessie Aron, who lived at 24 Richter Street, near Smith Street and Chalkstone Avenue.

My *Zaidie* and *Bubbie* had come to Providence from Vilna, Lithuania. She raised six children while he worked as a butcher in his kosher meat market at 34 Douglas Avenue, which was located adjacent to Sons of Jacob synagogue in Smith Hill. (In later years the business was known as Samuel Aron & Son Market, for his second son, Abraham, had gone into the business.) In his spare time, my grandfather would teach me my *Haftarah* for my bar mitzvah, which took place on November 10, 1962.

Meanwhile, some of my other interests were developing, thanks to such black-and-white TV shows as "Dr. Kildare" and "Ben Casey." I can honestly date my interest in becoming a physician to those shows in 1961, when I was 12 years old.

But a significant attack occurred during seventh grade while I was attending Roger Williams Junior High. I have never forgotten it.



Marvin & Ann

One day, when walking home from school alone, an older teenager confronted me. He approached and asked, “Do you have insurance for your stomach or would you like to buy some?” I declined the offer. He then asked if I was Jewish, which I did not deny. He then proceeded to punch me in my gut, which knocked the wind out of me, and I fell to the ground. I recall a car pulling up with laughing guys inside, my assailant jumped in, and they sped off.

I never said anything about this at home, but my parents knew something was wrong. I finally related this disturbing episode to them.

My father, Edward, who had been born in Romania, immigrated to America while an infant. Yet, it had been little more than a decade since he had seen firsthand what anti-Semitism could do. He had been a soldier in the 82nd Airborne Division. After surviving the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, his regiment fought its way towards Berlin. Along the way, it discovered the Wöbbelin concentration camp. With great difficulty, he had described to me what he and his comrades experienced there on May 2, 1945.

As a result of my being attacked, my family moved to the Park View section of Cranston during the summer of 1962. We lived at 65 Mayflower Drive in a neighborhood of single-family homes.

My clarinet lessons with Mr. Roberts at Broad Street School, during school hours, were very simple. They involved which fingers to use for every note on a page of music, but without any discussion about theory, dynamics or anything else. These I learned during Park View’s band practice. My musical career blossomed during high school and then in college.

### **Scouts**

In 1960 I had begun my involvement with Boy Scouts, when my father was Scoutmaster of Troop One Providence, Rhode Island’s first. That summer, our troop celebrated its 50th anniversary with a ceremony at Camp Yawgoog in Hopkinton. Following our family’s move to Cranston, I joined Troop 17. Michael Miller was Scoutmaster, and Dad was his assistant. We met at the Cranston Jewish Center on Park Avenue, which later became known as Congregation Torat

Yisrael. I was honored to become an Eagle Scout in 1964, as were my good friends, Howard Feldman and Richard Spivack. Another Scout I knew from Rhode Island was Bob Berkelhammer. In the summer of 1964, he and I took part in a 35-day trip, which included ten days of hiking and camping at the Scouts' Philmont Ranch in New Mexico.

The *Haftarah* at my bar mitzvah was in fact Isaiah 40: 27-41, which teaches "those who trust in the Lord shall renew their strength as eagles grow new plumes."

During my years at Cranston High School East, while playing clarinet in the marching band and oboe in the concert band and orchestra, I was eager to continue with Scouting. So I joined an Explorer troop, which met monthly at Rhode Island Hospital under the leadership of Dr. Melvin Hoffman (1925-1984). He had become an Eagle Scout in 1946. We were exposed to various departments and specialties, which certainly confirmed my determination to study medicine as my future career. A number of us did go on to train and practice as physicians. Among those I particularly recall are Mark Hochberg (a cardiac surgeon) and my cousin, David Wasser (an ENT surgeon), who is only eight days younger than I.

Much later on, in 1983, when Dr. Hoffman was looking for physicians to help out during summers at Camp Yawgoog, I volunteered to spend a week there. I continued for 12 summers. In 1984, the Temple of the Ten Commandments had been constructed and dedicated in Yawgoog's center, just across the main path from the Health Lodge, where I worked and saw ailing Scouts each morning and evening. My recently deceased uncle, Abe Aron (1921-1979), had chaired Rhode Island's Jewish Committee on Scouting. He was honored with a plaque affixed to the Temple. My father had been on the committee that developed the Temple's plan and saw it through to completion.

By the way, my cousin, Jay Aron, became an Eagle Scout in 1969, and his son, Abraham, followed in 2005. He too became a physician.

### **Brown**

Both my parents had been Honor Society students at Hope

High School: Dad in 1940, Mom four years later. Unfortunately, however, neither had the opportunity to attend college. Dad owned a photofinishing laboratory at 76 Dorrance Street in downtown Providence. He named it Hershel Photo Lab after his own Yiddish name. Mom, who had been a devoted mother and homemaker, later became a bookkeeper and a payroll manager for Big G supermarkets.

Of course my parents encouraged my studies, so I became an excellent student at Cranston High East. I was able to attend Brown thanks in part to a maximum Rhode Island state scholarship. Fortunately, I was also able to live on campus: freshman year in Caswell House on Thayer Street and three years at Hope College (adjacent to Manning Chapel and Faunce House).

I enthusiastically continued playing music for four years at Brown. This was my weekly diversion from rigorous study. We rehearsed, had fun, and played at all Brown football and hockey games, including those at home and away. I should mention, however, that in the fall of 1968, I missed playing at the Yale football game in New Haven. Like Sandy Koufax, who missed a World Series game with the Dodgers, I thought that I should observe Yom Kippur. Though I did participate occasionally at Brown Hillel, I went home for most major holidays.

While attending Brown but before its own medical school was established in 1971, I worked summers as an orderly at Rhode Island Hospital. After informing the young residents (“physicians-in-training”) that I was a premed student, they were inspired to expose me to a wealth of experiences in the hospital’s emergency department.

### **Bologna**

When I began thinking about where to apply for medical school, several resident physicians told me about various options in Italy. Some residents had studied in the northern city of Bologna, whose university, having been founded in the 11th century, was Europe’s oldest and most famous. They also mentioned universities in Roma and Padova. The medical school in Guadalajara, Mexico required some knowledge of Spanish, and another in Lausanne,

Switzerland required French.

My parents were extremely supportive of my educational and professional aspirations, as they were later with my siblings', and they offered to help in any way that they could.

When it came time for me to select a medical school, I applied to the one in Bologna. My father went with me to the Italian consulate on Tremont Street in Boston to submit my credentials. Bologna was of course state-supported, so its tuition was very low, even for foreign students. As I recall, the charge for my first year was about 150,000 lire, which was the equivalent of about \$200. The Italian government and people had been so grateful for their liberation from Fascism and Mussolini that, after World War II, many openings in their medical schools were made available to American students.

Of course, looking back over many decades, the vast majority of Americans who attended Italian medical schools were of Italian heritage, and they came primarily from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York. The vast majority of Rhode Islanders were graduates of Providence College. Like Jews, many of these Italo-Americans had suffered discrimination from American medical schools.

Keep in mind that I also faced the draft during the Vietnam War. I had participated in various demonstrations against the war, the most memorable being the protest over the killing of four students and the wounding of nine at Kent State University on May 4, 1970.

The draft lottery, which had begun in 1969 for 1970 graduates, selected men based on their birthdays. The lottery for 1971 graduates was held on July 1, 1970. My birthday on October 30 resulted in number 38. Ultimately, men with lottery numbers up to 125 were likely to be drafted, but all men in Rhode Island with numbers up to 150 were automatically called up for physical exams and possible conscription. Indeed, I reported for an exam at the Providence draft board facility, which, near the shipyard, was only a football field's length from where I grew up in Washington Park.

During high school, I had suffered a serious injury to my left knee, and it was again found unstable. Thus, I received a 4F clas-

sification, which disqualified me from active duty.

Fortunately, students attending qualified medical schools were automatically exempted from the draft. And Bologna was one. So if I could perform satisfactorily, I did not have to worry further about the military. I should mention parenthetically that I was not aware of other American students who enrolled at Bologna to avoid the draft or until the war was over.

Oh, did I mention that one needed to speak, read, and write Italian in order to study in Italy? Well, Russian (one of my languages in high school) was not going to help, though another, Latin, helped me to some degree. So, before my departure to Bologna in September 1971, I read an Italian grammar book to start on my big adventure.

I should mention that Bologna's medical school, known as the *Facolta de Medicina e Chirurgia* (Surgery), required six years of study. I must have been both optimistic and quite determined when I decided to enroll. I did not leave America with the thought that I would try the program for only a year.

In preparation for my departure, I met some Rhode Islanders who had already studied in Bologna for a year, and they gave me a key to their apartment, where I could stay at first. There were no dormitories, so everyone (virtually each man) arranged for his own accommodations.

There were approximately 3,000 medical students in each first year class. These included perhaps 500 Americans. So the eventual attrition was significant.

#### Marvin's graduation, Bologna, 1976



When looking back at those days, ignorance was definitely bliss! How would or could I cope with everyday needs on my own with minimal Italian-language ability? I was even flying to Italy alone. As a matter of fact, I had never been outside of this country!

G-d must have been watching over me because two *mala-chim* (angels) were in the waiting area of Logan Airport, and they offered to guide me all the way to the Bologna train station. They were Peter DeBlasio, Jr., a future Providence ophthalmologist, and his wife, Susan Leach DeBlasio, a writer at the time but a future Providence lawyer. Peter, who was returning for his second year of medical studies, could negotiate the language barrier that would have been so ominous for me. You can imagine how relieved my parents were at this turn of events.

One sad aspect of going to Italy was that it would be the first time since third grade that I would not have or be able to play a musical instrument. But for the moment, I had larger issues to confront.

My difficulties began almost immediately upon my arrival in Bologna, a city I grew eventually to love. After putting me into a taxi at the train station and telling the driver where to go, Peter and Susan wished me, “*Buona fortuna!*” I brought my luggage into the apartment at Via Schiassi 3, took off my coat, and then stepped out to have a look around. The door closed and locked behind me.

Then, having forgotten to take my passport, I decided to go back and get it. So I inserted my key into the lock, turned it, and nothing! The door didn’t open. This could not be happening to me! What do I do? I had no language to speak, no identification, no familiarity with the surroundings – only a key to prove that I belonged there.

I started to knock on doors, and the first woman who responded appeared too afraid to help me. But at the second door a woman appeared to understand me, as I pointed to my door and showed her my key. By indicating my problem with gestures, I was already becoming Italian! She got her husband, who seemed to understand my dilemma, and he retrieved a screw driver, tightened the loose lock on my door, and my key worked! *Grazie, grazie, grazie!* This, however, was only the first of many examples of kindness and

compassion shown to me by my Italian neighbors.

I learned where the food market was, and I coped by myself until my American roommates arrived a week or two later. Classes would not begin until later in October. Fortunately, there existed an American organization to help new students enroll in the university, pay tuition, and provide rudimentary language lessons. All the guys fell in love with our young Italian teacher, Cristina.

After classes began, I found them challenging only from a linguistic standpoint. Americans had mostly studied the content in college. The challenge was to be ready to interact accurately in a series of one-on-one oral exams, in Italian, with a professor at the end of the year.

By January 1972, I sought my own, less crowded living quarters. I found a note, posted in a local bar, requesting a roommate. So I called this older student, and he drove up to the bar in his tiny Fiat 500. Out came a fourth-year student from Eritrea, which, at that time was part of Ethiopia, a former Italian colony. Kahsai Ghedel was the best thing that could have happened to me! He was fluent in Italian and English but also Amharic and Tigrinya. For six years we spoke Italian to each other in our apartment at Via Argonne 3 and English when we were elsewhere. As a matter of fact, Kahsai worked as a DJ in a discotheque. I would get to my nearby classes by a 10-minute bus ride, and in later years by motorbike.

Beside helping me with the language, Kahsai was able to introduce me to all the cultural differences that I faced on a daily basis. In fact, his previous roommate had been a Jewish student from New York City. Kahsai, who was neither a practicing Christian nor a Moslem, mentioned the word *Falasha* (meaning landless wanderers), of which I had no knowledge. Of course many of these Ethiopian Jews, now known as Beta Israel, have fortunately become citizens of the State of Israel.

After completing his medical degree, Kahsai trained as a cardiothoracic surgeon and became a permanent resident of Bologna. In the 1980s, after I was married, he visited me for a week in Cranston. He had hoped to gain a training position in an American hospital but was unable to do so.



I had other encounters related to Israel with non-Italian students. For example, during my first year, I encountered some students in a university recreation room playing pool. Because I normally sought contact with people from around the world, I said hello. When they asked me if I was American, I nodded. When I asked them where they were from, they responded “Palestine.” In my naïve way, I thought that they meant Israel, since the country had changed its name in 1948! They insisted, however, that they were Palestinians, and proceeded to explain the difference to me.

A beautiful bonus to my Italian studies was a short and inexpensive trip to Israel. In fact, before knowing my ultimate medical destination, my parents had planned a trip there. So in December 1971, I met them in Tel Aviv, where we joined a 10-day bus tour. We met my cousins in Holon for the first time.

In 1922, my paternal grandmother Buzia (known as Bessie) had come to Providence from Belaya Tserkov (near Kiev, Ukraine). At the same time, one of her sisters went to New York and another to Palestine. This second aunt became the matriarch of our Israeli family, now in its fifth generation. My father had lost his mother in 1968, but when he met his aunt for the first time, his jaw dropped. He thought that his mother had been restored to life! They communicated in Yiddish during our visit. I had learned some Yiddish on *Shabbos* visits to my paternal grandparents’ home, but was never able to speak it.

Occasionally, when colleagues, patients or friends learn that I studied medicine in Bologna, they ask if I knew about the Edgardo Mortara kidnapping in 1858. This was when a six-year-old Jewish boy was secretly converted by a Catholic servant and then removed to the Vatican, which ruled Bologna at the time. Never reunited with his family, Edgardo eventually became a priest. Unfortunately, I did not learn about these tragic events until I read the book by David Kertzer, a distinguished Brown professor, in 1996. I have read all his subsequent books about Italo-Jewish and Catholic history.

Besides the architectural, artistic, musical, and religious aspects of Italian culture that I so gratefully experienced, the cuisine needs further comment. The very first experience that I can recall

was at a *trattoria* (a small café) during the first few days of my stay in Bologna. After I ordered a fish dinner, the waiter brought out some delicious bread. As a naïve American, I asked my Italian colleagues whether the butter was missing. They said, “No butter with bread!” Then, when a pitcher of *acqua minerale* was served, I asked innocently why there were no ice cubs. I was told, “No ice cubes, even with soda, except when *Americani* request it, but this would bring a condescending glance from the wait staff.

Then the main dish was brought to our table: an entire fish, head and tail, with an eye staring at me! Well, I knew this was going to take some getting used to.

Over many years, I came to enjoy all my culinary experiences in Italy and in other countries where I traveled. My daily routine in Bologna might include eating at *trattorie*, *ristoranti*, the school cafeteria, and in my own kitchen. My specialty was preparing pasta with a can of tuna or sardines mixed in with oil from the can. I also enjoyed cooking chicken or veal cutlets, mozzarella and *pomodori* (tomatoes), and vegetables. Nothing too elaborate but enough to keep me going. I tried to minimize the time spent on cooking so I had more time to study, my primary activity on weekdays. A distinctly warm and nostalgic memory is being invited to Sunday dinner by my apartment neighbors, a young couple with a young daughter.

Of course later in my life, when vacationing in Italy, my wife and I enjoyed a greater variety of specialties. But we still enjoy dining in Rhode Island’s Italian restaurants.

After completing my first academic year in Bologna, I went home to Cranston. This became my annual schedule, which usually allowed me to attend High Holy Day services with my family. Each summer I created opportunities for myself at Rhode Island Hospital by spending time in various departments, gaining excellent exposure and experiences.

Musically, by my second year in Bologna, I felt the absence and silence of playing music in my life. One day, when passing by a music store window in Bologna’s center, I saw a used silver tenor saxophone for sale, my dream instrument, and I bought it without

hesitation. Now I had the release from the rigorous and stressful medical studies I had been seeking. I played the “Jewish” tune “Summertime” (by a Jew, George Gershwin) over and over.

My classes consisted primarily of lectures and anatomy labs. The years went by slowly, but my education was growing and preparing me for the all-important American examination, the ECFMG (educational commission for foreign medical graduates), which would enable me to apply for a training position in an American hospital.

Meanwhile, I traveled to many places in Italy, elsewhere in Europe, and to the Middle East. One particularly noteworthy trip, in December 1976, was to Moscow and Leningrad (now called St. Petersburg). I traveled with an Italian group, and my passport had to be sent to Rome to be sure that I was not a journalist (or a spy?). The passport controller in Moscow was surprised (and suspicious?) when I greeted him in Russian, but I was allowed to enter with the group.

During the height of the Cold War, thinking that it might become useful, my father had encouraged me to study Russian in high school. It also happened to be one of my grandparents’ languages. Ironically, years later, when I was married and living in Cranston, Nikita Khrushchev’s son, Sergei, became both a senior fellow at Brown’s Watson Institute and one my neighbors and friends. We had many conversations in English that were sprinkled with Russian terms and phrases.

While walking with our guide in Moscow, I was approached by a young man who asked if I was an American. He then asked if I could meet him later on. I had a feeling that he was a Russian Jew, trying to pass a message or asking for help. I said that I would meet him, but we never connected. I always wondered what that meeting was about. The trip included a *de rigueur* visit to the Bolshoi, and we saw a performance of Mikhail Glinka’s opera, “*Ruslan and Ludmila*,” based on Alexander Pushkin’s poem.

In Leningrad we also visited the Hermitage Museum and had a New Year’s dinner that began with borscht. In my experience, borscht was beet soup, red, with some potatoes in it. When Leningrad borscht of the 1976 Soviet Union was served to my group of

well-paying, foreign tourists, it had meat and various vegetables, almost like a stew. When I questioned whether this was really called borscht, I was assured that it was. The Jewish-style soup brought to America was the recipe of impoverished peasants!

At the end of the trip, we flew back to Milano on New Year's Day, and decided to go to La Scala, the world-famous opera house. We were lucky to get a few cheap seats for Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" ballet, with Rudolph Nureyev starring as "Drosselmeyer"! During the following years, I attended opera at least four times per season by sitting in the highest and cheapest seats. The performances were glorious! In fact, I took my parents to La Scala during the year that they visited me.

Overall, studying medicine in Bologna was a wonderful experience, for it combined a world-class medical education with learning a new language, experiencing a new culture, and enjoying some amazing travel experiences. I have always concluded that going to Bologna was *beskert* – the best thing that could have happened to me.

My graduation, however, was unlike any in an American university. Each degree candidate entered a room with a dozen professors and proceeded to answer questions about his research paper written during the final year. A candidate was then excused from the room so that the professors could evaluate his work. When invited back into the room, the head professor congratulated the student upon obtaining his *laurea* (degree) and shook his hand. That's it! Now you are a physician.

During his or her third year of American medical schools, each student is required to spend months in a hospital, learning each basic area of medicine. During parts of 1975 and 1976, I joined Brown medical students, under the direction of Dean Stanley Aronson, at Rhode Island Hospital and Women & Infants Hospital. Thus, after completing the pediatric experience, I knew that I had found my calling, caring for children and reassuring their parents.

### **Back Home**

After my fifth year in Bologna, I was required to make a

“match,” which seeks to place a medical student’s highest preference for a hospital with a hospital’s preferences. Fortunately, I made my match with Rhode Island Hospital to train in pediatrics for three years. In fact, I found out when my excited parents called me in Bologna. To the best of my knowledge, all my American classmates were also matched with American hospitals.

Not surprisingly, I then lived with my parents for a year until I found my own apartment in Cranston. As a matter of fact, I spent the entire week of February 6, 1978, living in Rhode Island Hospital, working the aftermath of the infamous blizzard.

In August 1979, after I married Ellie Abrams at Brown’s Manning Chapel in a ceremony officiated by the Hillel rabbi, we moved into our first home in Cranston. She too had been a member of Cranston Jewish Center and a flute player in Cranston East’s band. We reconnected at our 10th high school reunion and began dating in the summer of 1977. Ellie had studied at Katharine Gibbs School and worked as a secretary.

Given that both of our families lived in Rhode Island, we decided to stay in Cranston, where I would set up my pediatric practice. Thanks to referrals from obstetricians and patients, my practice grew steadily. It eventually included families from all over the state and a few from Massachusetts. My greatest pleasure has been getting to know so many families and follow some into their second generation. I call these my “grandpatients.”

In addition to practicing pediatrics for 40 years, I have taught medical students as a clinical assistant professor in Brown’s medical school. The Hippocratic oath enjoins all physicians to teach the next generation, and I have gladly accepted this duty.

Ellie and I eventually had three kids: Jason, Rachel, and Emily. They eventually flew from their “nest,” married, and now live beyond Little Rhody. None became a physician, however. Thus, for the past 11 years, I have of course advised our children about the health of our six grandchildren.

Music performance started to lure me again, so in the 1980s I joined the Jewish Community Center’s chorus. There were two other physicians, Herman Marks and Saul Martin, as well as other

professionals from all walks of life. In addition to singing, I was able to dust off my old clarinet (from cousin Richard) and accompany the chorus on some songs. We loved singing for our very appreciative audiences, and I even performed in director Richard Shore's Purim *spiel* on clarinet at Temple Beth El in Fall River.

People have told me that I like to "blow my horn," and another opportunity came along in 1989/ 5750. As a member of Cranston's Temple Sinai, I had sat patiently every Rosh HaShana listening to the sound of the shofar, secretly wishing that it was I up on the *bimah*. Well, when the shofar blower moved to Chicago, Rabbi George Astrachan asked for volunteers and held auditions. To my great pleasure and honor, I was selected and have been the *Ba'al Tekiah* for more than 30 years.

I have also sounded the shofar at the Statehouse (with others), at the JCC prior to a march in support of Russian Jews, and on a boat traveling along the Providence canal and into the basin during "Waterfire." The last occasion, with a cheering crowd, was to celebrate an anniversary of the Jewish Alliance.

At Temple Sinai, I have often read Torah on Shabbat mornings, and have even filled in for our rabbi by leading services and Torah study. In 2010, my wife and I became charter members of *Shireinu*, the temple's community chorus (for which I play many instruments and sing). Particularly satisfying with this group and others is entertaining seniors at assisted living and nursing homes, such as Tamarisk in Warwick, Bristol Veterans' Home, and others around RI and Massachusetts.

I have enjoyed performing with numerous other groups. For example, I began singing with the Cranston Choral Company and played oboe for one of its songs. In 1995, we sang in Sydney's Opera House! In 1995, a question from my daughter's clarinet teacher resulted in my joining the Rhode Island Wind Ensemble as its second oboist. A few months later, after the return of another oboist, I was given a baritone saxophone to play. Then, after four years, I switched to alto sax, but eventually returned to baritone.

Still later, I joined some other musical groups. These have included: the Chorus of East Providence (clarinet, oboe, and flute), a

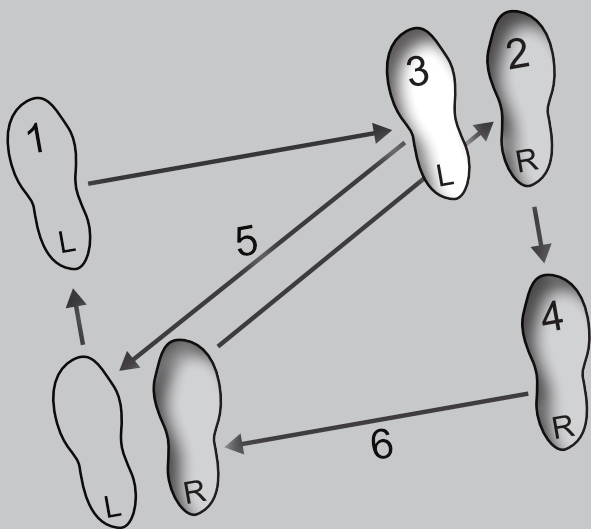
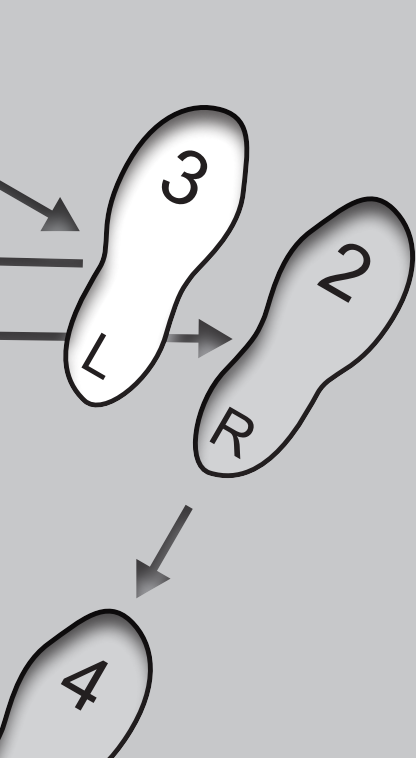
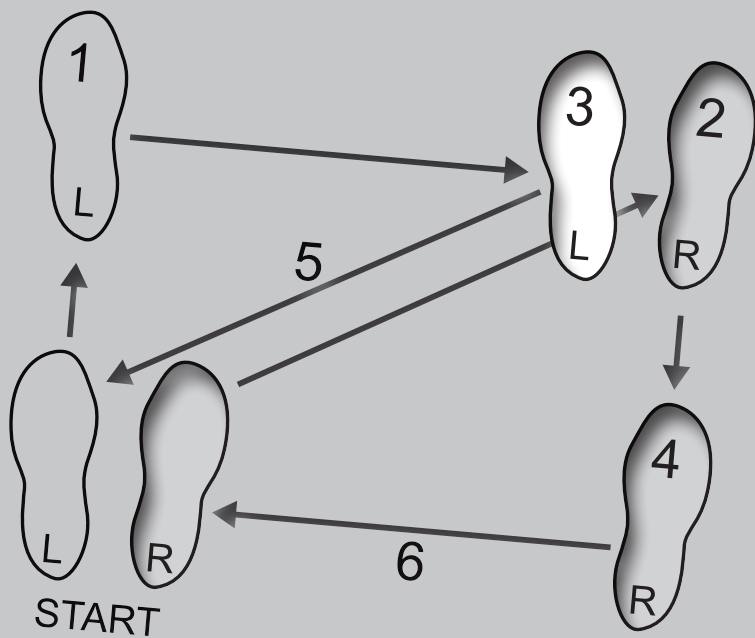
big swing jazz band (alto sax), the Fall River Symphony (clarinet and bass clarinet), the Lafayette Band in North Kingstown (bass clarinet and English horn), the Providence Medical Orchestra (clarinet and bass clarinet), the Ocean State Clarinet Choir (bass clarinet), a saxophone quartet (soprano, alto, and tenor), and for many summers the East Bay Summer Wind Ensemble (clarinet and alto clarinet).

Of course Bologna is still an important part of me, so I joined the University of Bologna Alumni Association of Rhode Island, which holds dinners twice a year. I have also served as its treasurer for decades. Through the Alumni Association I have met some Italian dignitaries and writers who have visited Providence. In 1997 I traveled to Italy with my 9th grade daughter, Rachel, on a school trip. I impressed others and myself with my Italian fluency and general usefulness. When my entire family traveled twice to Italy, I was able to relive many of my past memories with them.

One of my patients graduated from URI and, fortified by my encouragement, enrolled at medical school at the University of Padova, where he is now in his fourth year. I would be very happy to see more Rhode Islanders study in Italy and enjoy all the benefits that I received.

Inevitably, I am often asked how I find the time to practice medicine during the day, take night calls, teach, practice music, go to rehearsals, perform, and participate at Temple Sinai. My answer never varies: "You can always find time for what is important and worthwhile." Indeed, I hope to continue all of these endeavors for many years to come.

And to repeat the question that I asked my parents at the beginning of this essay, I have an answer. "Practice every day so you'll have music for the rest of your life!"





## Gotta Dance...

Stephen Logowitz

Having met as college freshmen, Steve and I have been friends for about 55 years. Had I grown up in Providence, it surely would have been longer. We could have met at Temple Beth-El's religious or Hebrew school, but also at Churchill House, a venue for dance classes. Steve may have been a better dancer, but I probably knew more jokes about dancing! Eventually, our mutual interests included art, photography, music, travel, and Jewish leadership. Both of us have also enjoyed living in historic homes. He and his wife, Dorothea, currently reside in a former church! Which brings us back to Churchill House.

**1961:** the moment when our nation abruptly transitioned from the gray Eisenhower years to the bold, technicolor New Frontier of the incoming Kennedy administration. Change was in the air. The gloves came off.

At least, they did on the East Side of Providence, where the word on the street was that they were no longer mandatory at dancing school.

But let me be clear: it was never really about dance. Not ever. Dancing school was simply a means to an end, a way for a young male on the cusp of puberty to experience previously unknown territory: physical contact with the opposite sex, however modest that might be. Sometimes we joined hands in a circle – digits clammy, or cold, or sweaty, or soft, or oversized (they varied). Other times we were instructed to support our partners gently from the waist, although in reality holding on for dear life as we stumbled through various exercises incorporating the foxtrot, the waltz, the cha-cha(!) amid gales of laughter in what quickly devolved into burlesques of the actual choreography.

So how did legions of Jewish twelve-year-olds find themselves in starched dresses and sport coats with clip-on neckties

moving slowly around a creaky parquet floor on occasional Sunday nights?

Blame it on the Bar Mitzvah Industrial Complex – to borrow a term from the Eisenhower years. If you were a Jewish young man coming of age at this time (sorry, but rarely did this apply to women then), your destiny was clear: you would study, you would struggle, you would ultimately learn the secret (rote memorization), at which point you would then help lead your synagogue's congregation in prayer during a tense Saturday morning, culminating that night in...an awkward teenage party, with the requisite disc jockey bellowing through a tinny sound system (typically drowned out by his own spinning 45 RPMs), while tables laden with mounds of tepid pizza and warm Coke stood near. The presumption, of course, was that everyone would be dancing up a storm.

That was the ideal. The truth was somewhat different: boys hunkered down in one corner of the room, girls cowering in the other, a vast no-man's-land in between. Enter the DJ, who actually earned his real keep by devising parlor games and assorted tricks to engage his nervous charges, little-by-little breaking down their shy resistance until (at last!) they began to move around in tandem, doing their level best to call upon their vague skills from those earlier, riotous Sunday nights.

Looking back now, some six decades later, the question arises: did the bar mitzvah festivities beget the dancing lessons, or was it in fact the other way around? The adult me now believes that the whole exercise was a product of Jewish upward social mobility: to enter polite society (and, in the broader context, Gentile society), one needed the skills to be – well – “polite.” Dancing acumen was part of that package, similar to the secure feeling of knowing which fork to select at a formal dinner. To gain access to the upper economic rungs of the American ladder, good manners were a necessity. They helped assure access. Our first-generation American parents understood that and wanted their children to know it too.

None of this was on our collective minds as we faced off on that enormous dance floor on Angell Street every month or so. Politeness and dignity both hung on by a slender threads as boys

were asked to cross that wide parquet expanse in search of a partner: some shuffled, a few even hesitated, while others actually charged (“No running!” would cry the proctor above the chaos, universally ignored); fortunate girls would quickly be surrounded; others, less so. Ultimately, all would be partnered.

Once paired, we then stood silently, gaping at Mr. C., the elegant instructor, along with his lovely, technically-flawless-but-totally-forgettable assistant. Their demonstrations were silent and graceful. “See how simple it all is!” they seemed to suggest. We were then invited to try it. This is when law and order broke down, as couples staggered awkwardly, crashed into each other or – worse – occasionally toppled over. In what essentially turned out to be a team-building exercise writ small, couples eventually stumbled through the mysterious footwork adequately enough to escape Mr. C’s critical eye.

In the end, we mostly seemed to grasp the basics, enabling us to at least fake our way through the all-important bar mitzvah season that year. But that was it. Polite society never quite called upon us again. The cha-cha disappeared from the landscape, with the jitterbug fading away not long afterward. Social forces far greater than ballroom dance began to have their day. The years of JFK and Camelot were long gone as that bar mitzvah generation grew into a newer, darker time of war, social unrest, and doubt.



Confirmation Class, Temple Emanu-El,  
1967



## How I Learned about the Beatles at Hebrew School

**Andi Brown**



Andi and my neighbor, Jill Fox Tobak, have been buddies since attending the East Side's John Howland School. As you will learn, however, they had rather different experiences growing up at Conservative and Reform temples. But numerous other experiences also happily defined their teenage years.

Following her graduation from Hope High School, Andi studied at Boston University and graduated from Colgate University in 1973. She majored in sociology and anthropology, but pursued her minor, art history, as a graduate student. Our paths could have crossed!

Andi worked four years at the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC, before becoming an event planner at the national headquarters of the Anti-Defamation League in New York City. Since moving to Boston in 1986, she has emphasized fundraising. For several years she has served as the senior major gifts officer at WBUR, the city's NPR news station. Andi brought up her children, Jack and Sydney, while living in Newton, and currently resides in Brookline.

Our author is also a linguist. In addition to her childhood studies of Hebrew and French, she has mastered Italian and Spanish and is comfortable with Portuguese. Indeed, Andi much enjoys chatting with locals when she travels. But she also enjoys writing, as demonstrated by her comedic novel, *Animal Cracker*, for example.

Andi remains quite close with some of her Hope High and other Providence friends. In addition to Jill, these include: Myra Levitt Braverman, Karen Massover Ostrowsky, Susie Gleklen Sikov, Patti Sadler, Susan Steiner, and Sherye Weisz. This sorority gathers almost monthly to share memories, dinner, and laughs. Andi also enjoys knitting and eating chocolate.

**W**hen I was in fourth or fifth grade at the late lamented John Howland School, we had a social studies unit on demography.

I returned home perplexed, informing my mother, Sylvia, that I'd found an error in our textbook, which stated that the Jewish population in the United States hovered around five percent. To my surprise, my mother said, "That sounds about right. What did you think it was?" "Eighty," I replied.

Thus was the makeup of one East Side elementary school. And until that revelatory moment, I'd had no idea that my people were a minority group.

### **Family, School & TV**

My family was an anomaly. I've often told people that I'm the only Jewish person my age I've ever met with all four grandparents born in this country. My maternal grandmother, Helen Rand Rosen (who told me, "If you ever meet a Jewish person named Rand, they're related") was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and moved to Providence as an infant. Her husband, Herman "Hy" Rosen was born in Providence. My paternal grandmother, Lillian Bearman Brown, was born in Providence. And my paternal grandfather, Charles Brown, was born in...Texas! No one seems to know why, or how he made his way to Rhode Island.

But there's a tale about his place of birth. When my mother was about to give birth to me, my father asked his mother, my Grandma Lilly, what to name me. Her father's name, Charles, was already taken by my first cousin, who is also my first cousin once removed, as I'll explain shortly. Lilly replied, to my father's astonishment, that his father's name wasn't really Charles. When he was a child growing up in Texas, he complained to his mother that his classmates were taunting him with his name, Abraham Isaac Brown, calling him Abie Ikey. I'll leave to the imagination what else they might have called him.

His mother asked him what name he might prefer, to which he replied, "Charlie." His mother said, "So be Charlie," which was how he came to be known his entire life. Taking the "A" from my grandfather's true name Abraham, my parents named me Andrea.

My grandparents on both sides were among the founders of Temple Emanu-El.<sup>1</sup> However, the Browns and Rosens became

even more intertwined through marriage. My grandfather, Herman “Hy” Rosen, worked for his brother, Sam’s, company, School House Candy.<sup>2</sup> Sam’s daughter, Phyllis, married Charlie and Lillian Brown’s son Bert, and several years later, Phyllis and Bert fixed up Bert’s youngest brother, Herb, my father, with Sylvia, my mother, who was Hy’s daughter and Phyllis’s first cousin.

I was born in 1951, and my sisters, Ellen and Heidi, and our friends enjoyed a classic 1950s upbringing. There were no school buses; everyone walked, rode their bikes or were driven to and from school by stay-at-home mothers. (And we never called them our “moms,” as our kids would refer to us decades later. They were our mothers.)

We knew nothing of school cafeterias. At noon, with the sounding of the city-wide twelve o’clock whistle, we scooted home for a full hour and a half for lunch. If memory serves (and it doesn’t always these days), I spent most of the lunch break watching television. Three shows I remember were the perennial soap opera, “As the World Turns”; “Big Brother Bob Emery,” a kids’ show out of Boston; and “The Big Payoff,” starring Randy Merriman, in which a mink coat, modeled by none other than the first Jewish Miss America, Bess Myerson, was given away every episode. (I probably would have been unimpressed by the knowledge of Myerson’s religious background because, remember, I thought everyone was Jewish anyway).

### **Hebrew School**

Starting in third grade, post-school hours were taken up with Hebrew school at Temple Emanu-El. Most Hebrew classes ran from 4:30 to 6:00 twice a week. Religious school classes, on Sunday mornings, were given over to Jewish history and, for a chosen few who excelled in language learning, present company included, an extra 45 minutes for Hebrew instruction. I’m not sure what the schedule was for Beth-El kids, and I didn’t know kids who attended Providence Hebrew Day School.

I remember one seminal moment from Hebrew School in 1964. My friend, Susie Gleklen, who had older siblings, gave me a vital piece of information one afternoon. “My sister told me about

this really neat new group. They're called the Beatles." Yes, in addition to everything else I learned in Hebrew school, I also discovered the Beatles.

Our history book was called *The Great March*, I think it was green, and it detailed Jewish history from its very roots. I remember a particular lesson which stipulated that many of the important passengers on Columbus's voyage were Jews. We poked fun, thinking it a bunch of ethnocentric nonsense. Turns out, it was true.

What I've since discovered to be highly unusual was the nature of our Hebrew instruction. Unlike most of my peers with whom I've discussed this, we were taught conversational Hebrew in addition to the language of the prayer book. I'm convinced that, at the age of eleven, I could have held my own in conversation with any sabra. We were not taught a genuine Israeli accent, however, sticking with the Ashkenazi intonations of our forebears. I never did learn how to read without vowels.

There were some kids who attended other elementary schools whose English names I never learned, thinking of them always as Shoshanna and Shmuel. My favorite teacher was the warm and generous Mrs. Esther "Giveret" Elkin.<sup>3</sup>

Our attitude toward discipline in Hebrew school was

first grade at John  
Howland School





markedly different from how we behaved in what we called “regular school.” Kids who wouldn’t dream of misbehaving at John Howland or Nathan Bishop Junior High felt no compunction about fooling around in Hebrew school classes. We used a paperback history book featuring an image and a biography of a noteworthy Jew on each page. Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, springs to mind. Alan Klibe, Ronny Price, and I spent time that should have been devoted to learning some point of Hebrew grammar drawing “thought bubbles,” which contained snarky comments above each picture. In another bit of irreverence, some wag penned a song about the head of our religious school, sung to the tune of the Davey Crockett TV show theme song:

Born on a mountaintop in Tel Aviv  
Raised on gefilte fish and Manischewitz wine  
Raised on the Bible since he was only nine  
You think it’s Davey Crockett but it’s really Aaron Klein

And then there’s the legendary event that occurred one weekday afternoon at Confirmation class, around 1966. We were gathered in the main sanctuary awaiting the arrival of Rabbi Joel Zaiman and Cantor Ivan Perlman when the silence was broken by the sound of music drifting down from the choir loft. The organ was playing not *Come Oh Sabbath Day* or *Ein Keloheinu* but *Light My*

*Fire*. Had Jim Morrison decided to pay a visit to Temple Emanu-El?

The always impertinent but musically talented and exceptionally brainy Alan Klibe had sneaked out of class and ascended the staircase in order to entertain his classmates with what turned into a rousing version (and no doubt the only synagogue performance ever) of one of the wildest and most sensuous songs of the day. We students were enthralled with both his talent and his chutzpah, the rabbi and cantor less so. I know Alan



got in trouble for his hijinks, though the form of his punishment eludes me.

### **Camp**

During summer months, many of us took off for points north, south and west for sojourns in the woods, where we'd learn to swim, build a campfire, play tennis and, as we grew older, dance with boys. I'm talking about camp, which in my case overlapped with my Jewish Providence bona fides.

Sam Kessler, who owned the all-girls' Camp Mataponi in Naples, Maine, had been the beloved head of Temple Emanu-El's religious school during my mother's childhood. She once told me, "If Sam Kessler is running a camp, that's where my children will go." A wise decision that was indeed; Sam operated a terrific home-away-from-home. Even all these years later, I think he did everything right.

Those eight-week sessions over nine summers were among the happiest times of my life. In addition to a sizeable Providence contingent, the camp drew girls from all over the country, most significantly from the New York and Boston suburbs, but also from Detroit, Miami, and Philadelphia. Mataponi fostered independence while ensuring we felt cared for and valued, and it created a community that lives on today.

One of my most treasured possessions is a box containing camp memorabilia, including: Friday night service books, scripts from plays in which I performed, (you missed my star turn as Annie Oakley in "Annie Get your Gun" in 1966?), and the camp songbook. A few years ago I helped plan the camp's centennial celebration in Maine, and several months ago attended a Zoom sing-a-long with camp buddies. I told one of my sisters that I wanted to be buried in my Mataponi t-shirt, and I wasn't kidding.

Some of my most cherished camp moments involved kissing boys. First kiss: Camp Cedar (Bruce Cohen) or maybe Camp Takajo (Roger Sherman), if a kiss on the neck counts. First make-out session: sitting on a log by Lake Winnepesaukee at Camp Winaukee (Ricky Browdy). Layered with nostalgia for those sweet summer nights and sweet summer boys, those may remain my favorite

memories of romance ever.

My friend, Fredda Zaiger, felt similarly about her camp, and was happy to be able to offer camp to her daughters who loved it as much as she did. She was once informed by a (non-Jewish) neighbor, “I could never send my kids to camp; I love them too much.” Fredda replied, “Camp is a gift I give my children.” And it may have been the best gift my parents ever gave me. While I know that summer camp isn’t only the province of Jewish families, I imagine few have embraced this tradition with as much gusto as us Jews.

### **Baseball**

And then there was baseball: boys as players and girls as spectators. I’m a bit fuzzy on the details, such as the years this activity encompassed, but what I recall is that we not-yet-women hoisted our hormonally charged selves onto our bikes and made for the fields near the JCC and Brown to cheer on and flirt with the boys as they took their turns at bat and fielded line drives in the early hours of spring evenings. There were probably around five simultaneous games per night, so ten teams, all sponsored by family-owned businesses, their names emblazoned on the backs of jerseys. The ones I remember are Herbert Brown Inc. (my father’s store), School House Candy (my mother’s family’s business), Clifford Metal Sales (Arlene Gordon’s father), and Benny’s (Arnold Bromberg’s). My recollection of the owners of other companies, such as Barton’s Hotpoint, Arrow Transportation, Classic Yarns, and Arden Jewelry, has been lost in the mists of time.

Those games formed the hub of our adolescent social life. I remember a friend providing some new details about menstruation one brisk spring night between pitches and pop flies.

I regret that Title IX hadn’t passed in my day. I wasn’t terribly athletic, but I was competent enough and would have enjoyed being on a soccer team. A friend tells me there was a girls’ softball team at the JCC, but I have no memory of it. But mainly, girls’ athletic activity consisted of after-dinner batball games in the street near someone’s home, most often Susie Gleklen’s.

### **Dancing School & Parties**

Another tradition, this one definitely not exclusively Jewish in nature, was dancing school. I suspect all across the country during the Fifties and early Sixties, adolescent boys and girls donned their finest garb to learn the box step, jitterbug, and cha-cha, skills that would prove about as useful as a butter churn during the latter part of the seventh decade of the 20th century.

I think that dance classes, sponsored by the Jewish Parents' Council, ran twice monthly during my sixth and seventh grades. We dubbed the classes "Churchill House," after the building on Angell Street where the program was held. Our instructors were Mr. and Mrs. Riccio.<sup>4</sup> The girls wore black, t-strap Mary Janes, white gloves, and white ankle socks, though I do remember that, during the second season, one rebel had the temerity to show up in... stockings! I begged my mother to allow me to swap my babyish anklets for the more grown-up nylons. No dice. Boys wore jackets and ties. No gloves.

When I picture myself primed for an evening at Churchill House, this is what I see: a petite girl with a "bubble cut" hairdo that lasted about five minutes until nature took its course and the entire edifice collapsed into a mass of limp strands. She's wearing a pale pink mohair jumper and matching satin blouse. She sports a shy metallic smile. Two other favorite Churchill House outfits: a black velvet jumper with a white blouse and a purple empire waist mohair dress. What was with the mohair? Those bulky, shapeless dresses were seriously unflattering.

By my recollection, Churchill House classes began with a demonstration by the Riccios. Then came the ritual pair-up. In the painful, cruel practice of dances during that era, boys lined up on one side of the room, and we girls on the other, where we waited to be chosen as some boy's dance partner. I resided in the middle ground, selected neither first nor last.

Once everyone was part of a duo, we marched like biblical animal pairs not into Noah's ark but something that loomed like a guillotine – the two sets of chaperones awaiting us at the ballroom's entrance. Upon arrival at the parental fortress, the boy – of course the boy! – would intone, "Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Brown. My



name is Alan Schwartz, and this is my partner, Debbie Cohen.” We then shook hands with the parents. This was perhaps the most fraught portion of the evening, especially if one’s own parents were chaperones that week.

My old friend, Jim Salk, had this to say: “Your mention of Churchill House made my hands sweat, set my heart thumping, my eyes darting this way and that, and of course a certain uncertain and indescribable feeling in my nether regions.”

Making it clear that the best part of Churchill House was... the sex. As in, actually touching the hands of a boy as we clumsily attempted the dance crazes that had been popular a decade earlier. It was anxiety provoking! It was intoxicating! Did Churchill House prepare us for the next phase of our social development? I’m speaking of course of the bar mitzvah era, and it most assuredly did not!

I’ve often told friends that I enjoyed my best social life ever in seventh and eighth grades. Though I existed on the fringes of the

[Above] party for 10th birthday at Brown home

popular group, I was “in” enough to amass a steady supply of party invitations, mostly from Emanu-El boys but a few from Beth-El, amounting to two and sometimes even three parties a month.

Here’s what a bar mitzvah party in Providence looked like, ca. 1964. Wardrobe: look no further than what you wore to Churchill House. When the attire tired, it was time to seek out a new frock at Poise ‘n Ivy in Riverside or maybe Teen Town in Wayland Square. (Full disclosure: the latter was owned by my aunt Gert Brown.) Descend the stairs into someone’s basement, arrayed with snacks like potato chips and pretzels... but nothing more. The hours, which appeared right on the invitation, never varied, always 7:30 to 10:30 PM.

I was extremely shy in those days, and being around boys totally flummoxed me – how ironic since my father owned a men’s and boys’ clothing store and had three daughters and zero sons.<sup>5</sup> Herbert Brown Inc., known to all as “Herbie Brown’s,” was located at 194 Wayland Avenue on Wayland Square. My mother, sisters, and I were corralled into service as sales staff and cashiers during the December holiday season. But that didn’t help much in the “how to talk to boys” realm. I relied on *Seventeen* magazine for advice, such as “ask him about his team,” assuming he played on or followed one. Mostly, I remained reticent around the opposite sex, for many, many years, I’m sorry to report. I have no idea how I made it conversation-wise through Churchill House and bar mitzvah parties, but somehow I survived.

Occasionally, a bar mitzvah boy was not in possession of a finished basement or, in springtime, a backyard. In such a situation, festivities were held in a hotel ballroom. (I remember at least one at the Biltmore.) Or in Sullivan’s Steakhouse, above the Howard Johnson’s on North Main Street. Rumor has it that some families went with a hotel affair solely in order to appear prosperous.

There were three disk jockeys who made the rounds: Matt Clark, Dave Chaffee, and Pete Klein. I think I had Dave at my basement bat mitzvah party but I’m not 100% sure. I do remember that I received three copies of one 1964 album, “Meet the Beatles,” as gifts. Other popular bat mitzvah gifts were slips, white gloves, handkerchiefs, and an undergarment known as “pettipants,” which

functioned as a slip but took the shape of shorts. All were most likely purchased at Mrs. Robinson's in Wayland Square, a block from my father's store.

The DJs spun platters featuring all the top bands of the day, mostly those representing the "British Invasion." I've been known to grow misty-eyed when I hear "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying" by Jerry & The Pacemakers, "Bad to Me" by Billy J. Kramer & the Dakotas, and anything by the Fab Four.

The dances we had learned at Churchill House were notably absent, having given way to the Watusi, the Twist, and what we called the "Bear Hug," which mainly consisted of standing in one place, hugging one's partner tightly, and moving our feet back and forth to ensure that this was in fact dancing and not ...something else. I found an old diary from that time, and one post-bar mitzvah party entry read "Whew! Everyone danced so close."

#### **Bat Mitzvah**

And what about the bat mitzvah? We Temple Emanu-El girls were divided into two groups of around twelve each for ceremonies on two different Friday nights. Each girl came forward on the *bimah* to recite... something. I have no recollection of my bat mitzvah other than a bleeding earlobe from a newly pierced ear.

My mother disdainfully referred to the ceremony as "a glorified Confirmation." Indeed, she was right. I can barely distinguish my bat mitzvah from my Confirmation ceremony a few years later.

They did things very differently at Temple Beth-El. My friend Jill Fox, who shared the *bimah* with four other girls, actually read from the Torah, having prepared with the cantor for at least a year. Jill says, "The only thing we could have used more coaching on was to be sure to keep our legs tightly together when sitting up on the *bimah*. Sadly, pants were not an option in those days, and we had no female role models."

Jill's bat mitzvah made an impression on me, and left me feeling shortchanged. In hindsight, it seems as if Beth-El were a pioneer. I watched with pride years later as my own daughter, Sydney, was called to the Torah all by herself.

Once every eligible boy and girl had become a man or woman according to Jewish law, what were a bunch of teenagers to do with our amped-up hormones? Enter another Jewish institution, the JCC. Center dances provided an outlet for young people whose bodies were being overtaken by chemical changes. The JCC on a Saturday night was the place to be for Providence's Jewish teen population. Pretty much everyone was there. A friend recently told me she and another girl stuffed the ballot box to win the Purim dance contest; her triumph was featured in *The Jewish Herald*.

I recall primping – who remembers metal rollers that we actually slept on? – and dressing and gossiping before and after each party. We now danced to the Beach Boys, Four Seasons, and Temptations. I never did get to jitterbug and cha-cha as the Jewish Parents' Council had intended.

Times had changed.

And so has my Jewish Providence. The site of John Howland School is now a condo development. Providence does boast dancing schools aplenty, where one can learn jazz and hip-hop. Swing dancing (for adults) is probably the closest you'd come to Churchill House. Ballroom dancing lessons are no longer foisted on Jewish children as vehicles for fostering community and identity. But I'm glad I got to experience that iconic era in exactly the way and the places that I did.

Still, as Chad & Jeremy sang at my first rock concert, "Gene Pitney's Cavalcade of Stars," held at the Rhode Island Auditorium, ca. 1965:

*They say that all good things must end some day  
Autumn leaves must fall...*

#### Editor's Notes

1

See: Rabbi Israel M. Goldman, "The Early History of Temple Emanu-El," *The Notes*, 4 (May 1963), 3-46.

2

For the history of School House Candy, founded in 1912, see: Samuel Rosen, "How School House Candy Started," *The Notes*, 11 (1993), 388-93. Rosen lived from 1894 to 1978. His son, Harris, read Samuel's remarks, which were written immediately after his



**Jill Fox Tobak and  
Sherye Weisz**



**John Howland School alumnae**

**[l-r]: Andi Brown, Susan Gleklen Norman  
Sikov, Patti Sadler Zoller, Susan Steiner,  
Karen Massover Ostrowsky**



retirement, at the Association's annual meeting in 1993.

See also: Raina E. Fox, "Shoelaces and Marshmallow Bunnies: Memory, Adaptation and Reuse at Pawtucket's Hope Webbing Mill," *Rhode Island History*, 74 (spring 2016), 36-39.

3

For Mrs. Elkin and her family, see: Josh Elkin, "My Formative Years in Providence," *The Notes*, 17 (2018), 759-71.

4

These teachers may have been Marge and Anthony "Andy" Riccio, who taught Friday night classes that were broadcast live by Rhode Island's first radio station, WEAN. They also taught in person at Saturday dances held at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. See: Alisha A. Pina, "Dancing Days: Rhodes on the Pawtuxet Marks 100 Years of Memories," *The Providence Journal* (online), August 8, 2015.

5

Herbert L. Brown (1918-2014) was a board member of our Jewish Historical Association from 1992 through 2001. Given his warmth and enthusiasm, he was one of the most successful chairs of the membership committee.



kindergarten: certificate of completion, 1954

# Temples of Memory, Wonder, Beauty, and Service: *My Life as a Reform Jew, Part I*

George M. Goodwin

As many readers know, I have a deep attachment to Temple Beth-El. Betsey and I became members in September 1987, within a few weeks of moving to Providence, and we have been active ever since.

Molly and Michael became *b'nai mitzvah*, Confirmands, and post-Confirmands at Beth-El. In a ceremony overflowing with joy, Molly and Adam were married in the Fain Sanctuary, and our first grandchild, Chloe, was named in a delightful ceremony in the Bennett Chapel. The naming of our second grandchild, Ben, was no less moving, though, during the pandemic, it had to occur as a Zoom service. Yes, my attachment to Beth-El has been lengthier, deeper, and happier than with many institutions, and I hope and pray that it endures years longer.

Given the fact that Betsey and I grew up in Reform congregations, it is fairly easy to explain why we chose to affiliate with Beth-El. A more complex and perhaps colorful story is where, when, and how we met, how we found our way to St. Paul, Minnesota, then Providence, and what synagogues have meant more generally to me. Perhaps someday Betsey will write about her own religious and spiritual journey, but she prefers serving as a copy editor (though not, as you'll see, for me).

Yet, some readers may question what the following narrative, focusing on my childhood, has to do with our lives in Providence. I would respectfully reply, "Just about everything." Perhaps this article will serve as a "prequel" to my article in last year's issue about Rabbi Yehoshua Laufer of Chabad House.

## Family

My twin brother and I were born in Los Angeles in 1948. I was always called George, which I liked, but Theo was originally known as Teddy and later as Ted. Our sister, Betty, was born in Los Angeles in 1954, and we spent all of our busy, happy, privileged, and disciplined childhoods there.

Like most kids of our generation, our parents were born elsewhere – Dad in Hartford, Mom in Cincinnati. But their paths led directly to Los Angeles’s oldest and largest Jewish congregation, B’nai B’rith, which had been founded in 1862. We never referred to it as a “synagogue” and didn’t know the word *shul*. In 1929 the congregation acquired a less formal name, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, when it built a glorious new home, its third, on one of the city’s most prestigious, east-west thoroughfares.

Dad and his three siblings, children of Eastern European immigrants, had grown up in New Britain, Connecticut, within a small Conservative congregation, B’nai Israel, which no longer exists. By contrast, Mom’s family, the Rosenthals, whose ancestors emigrated from Germany to Ohio before the Civil War, had always affiliated with the Reform movement. Indeed, in 1953, Mom’s father, George, became president of Cincinnati’s Isaac M. Wise Center, the suburban branch of K. K. Bene Yeshurun. He claimed some credit for helping restore the congregation’s second magisterial home, the famous Plum Street Temple, which had been dedicated in 1866 and was still used for High Holy Day services and ordination services of Hebrew Union College. Both Mom and her older brother, George, had been confirmed at the congregation’s suburban branch, only a few blocks from their spacious home in Avondale.

Crucial to the story of my religious upbringing is that my grandfather George had a younger sister, Evelyn, who married a San Franciscan, Edgar F. Magnin. A rabbinic student at HUC, he had been ordained in 1914. Two years after leading the Reform congregation in Stockton, California, “Uncle” Edgar (actually our great-uncle) went to Congregation B’nai B’rith as its assistant rabbi and soon succeeded its senior rabbi. Having never retired, Uncle Edgar served this Temple for 68 years!

The Goodwins had moved to Los Angeles in 1930, when they reunited with Grandma’s clan, the Feingolds. In 1943, Mom’s older first cousin, Mae Magnin, married a medical student, my Uncle Marvin Goodwin. This led inevitably to Dad meeting Mom and, following Grandpa’s urging, their marriage in L.A. in 1946. Although Mae and Marvin’s marriage lasted only briefly, Goodwin,

Rosenthal, and Magnin relatives remained devoted to one another. Indeed, Theo, Betty, and I considered Uncle Edgar and Aunt Evelyn a third set of grandparents.

But we had a fourth set in Mom's maternal Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Julius Jacoby, who also lived in Los Angeles but did not have children of their own. Alas, this set of elders became the first to die. And far too soon, we lost Mom's brother and Dad's eldest sibling, his sister Ruth.

I believe that Mom and Dad knew sooner than later that their marriage was truly blessed. Not only did it last longer than those of their siblings, but our parents complemented and counter-balanced each another in so many important respects.

### **Wilshire Boulevard Temple**

Though there were at least three relatively young and growing Reform congregations near our home in West Los Angeles, our family inevitably affiliated with Wilshire Boulevard, which remained a notable adherent to Classical Reform traditions and rituals well into the 1980s. Because it was located near the western periphery of downtown, we Goodwin kids became accustomed to a 40-minute drive from our home on Thurston Avenue, near UCLA, long before the Santa Monica Freeway (Interstate 10) was built. Indeed, our ranch-style home, constructed in 1950, preceded the construction of the older San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405).

Theo and I did not receive Hebrew names, but we were consecrated at Wilshire Boulevard in 1953, during the McCarthy era, and attended religious school through Confirmation in 1964. As documented by a panoramic, black-and-white photo hanging in my Providence study, our class consisted of 178 students. The Temple enrolled so many kids from throughout the L.A. basin that, given an extreme shortage of classrooms, we could usually choose each year whether to attend on Saturday or Sunday mornings. We almost always chose Saturdays, though we never referred to "Sabbath School."

Given the considerable distance from home and Mom and Dad's hectic schedules, we almost always rode to and from Temple in a yellow school bus driven for years by Al Lyons, who became a



**Teddy & George going to religious school**

family friend. The bus ride took nearly an hour each way, which meant that weekly religious school attendance consumed about four hours.

And as a further measure of family loyalty, Theo and I – later Betty too – were occasionally dropped off at Uncle Julius and Aunt Evelyn’s home for lunch. Then, to imbibe their deep appreciation of European culture, we were often escorted to a chamber music concert, a museum or a bookstore.

Mom and Dad were strict in the sense that we were taught to be polite, speak proper English, and of course show respect for guests and elders. We were never permitted to watch TV until our homework was completed – and then for no more than an hour or so. We were also expected to read for our own enjoyment. In addition to such magazines as *Life*, *Look*, and *Holiday*, I liked biographies, mysteries, and adventure stories. And of course we had to practice our musical instruments.

Grandma Sadie taught Theo and me to ride bikes, and Grandpa George, once a pitcher at Cornell and a lifelong Reds fan, liked to toss a baseball with us. Indeed, we could play outdoors most of the year on our Jungle gym or with our Teather ball, but we did not routinely hang around with neighborhood kids, for many boys were considered “bad influences” or simply “brats.” They were the ones who should have been sent to religious school!

Far sooner than later, however, the Temple, through its location, grandeur, and atmosphere, came to symbolize numerous ideals to kids like me. The most fundamental included: respect for the past, gratitude for the present, and hope for the future. This became the essence of an entire religious education. Such arcane and perhaps arbitrary words as “values,” “ethics,” and “morality” never entered our conversations, for they probably fell short of a few simple facts: both the Almighty and America had blessed us.

Like most kids and adults, Theo and I always wore our best clothes to Temple – as if we were guests in the home or stood in the presence of a great dignitary, but one we could only imagine. Our outfits included white dress shirts, ties, sports jackets, and pleated trousers as well as dress-up shoes. Indeed, by second or third grade, we carried our books in briefcases. Could there have been any doubt that Dad was a lawyer?

Our hilly neighborhood, north of Sunset and east of Sepulveda Boulevards – visible decades later from atop the Getty Center – lacked sidewalks, so Theo and I also rode yellow buses to and from public school. Bellagio Road Elementary, which opened during our second semester of kindergarten, enrolled kids from upper-middle-class or wealthier families, including several children of entertainers. I’m guessing that perhaps a fourth to a third of Bellagio’s kids were Jews. I was aware of only two Jewish teachers, Miss Kivel and Mrs. Hanf, however. The latter belonged to our Temple.

At Bellagio there were never school prayers or Christmas pageants, though on a “field trip” we were once taken to Mission San Fernando, a state historical landmark. As for our Gentile friends and classmates, Theo and I did not know which were Protestants or Catholics. Similarly, based on the sounds of surnames, we had almost no idea of kids’ ethnicities or ancestries. Surely, nobody spoke with a local or a regional accent – or ever used such words as “yous guys.” Except for Mr. Duckett, the custodian, there were no blacks at Bellagio Road.

Mom drove us in her red Ford station wagon to and from painting, dance, and music lessons and, eventually, by the time she inherited one of Dad’s Jaguars, to rehearsals of the L.A. Junior Phil-

monic. Oh, and of course to medical and dental appointments, the public library, the movies or our beach club in Santa Monica. Mom and Dad took turns driving our family to UCLA football games in the Coliseum or Dodger games (first at the Coliseum and then in their own stadium) or to plays or musicals.

### **Bar Mitzvah**

Understandably, however, Mom was unwilling to schlep Theo and me back and forth to Hebrew school or sit there until our lessons were over. Who would have taken care of Betty or would she have come along? And what about preparing dinner? Quite seldom did we eat out.

Consequently, Theo and I were tutored once a week at home. Initially, Mae and Marvin's older son, Marvin (later known as John), who lived nearly as far from Temple as we did, was part of this distinguished ensemble, but he eventually received lessons in his own home, as did his younger brother, David.

By the way, because John and David customarily rode with their Magnin grandparents to and from religious school, they were considered royalty by classmates and teachers alike. Theo, Betty, and I were considered somewhat lesser peers, but nobility nonetheless.

In public school, Theo and I were good students, but learning Hebrew was a truly horrible experience! Granted, we weren't exactly eager or conscientious, but Gideon, our Israeli tutor, was a bully. Though he never struck us, he usually scolded or screamed at us, and we typically responded with tears. Quite possibly he was mentally ill, for our family eventually learned that his claim to have been a UCLA medical student was a lie. Unfortunately, my fear and rejection of Hebrew lasted decades, never becoming a proper bridge to deeper learning or the acceptance of Torah in its fullest light.

Yet, who could have ever anticipated that my own kids would attend a Jewish day school? Of course one reason was that they could learn far more than I did, but also, quite possibly, enjoy it. And Betsey and I wouldn't have to fool around with Sunday school or a late afternoon Hebrew schedule. Wouldn't Betsey have ample time to prepare dinner?





**[l-r] George W. Rosenthal, Rabbi Maxwell H. Dubin, Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, Eugene S. Goodwin, Isadore M. Goodwin**

Ironically, beginning in junior high school, I somewhat enjoyed studying French. In college I also took Italian before studying in Florence and then German to prepare for graduate studies. Theo majored in French, studied in Paris, and also became fluent in Spanish. Both of us have loved world travel, including trips to Jewish sites, especially Israel.

Despite everybody's apprehensions, our bar mitzvah, held on September 9, 1961 (California Admission Day), which brought together our four sets of grandparents, many other close and distant relatives, and numerous friends, turned out to be a truly celebratory experience. Why couldn't Theo and I have anticipated such happiness and success (even if it meant standing on risers so we could be

seen behind the enormous lectern)? In our minds, at least, our Torah portion from Deuteronomy focused more on “the blessing” than on “the curse.” We had probably never heard the word *parashah*, let alone the name of ours, *Re’eh*.

Mom saved our bar mitzvah speeches, so I am pleased to share a few of the sentences that I read:

We are thankful for the blessing of having a sister like Betty, not only for the pleasure which she has given us, but also for the lessons we have learned in helping with her upbringing. Ted and I are especially blessed with the privilege of being twin brothers, something which happens so seldom.

I concluded my speech with the following thoughts:

We will always try to do our best to choose properly between the good and the evil and to deserve the love of our family and the affection of our friends and to become worthwhile members of our community. May the Lord help us to carry out these pledges.

The fast-paced service, using *The Union Prayer Book* (1940 edition), was followed by a festive luncheon in the Temple’s upstairs social hall (to which only our family’s guests were invited).

There was no dancing, though Theo and I had taken lessons at “The Cotillion,” which was sponsored by Mrs. Paul Henreid (wife of the Austrian-born actor) and held first at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel and later at the Beverly Hilton. Jewish and Gentile kids, especially those connected with the entertainment industry, seemed equally welcome. As best demonstrated by the cha-cha, Theo was a far more talented dancer than I, but Lloyd Bridges’s sons, Beau and Jeff, were considered exceptionally talented.

Both Theo and I had learned to play woodwinds, so at our bar mitzvah party we performed in a band with eight of our Jewish and Gentile classmates – all guys. We played mostly standards from a bygone era rather than surfer, rock ‘n’ roll or Israeli music.

Not until Emerson Junior High School did Theo and I begin to hang around with girls, but according to our bar mitzvah guest list, which Mom saved, 13 of our female friends (and 19 of our male friends) had been invited. I do not recall attending a bat mitz-

vah at our congregation or elsewhere, however. I would take Nancy, a member of Temple Sinai, a large Conservative congregation, to my Confirmation dance, but at 15 years of age I probably didn't yet know the word "statuesque."

### **Religious School and Jewish Lessons**

Although Theo and I acquired relatively little factual knowledge, I believe that religious school meant a great deal to us. We made numerous friends (one was Jimmy Fields, a piano prodigy who had a recurring role on "The Ann Sothern" TV show), and we enjoyed many of our teachers. Many had other professions, so they were eager to share their Jewish pride and knowledge.

I recall, for example, that Dr. Thomas Redler was a dentist. Rose Joffe, the religious school's director, was fittingly a public school principal. She never raised her voice nor lost her temper. Indeed, she seemed content merely to be in the presence of Jewish kids and adults.

My oldest religious school mementos are a few faded drawings that Mom proudly saved. One, entitled "Th Birthday of the Jews," shows Moses receiving the Ten Commandments atop Mt. "Sini." Beneath him are the "Jews camp" and a scene of "worshipping the golden cafe."

A much larger drawing, dated March 23, 1957, is entitled "My Jewish Home Has These Things." The 12 items include a "dredle," a "greger," "Jewish pictures" and "Jewish books." No doubt my teacher was quite generous, for she wrote "excellent" across the top.

Religious school was particularly meaningful because, after learning to write a few sentences, we were encouraged to compose our own prayers – that is, to perceive and ponder the Almighty in our own imaginative ways. A teacher, Mr. Hammerman, examined our words before kids read them aloud in class. Most of us did not snicker or make faces. Somehow, we learned to trust one another (or at least not interrupt).

I think that kids were welcome to ask questions about almost anything, and many teachers, in turn, asked us important ques-

tions. For example, Mr. Sherman once asked us to define Judaism. He explained that it meant far more than celebrating holidays or practicing rituals. Indeed, he encouraged us to believe that Judaism was “a way of life.”

Religious school and grade school differed in at least one telling respect, however. At Bellagio Road, during the Cold War, students were taught to expect a nuclear attack at any moment. Thus, there were occasional “drop drills,” which required kids, upon a teacher’s sudden command, to seek shelter under their desks. This would of course protect us against imminent incineration. Then again, in October 1962, during the Cuban missile crisis, we thought that the world was going to end. So why should we bother doing homework?

In religious school, probably thanks to Queen Esther, we had learned something about divine intervention. Indeed, Theo and I much enjoyed playing for many years in the Purim orchestra, which, quite suitably, was conducted by Mr. Guide. (On Sunday mornings he also delivered our copies of *The New York Times*.) The orchestra performed an overture in the religious school’s large auditorium before a quite elaborate play. A Purim spiel it wasn’t!

There was another important reason why I enjoyed religious school – or its location. I was a stamp collector, and a post office was located only a block from the Temple. Before classes I often dashed over to buy a “plate block” of the newest, commemorative issue. Inevitably, however, I was scolded for being tardy. Theo was spared some anguish by collecting Israeli stamps.

Thanks to my love of philately, however, I was taught an important lesson. At around ten years of age, I wanted to purchase a “first day cover” (from a stamp collectors’ shop) that cost \$13. Dad thought that this was an exorbitant amount, so he told me to take a few days to think about it. Why did I think that stamp collecting was so important? Most likely he gave me whatever I needed to augment my modest savings.

In religious school we had been taught about *tzedakah* without ever learning that word. Every week we brought a few coins to deposit in an envelope to help needy Jews or causes. Though we

also never learned such words as *pushke* or *menschlichkeit*, contributing funds became essential to my understanding of citizenship and humanity.

One year Mrs. Langley taught a class about Jewish social service organizations, and we were required to write reports and give presentations. I chose Federation because of our parents' involvement. Theo wrote about Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. We had in fact been born at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, in Hollywood, before its merger with Mount Sinai and relocation farther west.

Uncle Marvin was a pediatrician, and he encouraged my childhood interest in anatomy and my fantasy about becoming a physician. He even gave me his old medical school slides to study under my microscope. Then one day he took me to a hospital – was it Cedars or Sinai? – to visit his patients. They screamed as soon as they saw him.

Our family's involvement in such a secular charity as the Community Chest (later known as United Way) seemed no less important than support for Jewish causes. Indeed, I vividly recall, as a kid of perhaps nine or ten, walking door-to-door with Mom, as she proudly solicited gifts of five or ten dollars from some apartment dwellers. Please keep in mind that this valiant woman, a Lioness of Judah, knew perhaps six words of Hebrew. Indeed, she had grown up in a home with four servants and never attended a day of public school. She claimed that she never saw nor tasted a bagel before going to college!

Mom became both the first Jewish and the first woman president of Woodcraft Rangers, a boys' youth group focused on Indian lore, to which Theo and I were devoted during our elementary school years. She had in fact led our King Snake Tribe, which met weekly in a public park (and required more driving), and she would later lead Betty's circle of Camp Fire Girls, which camped out in our backyard on a few occasions (long before a swimming pool was built). Eventually, as a further measure of Mom's idealism, courage, and determination, she became a vice president of the ACLU's Southern California chapter.

To the best of my knowledge, however, Wilshire Boulevard

Temple did not have its own social action committee. To a large degree, Uncle Edgar and his two, longtime rabbinic colleagues spoke on behalf of congregants, who lived so far from one another that it was impractical to gather for frequent meetings. Surely during my youth the Temple never sponsored public demonstrations!

Nevertheless, efforts to promote racial integration surely gained momentum during the 1960s, especially as a result of the Watts Riots in 1965. But Mom and Dad also thought that it was too risky, if not foolish, for idealistic Jewish college students to become freedom riders and register Southern voters. By contrast, our parents were thrilled by Tom Bradley's election as the city's first black city councilman in 1963 and even more so, a decade later, when he became the first black mayor, a position he held for 20 years.

Yes, our family employed some black and some white maids, and over the years a few lived in our home. Elsie, a Swede, was surely the most exotic. I believe that all these servants were treated respectfully, and Mom often paid for their kids to attend Woodcraft Rangers' summer camp. Indeed, Theo and I became partially involved in this organization in order to meet "underprivileged" kids far beyond our orbit. Over many decades, Uncle Edgar and Aunt Evelyn also employed some black and some white servants, and our family much enjoyed their friendship.

Today it may sound apologetic or even condescending to mention, but both our parents, like the Magnins, happily chatted with waiters, waitresses, parking lot attendants, barbers, hairdressers, and manicurists, and gladly presented them with holiday gifts. By and large we were not acquainted with Hispanics, however. Again, it sounds like a cliché or worse, but for at least two decades we had a Japanese-American gardener, James Kimura, whom we considered a gentleman and a friend. His parents had been imprisoned in American "relocation" camps during World War II, and perhaps he had been too.

Without question, Uncle Edgar believed that all human beings were God's children. Perhaps some congregants feared his outspokenness or objected to his egotism, but he clearly resented pomposity and artifice, especially based on wealth or privilege.

Indeed, he often joked about “knowing where everybody was going,” meaning that he would have to officiate at countless more funerals. During my mid-30s, he explained to me that more than a few Temple presidents had encouraged him to consider retirement, but he had to bury them too.

Yet, Uncle Edgar’s mere presence among mourners mattered immeasurably. I still sadly recall Grandfather Isadore’s and Uncle Marvin’s funerals – yes, that of his former son-in-law too. The rabbi I knew best and loved most could have concocted excuses to be elsewhere, but he understood what mattered. Yet, living also meant much more than mourning.

In 1961, Mom and Dad, fond of European travel, made their first visit to Israel as part of a Federation “mission.” It was such a moving experience that Mom later gave some speeches about it. Although I do not remember learning the term “Zionism,” I felt comfortable enough with my basic understanding of Jews and Judaism to write a paper about Israel, an “ancient-new land,” for a public school assignment in seventh grade. In fact, Theo and I so much enjoyed Mr. Baum’s history class that we somehow ended up attending his church wedding to a fellow teacher, Miss Dulch.

Because Temple kids were taught to be ecumenical – to respect other branches of Judaism as well as other faiths – our Confirmation class was taken to observe an Orthodox service. Yet, we probably weren’t aware of differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions.

By the way, the official residence of the city’s archbishop- periodically elevated to cardinal – was only a block from the Temple, and this dignitary spoke there on a few occasions. Thus it could hardly have been a coincidence- long before Vatican II – that Uncle Edgar and Aunt Evelyn participated in a semi-private audience with Pius XII within his papal palace.

Surely some of our religious school classmates were grandchildren of survivors, but we were not taught in religious school about the Holocaust. This was surely strange or ironic because our youngest rabbi, Alfred Wolf, a German native, had been brought during the late 1930s to study at Hebrew Union College. Of course

the unfathomable tragedy that befell European Jewry had not yet acquired a name – let alone a monument or a museum. However, our Confirmation class was taken to see a new movie, an adaptation of Rolf Hochhuth’s controversial play, “The Deputy,” which dealt with Pius’s activism and silence.

### Religious Observances

Of course we Goodwins enjoyed family seders (using the 1923 edition of the *Union Haggadah*) and lit Hanukkah lights, but our family was never concerned with kosher food. (Indeed, beyond the occasional pronouncements of *Oy Vey*, I was also probably unaware that my paternal grandparents, Isadore and Sadie, could speak and read Yiddish.) We did not normally bless our food or wine, light Shabbat candles or discuss what made our lives sacred. Yet, we children knew that our lives were quite fortunate and privileged and we were expected (if not commanded) to lead upright lives. This meant, in particular, never bringing dishonor to fellow Jews or Judaism.

Though there were more than 1,700 seats in the Temple’s sanctuary and perhaps 350 in its auditorium, attendance on the High Holy Days required the use of a third venue. Thus, arrangements were made with nearby Immanuel Presbyterian Church, also located on Wilshire Boulevard. Dad, a polished public speaker, usually read some prayers to congregants in English. He served a few terms on the Temple’s board, but much preferred his decades-long involvement with the American Jewish Committee. Given that virtually all of his law partners and country club friends were Jews, there wasn’t much need for him to participate in Brotherhood (or other fraternal organizations).

Surely distance was a factor, but our family did not regularly attend Friday night services. Primarily for our family’s benefit but also



Confirmation dance  
with Nancy



as an expression of his professional pride, Dad worked extremely long hours, typically including Saturdays. Mom, who was no less devoted to our numerous relatives and her own circle of friends, also wrote weekly letters to her parents (and of course to us kids when we were away at camp and later at school). So by week's end, our parents were usually exhausted. Nevertheless, in order to advance in religious school, children were required to attend several Friday night services, as if we could arrive and depart on a magic carpet.

The most jammed Friday night service I can remember was on November 22, 1963, only a few hours after President Kennedy's assassination. How else could Jews express their communal sorrow? Or did they also feel somehow imperiled? In fact, Mom and Dad had met JFK at the Democratic nominating convention held in 1960 in L.A.'s new Sports Arena. My Rosenthal grandparents, lifelong Republicans, couldn't figure out where they'd gone wrong.

No doubt it had occurred quite early. For example, I remember wearing Adlai Stevenson campaign buttons in 1956. Dad also had a lasting friendship with his childhood buddy, Irving Ribicoff. His older brother, Abraham, had served as Connecticut's governor before becoming JFK's secretary of health and education and later a senator.

Of course RFK would be assassinated at the Ambassador Hotel, the site of our Confirmation dance and only a few blocks from the Temple. Nearby stood another civic monument, I. Magnin, part of the elegant department store chain that had been established in San Francisco by Uncle Edgar's grandparents.

As expressions of bipartisanship, Republican officials also spoke regularly at the Temple. Governor Earl Warren had been a notable example. Indeed, Uncle Edgar, who for so many exemplified modern American Judaism, offered prayers at two inaugurations: one for President Nixon, another for President Reagan.

Yet, there's more to say about oaths. Before becoming a bar mitzvah, a boy and his parents were required to sign an agreement that he would continue his religious studies through Confirmation. When presented with this document, Mom replied, "The hell with that." Of course Theo and I would continue.

### **Confirmation and American Jewish History**

During our Confirmation year, classmates were required to write a lengthy paper about “who and what is an American Jew.” I procrastinated and, without asking anybody’s permission, created a poster with sketches of 24 Jewish dignitaries, including, for example: Judah Touro, Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, three U.S. Supreme Court justices, Al Jolson, Jerry Lewis, and Sandy Koufax. There were three women: Emma Lazarus, Henrietta Szold, and Lillian Hellman. My teachers were not happy, but when Uncle Edgar expressed delight, the poster was hung in a hallway for years.

It’s both shocking and funny for me to realize that I’m now nearly the age Uncle Edgar was in 1964, when I was confirmed. Yet, a patriarch, wise man or diplomat I’ll never be! But even after thinking seriously about American Jewish history for at least 35 years, I would feel truly challenged to identify and write an article about 24 of America’s most notable Jews, especially one that included some visual artists and architects! Selecting that number of prominent Jewish Rhode Islanders would also present a challenge.

Of course the flaw in the Confirmation class’s exposure to American Jewish history was that it somehow overlooked our own families. Rather than beginning with ourselves and looking backward, we began with Columbus and the possibility of his Jewish ancestry. It was probably assumed that each kid fully understood his or her genealogy, but this was far from true.

Fortunately, during America’s Bicentenary, in 1976, when I was working part-time as an oral history interviewer at UCLA, Dad made a brilliant suggestion – that I interview both my grandfathers – so I did. (Alas, both my grandmothers, who also represented entirely different strands of American Jewish history, had already departed this world.) I learned all kinds of new details and also preserved the sounds of their voices. I also believe that they felt honored.

An American flag flew over the Temple’s Wilshire Boulevard entrance, and those who served and sacrificed during the World Wars were recognized through plaques in the foyer. But patriotism was expressed in still other ways. For example, Uncle Edgar, often described as “the poet of the pulpit,” occasionally recited passages from

Emerson, Dickinson, Whitman or even Anne Morrow Lindbergh. Oh, by the way, Uncle Edgar and Aunt Evelyn lived on Walden Drive in Beverly Hills. I never heard the word *aliyah*.

Perhaps I'm wrong, but I strongly doubt that a goal of Temple membership was to acquire a deeper understanding of Jewish texts or to become gradually more observant. Rather, good deeds mattered far more than written or spoken words (though we didn't use the term *mitzvot*). Indeed, there had been nothing academic about the extraordinary growth of one of America's youngest cities and its Jewish community.

The acquisition of an optimistic outlook was surely an important goal of or reward for Temple membership. Perhaps this was best expressed through a self-help book, *How to Live a Richer & Fuller Life*, which Uncle Edgar had written in 1951 and which was dedicated to his four grandsons and two grandnephews. (Of course Betty had not been born, and Mae Magnin and her second husband, Bill Brussell, had not yet given birth to their three daughters, Barbara, Bonnie, and Diane.)

No doubt Uncle Edgar was also well known as a proselytizer for decency and common sense, for he was regularly heard on radio, frequently wrote for local newspapers, and spoke at countless ribbon-cutting ceremonies and public school graduations. Yet, if America was good to Jews, then the reverse was also true.

### **Summer Camps**

In 1952, Wilshire Boulevard built its own beautiful, coed summer camp and conference center near the beach in Malibu. Theo and I attended for only one summer, in 1959. Especially when dressed in clean clothes for the Sabbath or gathering nightly for "Friendship Circle," Camp Hess Kramer felt like Sunday school in a sycamore canyon. It was far more than embarrassing when our cabin, Joel, won an award for "Cleanest Among Men."

Theo and I had already experienced Woodcraft Rangers' more daring and adventurous Lake Arrowhead camp, and we would soon attend another in Northern California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. Indeed, Grizzly Lodge included a nightly recitation of





**Cabin Joel, Camp Hess Kramer, 1959;**

[front row, l-r]: Ted & George

the Lord's Prayer (from which we abstained) as well as outdoor Sunday services in "The Church in the Wildwood." Alas, neither Theo nor I ever became a talented athlete. Perhaps this tendency had been foreseen as early as 1954, when, after completing our first summer of day camp, we received certificates for "Best Conduct on the Bus."

Sadly, in 2018, Camp Hess Kramer and its younger sister, Gindling Hilltop Camp, were destroyed by a wildfire, but they will be rebuilt. Both became truly beloved Jewish institutions throughout Southern California and far beyond. For most campers and perhaps many counselors, these camps probably meant far more than religious school.

### **The Arts**

Wilshire Boulevard Temple was impressive in so many additional ways. For example, during the 1950s and '60s, perhaps 2,000 families belonged. There were in fact three senior rabbis because both Maxwell Dubin and Alfred Wolf served the congregation for at least 40 years, as did Harry

McDermott, the gregarious head custodian who had an apartment within the Temple complex. Many other staff members, including Mrs. Joffe, the religious school principal, served for decades.

In place of a cantor or a cantorial soloist, there was a small professional choir, led by goateed Chuck Feldman, which performed high above the *bimah* (a word we didn't know), adjacent to the organ loft with its 4,000 pipes. His gorgeous, redheaded wife, Lea, sang in the choir. And there were educational programs of all kinds, which brought experts, officials, and artists – Jews and Gentiles alike – to speak in the sanctuary, often while kids were in religious school.

Essential to the Temple's wide appeal – perhaps exceeding music, poetry or members' demeanor – but not literature – was the celebration (perhaps exultation?) of physical beauty. And here I'm not referring merely to Queen Esther and her court. Freshly cut flowers were routinely displayed within the sanctuary, and a gorgeous, professionally designed *sukkah* stood on the religious school's patio. When leading services, rabbis wore somber but elegant academic gowns – but never a tallis nor a yarmulke. And of course no rabbi ever sported a beard or a mustache.

It never occurred to us kids that services could be conducted without a rabbi. Indeed, we never heard the term *minyan* – probably because one was never needed.

Perhaps the fullest expression of the Temple's magnificence was its building, an extraordinary example of 1920s historical eclecticism, which both evoked and imagined Judaism's worldly heritage. The domed sanctuary, rising more than 100 feet, alluded to such masterworks as Rome's Pantheon, Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, and the U.S. Capitol. This elaborate confection, partially made possible by Hollywood magnates and other Temple members from the entertainment industry, endures as an extraordinary source of mystery, wonder, and enchantment.

Far more unusual than its coffered ceiling, eight hanging chandeliers, stained glass windows, walnut paneling, marble marquetry, and bronze ark doors was a figurative mural that encircled the sanctuary's interior. Designed and painted by a Warner Brothers artist, Hugo Ballin, it portrayed Jewish history from Creation

through Columbus's departure to the New World. Heroes, sages, villains, and miracles abounded!

Of course religious school kids of the 1950s thought that the Temple was old (though it was also compared to the city's Mormon Temple, which was built during the early 1960s adjacent to our Emerson Junior High). In fact, Emerson was designed in 1937 by a Jewish Viennese émigré, Richard Neutra, whose influence on school and residential architecture became widespread. Yes, if the Temple had chronological or stylistic counterparts, they were the pseudo-Chinese and Egyptian movie palaces on Hollywood Boulevard or the nearby Wiltern Theatre. Today many architects and connoisseurs consider modernism, perhaps another bygone style, a similarly fabulous creation.

Since childhood, however, the Temple's mural, flickering in my mind like a silent film, has kept me spellbound. It surely contributed to my adult embrace of art. So why didn't it produce many more art historians, artists, and art collectors?

No doubt synagogue architecture was in my blood, for I recently discovered that my maternal great-grandfather, Sigmund Rheinstrom (father of Marion Rosenthal and Evelyn Jacoby and another Cincinnatian), had chaired the building committee of the national Reform movement's executive board in 1909. Having remained on the executive board until 1922, he was no doubt involved with the design and construction of Hebrew Union College's Clifton Avenue campus, which had opened in 1913. I'd like to imagine that he favored the creation of a stained glass window in its chapel, which superimposed the Ten Commandments over a fluttering American flag. The perfect embodiment of Classical Reform! By the way, I still have his 1908 copy of the *Union Prayer Book*, which was inscribed to his daughter Evelyn in memory of her mother, Madeline.

Inevitably, the inspirational nature of my childhood introduction to Judaism was flawed in at least one important respect, however. Mr. Sherman and other Temple teachers never conveyed that we kids would need to absorb far more than upbeat classroom lessons. Yes, if possible, we should have learned more about seeking strength and courage, for our adult lives would surely bring not only

joy and sweetness but also storms and sorrows.

But such precautionary thinking is probably foolish, for most kids could merely look forward to obtaining their drivers' licenses or staying out past ten o'clock. Indeed, few subjects in high school encouraged a glance beyond the following month or semester.

No rabbi or teacher could have ever explained that the Temple was at best a grand metaphor or a glorious illusion. God alone was our true sanctuary.

### **Recent Years**

Fortunately, for many happy and indispensable reasons, Mom and Dad always remained loyal to Wilshire Boulevard, as have Betty and her husband, Keith. Indeed, their son, Aaron, before becoming a bar mitzvah, briefly attended its day school, which had been built in 1998 at the Irmas Campus on the city's West Side. In 2021, the Temple expanded again, primarily in order to enlarge its day school, by subsuming a Reform congregation even closer to Betty and Keith's home – indeed, the one where we three kids had grown up.

But the Temple could never abandon Wilshire Boulevard, and neither could I. In 2013, Congregation B'nai B'rith completed a glorious \$150 million restoration and expansion of its landmark structure as part of the Glazer Campus.

Dad had passed away at 95 and Mom was too sick to attend Molly and Adam's wedding in Providence in November 2013. Thus, earlier that year, we were fortunate to hold a family blessing ceremony on Wilshire Boulevard's refurbished, ever-glorious *bimah*. This ceremony was followed by another, a delightful outdoor lunch at the hotel where Mom and Dad had been married.

Alas, Wilshire's leaders have never tired of building. In 2021 a \$90 million, multilevel social hall and performance space, known as the Irmas Pavilion, was dedicated a few paces east of the sanctuary (in a former parking lot). I'm quite concerned about the suitability of this brazen design by Rem Koolhaas's hip firm. But I also ask myself, both as an architectural devotee and a ceaseless yacker, "When is enough enough?"



When I lead a *minyán* service within Beth-El's relatively austere but intimate Bennett Chapel, and only a few congregants are present, I feel content. Wonderfully strengthened by my noble heritage and my countless blessings, I yearn to be and do my best – nothing more nor less.



Tony with his daughter, Casey

## My Surprising Jewish Roots: *A Father and Daughter's Self-Discovery*

Tony Silvia

This is Prof. Silvia's third consecutive article in our journal and also his most personal. As its title suggests, it may well be his most surprising.

Surely Tony and I had begun to feel like colleagues, but we had not yet met in person when he proposed an article about his own religious identity and a close relative's. I am so pleased that he trusted our readership's curiosity and open-mindedness and perhaps my guidance too.

Through the creation of this new article, Tony and I have grown closer to one another. By his mentioning one of our departed colleagues, I feel an even stronger bond.

Needless to say, I hope that Tony will write another article for *The Notes*. Perhaps his relative will write one of her own. And perhaps more of our readers will feel inspired to reflect on their own spiritual journeys and wanderings.

“I have a question for you,” is how I began. To the best of my recollection, it was 1997 and the scene was a holiday party hosted by the University of Rhode Island's president, Robert Carothers. I had an unanswered question that had troubled me for some time, and I cornered the one man in the room whom I thought might have the answer. Dr. David Gitlitz was among the nation's foremost experts on the history of Sephardic Jews.<sup>1</sup>

We were URI faculty colleagues, and he was also the university's provost, a sort of second-in-command. I waited my turn as others courted his attention. Finally, wine glass in hand, I made my way to his side. We exchanged salutations, holiday greetings, and I said, “I have a question for you, David.”

His response was quick and short, “You want to know if you're Jewish.” He added, “You're Portuguese, aren't you? How far back?” Suddenly, I felt unprepared and slightly off-balance.

Without much reliable authority on which to lean, I impulsively said, “All the way back.” To be fair to myself, I never had heard of anyone in my lineage, going back to the Azorean island of Sao Miguel, who wasn’t of Portuguese heritage.

“Then you’re Jewish,” he said, matter-of-factly.

Those three words were the beginning of a journey that would involve my teenage daughter, a colleague at another university, America’s first synagogue, and my own identity.

If your interest is peaked, so was mine. Having been raised Catholic in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, and having attended St. Barnabas Church, I’d searched for a faith life, but not the one into which I was born. The possibility loomed that in my DNA was another option – a connection to a religion and a people about which I knew little aside from the few Jewish students I’d met while in high school and college.

And that was both exhilarating and a little disconcerting at the same time.

More so was the realization that my revelation was a surprise to almost no one, except me.

\* \* \*

I flashed back to 1980, when my wife, Regina, was pregnant with Casey, the first of our two children. In those days we were participants in what was then a trendy expectant parent ritual: listening to classical music, visiting art museums, exploring historic sites. The idea (unscientific, of course) was that your unborn child would benefit from exposure to these cultural stimuli.

Yes, it was a Sixties ideal, I’ll admit. But it seemed like a better way to spend nine months than ruminating over the fear you might end up being the world’s worst parent.

Somewhere I had read or heard that America’s second, but oldest extant, synagogue was in Newport, the very city where I was born in 1952. I had never visited it, neither on a school tour nor on my own. For whatever reason, my wife and I made the trip, not suspecting it was really the start of a series of circumstances that would one day make me both question and embrace, deny and accept.

I didn't yet know it wasn't merely a visit to a historic site. Rather, it was a pilgrimage to my roots in a place I had never been, to the soil I had never touched, to the ancestry I'd never known. It was the first of many times, some might say coincidences, which would push me forward to ask questions, to examine my past, to experience a pull toward a place I had never imagined. It wasn't that, all at once, I felt "Jewish," but it was a strong inclination toward a life of worship I'd never even considered.

"Then you're Jewish," the expert on Sephardic Jews had said. I began to think maybe I was.

Maybe I am.

\* \* \*

Fast forward to 1996. I had met Nancy Kaplan, a professor at New York's Hofstra University, at an academic conference, and we had discussed collaborating on what would become our first book. It was published in 1998.<sup>2</sup> In the two previous years, we had spent a lot of time together. That's what happens, especially pre-Skype, Zoom, and other tools that now allow one to write apart. Nancy is Jewish and regularly attends a Reform temple in Wantagh, New York. She and I always had what I would call an intuitive connection. We would discuss Judaism from time to time, nothing deep or definitive, just conversation.

Then came Casey, our daughter, raised as Catholic and a student at Catholic schools, starting with St. Philomena's School in Portsmouth, Bishop Connelly High School in Fall River, and Seton Hall Law School in New Jersey. But she also was someone who pushed back at religion as a teenager, rebelling against it, ranting about what she perceived as lapses in Church doctrines, such as its stance on birth control and women as clergy. There was little her mother or I could do to mitigate her angst. She wore black clothing, closed the door to her room, and listened to music by alternative bands with names like Bikini Kill.

Enter a visit from Nancy, my coauthor on that first book, when Casey was a senior in high school. She and her daughters, Samantha and Jessica, came to visit Rhode Island from New York.

Yes, we had visited them as well in their home, but this was different. Nancy suggested a visit to Touro Synagogue. Casey had never been there, except when in her mother's womb. So, maybe she actually HAD been there previously.

Nancy said that she and her daughters would drive the half hour from Little Compton to Newport to attend Sabbath morning services at Touro.

I declined, as did my wife. We had been there, I said.

It was a surprise to me when Casey said she wanted to go.

I took her aside and said something along the lines of, "I appreciate you wanting to be polite and hospitable to our friends, but you don't have to this."

"No, I want to," was her response.

Progress on one level. Mystery on another.

\* \* \*

The mystery was only beginning. By late afternoon, Nancy, her kids, and Casey returned to our home, and I don't think I was imagining this: Casey seemed somehow "changed." Before I even had a chance to ask, she volunteered that she'd had a wonderful time at Touro. Further, she said she felt very much "at home" there. For a teenager who didn't exactly emote enthusiasm at that time, especially to her parents, Casey was jubilant. "I want to go there again," she said. She also made phone calls to Temple Habonim in Barrington, asking about Hebrew lessons. Despite the fact that she didn't literally understand much about the actual service at Touro, she sensed an inexplicable pull toward Judaism.

So began a father-daughter journey, an expedition to roots neither of us knew we had, but I had already suspected. My wife, like myself, had been raised Catholic and, in fact, taught English at Catholic high schools much of her career as well as one year, 1978-79, at New England Academy of Torah. She was supportive, though not as involved in Casey's transition as I was.

Casey began reading incessantly about Judaism, going to bookstores to obtain titles dealing with Jewish history and philosophy. As I write, I'm surrounded by some of those books that she left

here in our Little Compton home when she moved to Boston after law school. She was all in.

It was both daunting and inspiring to a father who had been searching for a common path to understanding with his firstborn. Our son, Corey, would not travel in a similar direction.

Casey's path led her to Barrington's Temple Habonim, where she faithfully attended Shabbat services weekly. She didn't know anyone in the congregation, but made some initial phone calls to become familiar with its precepts. She was on the brink of admittance to Northeastern University, the work-study element being of primary interest to her.

It was a time of transition and tension.

\* \* \*

Finally came graduation from Bishop Connelly, then the move to Boston and Northeastern. I was a wreck. Seriously, I cried that morning we were driving our "baby" to college, locking myself in our bedroom so she couldn't see the tears. It wasn't that she was going to college. It was that she was leaving the nest.

I took it hard.

Those were the early days of cell phones and, after helping move her into her residence hall, I phoned before even leaving the campus, asking if she were okay.

My spirits brightened a few days later when Casey called to say she had found a new place of worship, Temple Israel in Brookline. I'm not sure, nor does she fully remember, why Temple Israel appealed to her, given its distance from the Northeastern campus, but she found it to be a good "fit." She also relayed that she was going to begin her journey toward converting to Judaism, a process that could take up to two years.

She was ready. But was I?

The answer was coming when Casey next came home.

\* \* \*

"Dad, there's a really interesting thing going on at the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth this Sunday," she said. "It's

cross-cultural between Portuguese and Jewish poems and songs.”

What? Here it was again. Judaism. It kept coming back. It’s probably a given by this point that Casey and I went to that afternoon event. It was fabulous! I can’t recall many specifics other than there was a lovely intertwining of poetry and music. The memories resonate to this day of a cross-cultural awareness I had never known or previously pondered. As we listened on that rainy, gloomy autumn afternoon, I felt there was light being shown on a piece of my own history long left in the dark.

I felt a “stirring,” something that, in my soul, resonated and reverberated. It was like I’d been there before. *Déjà vu*, but better. Real-time realization.

When we got home, however, I was jittery. I called my friend, Nancy Kaplan.

“Nancy, I just had the most amazing experience with Casey.” I went on to tell her about the poetry/music event we had just attended.

I will always remember her reply.

“I always thought you were Jewish,” she said. “And I felt so guilty about taking Casey to Touro that I even talked to my rabbi about it.”

“Nancy,” he said, “You can’t make someone Jewish. The person is or isn’t.”

WOW.

It was like a shock up and down my body.

“You can’t make someone Jewish,” I heard myself repeating.

\* \* \*

The next day I went to teach my classes at URI. Somehow, in some context, I told the story of the previous day.

I believe it was a course in diversity called “Race, Gender, and Class in the Media,” which I had developed and taught for many years since. As the title suggests, it involves a critical analysis of how the news and entertainment media depict people who are “different” from the mainstream population. In addition to race, gender, and class, we also considered differences in religion. There are many



stereotypes involving Jews in the media, so the topic was not far from the course work.

Students seemed interested, maybe even fascinated, by my story.

After class, several students whom I knew were Jews, based on their comments in classroom discussions and during office visits, met me in the hallway.

“You didn’t know you were Jewish?” they said. “We always assumed you were Jewish.”

\* \* \*

### **Phase 1: The Conversion**

Casey’s journey during her freshman year at Northeastern led her to the *mikvah* at Temple Israel, a solemn and pivotal event in her life – and mine. She was immersed in a bath and recited in Hebrew. I was there to witness her conversion, and it is still one of the most important moments I’ve ever experienced.

There was never any question about my own conversion, for I do not believe that a ritual is necessary. My wife was moved by Casey’s decision, though not entirely understanding of her reasoning.

The level of Casey’s achievement was overpowering. I cried. Again. I guess when it comes to my kids, now adults, that’s the one thing that can make me cry: the immensity of their achievements.

I’ll always remember that Casey’s Northeastern roommate, Lauren, often declined to attend Shabbat services with her.

“You’re a better Jew than me,” Lauren would joke.

That raised a point for me as Casey’s dad. I once thought, “Are those who convert to Judaism ‘less than’ those ‘born into it’?” I received the same answer from my friend Nancy and from Lauren, Casey’s roommate: “Those who convert are not looked down upon, but looked up to.” They also understood that the process isn’t easy. Lauren used to call Casey a “Super Jew.”

Super or not, she brought me to a new level of interest, understanding, and engagement.

### **Phase Two: Tonics and Torah**

Each week while Casey was a student at Northeastern, Temple Israel hosted an event combining reading and discussion of Torah with beer and wine. It was convivial, but also intellectual, and open to all.

Casey and I would go once a month, at least. It gave me a reason to visit her at Northeastern and also reinforced our father-daughter bond.

An added benefit was the energizing discussion. Having been raised a Catholic, I wasn't encouraged to doubt, debate, or discuss Church doctrine, but simply to accept it.

This was different. Everything was a question. "What do you think is meant by this passage?" "How does this relate to your life?" "Is this relevant today?" These were the kinds of questions that came up between the introspection and the imbibing, and a singularly rewarding experience ensued.

It wasn't difficult. It was familiar. It was what I, as a journalist and, later, as an academic and teacher, valued most: the great questions.

Prayer, silent prayer especially, helps in this process. Some refer to it as meditation or reflection.

The purpose is to seek. Answers are always pending. Questions lead us to them. We get closer.

### **Phase Three: Ancestral Home**

Casey has visited Portugal and the Azores, my ancestral homeland, several times. Sometimes she went with her brother, Corey, or her husband, Matthew, or sometimes alone. I have not yet visited, but now that I am on the verge of retirement, I may well go.

So far as I've been able to tell, my great-grandparents arrived in America, settling in Massachusetts, probably to work in the fishing or textile industry, in the early twentieth century. I'm uncertain how many relatives I may still have living in the Azores or mainland Portugal.

I have learned that the mainland, as well as the island of Sao Miguel, home of my ancestors, is dotted with synagogues.<sup>3</sup> In fact,

the oldest synagogue in Portugal is located there, 900 hundred miles from the mainland. Sahar Hassamain was renovated and rededicated in 2015.<sup>4</sup>

Do I have the definitive answer to my own ancestry, faith or identity? NO. Neither Ancestry.com nor 123go.com can fully reveal that truth.

However, I do know that my surname was more than likely changed at Ellis Island because my great-grandfather, when asked, was not able to spell it correctly in English, and so it was transposed with an “i,” as Silvia (or the immigration clerk misspelled it).<sup>5</sup> It’s also possible that the misspelling, if that’s what it indeed was, occurred much earlier than my great grandfather’s arrival in America, meaning that it might have been misspelled on the ship’s manifesto at my relative’s point of departure.<sup>6</sup> It was more likely Silva, a common surname, in fact the most common, in Sao Miguel.<sup>7</sup>

It may be that my true ancestral home resides, ultimately, in Israel. I suspect that I am not alone in the quest for what may be my surprising roots.

Will I ever know the “truth”? What exactly is the truth? Is it a surname that validates us as one thing or another or is it our beliefs, faith, and actions? I think the time may be right to explore ourselves more than before. I plan to do so in 2021 and beyond. I may not have answers, but I at least am willing to ask the questions.

We expect great stories to have great endings. Sometimes they just have good beginnings.

## Notes

1

For more on the late David Gitlitz and his contributions to Jewish history, see Abby Klionsky, "David Gitlitz, Scholar of Sephardic Jewish History, Dies," *Jerusalem Post*, January 22, 2021. Retrieved July 5, 2021 from <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/david-gitlitz-78-scholar-of-sephardic-jewish-history-65634>.

2

Tony Silvia and Nancy F. Kaplan, *Television in America: Channels of Change* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1998).

3

"The Cultural Guide to Jewish Europe." Accessed from <https://jguideeurope.org/en/region/portugal/azores-islands>. Among many points, the website points out: "In 1815, North African Jews whose ancestors had been expelled from Spain came to the Azores. The island was duty-free and allowed them to import and resell to local businesses. In 1820, the Portuguese liberal revolution led to religious diversity. In 2004, a genetic study concluded that 13.4% of the Y chromosome of Azoreans is of Jewish origins, a fact that suggests the importance of the Jewish presence in the Azores over many centuries." Additionally: "There are three major instances of the Jewish presence in the Azores. The first dates to the original settlement in the 15th century; the second takes place in the first quarter of the 19th century; and the third coincides with the Nazi era. During the Second World War, the Azores became a haven for German and Polish Jews who managed to flee Europe. Commerce was the main economic activity of the Azorean Jewish community."

4

See "Portugal's Oldest Standing Shul Reopened," *The Times of Israel*, April 24, 2015. Retrieved July 5, 2021 from <https://www.timesofisrael.com/portugals-oldest-standing-shul-reopened>.

5

This is information I recalled from a conversation with my maternal uncle, Michael Miranda, sometime during the 1980s.

6

This apparently happened frequently. See: Laura Clark, "Ellis Island Isn't to Blame for Your Family's Name Change," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 8, 2015. Retrieved July 6, 2021 from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/ellis-island-isnt-blame-your-familys-name-change-180953832>.

7

Much has been written about the origins of the surname Silva, including this: "There are many indicators that the name Silva may be of Jewish origin, emanating from the Jewish communities of Spain and Portugal." From "Names Analysis Report." Retrieved July 6, 2021 from

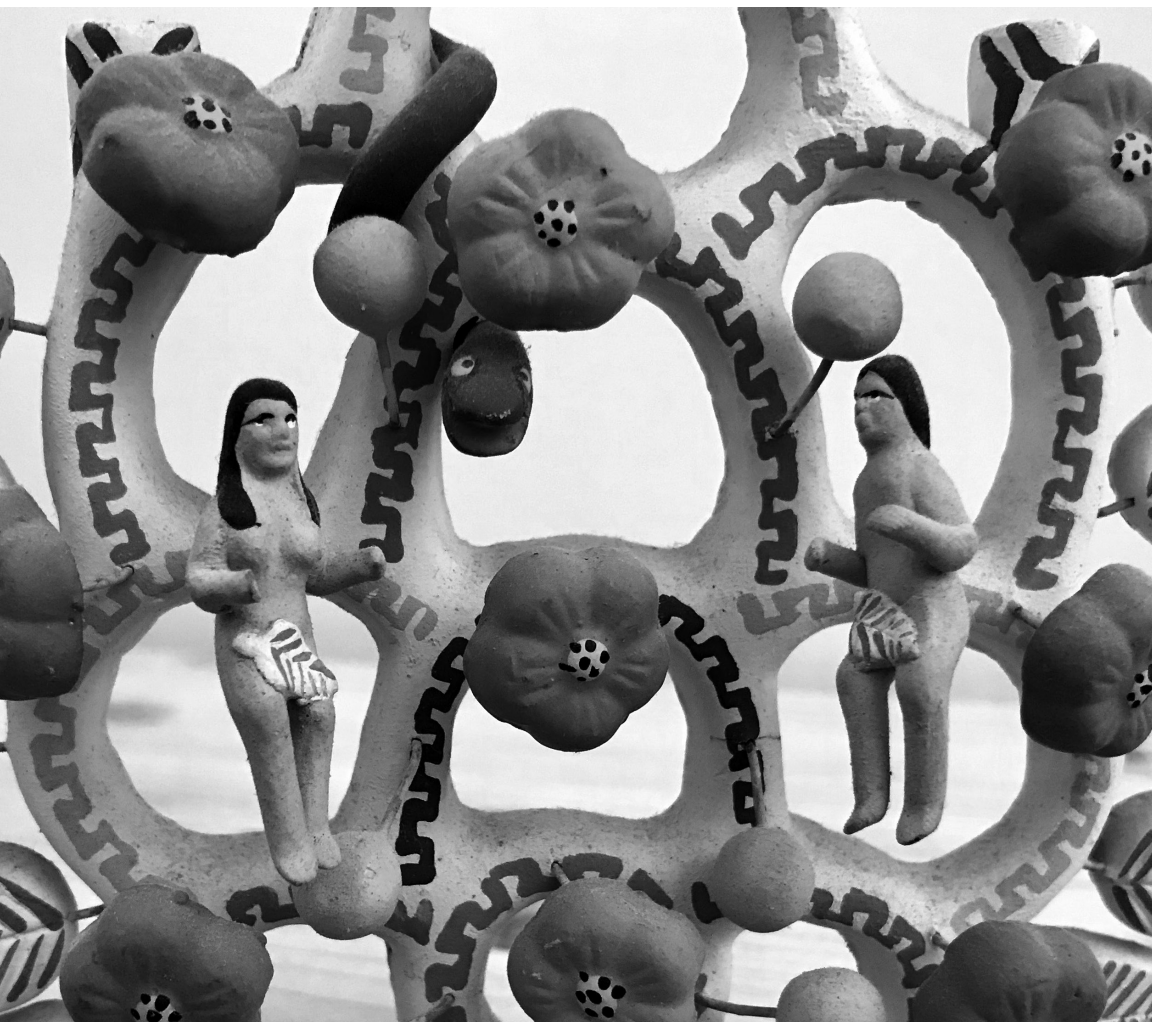
<https://nameyourroots.com/home/names/Silva#:~:text=The%20name%20Silva%20is%20of,communities%20of%20Spain%20and%20Portugal>.

The research on this website further states: "When the Romans conquered the Jewish nation in 70 CE, much of the Jewish population was sent into exile throughout the Roman Empire. Many were sent to the Iberian Peninsula. The approximately 750,000 Jews living in Spain in the year 1492 were banished from the country by royal decree of Ferdinand and Isabella. The Jews of Portugal were banished several years later. Reprieve from the banishment decrees was promised to those Jews who converted to Catholicism. Though some converted by choice, most of these New-Christian converts were called *Conversos* or *Marranos* (a derogatory term meaning "pigs" in Spanish), Anusim (meaning "coerced ones" in Hebrew) and Crypto-Jews, as they secretly con-

tinued to practice the tenets of the Jewish faith. Our research has found that the family name Silva is cited with respect to Jews and Crypto-Jews in at least 29 bibliographical, documentary, or electronic references." Editor's note: The number of Jews living in Spain before 1492 was probably much smaller. See, for example: David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews, Jewish Latin America*, ed. by Ilan Stavens ( 14 vols.: Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).



Silvias at Casey and Matthew's wedding



Eve & Adam, miniature candelabra:  
Mexican folk art from Gitlitz Collection

# My Collaboration with David

George M. Goodwin

Some readers occasionally ask me how an article has evolved. Did an author approach you or vice versa? Did you like or love an author's proposal or how else was the suggestion received? Was an article intended for a broad or rather narrow readership? Were bibliographical references and endnotes recommended or required? How many drafts were necessary? When did you consider photos or illustrations? How did the two of you know when an article was finished? Were both of you equally satisfied with the results? How soon was a sequel proposed?

Over many years I have learned – for better and for worse – that no formula leads to or guarantees success. Of course I enjoy working with experienced writers, but I also enjoy taking chances with those new to the publishing process.

Working with such a distinguished scholar as Prof. David W. Gitlitz, who retired from the University of Rhode Island in 2008, could have been a quite formidable experience. In almost every respect, he is far more accomplished than I! But over nearly two decades of friendship and working together on some previous articles, we learned to trust, challenge, and enjoy one another. At least that's the way I perceived our relationship.

Of course my naïveté may have helped, for I felt free to ask all kinds of questions and make countless suggestions. But David also felt free to accept, reject or modify just about anything or everything. Fortunately, whatever rewards we earned would have nothing to do with money, prestige or power. Under the banners of humanistic and Judaic studies, we endeavored to learn from one another in order to serve our readership.

The following emails – to and from Mexico – represented the majority of our conversations that led to David's wonderful article in last year's issue of *The Notes*. In order to create some space within my overflowing mailbox, I routinely delete emails when an issue is completed. Fortunately, having somehow sensed that my dialogue with David was quite special, I now feel pleased to share it with you.

*Goodwin email 1: April 10, 2020*

Dear David,

So good to hear from you! I was thinking about you yesterday, but didn't want to bother you. Wish I had!

Betsey and I are doing satisfactorily. Our daughter and granddaughter from Brooklyn have been living with us for a month while their husband/father treats his pediatric patients. Our son, who works for Chevron, is currently in Mexico City and doing well. A Spanish-speaker, he's involved with government relations.

Betsey and I were fortunate to take a European cruise in the fall (Monaco to Barcelona). We particularly enjoyed Malta and Majorca. We planned a trip back to Italy in March, but it was obviously canceled. Perhaps next year!

Meanwhile, I'm back to many of my normal pursuits- especially reading and photography, but no museum visits. Taking walks and going for groceries, but little else outside.

Of course I'm working on the new issue of *RI Jewish Historical Notes*, my 17th, which will tie Seebert Goldowsky's record for editorial longevity. I'm hoping to break it.

David, if you're truly searching for an enjoyable diversion, why not consider writing an article? An update on your life in Mexico that includes a Jewish theme or angle? For example, where do you buy or how do you make matzo? Of course you should have some fun. Fine photos would also be most welcome.

I hope and imagine that you're involved with many writing projects.

Now for a somber note. Your email to a select group of friends included Janet Gutterman. I presume that this is Les Gutterman's wife. Are you aware that she is gravely ill with pancreatic cancer? She had surgery on Monday. Once again, Les is in a terrible state.

Spring has nearly arrived in Little Rhody. The last several days have been mostly wet and gloomy. Time for our planet to heal and arise from its slumber! Sadly, Providence looks and feels like a ghost town.

Thanks again, David, for thinking of me and following through with your note.

Wishing you the best, as always, George (and Betsey too)

*Gitlitz email 1: April 10*

George and Betsey,

Thanks for the note. Yes, I'm in the know about Janet: in fact, she and I have been occasional pen pals forever, and regular pen pals since this



current medical crisis came to dominate their lives. I feel deeply for the both of them, wonderful folks. A thousand years ago, when Linda and I were setting off to drive south (to Panama), Les gave me a talisman to keep us safe during the expedition: a little squeaky toy, shaped like a Franciscan nun. Today, twenty years and four cars later, it is still in my glove compartment, and I squeak it every week for Les and Janet. So far, give or take a major loss or two, it still seems to be working.

May the mojo rub off on your son in Mexico City, too. I think folks there are taking *Susana* (*su sana distancia*) seriously. Here the expat community clearly is, and we are all, no make that “each,” shuttered in our houses with little to amuse ourselves but the front porch views of one of the prettiest valleys in all of Christendom. The locals? Some do, some don’t, the moto-taxis still cram 5 or 6 persons together in the cramped space, as do the *colectivos*. Downtown here, I’m told, is a ghost town, like up in *El Norte*. It’s like we’ve all been assigned bit parts in some dystopian B film. The *alebrijes* (folk art carvings), however, seem to be sheltering in place, what with the tourist industry, Oaxaca’s only major source of income, having sunk into the sub-basement.

Matzo? *Tostadas and tortillas*, with ample documented precedent in the Mexican Judaizing converso communities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

And as to your invitation, I will not reject it out of hand, but ...

Hugs to you both. David

### *Goodwin email 2: April 11*

Dear David,

You’re not losing it! A typical witty and insightful message.

The obvious topic for an article is “talisman”– Jewish and gentile- whatever have adorned your life. You could even begin with the Guttermans. Do you still have some ritual objects from your youth or others that belonged to, say, grandparents?

Another topic could indeed be your favorite Jewish foods and how your diet has changed in Mexico. What’s missing and how do you compensate? The Spanish or Indian names of such foods too. Any kosher products around? Once again, the idea would be to have some fun!

Do you know the world’s worst Jewish joke? “Why are oysters ‘traif’?” Answer: “They begin with ‘oy.’” Sorry. Betsey and I do have a favorite place for oysters in Providence, Parkside on South Main. We often go (or went) on Tuesday nights. Occasionally, we saw Les, Janet, and other Beth-El friends there!

David, be well, and let’s be in touch. Fondly, George & Betsey

*Gitlitz email 2: April 11*

George,

I liked all of your suggestions, and probably won't follow any of them. It's traditional. My mentors always threw up their hands at this point.

So how does a type-4 Jew spend a glorious Shabbat morning? Working. I set out around 6:30, when I could still count the stars, and headed up to the foot of the mountain to meet my lab partner, Frida. Both of us masked and careful to keep *Susana* between us. Frida, a bright young *Santa Cruceño* of about 26, is an architecture student. Her thesis topic, and our joint project, which we hope will lead to a book, is to study the remnant ancient adobe architecture in our village.

This morning's target, number 14 of an estimated 80, was about a 45 minute climb up the mountain into a woodlot at the edge of a field that probably hasn't been touched in 30 years, which seems to be about when the house was abandoned. The only other person we met on the trail was a woodcutter: one axe, four donkeys, and lots of rope. We chatted for a bit; I see him often on my rambles. Frida and I cut through the vines and sidestepped the cactus to get close enough to the house to note details, and then for nearly three hours measured, probed, mapped, photographed (me), sketched (Frida), and took notes – this is still Pesach – on the theme of wherefore is this house different from all other houses?

I tried out the line on Frida but drew a blank. Not surprising, since she is a Mormon, part of the 20 to 30% of our village who are not RC. Her two dogs, *Güero* (Whitey) and *Manchis* (Spot) and my *Qalbá* enjoyed sniffing out lizards in the underbrush.

Traditional vernacular architecture tends to be all pretty much of a muchness, but the joy is recognizing different hands, occasional idiosyncratic touches, and unique solutions to problems specific to the site. This ruin rewarded us with some of each, and a couple of gorgeous handmade artifacts to boot. We gather them, catalog them, describe and store them, and at the end of the project will donate our small museum to the town along with the photo-archives of how their grandparents lived in our little *Shtetl* on the western edge of the Sierra Madre Oriental.

Too bad *this* is a topic that probably couldn't be molded to fit the journal...

Probably.

David

*Gitlitz email 3: April 14*

George,  
I'm thinking, I'm thinking.  
How do you feel about 5,000 words?  
David

*Goodwin email 3: April 14*

Hi David,  
5,000 words would be just right. Can't wait to read them.  
Be well, George

*Gitlitz email 4: April 15*

George,  
It's attached. See what you think.  
If you edit, please let me approve the editing before you publish or show it around.  
David

*Goodwin email 4: April 16*

Dear David,  
I feel so privileged and blessed to have played a tiny role in the creation of your deeply touching essay. I nagged you! And I did so because I care about you and Linda, the RI Jewish community, Jewish peoplehood, and the quality of *The Notes*.

I believe that your fine essay will be remembered as one of the best – perhaps astonishing – of my editorship. I will certainly remember it this way.

And you wrote it so damn fast! Obviously, you have been thinking about all these issues for decades- perhaps your entire life. I can't believe, however, that you could pull this off within a day or two.

I'll read the essay a few more times before I make perhaps a few tiny suggestions. I'd also like to ask a few questions. I certainly don't plan to quibble about anything. In many ways, I believe, your essay resonates as a prayer.

David, I feel so happy to have played a tiny role in perhaps "commissioning" your work. A commission in which no financial transaction occurred! What a bargain!

Thanks again. Your Anglo, Jewish, folk art collecting buddy, who speaks no more than a few words of Spanish but also loves Mexico.

George

*Goodwin email 5: April 19*

Dear David,

I'm so much enjoying your article. Given your permission to "fire away," I'm also raising many questions about content and format. I'll be happy if you accept some or ignore many of these points. Of course I don't want to impose myself on your highly accomplished methods and results. Rather, I'm trying to keep my readers in mind. I hope to send you my detailed comments (perhaps quibbles) tomorrow.

Thanks and be well, George

*Goodwin email 6: April 19*

Dear David,

I finished sooner than I expected. Now I can wander around outside with our daughter and granddaughter, who've been with Betsey and me for five weeks. Probably at least another month! I'm not complaining, however. This has been a special visit (at least for us). Too bad that Adam is stuck with his patients back in Brooklyn, but he's devoted to them and afraid of infecting his loved ones.

Please do not be offended by all my little questions, comments, and quibbles. I didn't intend to be disrespectful or difficult. I'm sorry if I sound that way.

Simply consider and use whatever you like. Please delete whatever you don't like, and send this draft back to me. I'll show you the changes in a clean draft to make sure that they're accurate.

And do you have six or eight photographs to illustrate your article? If so, please send them separately from your draft as email attachments.

Thanks, once again, David, for telling your fascinating story with old and new friends back in Little Rhody.

Be well, George

*Gitlitz email 5: April 20*

George,

I've taken all your comments to heart, and I've accepted and incorporated some, but not all. I tried to comment on the edited version you sent me, but I have produced a new and somewhat revised manuscript, which you should consider to be the Second Draft, ready for you to take your Sharpie and even sharper eye to helping to make even stronger.

Here, then, is yours, with comments; plus 2nd Draft; photos, batch 1. I'm sending you 15, and you should feel free to use any number you like, 0 to 15, and to request others if you think they'd be useful.

David

*Goodwin email 7: April 20*

Dear David,

I'm so deeply grateful for your devotion to this project. While not seeking or accepting much credit, I do believe that your second draft is even better than your first. My readers will also surely feel a great deal of gratitude. You teach us much through your kindness, art, modesty, and wisdom. You are truly one of the significant teachers in my life!

Your *topil* (sheriff) doesn't need to worry about me. I do plenty of worrying about and for myself.

I'd like to read your second draft a few more times before making any tiny suggestions. But I'll do this within a few days.

Of course I love your photos. I won't know for months how many I can use, but probably only half.

Thanks again, David, for sharing so much of yourself and, I dare say, your soul.

Be well! Fondly and gratefully, George

*Goodwin email 8, with portions of Gitlitz email 6 inserted with capital letters: both written on April 21*

Dear David,

Your fine essay is about 99% finished. No need for me to return your second draft. May I please raise a few tiny points, however? Once again, you're welcome to accept, reject or modify these points.

(Several of my points and his responses are deleted here.)

Just a few other lame thoughts for now. Don't you miss playing golf?  
I DO; HAVEN'T PLAYED NOW IN THREE YEARS.

Anything else you miss from your years in Little Rhody or elsewhere?  
DIGGING CLAMS ON THE FLATS WHEN LOW TIDE COINCIDES WITH FIRST LIGHT AND IT IS JUST ME AND THE DEER AND THE GULLS.

What, golf isn't central to your Jewish identity?

NOT SO MUCH; NEITHER IS CHINESE FOOD, THOUGH I SEE THEIR UTILITY IN CERTAIN SOCIAL SITUATIONS.

Obviously, you've identified yourself as a former Rhode Islander. But beyond Jewish dimensions, did you ever think of yourself as a Rhode Islander?

YES.

Or even as an expat Rhode Islander?

NOT SO MUCH.

Or was RI only another chapter in your lengthy and distinguished academic career or life's journey?

ALSO TRUE.

For that matter, are you still a kid from Binghamton?

ALSO TRUE. AND FROM MADRID; YEARS THERE WERE ALSO FORMATIVE. I AM LIKEWISE NOSTALGIC ABOUT NEBRASKA (GOOD PEOPLE, AND NOTHING MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN THE WIND MAKING WAVES IN THE WHEAT BY MOONLIGHT). AND SOUTHERN INDIANA, WITH ITS LIMESTONE GULLIES AND ITS QUIRKY COMBINATION OF REDNECK APPALACHIA AND BLOOMINGTON AS WHOLLY INTERNATIONAL (AS WELL AS IT'S MY CURRENT LEGAL HOME, AND WHERE MY GOLF CLUBS RESIDE).

Although I do think that we're about finished with your fine article, you will be welcome to very slightly modify it over the coming months. Assuming, based on new experiences, you want to add, delete or modify something!

Meanwhile, thanks again, David, for adding depth and luster to the new issue.

Fondly, George

ANY IDEAS ABOUT TIMING OF THE ISSUE?

AND THANKS FOR YOUR SAGE COMMENTS, THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS, AND FINE TUNING SKILLS. d

### *Goodwin email 9: April 21*

Thanks again, David. You're easy and fun to work with (unlike me). I'll make the appropriate changes pronto. As for timing, most articles won't be finished and edited until October or so. Then my graphic designer becomes involved. If we're lucky, everything goes to the printer by the end of the year. Although issues are dated November, they are seldom mailed before February. The large problem is that Association members have to pay their damn annual dues on time so that the office can mail everything by a bulk rate.

I believe that many of the best articles won't be fully appreciated for decades! But I'm not worried. As you can see, I think that editing is a creative process that can often be both rewarding and lots of fun.

So would Qalbá like to write an article for the 2021 issue? His RI perspective may be limited, however.

Be well, George

*I felt quite fortunate to participate in David's Zoom birthday party on April 24, 2020, which had been organized by his daughters, Abby and Deborah. The next day, David sent the following email:*

Betsey and George,

What a delight seeing you last night. It wasn't quite like having you here lounging on the porch looking out at Monte Albán, but I was really touched. You guys (and maybe even the *alebrije* dragon) are important to me. I couldn't sleep last night thinking of all the people my kids had e-assembled, and how much each of them has meant and still means in my life. And then, to top it all off, it rained! Those cicadas can be pretty effective when they put their collective minds to it.

Many thanks. David

*That same day, I replied to David's email:*

Dear David,

The pleasure was ours! Betsey was listening nearby in our family room (as were our daughter and granddaughter). What an outpouring of fandom and love for a special person! Old and new friends, colleagues too, from everywhere. I feel so honored that your daughters bothered to include Betsey and me.

The dragon I flashed on the screen may not be an *alebrije*, however. Rather than a carving, it's papier-mâché. And the wings are in storage. I found the delightful thing at a shop in Portsmouth, NH, where over many years I obtained other Mexican curiosities and treasures. (Which are which?) Unfortunately, this "head" shop closed a few years ago.

So why are you up and working so damn early? Because you couldn't sleep? I've been up since about three, thanks to our granddaughter's outbursts. Fortunately, after several days of too much rain and darkness, it looks like a sunny day. Haven't heard any cicadas, however. A rabbit family is living under our front porch.

Thanks again, David and daughters, for including us in your remarkable birthday celebration!

Fondly, George

*In February I received word that David had passed away on December 30, 2020, at 78 years of age, in his beloved Oaxaca. Already deeply compromised by a genetic condition found among Ashkenazi Jews, he suffered complications caused by COVID 19. Of course our former board member had miraculously survived for 12 years following a liver transplant. His dear friend and colleague at the University of Rhode Island, Daniel Carpenter, had been the selfless donor.*

*Although not allowed to see him after his hospitalization on December 24, David's daughters, Abby and Deborah, had been able to reach Oaxaca. He knew that they were there, and they were able to speak to each other. Abby and Deborah are grateful that he was not forced to linger in a diminished state.*

*As he had requested, the Association sent David's copies of the 2020 issue of The Notes to Abby's home in Bloomington, Indiana, and she sent a copy to Deborah's home in Wilsonville, Oregon. Sadly, the new issue was published too late for David to enjoy it.*

*David's wife, colleague, and fellow adventurer, Prof. Linda Kay Davidson, had passed away three years earlier. Her ashes were scattered within her beloved dahlia garden that surrounds the Gitlitz casita in Santa Cruz Etla.*

*A memorial service for David was held on August 14, 2021 in Oaxaca, and most of his ashes were scattered at the nearby nature preserve that he so dearly loved. Abby and Deborah, who inherited David's travel gene and genius, will also carry some ashes on their journeys.*

*Rather than writing a conventional obituary for David, like those usually found in our journal's closing pages, I thought that the preceding emails would suffice. His own words say far more than would a list of his professional accomplishments and honors.*





David with daughters, Abby & Deborah, Oaxaca

Coach Tom Ossman; top row, Harris  
on left; David on far right, 1975



## David Bazar:

### PCD stalwart and community leader

Harris K. Weiner

Harris wrote fine articles about tennis stars in our 2011 and 2014 issues, so I'd like to think of him as our sports reporter. But both articles, presented in a breezy style, also acknowledged some deeper issues. Indeed, his first article, about Jules Cohen, had much to say about their alma mater, Providence Country Day.

I'm a decade older than Harris and his buddy, David, but I wish that they had been my classmates. I too attended a prep school, though as a boarder, in my native Southern California, and built some lasting friendships with Jewish and Gentile kids. But these were hardly as a result of playing numerous varsity sports – or even one! Unlike Harris or David, I also suffered a bitter, anti-Semitic experience.

Harris and I became acquainted more than three decades ago. The vehicle was not our congregation, Beth-El, however. Rather, both of us often rode the same RIPTA bus Down City.

Nevertheless, Harris and his wife, Jan, do enjoy a quite special Beth-El distinction. They met in its religious school when only eight or nine! Of course, their courtship began many years later, probably far from a tennis or any other court. Harris is an attorney, but given the warmth of his writing, it's difficult for me to think of him as a litigator.

Of course I also know David and his family from PCD and Beth-El. We enjoy a further connection through Hartford's Trinity College, which is again related to PCD.

I first met David Bazar in the summer of 1969 on Slater Avenue in Providence, where we both lived. We had been accepted for the sixth grade (Class of 1976) at Providence Country Day School. David had attended Providence Hebrew Day School and St. Dunstan's, and I had gone to Summit Avenue School and John Howland. Having migrated from my family's first apartment on 12th Street and a starter home on Greaton Drive, I was relatively new to this part of

the East Side.

David thought I looked and acted too old for PCD's Middle School (which began in sixth grade), and I thought he was too small and baby-faced for a grown-up boys' school. In his defense, David was born in late January, but his mother, Beverly, had pushed him ahead a grade, but not for Hebrew school. In my defense, I had inflated confidence from my father, Shelly's, forceful encouragement. Fifty years later, David still looks and acts considerably younger, and my self-assurance has survived 40 years of competitive sports and also, like David, the rigors of practicing law for over three decades.

### **Neighborly, Family, Sartorial, and Jewish Connections**

We remain friends through the close bonds made and maintained at PCD, which we shared with many fellow Jewish students. Those in our class of 38 included: Jeff Gordon, Andy Green, Max Lesselbaum, Andy Lewis, Mike Litchman, Greg Mencoﬀ, and Ron Tanner. Len Ranalli, son of a beloved teacher and a mother who managed a Jewish law firm, seemed to believe he was also a member of our tribe. Jewish students in the Class of 1975 included: Seth Berger, Jimmy Feinberg, Paul Finkelman, Charles Fradin, Peter Kaplan, Bob Lapidés, Bobby Lieberman, Bob Salk, Jon Savage, Lee Troup, and Marc Zwetchkenbaum. As I will explain later, we represented only a second generation of Country Day's Jewish students.

Prior to applying to Country Day, in 1968, I had applied to Moses Brown School. There were three openings for which 20 boys competed. We spent the day on campus with the intimidating admissions director and took an exam on which I received the third highest score but was nonetheless denied admission. The rejection letter gratuitously added that I was not private school material (perhaps, I thought, because I had trouble with my necktie and the crackers they gave us as a snack). My furious father apologized to me by stating that it was his lack of social status that was to blame. He felt that if he were an Ivy League doctor from the upper East Side, I would have been accepted. Undeterred, he contacted PCD, which was smaller, newer, non-religious, more inviting, less elitist, but no less elite academically.

The admissions process at Country Day was fun. I was greeted by Headmaster Evan West, who explained the day's program. It took place in a nice white house with creaking stairs, a fireplace, and antiques. Registrar Clifford Mason (Commander, U.S. Navy, retired) administered the aptitude test and immediately announced with enthusiasm how well I had done. I was given a tour that included sitting briefly in active classes. I recall being asked whether I knew any of the boys, and I pointed out the redheaded Peter Sadick, whom I recognized from Temple Beth-El's Sunday school. I was awed by the giant football players whose cleats clanged on the pavement as they walked from the locker room to the field. Then I was interviewed by Mr. West, who teased out of me that I enjoyed reading about such world explorers as Balboa, Magellan, and Columbus. Mr. West showed genuine excitement and included a reference to my special interest in his acceptance letter.

David's parents had a clearer basis to choose PCD. Their older son, Peter, was in the Class of 1973 at Moses Brown but not altogether happy. In fact, he would leave a year early to enter the University of Rhode Island. Mrs. Bazar, a trained educator, knew that David was smaller, quieter, and younger for his class than Peter and would thrive in a more nurturing academic setting. The Bazars' "sales rep" business, specializing in electronics and jewelry, was located in East Providence so they passed PCD daily and liked what they saw and learned about the school.

Neither my parents nor the Bazars wanted to abdicate raising their sons to boarding schools, and they did not mind shuttling us back and forth across the Seekonk River every day. Tuition, which was the same for all of the area's independent schools, was well under \$2,000.

There were 20 boys in Mrs. Pratt's sixth grade, about half the size of the "upper forms." Although I nipped academically on the heels of a top student, Jock Toulmin (who much later became CFO of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts), and Kip McHenry's year-end geography project on Ireland narrowly beat out mine on Israel, we lived and learned science together for a week at the Alton Jones retreat in West Greenwich, where Brown University soccer legend,

George Gerdts, taught us about the natural world and cooperation. Those field trips – Deerfield and Nantucket in following years – were integral to us coming together as a class and learning completely new things about history and science in places and ways that were outside our individual comfort zones.

Orienteering through the woods without instruments, studying whaling history in a Nantucket museum from a ship captain's descendant, and reliving Native American wars in the Connecticut Valley were among many unforgettable experiences. So was living with boys who regularly hunted, fished, skied, and played hockey, all of which were foreign to my family. By contrast, other boys could not comprehend my love of sleepover summer camp, which had been passed down by my father. For my part, I could not fathom that boarding school was in the predetermined future of several classmates.

On an ironic note, the “preppifying” of public schoolers like me, who arrived with Cranston-style wardrobes of bell-bottoms, shiny shirts, and two-toned platform shoes, was achieved largely through local Jewish-owned haberdasheries. Herbie Brown's store for boys and men in Wayland Square supplied Middle Schoolers with corduroys, button-downs, blazers, and loafers. Bob Singer, whose son David '74 was PCD's hockey goalie, owned Hillhouse Ltd., a shop near Brown University founded by Martin Roses. This is where Hospital Trust and Textron executives (virtually all male) shopped for traditional cuts. I bought shirts and wingtips alongside G. Wil-



liam Miller when he was the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. Harvey Lapedes, whose son Bob '75 was a PCD tennis captain, owned Harvey Ltd., also on College Hill. It outfitted more stylish bankers, such as George Graboys, whose son, Ken '81, successfully wrestled for PCD and whose daughter, Angela, became a Reform rabbi. My high school graduation suit would come from Harvey's. Yet, my too-hot, three-piece, worsted wool college interview suit was purchased from Philip Woolf in downtown Providence.

Despite my mother's efforts to make me "think Yiddish and dress British" and follow a PCD teacher's sartorial example, I continued to be influenced by my father's preference for Shelly Summer's Richards store on Weybosset Street, which provided contemporary styles favored by fashion-minded gents. My father, Sheldon, and Lib-erace had three things in common: they both shopped at Richards, they both played the piano, and they both entertained Natalie Weiner and made her laugh. My parents' close friends, Banice and Beverly Bazar, once bought matching suits at Richards and looked great. After the continual whiplash of these childhood textile traumas, these days I favor functional basics mostly in navy blue. Red and black, however, are my PCD colors.

David and I played Upper School football and basketball for Coach Tom Ossman (also a math teacher). Thus, in the fall, I threw the ball and he caught it; in the winter, I inaccurately shot the ball and he tenaciously defended the other team's best guard. In the spring, however, we parted ways. I played tennis for Coach Spofford



Woodruff, who chaired the science department, and David played baseball for Athletic Director Robert Dickerman. Both men were PCD and Amherst College alumni. In the summer, while I went to Camp Manitou in Maine for land sports and lake swimming, David focused on basketball, golf, and being on the water but never in it. For a boater and a fisherman, however, he still swims like a landed bluefish.

For decades I have been an active alumnus – teaching, coaching, serving as a mock trial advisor to the State champions, and as a trustee from 2000 through 2006. I have also sent both my kids, Spencer and Elizabeth, to PCD. He graduated in 2013, she a year later. David also sent his three daughters there. Meredith graduated in 2002, Caroline (“CeCe”) in 2007, and Alexandra (“Ali”) five years later.

But David has numerous other family connections to our alma mater. For example, his three Finkelman nephews also became PCD graduates: Adam in 2002, Alex in 2004, and Corey in 2007. Indeed, their father, Roy (David’s former brother-in-law, who was married to David’s only sister, Karen) was the outstanding student-athlete in the Class of 1977. Roy’s brother Paul ’75 graduated *cum laude*, and the third Finkelman brother, Alan ’74, played football under the nickname “Flex” Finkelman. David’s nephews, Justin and Todd Bazar, graduated together in 1994; another nephew, Cameron (“Cam”) Sigal, graduated in 2012 (with his cousin Alexandra). Cam’s father, Steven ’81, and uncle, Andy ’72, as further discussed below, also attended. Despite the interrelated Bazar, Finkelman, and Sigal families’ numerous ties to Country Day, the record is held by the Buxton boys, who reportedly constitute 23 graduates.

### **Some PCD History and Traditions**

Before giving more details about David’s involvement at PCD, however, it is necessary to take a broader look at our alma mater. Only a few miles from the East Side, it surely deserves to be better known.

When founded in 1923, at the northwest corner of Waterman and Pawtucket Avenues in East Providence, PCD was truly a



“country” day school. It was located at the eastern terminus of a Providence trolley line. The school’s attractive open spaces and well-groomed athletic fields, located on the former Sweetland farm, still warrant this moniker.

Initially, the faculty, consisting of a head and three other “masters,” taught and coached 32 boys. Duncan Campbell became the first graduate in 1927. The campus extended to the east side of Pawtucket Avenue in 1928 with the purchase of the Luther family’s 30 acres. A decade would pass, however, before PCD enrolled more than 100 students. As late as 1968, the enrollment stood at only 210.

(It should be mentioned parenthetically that a prominent member of the Class of 1968 was David Russek Leeds, who would earn his bachelor’s degree at Harvard. He was the namesake of PCD’s new library, dedicated in 1981 within Lund Hall. The Leeds were a prominent Jewish family from the East Side.)

Country Day was actually an outgrowth of Gordon School, which Helen W. Cooke, a physician, had founded in 1910 in her backyard at 405 Angell Street, on Providence’s East Side. Originally known as “The Open-Air School,” Gordon, named after her younger son, was intended as an alternative to Moses Brown, which her older son, Stuart, had attended. Both schools were coeducational at that time. After completing fifth grade, Gordon’s boys, known as “Cookies,” were expected to enroll at Country Day. In 1926, when Moses Brown became a boys’ school, more girls enrolled at Gordon. Seventh through ninth grades were added, but these were abolished in 1936. After completing Gordon, most girls probably enrolled at Providence’s two girls’ schools, Lincoln and Mary C. Wheeler. Like Moses Brown, these schools enrolled some boarders, but presumably some other girls were sent farther away to boarding schools.

By the fall of 1938, during the depths of the Depression, only 65 children were enrolled at Gordon, which was still located adjacent to the Cooke home on the East Side. Thus, PCD, which was somewhat stronger, took over its governance on a temporary basis. Not until 1947 was this agreement terminated. During the following year, however, Gordon enrolled only 148 girls and boys.

In 1961, soon after celebrating its 50th anniversary, Gordon

purchased land in East Providence to build a relatively rural, “open-air” campus. Seventh and eighth grades were once again added, and in January 1963 the new complex on Maxfield Avenue opened. Gordon has continued to send many graduates to PCD.

For three generations, Country Day enrolled families with such names as Chace, Chafee, Lippitt, Mauran, Metcalf, and Tillinghast. Well into the 1970s, PCD still had a Waspy legacy. For example, George Wightman Williams, an eccentric direct descendant of Roger Williams, who passionately taught Latin from the classics’ “Cave,” joked dryly about everyone’s ethnicity without malice or judgment. F. Philip Nash, the registrar and college advisor, was a scion of a Massachusetts whaling dynasty. As the commodore of the Nantucket Yacht Club, he wore embroidered eye patches (for real) that matched his woven whale belts and red pants.

During my PCD years, a number of students had such nicknames as Trip, Kip, Skip, Chip, Zip, Flip, Jock, Ronbo, Jeb, Ned, Teddy, Twig and, unfortunately, King. There were many “thirds” and “fourths,” who had to be distinguished from their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers.

Of course Kingsley “King” Meyer ’39, an advertising executive who became chairman of PCD’s board of trustees, is a particularly colorful example. My mother, Natalie, when a teenager visiting her sister, Lorrain Kaplan, on Penrose Avenue in Providence, was smitten by Mr. Meyer, a striking, white-haired neighbor. So sharp was her memory of him, as he bounded into his convertible wearing tennis whites, she vowed to name a future son Kingsley. In fact, when I was a sixth-grader at PCD, Athletic Director Robert Dickerman ’50, after seeing my regal middle name, wrote “KING” on the back of my wrestling headgear. Several of my friends, including Marc Zwetchkenbaum ’75 and Elwood Edson “Skip” Leonard III, still call me “King.” My brother, Alex ’80, despite having no middle name nor nickname, overcame these handicaps by becoming an outstanding student-athlete and PCD’s school president.

Protestant hymns were sung at Country Day’s Christmas gatherings and at graduation, although grace at meals was intended to be nondenominational. Faculty and students recited these words:



“Bless this food to our use and us to Thy service and make us ever mindful of the needs of others.” For those who opted for hot meals, something called “pigs in blankets” was served regularly. I brown-bagged. Despite these goyish touches, Jewish students were excused for the High Holidays, Jewish traditions were respected, and many of my Gentile classmates attended my bar mitzvah at Beth-El and had a great time.

Traditionally, Country Day’s faculty members were predominantly white Protestant men. As such, many held bachelors’ or graduate degrees from Brown, other Ivies, and elite men’s colleges and universities primarily in New England. Many faculty members had also been student-athletes. Of course, most PCD parents sought similar success for their sons.

Uniformly, however, faculty members defied Jewish perceptions of pedigreed Rhode Island Yankees. These tweedy teachers were warm, kind, humorous, inquisitive, and devoted to their students and players. Many remained loyal to PCD for decades – some well

beyond their retirements. For example, Spofford “Cap” Woodruff ’48, who actively gardens, recently competed in Red and Black tugs-of-war on the football field named for his family. (His father, Gerald, was PCD’s long-time assistant headmaster). Robert Dickerman ’50, at 86, continues as a volunteer coach and manicures the infield that bears his name. Until three years ago, Coach Tom Ossman, now 91, whose touchdown record at Harvard endures, continued to teach and help landscape the campus. Richard Philbrick ’42, who passed away in May 2021 at 95, remained politically active long after his retirement, and was generous in his continuing loyalty to PCD and Brown.

The faculty always demanded integrity and humility, perhaps necessary lessons for some of the newly moneyed families sending sons to be educated by and among academically accomplished Yankees. Tending to downplay elitism, these teachers and coaches celebrated merit.

To achieve academic excellence, PCD has also always been structured around small classes, such that students strive to punch above their weight. Probably since its founding, Country Day’s motto has been “Play the Game,” which was derived from Sir Henry Newbolt’s 1893 poem, “Vitai Lampida” (Torch of Life), about British soldiers who fought in 1885 in Sudan. At Country Day, however, the motto connotes participation, perseverance, sportsmanship, and teamwork as well as strong personal efforts.

While drawing on many boarding school traditions, such as formal dress and manners, PCD from the start was perhaps a friendlier, more student-focused, and more inclusive school than its rivals in Providence and on Aquidneck Island. Every Country Day boy was made to feel important. Students heard their academic and athletic achievements praised by name at weekly, all-school assemblies. They were featured in plays and music, student government, the *Round-table* newspaper, and in the *Red and Black* yearbook. Even members of the auto club and the audio-visual crew were lauded, as were team managers. Earned awards were given ceremonially and generously. The sentiment that every boy should feel important still rings true, for both our sons and daughters.

The School's significant standards and impact can be sensed by many graduates' professional success. Some Knights have gone on to nationally significant careers in the United States Senate, the National Gallery, top banks, major hospitals, research universities, prominent law firms, design studios, not-for-profit organizations, and multi-generational as well as start-up businesses. My class of 1976 includes, for instance, six manufacturers, five lawyers, several accountants, realtors, teachers, two physicians, two architects, a marine biologist, a bridge contractor, an importer, a development officer, a clergyman, and an artist.

### **Earliest Jewish Students and Continuing Jewish Loyalty**

Based on historian George Goodwin's examination of common Jewish names and his familiarity with Rhode Island Jewish history, we believe that Country Day's first Jewish student was probably Charles Shartenberg, Jr. (1916-2009), a member of the Class of 1934. Having spent his senior year at Phillips Academy, Andover, he graduated there. Like the majority of Phillips alumni, he then entered Yale, where he graduated in 1938. He spent his career with the Shartenberg Department Store in New Haven.

Charles's brother, John (1919-1996), was probably PCD's first Jewish graduate, in 1937. He matriculated at Brown in 1941 and worked at Shartenberg's in Pawtucket before it closed in 1965.

As George pointed out in his 2014 article in this journal, "Class of 1896: Three Pawtucket Lads at Harvard," the Shartenbergs, who were members of Temple Beth-El, were not only successful merchants, but achieved early educational renown. The two boys who attended PCD during the 1930s had an uncle Henry (1877-1966), who, having graduated from Pawtucket High School in 1892, earned his bachelor's degree at Harvard. Henry's younger brother, Charles, Sr. (1888-1959), graduated from Andover in 1907 and from Yale four years later.

Most likely, PCD's second Jewish graduate was Alfred M. Weisberg, Class of 1943. Born in Providence in 1926, he was the only child of Mark and Rose, both of whom were Russian immigrants. Following his graduation from Harvard in 1947, he joined his

father's chemical business, Technic, Inc., and eventually became its owner. Alfred was also president of the International Precious Metals Institute, historian of the American Electroplaters and Surface Finishers Society, and executive director of the Providence Jewelry Museum.

Country Day's next Jewish graduate was probably Leonard M. Rumpler in 1948. Born in 1929, he has lived most of his adult life in Barrington. He too followed in his father's footsteps and worked at Builder's Specialties Company in Pawtucket for most of his career.

A few more Jews, who enrolled at PCD during the late 1940s, graduated in the early to mid-1950s. One such illustrious graduate was Jules Cohen, Class of '51 and Yale '55. As I explained in my 2011 article in *The Notes*, he was not only a standout athlete in tennis but in several other sports at PCD. He recalled many wonderful years at PCD and still participates in alumni events. Perhaps the same was true of his brother David '58. Still another Cohen was Avram '51, though he was no relation. According to the 2013 alumni directory, 11 boys named Cohen had graduated from PCD!

#### **Additional Sibling Alums & Rivals**

By the 1970s, many loyal Jewish parents doubled down on Providence Country Day by sending a second or third child there. These families included: the Sigals, Andy '72 and Steven '81; the Percelays, Jim '73, Bruce '73, and David '70; the Feinbergs, David '73 and Jimmy '75; the Wallicks, Marc '70 and Peter '74; the Satloffs, David '73 and Lewis '74; the Levines, Marc '77 and Neil '80; the Leaches, Jim '79 and Peter '78; the Bergers, Jay '72 and Seth '75; and the Greens, Steve '72 and Andy '76. In addition to the previously mentioned two sets of Finkelman brothers and two sets of Weiners, there were the Savages, Robert '71 and Jon '75, and the Zawatskys, Jay '72, Paul '74, and Marc '80. More recent alumni were the Rogols, Josh '04 and Abby '06; the Bergmans, Hannah '06 and Rachel '08; the Salks (son of Robert '75), Katrina '07, Natalie '09, and Gabriel '10; and the Kirschs, Madeline '11 and Sam '12.

Apparently, some parents, Jews as well as Gentiles, were confused by sending one son to PCD and another to that Evil Em-

pire, on the other side of the Seekonk River, known as Moses Brown. As was previously noted, David Bazar's older brother, Peter, who would have graduated from MB in 1973, found that entering in 9th grade had been difficult. Many of his classmates had begun bonding in kindergarten. Peter, who much admires David's commitment to Country Day, explains, "Once he gets involved in something, he does not let it go."

Tony Capone was PCD '76, and his brother, John, was PCD '78, but their baby brother, Walter, opted for an MB education. The same was true of Greg Mencoff, PCD '76, whose older brother Sam attended the older, Quaker school. There were other brothers who submitted to a Lloyd Avenue indoctrination. These included the siblings of Marc Zwetchkenbaum, PCD '75, John and Sam, who were apparently afraid to leave College Hill for their schooling. Similarly, Ed Votolato, PCD'76, has a kid brother, Ernie of MB, my dentist, who played lacrosse with me at Bowdoin. Jeff Gordon, also PCD '76, had a younger brother, Bobby, who stayed on the East Side for his education. All these parents must have been torn like border-state families during the Civil War.

Yet, a once fiery rivalry driven by David-and-Goliath athletic contests has subsided over the years. This has been especially true since both schools shifted their identities by adopting or returning to coeducation. One prominent convert, PCD's Associate Head of School, Mark McLaughlin, MB '79, explained: "The rivalry was genuine and intense, and bragging rights were a big deal. Turnout was high no matter the sport, but especially for football."

Even with one son or daughter enrolled elsewhere, many Jewish parents have been actively engaged in Country Day's Parents Association. Some notable leaders include, for example, Gerry and Dottie (Emers) Finkelman, and Rich '88 and Bethany Sutton. George and Betsey Goodwin, whose son, Michael, graduated in 2006, almost never miss a fundraiser or an opportunity to donate books.

### **David**

A significant number of Jewish alumni and some parents of alumni have expressed their continuing affection for Country Day

by serving on its board of trustees. None, however, has matched the longevity or achieved the level of success as my classmate, David Bazar.

Indeed, he has devoted most of his life to our alma mater. David's tenure as a trustee began in 1991, so it spans three eventful decades and five talented heads of school. He was president of the board from 1998 through 2011 and resumed his presidency a year ago. Mark McLaughlin, PCD's associate head, recently observed, "Over the past 20 years, David's impact and influence over the school have been unparalleled."

Since his graduation from law school in 1983, he has been a leader in nearly every major improvement at PCD as well as in multiple capital campaigns – both as a fundraiser and a donor – and in many head-of-school searches. Additionally, David recruits talented students wherever he goes. My classmate has also played prominent roles in a series of monumental institutional decisions.

For example, in 1991, he was involved in the implementation of coeducation. Wheeler had accepted it in 1975, and Moses Brown returned to it two years later. David's efforts also led to the hiring of more women teachers and staff. During our era as students, there had been a small group of women faculty: Ruth Pratt, PCD's first, began teaching sixth grade in 1944; Judith Speyer taught art; Florence Eaton taught French; and Charlotte Stratton, taught drama. Mary Philbrick was the librarian. Two Jewish women, Nancy Mayer (later Rhode Island's treasurer) and Jill Forman Chase Starr, taught part-time in the Middle School. Eventually, another Jewish woman, Jane Kaufman, taught Latin and English.

Collectively, boys were rowdy, and they needed some guidance on manners. When David and I were students, the headmaster's wife, Sally West, issued etiquette rules for the dining hall, which included standing for women seated at one's table. Serious infractions resulted in Saturday morning detention, which included manual labor around the campus. Yes, this served as a great deterrent.

While board president, David was instrumental in hiring and retaining Susan Haberlandt, Country Day's first and only female head, who served from 1998 to 2011, the same years as his first presi-



dency. Some observers have surely also noted the relative importance of Hartford's Trinity College in Susan's tenure. She had been one of its first female graduates and also served on its admission staff. Susan's husband, Karl, was a prominent psychology professor there.

David is a 1980 Trinity alumnus, and his brother-in-law, Andrew Sigal, is Trinity '76. He is also a past president of PCD's Alumni Association. One of Country Day's longtime, master teachers of English, Dr. Peter McCalmont, was Trinity '65, and F. Philip Nash, PCD's college counselor, was Trinity '51. Indeed, David's middle and youngest daughters, Caroline and Alexandra, graduated from the former Episcopal men's college in '11 and '16.

PCD's connections with my alma mater, Bowdoin College, though not as extensive, are also strong. Bowdoin alumni John Lunt, Robert Drayer, and Jason Roderick have taught and coached at Country Day. The current head of school, Kevin Folan, is another Bowdoin alum, as is my brother, Alex. Lee Troup and Barry Lagueux Chapin are fellow PCD Knights and Bowdoin Polar Bears. Through playing PCD football with Barry's brother, Greg '77, I met their father, Superior Court and U.S. District Court Judge Ronald R. Lagueux, a Bowdoin three-sport athlete and a Harvard Law School graduate. He has become my greatest mentor and professional influence. I believe that David feels the same way about his former law school dean, Anthony Santoro, at the University of Bridgeport, who became the founding law school dean at Roger Williams University.

While a PCD board member or president, David also oversaw the consolidation and remodeling of the main campus, which included the relocation of two historic buildings from the west side of Pawtucket Avenue. (Having been sold to East Providence, the west side became the city's seniors center.) David also participated in the expansion of the arts, athletics, and curriculum, which led to synergistic partnerships in team sports, a state-of-the-art turf field, international cultural exchanges, the establishment of the Chafee Institute for Public Policy, a partnership with the neighboring Rhode Island Philharmonic School, and numerous technological initiatives. No less important was his involvement in a plan to restructure tuition, which has led to increased access and diversity.



David & Harris at Bazar Basketball Court, 2021

Most recently, David was involved with PCD and Henry Barnard School's merger, which, within a few years, will bring students from kindergarten through grade five from Rhode Island College's campus in Mt. Pleasant to Country Day's campus. Not surprisingly, some Henry Barnard parents involved in merger negotiations were Jews. They included, for example, Rebecca and Scott Bromberg and Rabbi Sarah Mack and her husband, Jeffrey Isaacs.

Just as people are said to resemble their spouses, pets or cars, Country Day resembles David Bazar in numerous ways: fun-loving, hyperactive, intelligent, creative, tolerant, hard-working, and competitive.

### **David's Parents**

Clearly David's lifelong commitment to PCD was also shaped by his late parents, Banice and Beverly (née Wishnevsky). Banice, who passed away in 2019 at age 90, came from a rambunctious South Providence family with five children. A gifted people-person, Banice bestowed on David the ability to engage anyone in a sincere, caring, and fun way. Banice's sharp mind was honed within University of Rhode Island chemistry labs and by a successful business career, but he also passed down to David a sense of courage that he had displayed on Korean battlefields.

From his mother, a Rhode Island College-trained teacher and entrepreneur who died in 2018 at 88, David received traits of self-confidence, decisiveness and loyalty to educational institutions. Beverly had almost single-handedly saved the East Side's St. Dunstan's School, which her daughter, Karen, attended during the 1970s. This grandmother of 12 and great-grandmother of 11 showed David what a difference he could make to individuals and institutions. He has. In fact, Beverly and Banice adopted David's oldest brother, Joey, when he was a troubled teen, and David informally adopted Matt Silva, whom he has guided for more than 35 years.

### **David and The Bar**

Beyond his tireless work for his beloved PCD, David served as president of the Rhode Island Bar Association from 2019-20, during part of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was in fact briefly hospitalized with the virus. David was actually the Bar's 13th Jewish president since Arthur Levy in 1950-51.

David ascended to the presidency after 30 years of service to the Bar, including numerous years as a delegate representing East Providence attorneys, long-term membership on the executive committee, and ten years as editor of the *Bar Journal* (2006-16). Among

many scholarly articles, columns, and comments, he published my article on eminent domain, which took top writing honors in 2009. (This occurred despite my topic headings based on Mel Brooks movies. Yes, the bench and bar apparently needed some levity.) David was well prepared for the editorship because he had been an editor of the law review at his alma mater, University of Bridgeport, which is now part of Quinnipiac.

For recreation David teaches law to high school and college students using the Socratic method – in a much softer style than the terrifying law school version. Many years ago, when David was in law school at Bridgeport, I noticed an odd phenomenon. Every woman in his class, from ages 22 to 60, touched David’s curly hair and smiled when she passed his seat by the door. David giggled, acknowledging each touse. Of course that ritual would become the exclusive domain of Susan Sigal Sondler Bazar, his wife of 33 years.

David’s innocent flirtations began in seventh grade at PCD, when our substitute science teacher, who was also a fashion model, offered extra help after class for anyone who did not do well on a test. When David lined up first, Ms. Eva Marie Gerdts looked puzzled and said, “But David, you got an ‘A.’”

David also bears the title “Honorable.” Since 2003, he has served as an East Greenwich municipal judge, meting out justice to ordinance violators and traffic scofflaws. His favorite aspect of the post is officiating at weddings, however. He does so with a dash of humor and a bit of poetry. Once when I visited Town Hall to see the robed Judge Bazar in matrimonial action, I was drafted as the official witness to a bride’s third wedding. She surprisingly gave me a tearful hug and kiss for my contribution to her nuptials.

Of course David also runs his own law practice in East Providence, which focuses on elder law, family law, business, personal injury, and workers’ compensation. He has successfully litigated landmark discrimination and injury cases. He and I have joined forces on many business and real estate cases over the past 35 years, and I can attest to David’s sharp legal mind and excellent collaboration.

### **Beyond and Back to PCD**

David and Susan are active supporters of the Miriam Hospital, where they have also been leading fundraisers. Susan works in social and housing services for Jewish seniors. Officially, she is executive director of Shalom and Shalom II Apartments and liaison between the Phyllis Siperstein Tamarisk Residences and Jewish Collaborative Services (the former Jewish Family Service).

Of course the Bazars' service extends to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association for which David served as treasurer from 2011 through 2018. They are longtime members of Temple Beth-El.

David is also an active board member of the Aurora Civic Association, where his father and mine loved to dine regularly at this historically Italian club on Federal Hill. Kenny Steingold, their buddy, actually served as its second Jewish president from 2003 to 2005. (Arthur Reinherz had actually the first Jewish president in 1949.) David and I continue to enjoy this wonderful Association, especially the camaraderie and the very non-kosher cioppino.

When he is not loafing, David still plays basketball on the court that was secretly named for him in 2012 at Providence Country Day. I ruined the surprise by asking David if he was ready for his big night. Fortunately, there were many more professional, familial, and alumni celebrations that followed. In the best tradition of Country Day, my classmate still "Plays the Game" in all aspects of his busy and remarkable life of achievement and service.

Author blowing shofar at  
interfaith vigil at Statehouse,  
Providence



## Temple Sinai and Beyond:

### *My Rabbinate of Inclusion and Activism*

**Peter W. Stein**

Fortunately, many rabbis, cantors, and Jewish communal professionals have spent decades within our community. A few have, remarkably, spent their entire careers here, building and strengthening our organizations and our lives.

Many other clergy and professionals, having gained deep insights and rich experiences in Rhode Island, have then accepted leadership positions elsewhere in New England, around the Northeast, and across the country. We remain grateful to and proud of so many of these alumni and alumnae.

In the following article, Rabbi Stein explains what brought him to Cranston's Temple Sinai, some of what he learned and accomplished there, and how he was prepared to lead his third congregation and community, B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York.

Rabbi Stein did not mention, however, that Percival Goodman, a highly prolific and accomplished modernist, designed synagogues in Providence and Rochester. Rabbi Peter's commitment to ecumenical understanding and cooperation is also reflected architecturally, for Pietro Belluschi designed B'rith Kodesh and the chapel of Portsmouth Abbey and School. As sister houses of worship, completed during the early 1960s, both reward silence, song, and celebration.

#### **Upbringing and Early Jewish Education**

I was born in 1970 and grew up in Plainview, a robust Jewish community on Long Island, with a number of important Jewish influences in my life. My mother Saralee, whose immigrant family from Belarus lived in the Bronx, was devoted to Yiddish culture and a secular (even anti-religious!) Jewish identity. My father Bob was raised in a suburban environment in Eastchester, New York, as a third-generation, classical Reform Jew. His rabbi, Jacob Shankman, was a mentor and a profound influence on him. Both of my parents, as different as their perspectives were, emphasized the importance of

Jewish commitment and helped create Jewish pride.

I studied principally at the I. L. Perez School, a Workmen's Circle Yiddish school, although I participated in religious school as a teen at Community Reform Temple in Westbury. I was influenced in my high school and college years by its rabbi, Marc Gruber, a great social activist, and I also regularly participated in Shabbat and holiday services along with my father.

My mentor at the Workmen's School school was Michl Baran, a Holocaust survivor, a significant Yiddish teacher, and a cultural leader in New York. Vibrant well into his nineties and still devoted to creating passion in the next generations of Jewish children, he died two years ago.

I grew up with my older brother Howard and younger sister Irene in a neighborhood with a significant modern Orthodox population. I didn't know or understand much about Orthodoxy, but I was always fascinated with Orthodox Jews' commitment and have sought to learn and build bridges across the Jewish spectrum in my rabbinate and in my personal life.

I was also exposed to different religions and different practices of Judaism in an important way through my involvement with Boy Scouts. I rose to the rank of Eagle Scout in a troop sponsored by a Catholic church, Holy Family, in Hicksville, and I forged memorable and important relationships with my fellow Scouts, most of whom came from the church. I adored hiking, camping, and other outdoor activities, and continue to be a passionate outdoorsman. I also served for a number of years on the camp staff at the Onteora Scout Reservation, ultimately in senior leadership positions. For a few of those years, I actually served as its Jewish chaplain. This was before my rabbinic education, however, and I had to learn very quickly what Jews of different denominations considered to be important or normative parts of Shabbat worship.

My chaplaincy experience left me with a commitment to work across denominations and with those of different identities. It remains important to me to celebrate differences and also to work hard on the inclusion of diverse populations.

After my graduation from Plainview Old Bethpage High



School, I entered Cornell, where I studied social work, political science, and education. I loved the extraordinary range of academic and social experiences that were available to me as well as the university's proud history of inclusion, egalitarianism, and social justice. I was active at Hillel, which was led at the time by a deeply caring and kind rabbi, Laurence Edwards. He relished the opportunity to be with a cross section of Jewish students.

My most formative mentors, however, were the professors who guided me in my social justice commitments. I am indebted to Ruth Bounous, Alan Hahn, and Donald Barr for modeling for me how to combine academics with community service. I worked in a downtown Ithaca homeless shelter, studied social service policy relating to mental health and child abuse (this was during the Reagan era), and was a founder of an adult literacy project, CLASP (Community Learning and Service Project), which is still running today, 30 years later.

I graduated college in 1992, uncertain of my next steps, and spent the next couple of years volunteering and also, increasingly, exploring the intersection of my social justice commitments and my Jewish identity. Ultimately, this led me to the rabbinate, where I hoped to become not merely a ritual leader and a pastoral counselor, but also a community leader as well.

#### **Rabbinic Education and Mentors**

In 1994, I began studying for the Reform rabbinate at the Jerusalem campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. After spending the next four years at its New York City campus, I was ordained at Temple Emanuel in 1999. My scholarly interests focused on rabbinic thought process, especially in Talmud and post-Talmudic, *halakhic* texts.

I was influenced by a number of professors, in particular Dr. Michael Chernick. A remarkable educator, he was an Orthodox rabbi who taught for decades in the Reform seminary. To be clear: he isn't someone with an Orthodox background who evolved into a Reform Jew. Rather, he is a deeply committed Orthodox Jew, profoundly dedicated to building relationships among all kinds of Jews.

He is devoted to the concept of *klal Yisrael*, the unity and connectedness of the Jewish people. My studies with him resonated, I think, because of the variety of Jewish experiences in my background. He also prepared me for a rabbinate filled with connections to different segments of the Jewish community.

At HUC, I was also greatly influenced by Dr. Eugene Borowitz, one of the great theologians of our time. He demanded academic rigor, expected honest struggle with important ideas, and also wove in a personal commitment to social justice. Famously, Rabbi Borowitz was part of a group of Reform leaders arrested in St. Augustine, Florida, during the civil rights movement. Like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he penned an important letter from his jail cell.

After ordination, I went to Pittsburgh's Rodef Shalom, one of the great historic congregations in American Judaism. It was important to me to begin as an assistant rabbi, where I could continue to learn practical rabbinics from veteran senior rabbis within both the Reform movement and the city. Rodef Shalom was a tremendous place to begin my rabbinate, giving me experience with the pastoral, educational, and ritual aspects of the synagogue as well as the start of significant involvement in multi-faith and civic efforts.

Rodef Shalom's rabbi emeritus is Dr. Walter Jacob, one of the foremost scholars and rabbis of the Reform movement and beyond. He became one of my most important mentors. His academic interests are in *halakhah*, so they closely related to my work with Dr. Chernick. Also a Holocaust survivor, Dr. Jacob became the founder of the new Reform seminary, Abraham Geiger College, in Germany. I was blessed to work with him in support of that groundbreaking effort. Based on how he conducted his own rabbinate, Dr. Jacob taught me about humility and maintaining genuine care and concern for each congregant.

I was also mentored by a number of women, including Rabbi Judy Cohen-Rosenberg (Rabbi Gruber's successor at Community Reform Temple) and Prof. Nancy Wiener at HUC. I am grateful for the diverse role models I have had through the years as well as their unique perspectives on the rabbinate. Especially in recent years,

as more attention has rightly been focused on ending sexism in the Jewish world, I am grateful to have had these teachers. I am grateful to many other powerful women as cherished colleagues and leaders.

In recent years, I have thought back on my formative experiences in Pittsburgh for a different reason. My wife, Amy, whom I married in 1996, served as director of education at Tree of Life Congregation. I was there with her for any number of occasions, and our young children, Ari and Eliana, played and participated in family programming there. Tree of Life, of course, became a tragic icon in American life after the mass shooting in October 2018. This was one of our homes! After the event, enriched by my personal connection to the congregation and city, I was able to host a major community gathering in Rochester, at my third congregation, to commemorate the shooting.

#### **Rhode Island**

I came to Rhode Island in 2003 to serve as rabbi of Temple Sinai in Cranston. It was a tremendous privilege to be a part of this community for 11 years, and I also cherish my involvement within Rhode Island's larger Jewish community and in many parts of the broader faith community. I am grateful for the work I did in many places across the state.

Though I had never spent time in Rhode Island before, I was attracted to Temple Sinai for a number of reasons. And I immediately felt at home. I was eager to provide leadership for a congregation of my own. I was not particularly concerned that I would be moving to a much smaller community. Yet, I could not foresee how fruitful and critically important my experience would be there. I would eventually leave Rhode Island for a much larger, historic congregation in Rochester.

Beyond my rabbinic leadership, Rhode Island was of course quite significant to my family. Our children did much of their growing up here, in our home in Coweset. They attended public school in Warwick and of course Sinai's religious school. My daughter's bat mitzvah and my son's bar mitzvah at Temple Sinai were truly special celebrations with our temple family, who had seen them grow up.

Amy, a working professional in Rhode Island, most notably served as development director of AIDS Project Rhode Island. She was responsible for raising its profile through a number of important community events and programs.

Rhode Island is a special and challenging place to serve as a rabbi. I think back on four significant achievements during my time there. The first was building robust participation in Jewish summer camps and transforming the culture of youth engagement and involvement within my congregation. The second achievement was my work in adult education. The third was my devotion to social justice, in particular the extraordinary advocacy efforts that resulted in the passage of the marriage equality bill in the Rhode Island legislature.

The last but not least achievement of my Rhode Island rabbinite was my significant engagement with the Catholic community,

#### **Cranston Clergy Association**



which is of course such a dominant presence in public discourse and with other faith groups. Committed not only to building close relationships among these groups, I also sought to overcome significant tensions or challenges that sometimes arose when pursuing progressive social justice values.

Now I would like to address some of these achievements in detail.

### Summer Camps

Rhode Island has a long and proud history of maintaining an outstanding Jewish summer camp. It was evident when I arrived in Cranston that quite a number of families were deeply committed, across generations, to participation in Camp JORI. At the same time, however, it was evident to me that this camp was not the right fit for every child, and that the JORI experience didn't necessarily reinforce a commitment to year-round involvement at Temple Sinai.

I tried to strike a balance: supporting and recruiting for JORI while also building awareness of other camp options. In particular, I worked to build substantial involvement with the Union for Reform Judaism's camps: Camp Eisner, the regional camp in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and Kutz Camp, the national teen leadership camp in Warwick, New York. These camps offer robust educational programming above and beyond such traditional summer camp activities as swimming and arts and crafts, which are offered at JORI and other secular Jewish camps.

I also recruited heavily for summer and semester programs in Israel operated by NFTY (National Federation of Temple Youth), the Reform movement's teen youth group. I was so proud of my students who spent time in Israel, which became formative in their adult identities. Ultimately, some students made *aliyah*, while others became committed and active Zionists in the United States; still other students went on to professional roles within the Jewish community.

During my years in Rhode Island, as earlier in my life and career, I spent part of every summer on the faculty of various camps. Without creating a decline in the number of families attending JORI,

I was able to build a significant delegation of campers at Eisner. This became one of the largest delegations in the region, especially as a percentage of our smaller congregation's size. Some of these campers went on to senior staff roles at Eisner.

One camper, Eric Abbott, not only met his future wife at Eisner, but also has become a rabbi. He is presently the senior Jewish educator at Johns Hopkins Hillel.

These camping achievements were well received by many in my congregation and community and did translate to increased involvement in year-round school and youth activities. However, there is no doubt that this effort also brushed up against some of the parochialism found among many Rhode Islanders. So many Jews are born, raised, and remain within the Rhode Island community over many generations. They are rightly proud of their home and their institutions. But there can also be challenges to innovation and growth. Little Rhody is thus a fascinating laboratory, a delicate balance between honoring deep roots and venerable traditions with the need for change imposed by 21st-century realities.

#### **Adult Education**

Every rabbi has activities that energize him or her and become a particular source of passion and joy. I love to teach students of all generations, and try to build on my enduring curiosity to create learning experiences. In particular, I found that Temple Sinai members were eager to engage in all kinds of study, which led further to communal strength.

One of the things I inherited when I came to Temple Sinai was a long-standing Shabbat morning Torah study group. No matter the weather, no matter what might be happening in the world, these incredibly devoted volunteers come together to set up, cook a full, hot breakfast, eat, study, and clean up.

This group inspired me with its eagerness to read, debate, and study together. During my tenure, in addition to continuing the traditional study of weekly Torah portions, we spent years studying in other ways. These included particular commentators, later books of the Bible, and more.

This group also served an important role as ambassadors and outreach volunteers for the congregation. Inviting a new member to a Shabbat morning breakfast was a perfect way to build relationships and allow a newcomer to feel at home. It was also a perfect way to help a person studying toward conversion to feel at home and better understand the synagogue.

While some Sinai members came occasionally or only participated in certain classes, many others were steadfast in attending any and all adult education activities. The group became very close, supporting one another at life cycle moments and celebrating together at holidays and congregational events.

I believe that the significant growth of and robust participation in lifelong learning is part of what makes Rhode Island a special place to be a rabbi. I was able to continue my own learning, refine my skill as a teacher, and enjoy a rabbinate with Torah firmly at the center.

I also have fond memories of the community-wide learning events that took place for several years. Hosted by the Federation/Jewish Alliance at the JCC, the entire Rhode Island Board of Rabbis and other teachers served as faculty for a cross section of the Jewish community. Many other Jewish communities can only dream of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and secular Jews coming together for *havdalah*, dessert, and intensive study. Naturally, such gatherings partially reflect the small size of our community, but we aren't just small, we're close!

### **Social Justice**

Rhode Island clergy are incredibly committed to the work of justice and peace, what in Judaism is referred to as *Tikkun Olam*, “the repair of the world.” I was blessed to develop very special relationships with a number of faith leaders as we worked together on different efforts. This is a unique aspect of Rhode Island’s legacy: Roger Williams’ commitment to religious freedom and the separation of church and state while recognizing the importance of religion in Rhode Island’s public affairs. Like many clergy, I cherished my close connection learning from and working alongside Rev. Dr. Donnie Anderson, then executive director of the Rhode Island Council of Churches.

During my rabbinate here, I was one of the founders of the Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty. I am proud that this group has created a significant presence in its work to combat hunger, homelessness, and poverty. At the opening of each legislative session in January, the Coalition conducts an important ceremony in the Statehouse rotunda. I cherish the cross section of religious traditions that are part of this effort and others throughout the year.

During these years, I participated in another significant coalition with clergy and members from a variety of religions to fight for marriage equality. This was part of the wave of activity across the country that, beginning with state-by-state legislative victories, culminated with a landmark Supreme Court decision, making marriage legal for all throughout the country.

Because Rhode Island had the highest percentage of Catholics in any state (now it's Massachusetts), and many highly vocal and assertive bishops have led its diocese, much work by progressive clergy has followed in the spirit of Roger Williams. We sought to articulate that our religious traditions allowed for gay marriage. Indeed, our religious freedom would be violated if we were forced to abide by Catholic standards.

I was incredibly proud to participate in these efforts. I will always remember one long night at the Statehouse, where I was one of many speakers at a Senate hearing. Catholic leaders, who were given the microphone early in the evening, were able to finish quickly. By contrast, some of my colleagues and I were not recognized until after 4:00 AM. After being seated in the hearing room for 12 hours, it was an “only in Rhode Island” experience to walk back into the deserted parking garage at Providence Place Mall at dawn. All this so I could explain that Rhode Islanders deserved a right to practice their own religions in their own ways!

I will always remember the celebratory gathering at one of the downtown Providence churches after the bill passed. It was, I assume, the first time in that church's history that two rabbis (Sarah Mack and I) stood on its pulpit, garbed in white High Holy Day robes and under a *chuppah*, to offer some prayerful words of gratitude. We were now closer to equality and justice for all.



I was also involved with Planned Parenthood and Clergy for Choice. We clergy were a regular presence at the Planned Parenthood clinic and at the Statehouse, serving as a media presence to counter claims that “religion” opposed abortion. I vividly remember regular encounters with protestors outside the Planned Parenthood clinic; when I arrived for meetings, they would take note of my *kippah* and shout, “Killing babies isn’t kosher!” Rather than intimidate or deter me, these experiences deepened my commitment to be an explicitly religious voice for freedom of choice.

One of the greatest honors of my rabbinate came in 2015, the year after I left Rhode Island, when Planned Parenthood honored me with its Champion of Women’s Health award. I was able to return to see so many cherished friends and colleagues who influenced and supported me and who continue to fight for justice. These include Rev. David Ames and Rev. Gene Dyslewski, along with a number of rabbinic colleagues.

I was a partner and vocal supporter of the Rhode Island Council of Churches. While serving as Board of Rabbis president (from 2008 until my move in 2014), I convened the first ever series of formal dialogues between Rhode Island’s imams and rabbis. These and other connections were incredibly important to me in developing one of the primary commitments of my rabbinate: to pursue honest and principled relationships with other faith leaders and to develop genuine understanding between different religious communities.

Another memorable moment in my interfaith work came in 2012, when a number of progressive clergy worked in partnership with Rhode Island’s chapter of the ACLU to support Jessica Ahlquist, who led a fight for the removal of a prayer banner at Cranston High School West. There was venomous opposition to this support, yet it was an honor to be a member of the clergy fighting for religious freedom. I was distressed at the hatred and ignorance that were displayed, against all of us seeking to end a “venerable tradition.” It was a great moment of affirmation and celebration when the federal court case was decided, supporting our insistence on the separation of church and state.



Vatican City,  
2007

Beyond the faith community, I thrived on genuine closeness with a number of public officials, which may be a unique aspect of Rhode Island's political life. I was able to partner with all four members of the Congressional delegation as well as a number of state officials and the mayors of Providence, Cranston, and Warwick. We developed trust and a true sense of cooperation that went far beyond sharing ceremonial moments.

### **Catholic Church**

Serving as a rabbi in Catholic Rhode Island offers great challenges but also important opportunities. I worked hard to build relationships with Catholic leaders in different ways. Unfortunately, while serving as president of the Board of Rabbis, I had strained and difficult interactions with Bishop Thomas Tobin. Typically, they were driven by issues of access to abortion and contraception.

Despite these difficulties, it was important for me to grow meaningful connections with the Catholic community. Thus, in 2007, I traveled to the Vatican with Prof. Arthur Urbano, a Catholic theologian at Providence College, for a papal audience and a dialogue with various church leaders. We went together as a way of creating a foundation for activity back home in Rhode Island. We succeeded in establishing a robust series of programs at PC, a variety of opportunities bringing together Temple Sinai and area churches, and creating an atmosphere of closeness and respect, even when there were moments of principled difference.

### **Rochester**

My move to Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester in 2014 has become the fulfillment of the Jewish ideal to go "from strength to strength." Like Rhode Island, Rochester is a rooted community with many multigenerational families.

While serving as the senior leader of a central synagogue, with a large and talented staff, I have been able to carry on my commitments as a community-wide leader. As in Rhode Island, there are opportunities to forge close relationships and work as part of significant coalitions and alliances. For example, I have served on the faculty at a Christian seminary (Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, an alma mater of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.). I have also worked to convene meetings of Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim leaders. Additionally, I have become involved in the national leadership of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

My years in Rhode Island were important to me professionally, spiritually, and personally. My children have a foundation as Rhode Islanders. My wife and I still feel very close to many in the Ocean State, where we were embraced and treated with respect and affection. While my move to Rochester has been significant in my continued growth and satisfaction, I look back with fondness and pride, even some poignancy, at what I was able to experience and accomplish in Cranston and far beyond.

Rhode Island's Jewish community and larger faith communities are historic yet evolving, proud yet flexible, and also beautiful, diverse, and inspiring. I will always consider Rhode Island one of my beloved homes.

## Mel Blake, Newburyport, and Jewish History

George M. Goodwin

**M**el was one of my best friends – perhaps as close as an older brother. Of course he knew and enjoyed so many people, and probably most felt a special bond with him. Surely a fascination with Jewish history, expressed in many ways, strengthened our connection to one another.

Though Mel had graduated from Brown in 1961, both of us were relative newcomers to Rhode Island. That is, we had grown up elsewhere: he in Massachusetts, I in California. In 1997, while still residing in Framingham, Mel and Pat purchased a vacation home in Narragansett. Three years later they bought a condominium, also near the water, at Corliss Landing in Providence.

Yet, until quite recently, Mel continued to work part-time in Lowell. Why did he endure this long commute? Yes, he did enjoy driving, but he was a highly effective and accomplished business executive, and he must have enjoyed work too.

We Blakes and Goodwins met through Temple Beth-El, which remained essential to our mutual loyalties and affection. Amazingly, in 2002, only two years after joining the congregation, Mel was elected a trustee. In 2005 he became treasurer and a year later senior vice president. I had waited 19 years to become a Temple board member, so Mel helped me obtain a presidential appointment under Susann Mark's leadership. When Mel became president in 2008, I was elected to a full, three-year term. When he completed his term in 2010, he did not become an honorary board member, as had all of his presidential predecessors. Instead, Mel had successfully advocated for abolishing that tradition.

Mel loved so many communal organizations. No, he was not a politician who sought praise or power. Rather, he believed in what these institutions sought to accomplish and knew that he could be helpful. But mission statements and lengthy reports went only so

far. At a typical Temple Brotherhood meeting, for example, he gladly prepared food or washed dishes (as he cheerfully did at home). Likewise, while serving on the board of Camp JORI, he rolled up his sleeves or the cuffs of his faded dungarees. But Mel also gave significant advice to these organizations and many others. Accordingly, in 2018, he received Brotherhood's Lindenbaum Award, which was presented by another of his dear friends, Temple president Jill Tobak.

Mel and I also bonded through our Jewish Historical Association, which he and Pat had joined in 2000. He happily served as a board member from 2008 through 2017. When his business expertise was once again needed, he gladly returned as treasurer in 2019 and prepared highly detailed reports.

Soon after we met, I learned that Mel had not only grown up in Newburyport, but was a 1957 graduate of a nearby prep school, Governor Dummer Academy, which had been founded in the village of Byfield in 1763. My brother-in-law, Bill Shack, a boarding student, had graduated from GDA in 1971, and so did his son, David, in 2006.

I don't know the extent to which his prep school deserves credit, but Mel became a quite serious student of European, American, and Jewish history. The considerable library he amassed at his Narragansett home also included many volumes about travel, photography, and fishing.

Mel's "preppy" past was surely evident decades later when he continued to wear bow ties, suspenders, and pastel-colored slacks. In honor of his favorite sport, he also continued to wear baseball caps. Surely some of his favorite caps bore letters with some variation of Dummer. Its teams, now coed, were once known as "The Governors."

Betsey and I were also acquainted with Newburyport

because of its proximity to her childhood home in Andover. On the day before our wedding at its Temple Emanuel in December 1983, eager to take a break from relatives and other guests, we went on an excursion to Newburyport. In fact, we obtained permission to climb high into the steeple of its Unitarian church, a gleaming younger sister of Providence's First Baptist Church in America, to enjoy magnificent views and take photos. Given my curiosity about tombstone carvings, we also inspected Old Hill Burial Ground, which dates from 1729.

Soon after meeting Mel, Betsey and I learned that some of our relatives had also been acquainted. Betsey's paternal and maternal grandparents had lived in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and they shopped at Posternak's kosher butcher shop at 141 Valley Street, which belonged to Mel's maternal grandfather, Jacob. As a child, my mother-in-law, Roberta, now 92, had a crush on his dashing son, Joe, who worked behind the counter. In 1989, I had written a history of Lawrence's Jewish community in which Posternak's was mentioned, so when Mel eventually learned about my study he sent a copy to his retired uncle in Florida. In fact, Mel had been born in Lawrence in 1939.

Mel, Pat, Bestey, and I also discovered that we shared Midwestern roots. Pat had grown up in La Crosse, a small Wisconsin city on the Mississippi, which Betsey and I had seen when we lived for a few years in Minnesota. Indeed, we lived only a block from the river's eastern bank in St. Paul. Mel and Pat had met in Chicago, and I had attended Lake Forest College in a northern suburb. Mel once mentioned that during the Vietnam War, he had gone through basic training at nearby Great Lakes Naval Base. Yet, he could also jokingly refer to his service in the Coast Guard as "the Jewish navy." Of course I too had done my best to avoid the draft, but was saved miraculously by a high lottery number.

Beyond our devotion to Beth-El and the Jewish Historical Association, Mel and I became even closer friends through another organization. No, it was not one of his two favorites: the Wood River Fly-Fishing Club and the Aurora Civic Association, a predominantly Italo-American dining club on Federal Hill. Rather, this elite orga-

Mel & Pat at wedding of  
Reuben & Laura Fink, 2017



nization was an early Saturday morning coffee klatch consisting of only four members. Its founders were our dear friends Bernie Bell and Mike Fink, who had often enjoyed cocktails together. In 2006 I became the third member, and Mel was soon recruited. Subsequently, some other men and women, including a few of Mike's former RISD students, became involved. Perhaps the most remarkable, uninvited member was Gerry Wolf, Rhode Island's Episcopal bishop, who had been born a Jew and sat *shiva* for her sister at Temple Emanu-El.

Our major purpose was to schmooze about Jewish communal affairs, which could of course encompass just about anything. Because we met on Shabbat and the four founding members were in some way acquainted with Rabbi William Braude's eccentric eldest son, also a rabbi, we often referred to ourselves as "Congregation Joel Braude." Given the fact that the four of us had earned Ivy League degrees, we could have found another esoteric name. Yet "Yackers & Snackers" would also have sufficed.

In furtherance of our fascination with Jewish history, Mel, Mike, and I – along with our better halves – decided to visit Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History in 2011, soon after it had opened. Mel happily drove both ways, and we spent a wonderful weekend together. Yacking, eating, and drinking meant at least as much to us as the new museum, however. Indeed, we could have gone just about anywhere together. Eventually, Mel also belonged to the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, but Charleston would have been a rather challenging drive.

Of course the Blakes frequently hosted friends, neighbors, and numerous other acquaintances at their beautiful homes in Providence and South County. As a result, we also became acquainted with Mel and Pat's twin daughters, Jane and Sarah, other relatives, and old friends from greater Boston. Frosty late December gatherings overlooking the sea in Narragansett were especially memorable.

Mel and Pat also invited us to join some other organizations. For example, there was the Review Club, consisting of many retired Brown professors, who gathered in formal attire to hear members' presentations. Bernie and Mel were particularly fond of



lectures and programs sponsored by the John Carter Brown Library. Indeed, both these Brown alumni were well acquainted with the library's directors and many of its donors and scholars. The biggest problem – far from intellectual – was parking.

Of course Mel didn't need an organization to make his shining presence felt. On more than a couple of occasions we bumped into each other while visiting bedridden friends at Miriam Hospital. Yet, when undergoing his own hospital recuperations, he told hardly anybody about them.

For several years Betsey and I had been eager to gain a deeper understanding of Mel's upbringing in Newburyport, so we suggested going with the Blakes for a day's visit. Then the pandemic occurred. Fortunately, however, the four of us made a pilgrimage on April 12, 2021. The Blakes picked us up early on a rather gloomy day, but our hours together sparkled.

Our first stop was Governor Dummer Academy, where Mel reminisced about some colorful teachers and classmates and pointed out various landmarks on the inviting campus, which once included a nine-hole golf course. Needless to say, Mel was wearing his school cap. During his era, few Jews or day students were enrolled. Indeed, he customarily commuted with a few other "townies" in a taxicab.

Though Brown had not been Mel's first college choice, he was indeed pleased to study there. He soon became a class leader and eventually a perennial organizer of reunions. In retrospect, however, Mel once explained that he would have enjoyed a more philosophical major than chemistry.

Surely Mel and Pat were aware of another connection between Newburyport and Little Rhody. An important late 19th century painter, Martin Johnson Heade, had portrayed the meadows, marshes, and inlets of both places. Indeed, no less a museum than the Metropolitan owns Heade's canvases of both places.

The next stop on our April itinerary was Newburyport's small "Hebrew" cemetery, which is actually located a few miles north, across the Merrimack River, on Toll Road in the smaller town of Salisbury. We paid our respects to Mel's paternal grandparents, Joseph and Ida, and his parents, Alan and Beatrice, and then to nu-



[above] Hebrew cemetery, Salisbury, MA,  
with Pat, Betsey Goodwin & Mel;  
[right] photo with Mel's father's  
Confirmation Class, Ahavas Achim

merous family friends and acquaintances. Of course there were many familiar, Jewish-sounding names as well as a George M. Cohen (not the Providence native nor my relative). But I was taken by the grave of Theodore Herzl Stillman, who had died in 1926 at only 20 years of age. An inscription explains that he was able to attend Harvard for only three years.

Alas, this cemetery, with its own small chapel, is not nearly as beautiful as Beth-El's. It also suggests that Newburyport's Jews lived in and died on the town's periphery.

On our way back to Newburyport, we drove by the vacant lot in Salisbury where Mel's father operated his used car dealership. It is now overgrown with weeds. Mel pointed out, by contrast, that his dad always dressed formally for work. Whether or not his wife was



pleased, he usually went home for lunch.

Our next stop, close to the town's center (and the birthplace of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison), was far more alluring. This was the synagogue of Congregation Ahavas Achim, which had been founded in 1896 by men with such "Christian" names as Hyman, Isidor, Morris, and Moses. In 1935

this traditional congregation moved to its new home on Washington Street and soon hired its first rabbi. This lofty structure, built in an Italianate style in 1865, had been a Methodist church.

The shul's exterior and interior are in good condition – beckoning a congregation much larger than its hundred or so families. Mel had arranged for the current president to show us around. Sue Latham, a gracious host, was a relative newcomer both to Newburyport and Judaism. Her parents had been the owners and directors of a summer camp, so she had many insights about communal needs and dreams.

Of course Mel had much to tell us about the downstairs chapel, classrooms, and social hall as well as the upstairs sanctuary. Indeed, he brought along a few family photos, including one of his father's Confirmation class, to share with Ms. Latham. So taken by Mel's vivid and extensive memories was she that she recorded most on her cell phone.

I also took numerous photos of Mel as he guided us through the structure and his recollections. Rather than pose, he interacted with our surroundings: pausing before the downstairs ark, standing on the upstairs *bimah*, sitting within the empty pews, and identifying various relatives whose bronze memorial plaques hung near the sanctuary's entrance.

Mel identified numerous congregants on a bronze honor roll, which listed the 72 men and one woman who had served in the

military during the World Wars. Four patriots sacrificed their lives.

Given how much Ahavas Achim still meant to Mel, I was surprised to learn that his last visit inside had been perhaps 45 years ago. Like me, he probably feared that his bar mitzvah certificate could be revoked. Yet, I later learned that in June 1950 he had been presented with the Edelstein Award for “good attendance at Sabbath Services.”

If not exemplary Hebrew or religious school students, Mel and his younger brother Frank (but not their sister Madeline) were often called to help complete the daily minyan. Indeed, this *mitzvah* was partially made possible by the site of our next visit, their childhood home at 52 Boardman Street, only a few blocks away.

We did not get out of the car to have a closer look, but Mel explained how this early 19th-century structure and many others in the same neighborhood had been refurbished over recent decades. Indeed, much of Newburyport’s rich architectural history has been rediscovered and gentrified. This was particularly evident when Mel drove us down High Street to see his alma mater, Kelley Elementary School, which had been built in 1872. Used for instruction until 2008, it was recently refashioned into condominiums.

As I was admiring the façades of various rejuvenated residences, Mel explained that this was also the neighborhood where he had delivered newspapers. Of course one of his summer jobs had been washing and polishing cars on his dad’s lot.

The four of us enjoyed a leisurely lunch at an Italian restaurant on Pleasant Street. This was nearly opposite the glorious church that Betsey and I had once so happily visited. The synagogue president had mentioned that a congregant was the restaurant’s current owner. On the walls were many large paintings of Venice, clearly the work of a more ambitious than gifted artist. As world travelers and art aficionados, Mel and Pat could have made a comparable observation but in their typically generous manner abstained from doing so. I couldn’t resist.

Later, when we were departing Newburyport, Mel pointed out Griffin House, the well endowed “Home for Aged Men” on High Street. Mel’s father, as a widower, had tried living there but didn’t

like it or was kicked out. Then Alan (born Abraham) tried living in Arizona, near his younger son, Frank, but did not like that either. So Alan showed up on the doorstep of an old friend in Salisbury but expired within a week.

Soon after entering Brown, Mel seemed to have grasped that Newburyport would never again be his home. A much larger world intrigued him. Indeed, he would earn his MBA at Columbia, work for some large corporations, and serve clients in many nations. Mel didn't hold a grudge against his hometown, but he didn't take Pat to see it until after they were married in 1965. They had in fact enjoyed two ceremonies: the first at Chicago City Hall and the second, in 1967, following her modern Orthodox conversion, at Temple Beth-El in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Mel mentioned that despite its popularity as a summer vacation spot, his mother had never enjoyed Newburyport. And neither had his paternal grandparents, who were Eastern European immigrants. As with many Jews, however, the junk business enabled them to gain some understanding of the rewards and perils of material success. Fortunately, Newburyport also provided the Blakes with some more fulfilling lessons. Indeed, it became a place where Jewish pride, values, and ideals flourished.

Yes, my friend became a kind, gentle, and honorable person. Likewise, he never found an occasion or a need to boast about his ambition or success. Even accounts of his four grandkids' accomplishments seemed muted. Mel seemed happiest simply being around and helping others. After my April visit to Newburyport, however, I believe that this small, rather isolated town was a key to understanding his humility, decency, and inner strength.

During our outdoor coffee klatch on May 19, I shared many of my photos of Newburyport with Mel, Mike, and our friend, Fred Franklin. Mel thanked me for schlepping my heavy album. He seemed nearly as pleased as Betsey and I did for making this trip home. It was, unfortunately, his last. He passed away on May 23 in Narragansett.

## In Memoria:

*November 1, 2020-November 1, 2021*

**Bernard Bieder**, the son of the late Sonia (Ostroff) and Emil Bieder, was born in Fall River. He was predeceased by his wives, Audrey (Benzion) Bienenfeld Bieder and Harriet Farber Bieder, and his daughter, Janet Sollitto.

Mr. Bieder graduated from Classical High School in 1941 and attended Boston University. Born on July 4, 1923, he received a Purple Heart for his Army service during World War II. For decades the owner of Peoples Department Store, he retired in 1984. He lived most of his adult years in Warwick.

Mr. Bieder, known as “Honey Man” and “Bee Man,” kept his own apiary and tended hives around the state. He was a former head of the Rhode Island Beekeepers Association and taught the art of preparing honey to countless friends and acquaintances.

Mr. Bieder belonged to Temple Am David, Congregation Or Chadash, and Temple Beth-El. For decades this soft-spoken man was also a board member of Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence.

He is survived by his son, Jeffrey, and his daughter, Susan Greco, and his stepchildren, Linda Cherney, Steven Bienenfeld, and Carol Mitchell.

*Died on January 23 in Phoenix, Arizona at the age of 97.*

**Stanley P. Blacher**, the son of the late Harry and Bertha (Adler) Blacher, was a Providence native. He graduated from Brown University in 1947 and served as recently as 2017 as a marshal at his class reunion.

He was president of Blacher Brothers, a manufacturing and real estate business. Mr. Blacher was a member of the Capital Center Commission and chaired the Providence Redevelopment Agency for nearly two decades. He was also a board member of Fleet National

Bank for many years.

Among numerous communal endeavors, he was a former treasurer and a life governor of the Miriam Hospital Foundation and a life member of the Miriam Hospital. Also a member of the Rhode Island Hospital Corporation, he was a life trustee of the National Jewish Center for Immunology and Respiratory Medicine in Denver. He also served as a board member of Temple Emanu-El and the former Jewish Home. In 1975, having chaired the Rhode Island Committee of Israel Bonds, he received the Prime Minister's Medal for Exemplary Leadership.

Mr. Blacher was a lifelong member of Ledgemont Country Club, which his father had cofounded. He was also a member of the University Club.

Mr. Blacher is survived by his wife, Marcia, and their sons, Richard and John.

*Died on August 27 in Providence at the age of 95.*

**Melvyn Blake.** [Please see the article about him in the preceding pages.]

**James R. Engel**, the son of the late Barbara (Stein) and Dr. Herbert W. Engel, grew up in Oakhurst, New Jersey and attended Brookdale Community College in Lincroft. Later a resident of High Point, North Carolina, he worked for the state's Commission of Alcohol Beverage Control for 23 years. He later worked in Brown University's dining services department for nine years.

Mr. Engel was a vigorous fan of New England sports and enjoyed traveling with his extended family to Mexico. He also relished spending summers in Narragansett.

Mr. Engel is survived by his brother, Peter, and his sister, Cathy Oresman. He was also the stepson of the late Fred Swartzberg.

*Died on May 24 in Pawtucket at the age of 62.*

**David Engle**, the son of the late Melvin and Mary (Kantrowitz) Engle, was a Providence native. Following his graduation from the University of Rhode Island, he joined his family's business, Engle

Tire Company, in Providence, where he worked until his retirement in 2005.

Mr. Engle, an avid sportsman and spectator, was a member of Touro Fraternal Association.

He is survived by his wife, Ronnie Golden Engle, and their son, Henri-Martin.

*Died on October 15 in Providence at the age of 71.*

**Lois H. Fain**, a daughter of the late Dorothy (Schneidman) and Dr. Carl Jagolinzer, was born in Providence. She was predeceased by her husband, Burton, and their daughter, Debra.

A 1945 graduate of Hope High School, Mrs. Fain earned a bachelor's degree in psychology at Pembroke College of Brown University four years later. She served as a class officer and chaired many of her Pembroke reunions. In 1994 she received the College's Alumna Service Award.

Mrs. Fain's interest in helping deaf children began as a camp counselor in Maine. While teaching at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf from 1970 to 1988, she guided and encouraged many student teachers from Gallaudet College in Washington, DC.

Overflowing with energy, Mrs. Fain enjoyed entertaining, gardening, baking, sewing, quilting, and playing cards and piano. She also enjoyed traveling, including trips to China and Florida.

Mrs. Fain was a member of Temples Emanu-El and Beth-El. Also active in the National Council of Jewish Women, she helped lead its youth group. A further expression of her dedication to youth was supporting Hasbro Children's Hospital and its Camp Dotty.

Mrs. Fain, a life member of our Association, is survived by her son, Frederick.

*Died on April 17 in Providence at the age of 92.*

**Arthur I. Fixler**, the son of the late Fannie (Rosenhaus) and Sol Fixler, was born in the Bronx. He was predeceased by his wife, Ruth (Cohen) Fixler.

Mr. Fixler, once known as "Arty," graduated from New York University and also its law school and then practiced in New York



City. In 1972, he and Ruth moved to Rhode Island, where he practiced tax and estate-planning law with several Providence firms.

Soon Mr. Fixler became active in numerous Jewish communal organizations. He became a vice president of the former Jewish Federation, a chair of its Endowment Committee, and a president of the Holocaust Education and Resource Center. In 2007, he received its Never Again Award. Mr. Fixler was also a board member of the Bureau of Jewish Education, the former Jewish Seniors Agency, and the former Heritage Harbor Museum.

Mr. Fixler was especially fond of Temple Emanu-El. A musical aficionado with a contagious sense of humor, he often performed in its Purim spiel.

He is survived by his daughters, Nancy Abrams and Masha Traber, and his son, David. Maxine Goldin, a perpetual board member and officer of our Association, was his dear friend and companion.

*Died on January 17 in Providence at the age of 91.*

**Janet L. Friedman**, a daughter of the late Bessie (Sholes) and Louis Lipson, was a native of Pawtucket. She was predeceased by her husband, Dr. Lester M. Friedman.

Mrs. Friedman, a lyric soprano, graduated from the Boston Conservatory of Music (later a part of Berklee Conservatory). She was a member of Temple Emanu-El before joining Temple Beth-El and becoming active in its Sisterhood and its choir. She was also a member of the Chopin Club and a president of the Rhode Island Federation of Garden Clubs.

A longtime resident of Warwick, Mrs. Friedman later lived in Providence.

She is survived by her sons, William and Robert.

*Died on February 24 in Providence at the age of 90.*

**Prof. David W. Gitliz.** [Please see the article by him in last year's issue and the one about him in this year's.]

**Lillian Golden**, the daughter of the late Belle (Sherman) and

Benjamin Tichman, was born in Philadelphia and reared in Providence. She also lived in Woonsocket before returning to Providence. She was predeceased by her husband, Edward, and their son, David.

A graduate of the University of Rhode Island, Mrs. Golden worked in the consumer protection unit of Rhode Island's Office of Attorney General. She was a volunteer at Paul Cuffee School and taught literacy to immigrants.

Mrs. Golden, a member of the Chopin Club, loved classical music. She was also an avid reader and enjoyed playing bridge among numerous friends in the Laurelmead community.

Mrs. Golden is survived by her daughter, Carol Golden Einhorn.

*Died on June 24 in Providence at the age of 98.*

**Edwin S. Gozonsky**, a son of the late Ida (Halperin) and Archie Gozonsky, was a native of Laconia, New Hampshire. He was predeceased by his wife, Dorothy, and his stepdaughter, Diane Goodman.

Mr. Gozonsky was the valedictorian of his Class of 1948 at Laconia High School and continued his debating career at Yale College, from which he graduated four years later. He served as his class agent for two decades.

Mr. Gozonsky earned a master's degree at Harvard's Graduate School of Business in 1954 and served in the Army from 1956 to 1958. He spent his career as an institutional stockbroker in Boston for several large firms, ultimately becoming a vice president of investments at Paine Webber.

In 1965 Mr. Gozonsky married Dorothy Adelson of Providence, and he became close to many of her relatives. He is survived by his stepdaughter, Judith Golias.

*Died on March 20 in Providence at the age of 90.*

**Janet Engelhart Gutterman**, a daughter of the late Bernice and Milton Hess, was born in the Bronx. As she explained in her lengthy article in the 2018 issue of our journal, she grew up on Long Island. Indeed, she was a religious school student – kindergarten through

Confirmation – at Suburban Temple in Wantagh.

Mrs. Gutterman graduated from General MacArthur High School in Levittown in 1964 and then earned her bachelor's degree in education at Hofstra University. In 1971, after teaching for three years in Fort Lee, New Jersey, she moved with her first husband to Greenville, Pennsylvania, and then earned a master's degree in counseling at Duquesne University. Having joined the staff of Pittsburgh's Jewish Federation, she was initially involved with the resettlement of Soviet Jews. Later involved with programming and allocations, she continued to accept greater responsibilities and move up within Federation's professional leadership.

In 2000 Mrs. Gutterman became the first woman executive of Rhode Island's Jewish Federation (now the Jewish Alliance). Indeed, she was the first woman executive among the country's 40 largest Jewish federations. Once again, she emphasized community involvement, intra-agency cooperation, and long-range planning.

In 2005, following her retirement, Mrs. Gutterman resumed her role as an educator and became a tutor at King Elementary School in Providence and a docent at the RISD Art Museum. Perhaps her love of children was exceeded only by her love of gardening. Given her essential kindness and generosity of spirit, she played far more than a ceremonial role at Temple Beth-El. She was also a life member of our Association.

Mrs. Gutterman is survived by her husband, Rabbi Leslie Y. Gutterman, her daughter, Allison Spielman, and her stepdaughters, Rabbi Rebecca Gutterman and Elizabeth Gutterman.

*Died on May 13 in Providence at the age of 74.*

**Betty J. Jaffe**, a daughter of the late Dorothy (Alpert) and George Rossyn, was born in Boston. She was predeceased by her husband, Dr. Alfred Jaffe.

Mrs. Jaffe graduated from Malden High School in 1948 and Smith College four years later. She was a president of the Smith College Club of Rhode Island.

Mrs. Jaffe earned a master's degree in history from Brown University and worked as an architectural historian in the Mayor's

Office of Housing and Community Development in Providence. Following her retirement, she pursued numerous interests, including gardening, reading, and bridge. Additionally, she was a volunteer counselor at Planned Parenthood of Rhode Island and a board member of the Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center. She was a life member of our Association.

Mrs. Jaffe is survived by her daughters, Miriam Browne and Sarah Eisert, and her son, David.

*Died on December 18 in Providence at the age of 90.*

**David M. Korn**, a son of the late Fannie (Brodsky) and Lewis Korn, was born in Providence. He lived most of his life in Providence and Pawtucket and, more recently, in Cranston.

Mr. Korn, a graduate of Hope High School and an Army veteran, owned Safeway Electric Motor Company in Providence. He belonged to Temple Emanu-El and Hebrew Free Loan Association of South Providence.

He is survived by his wife, Brenda, and their daughters, Ruth Sapper and Carolyn Flammey, and their son, Philip.

*Died on July 25 in Cranston at the age of 86.*

**Mindel "Mindy" Levine**, the daughter of the Rose and Fred Spigel, was a Providence native. She was predeceased by her husband, Laurence, with whom she owned Larry Levine's Kosher Meat Market in Peabody, Massachusetts.

Mrs. Levine, who had also lived in Malden, is survived by her daughter, Renee Schecker, and her sons, Allen and Todd.

*Died on July 22 in Danvers, Massachusetts at the age of 85.*

**Shirley H. Millen**, the daughter of the late Minna and Herman Swartz, was born in Providence. She was predeceased by her husband, Max.

Mrs. Millen was a graduate of the University of Rhode Island. Always dressed stylishly, she was known as "Miss Manners." She cared deeply about her fellow residents at Tall Oaks Assisted Living.

Mrs. Millen is survived by her son, Mathew, and her

daughter, Reesa Belin.

*Died on February 21 in Reston, Virginia at the age of 98.*

**Morris P. Schwartz**, a son of the late Rebecca (Rosenberg) and Samuel Schwartz, was born in Providence and spent most of his life there. In recent years he lived in Greenville.

Mr. Schwartz, a natural raconteur, wrote about his upbringing in South Providence and his early adult years in the 2013 and 2015 issues of our journal.

In 1944, after graduating from Classical High School, he entered Brown University. Following his Army service during the last years of World War II, he returned to Brown and earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry. He much enjoyed Tower Club, a Jewish fraternity.

Mr. Schwartz explained that the highlight of his twenties was meeting and dating his future wife, Barbara. She continued ever after to mean the most to him.

After Brown, Mr. Schwartz worked in chemical laboratories, but found his true calling as a salesman. His forte, which also required considerable physical strength, was presenting industrial maintenance chemicals to clients.

Known far and wide as "Moe," Mr. Schwartz was a diehard Red Sox fan. He much enjoyed a weekly poker game with many lifelong friends and was also fond of photography and baking banana bread. A former member of the Cranston Jewish Center, he later belonged to Temple Emanu-El.

Mr. Schwartz is survived by his wife, Barbara, their daughter, Judy Flaxman, and their sons, William and Steven.

*Died on December 23, 2020 in Providence at the age of 94.*

**Norman M. Shack**, the son of the late David and Rose (Spector) Shack, was born in Andover, Massachusetts. He grew up in nearby Lawrence, where he was educated at a traditional, Ashkenazi congregation, Anshai Sfar, which was better known as the *Russishe shul*. As a boy and young man, he worked in his father's newspaper distribution business.

After graduating from Lawrence High School in 1945, Mr. Shack earned a bachelor's degree at Tufts University in 1948 and belonged to Phi Epsilon Pi fraternity. Three years later, he graduated from Boston University Law School and then entered private practice in Lawrence. He served as a president of the Lawrence Bar Association from 1983 to 1984 and in 2008 received its leadership award. For four decades, his son, William, practiced with him in Lawrence, Methuen, and North Andover.

Mr. Shack, a resident of Andover for six decades, became a devoted member of its Reform congregation, Temple Emanuel, and served as a trustee. He was close to Rabbi Harry Roth and his successor, Rabbi Robert Goldstein. Mr. Shack established a lectureship in memory of his parents and commissioned a Temple history. He was a life member of our Association.

Mr. Shack enjoyed playing tennis, wagering on horses, wintering in Florida, reading mysteries, and smoking cigars. Although fond of wearing beautiful clothes, he also assembled a huge collection of baseball caps. While delighting in his wife's cooking, he also enjoyed many ethnic cuisines as well as glasses of white wine with ice.

Nothing made Mr. Shack happier than spending time with his family. Thus, he delighted in leading Passover services and participating in his children's and his grandchildren's rites of passage.

Mr. Shack is survived by his wife, Roberta, and their children, William, Betsey Goodwin, Karen, and Nancy Grecoe.

*Died on November 6 in Andover at the age of 92.*

**Marilyn H. Winoker**, the daughter of the late Dora (Seidel) and Sigmund Horovitz, was born in Providence. She was a 1951 graduate of Hope High School and earned a bachelor's degree at Boston University's School of Public Relations and Communications. She later received the School's Charlotte Brown-Mayer Award.

For more than 35 years, Mrs. Winoker partnered with her husband, James, in the management of B. B. Greenberg, a jewelry manufacturing company. Also with her husband and their son,

David, she founded Belvoir Properties, a property management company, which their daughter, Susan, later joined. The Winokers won numerous awards for the preservation of historic buildings.

A dynamic leader, Mrs. Winoker was a board member of numerous organizations, including: the Rhode Island Philharmonic, State Board of Higher Education, Children's Museum, Children's Theatre, Commodores of Rhode Island, Insight Rhode Island, and YWCA.

Mrs. Winoker was also a vice president of the Women's Division of the former Jewish Federation of Rhode Island (now the Alliance) and helped lead the former Jewish Community Center. She was a fellow of Brandeis University for more than 35 years and a member of Temple Emanu-El. Additionally, she enjoyed memberships in the Dunes, Hope, and University Clubs.

Mrs. Winoker, a life member of our Association, is survived by her husband, James, and their children, Susan, David, and Steven.

*Died on June 6 in Cranston at the age of 88.*

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