

# VOICES

Congregation B'nai B'rith SPRING 2018 • JOURNAL VOL. 93 NO. 1 • TISHREI 5778 - NISAN 5778

FOCUS: JEWISH IDENTITY AROUND THE WORLD

## A House for Everyone

By Ann Pieramici

Shlomo and Lekenesh Mehari maintain a profound connection to a homeland they fled as toddlers and barely remember. They are Ethiopian Jews, deeply connected to their heritage and individual journey making aliyah. They are now living in Santa Barbara, 7,500 miles from their Israeli home, adjusting once again to a new culture while continuing to honor and teach their children about their Ethiopian Jewish origin.

**SHLOMO WAS JUST** three years old when he escaped the civil unrest, religious persecution and famine in Gondar, Ethiopia. His father, an active dissident against the ruling government, participated in efforts to sneak Ethiopian Jewish families through Sudan to Israel in multiple missions that began in the late 1970s and continued through the '80s.

It was in 1984 that Shlomo, his sister, mother, grandparents, and extended family fled Ethiopia in a secret mission to the Sudanese border. The family traveled by foot—for nearly three weeks—to the refugee camp, where they would spend another nine months in poor conditions, waiting to be airlifted to Israel



**L-R:** Lekenesh as a young girl with her parents in Ethiopia, 1986; Shlomo, Shaked, Lekenesh, and Ofek Mehari.

in a mission now known as Operation Moses.

Shlomo's father had escaped separately and was already living in America at that time. Though in contact, his father never lived with his young family again. Shlomo says it was a harrowing pilgrimage with 4,000 people dying en route due to hunger, sickness and violence. It is a voyage his mother will not speak of to this day. And it is a journey tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews endured; those who survived ultimately found a home in Israel. Each year, in Israel, there is a ceremony to remember those who perished and memorialize this historic emigration.

Lekenesh was five years old when she escaped in 1990 with her parents and eight of her twelve siblings. Two of her sisters left in the 1984 expedition and two of her brothers were captured and imprisoned en route to Sudan. More than three decades

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The SBORTY logo is in pink, bold, sans-serif font. Below it are several photos of teens: a group of four teens sitting on grass, a group of teens around a bonfire, a group of teens posing, and a group of teens standing together.

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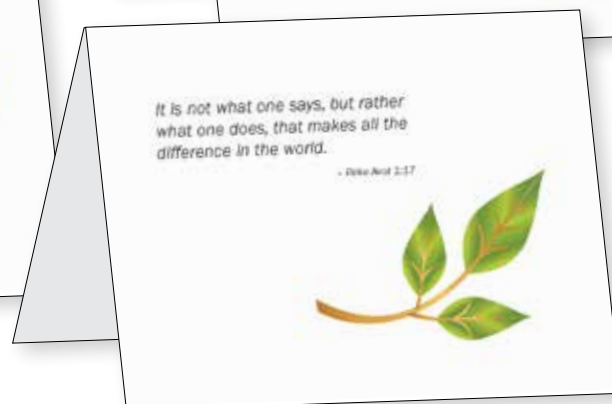
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# CBB Resource Guide

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**VOICES** is a publication offered free  
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# Who Are These Jews?

By Rabbi Steve Cohen

A poem called "Who Are These Jews?"  
by Ruth Brin begins like this:

*There were women who sat in the market  
selling beets and cabbages so their men could study;  
they were Jews.*

*There were men of Yemen, great swordsmen,  
guards of the king: they were Jews.*

*There are dark women from India, wearing saris,  
Black farmers from Ethiopia,  
Children with slanted eyes: all Jews.*

**GROWING UP IN ROCHESTER**, New York, I had no idea how truly multicultural our Jewish people is. In Rochester in the 1960s, many of the elderly Jews had Yiddish accents, and there were many very colorful personalities, but I do not remember knowing any Jews from Morocco, or Yemen, or India. We were by and large a community of Ashkenazic Jews.

Only when I first traveled to Israel were my eyes opened: the Jewish people is a tribe of many colors. Over two thousand years of Diaspora, scattered to the four corners of the earth, we came to cook many different foods, don wildly different clothes, play different music, speak many different languages: Judeo-German (Yiddish), Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), Judeo-Persian, Judeo-Arabic. And our skin took on every color of the rainbow.

And then in the 20th century, the miraculous ingathering of the exiles occurred, and all of those foods, languages, clothes, music and skin colors all came together in one tiny country. Israel.

I would like to invite you to join me for ten days in Israel, this



coming **November 26-December 7**. I know of no more powerful way to connect to Jewish history, to the worldwide Jewish people, to Jewish religion or to our own congregation than by traveling together to Israel.

It will be an educational trip, focused on the profound and challenging issues facing Israel today. We will encounter conflicting political and religious viewpoints, Israeli and Palestinian, religious and secular, left and right wing.

By the end of the trip we will find ourselves better informed, deeply emotionally engaged, and (I predict) less sure of our own opinions. I hope that you will consider joining this life-changing trip to the heart of the Jewish world.

**Please note that I am limiting the size of the group to twenty people, to ensure that we have a powerful, intimate group experience.**

Check out information about our trip at [cbbsb.org](http://cbbsb.org). If you have questions, feel free to contact me at [rabbi@cbbsb.org](mailto:rabbi@cbbsb.org) or our Community Engagement Coordinator Mariela Socolovsky at [mariela@cbbsb.org](mailto:mariela@cbbsb.org). ■

## Rabbi Daniel Brenner Joins CBB



We're thrilled to announce that Rabbi Daniel Brenner will be joining the clergy team at Congregation B'nai B'rith starting on **July 1st**. In addition to providing clergy support to meet our community's growing needs, he will be teaching

confirmation classes, Melton classes, and working with our young adults and young families. He'll also be assuming a number of special projects including strengthening our community of respect and understanding.

**ORDAINED IN MAY 2018** by Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, Rabbi Daniel has served as the Student Rabbi of Congregation B'nai David in Visalia, CA, the rabbinic intern of Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills, and most recently, as the rabbinic intern here at CBB.

During his years of HUC study, he was also a rabbinic fellow for NFTY in Israel, and a member of the AIPAC Leffell Fellowship, which brought rabbinic students from seminaries across the religious spectrum together for learning and engaging around Israel.

Rabbi Daniel is proud to hail himself as a "local boy," having been raised in Ventura at Temple Beth Torah. He received his bachelor's degree in Israeli and Middle East politics from American Jewish University in 2011, and has a Master's in Hebrew Letters from Hebrew Union College in addition to his rabbinic ordination. He is a frequent Israel traveler, having both participated in Birthright and staffed many of their trips.

Daniel was married to CBB member Felicia Palmer in July 2016, and the two of them are so excited to join her family's community. They both share a love for travel and make special arrangements to visit Jewish sites wherever they go. ■

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# What It's Like to Be a Jewban: *The Story of Leon and Abe Presser*

By Danya Belkin

After fleeing the Bolshevik revolution on one side and seeking a better future on the other side, my great-great-grandparents landed in Cuba. One from Ukraine and one from Poland.

**PENILESS**, like most immigrants, they initially worked as peddlers and then started small stores. By 1922 they had established their family roots in Matanzas, a provincial capital town approximately 100 km from Havana. They also established roots in the province of Pinar del Rio in the western end of Cuba where my great-great-grandparents purchased a farm. As one of the few Jewish families in Matanzas, they had a strong Jewish identity and were proud of their heritage.

My grandfather Leon (Zeyde), and great uncle Abraham (Tio Abe), were born and raised in this beautiful and friendly city before Fidel Castro rose to power in 1959.

In the late 1950s, during my grandfather's and uncle's childhood, Cuba had a population of about 6 million people and of those, about 20,000 were Jews. Approximately seventeen Ashkenazic and fifteen Sephardic families made up the entire Jewish population of Matanzas.

For Sephardic Jews, Cuba was an attractive destination. They spoke Ladino which

was the Spanish spoken in Spain in 1492 when they were expelled from Spain for being Jewish. Ladino is very close to modern Spanish.

The reason why many Ashkenazi Jews immigrated to Cuba in the early part of the 1900s was because the United States had established a quota system for immigration; however, if you lived in Cuba for five years then you could enter the United States as a legal immigrant.

The Cuban culture, with its rich traditions, welcoming nature, and lacking gross anti-semitism, enticed some of the Jews in Cuba to stay. Growing up, the bulk of Leon and Abe's friends were non-Jews due to the limited Jewish population in Matanzas and the welcoming nature of fellow Cubans.

The Ashkenazi Jewish community in Matanzas rented a second story space above a storefront, where Shabbat and other holiday services were held in addition to Jewish social and cultural event celebrations. The Sephardic Jewish community in Matanzas had a different

location where they would meet.

One big difference between America's Jewish population compared to Cuba's was the big difference between being a Sephardic Jew and an Ashkenazi Jew. The two communities did not intermix. My grandfather and uncle are Ashkenazi. In a way, it was almost considered inter-marriage for an Ashkenazi Jew to marry a Sephardic Jew. By the late 1950s this separation was beginning to decrease.

My grandfather recalled an experience while a student at the University of Illinois when he asked a Jewish girl whether she was Ashkenazic or Sephardic. Her response was that she had no idea but would check with her mother and let him know. This represented a welcome eye-opener for him.





Getting a formal Jewish education in Matanzas was challenging. There was no rabbi or cantor in Matanzas, which meant that a community member would lead services whenever they occurred. Compared to Havana, which had three Jewish day schools, Matanzas had none. Having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah was a difficult task if you lived in Matanzas.

Tio Abe told me that in order to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah he would travel to Havana by bus on Wednesdays, meet with a Jewish educator, and then return by bus on Friday evening back to Matanzas. He would stay in a hotel while visiting Havana. Fortunately, my great-grandfather was able to meet him in Havana for work during many of his Bar Mitzvah training trips.

Interestingly, it was customary for Ashkenazic Bar Mitzvah students to recite their Bar Mitzvah speech in Yiddish. Yiddish was commonly spoken among many Jews in Cuba. This was because many Jews who immigrated to Cuba already spoke Yiddish and brought the language with them. Hence, both my grandfather and uncle learned to speak fluent Yiddish in their homes.

They referred to their Yiddish as 'defensive Yiddish' because they learned it to be able to understand what their parents were saying when they talked about them. To this day my uncle still remembers his Bar Mitzvah speech in Yiddish!

The bulk of the Cuban Jewish community resided in Havana, where the community consisted of some 15,000 Jews. Consequently, Jewish life in Havana was closer to what Jewish life was in the United States.

My grandfather and his family eventually moved to Havana during his late teenage years.

A good portion of the social life for Jewish kids in Matanzas and Havana centered around the activities of one of several Zionist youth groups, each affiliated with a different political party in Israel. Jewish representatives from Israel (Shaliachs) were sent to Cuba to organize and teach the kids about Israel through weekly activities and summer sleep-away camps for kids and adolescents. My uncle recalls his deep involvement with the Zionist movement throughout his childhood.

My Zeyde and Tio recall that few Cuban Jews made *aliyah* (moved to Israel) throughout their childhood. Making aliyah became more common after Fidel Castro came to power because of political and economic reasons as well as anti-semitism. Jewish organizations in the U.S. were very helpful in assisting Cuban Jews immigrate to the United States or leave Cuba for other countries after Castro's takeover. Unfortunately, after Castro rose to power, the once thriving Jewish community almost completely disappeared in Matanzas and in other cities across Cuba.

My grandfather came to the United States to attend university before Castro came to power. A few years later my Tio Abe followed suit. My grandfather never imagined he wouldn't be returning to Cuba to live out his life. Unfortunately, the majority of my family was forced to leave behind their lives, and abandon their belongings, which were confiscated by the Communist government.

However, they escaped the Castro regime. They were fortunate to enter the United States and start their life anew. I have no relatives left in Cuba. What they did bring with them was a rich blend of Jewish and Cuban culture, which they have now been able to share with their growing families. Lucky for me, I have grasped onto this amazing culture which I hope to pass on for many generations to come.

*Danya Belkin's first children's book, Tanya's Tech Troubles, was published last year. She will be a junior at Dos Pueblos High School this fall. ■*



**Opposite** (top-bottom): Leon and Abe as teenagers; Leon with his mother, Raquel, and Abe; Leon's bris in Matanzas, Cuba, Jan 1940. **This page:** Danya, with grandfather Leon (left) and great uncle Abe (right).

# You're Jewish? I thought you were English!

By Nick Woolf



I'm always amazed when asked – “You're *Jewish*? I thought you were English!” It happens a lot, and not just in the small Midwestern town where I lived for 20 years. I grew up in North West London near that epicenter of Jewish life, Golders

Green, and everyone we knew was Jewish. With nearly 300,000 Jews and 450 synagogues you can certainly be both English and Jewish. And we were.

**IN MANY WAYS** growing up Jewish is growing up Jewish wherever you are. Candles are candles. The Shema is the Shema. But on reflection it's not such a silly question. To paraphrase Mao Zedong, I always felt I was “Jewish with English characteristics.” This required navigating a fuzzy zone between Jewishness and Englishness.

To understand why, you first have to understand the English class system. This system is unspoken, which is ironic because it is based on how you speak. As soon as you open your mouth your place in society is completely understood. So my parents went to enormous lengths to make sure I had an unblemished BBC accent.

When other kids had math and science tutors, I was sent to elocution classes. My mother was less concerned about my friends' behavior and more about how they spoke, lest a “common accent” might start to rub off on me and ruin my chances of fitting in and advancing. And along with a proper accent went a proper demeanor, and it was distinctly non-ethnic.



Accents varied on a sliding scale. There was aristocratic speech which was often unintelligible because it seemed like there was a gigantic plum in the aristocrat's mouth. This was another planet, and we knew no one who spoke like that. Then there was the perfect, crisp BBC accent to which I was to aspire. I'll call it BBC+. But a large part of the upper middle classes spoke what we could call BBC-. Proper English, just not quite as crisp. They probably hadn't been sent to elocution classes when children. Below BBC-, all the way down to cockney, there were many gradations which really didn't concern us.

All this taught me that there were many social strata, and when we were with people in our exact speech strata, we were most comfortable. With those whose speech was a little off we were a little more formal. We instinctively knew how to behave in each speech environment.

And it carried over into our Jewishness. I instinctively knew when I was to come across as more or less Jewish in different contexts. For example, just as we didn't identify with aristocrats or aspire to their extreme almost unintelligible speech, our identity did not overlap to even a minuscule degree with ultra-Orthodox Jews. My parents, while in principle rather impressed by those more frum than themselves, were distinctly embarrassed to see a person in ultra-Orthodox dress and appearance in the street. This ethnic appearance of not fitting in was what the Jewish community should be trying to avoid, at least in public.

So that was the first big principle I learned: things are very different inside the home and outside. At home we could use words



like *shul* and *frum*, in public, never; it was always synagogue and religious, just like any non-Jewish English person would say. And in family groups — well it depends how they spoke. With an all-BBC+ crowd we all knew our own status, so it was fine to throw in the occasional Yiddish word. In a mixed family group with some BBC-'s, well, we had to be clear about our own slightly superior fitting-in status, and Yiddish was out. Subtly adjusting our Jewish-English behavior in this way became second nature.

I never experienced any hint of anti-Semitism growing up, and I have no idea if this had anything to do with the very private nature of our Jewish practice. I was astonished when I came to America and found people wearing *yarmulkes* in public, or using and even explaining Hebrew or Yiddish words in mixed company. But at home or with family we were very Jewish.

Our Orthodox shul was traditional, with the women upstairs and the services long, and, to a pre-Bar Mitzvah boy, dry and tedious. All I remember of sermons is that they were uninspiring and mostly devoted to recriminations and exhortations to the congregation to attend more services and give more generously.

Other than Passover and lighting the Hanukkah candles we did

not celebrate other festivals, but we did celebrate a Jewish version of Christmas Day, which allowed

me to easily fit in with my non-Jewish friends. To much excitement I woke on Christmas morning to numerous presents which were "hidden" under the dining room table. That was it. Plus a big family gathering for lunch just as everyone else was doing in England at the same time, a meal strangely similar to Thanksgiving — always roast turkey with a consistent collection of side dishes.

We kept a degree of kosher. We never had milk and meat at the same meal, and certainly no pork in the house. But this again was a private matter. At home my mother wouldn't consider having shellfish. But in a nice restaurant she loved to order shrimp in her proper English accent, just like the other diners. My father quietly seethed, but we knew he could never go so far as vocalize or flap his arms wildly in public as he would at home, so my mother was always off the hook.

When I moved to America I noticed that most people seemed to know where they came from. I imagined detailed family conversations about which town each grandparent came from

*Continued on page 13*

**Opposite:** Nick's father wearing English morning jacket and Nick wearing a Scottish kilt at aunt's Jewish wedding, 1957. **This page:** Nick's bar mitzvah certificate, 1963; Nick with parents in Israel during Boy Scouts International Jewish Jamboree, 1965; Nick's Bar Mitzvah dance with his mother, 1963.



*"A House For Everyone", continued from pg. 1*

later there are still hundreds of Ethiopian Jews, known as the *Falashmura*—people who lived as Christians for generations but claim they have Jewish ancestry—who want to return to Judaism and are waiting to get out or reunite with lost family members.

Though they were fortunate to escape, Shlomo says the adjustment to life in Israel was difficult.

"We faced racial prejudice and doubt regarding our Jewishness," he explains. "The Orthodox rabbinic community in Israel has questioned our Jewishness and some consider us illegal immigrants. What bothered us in Israel and remains a problem today is that people who know us, and know our story still doubt our Jewishness," says Shlomo.

Lekenesh explains that shortly after her arrival in Israel, her kindergarten teacher changed her name to Batia, to sound more Israeli-Jewish. It wasn't until she was in her mid-twenties that she finally had the confidence to go back to the name her parents had given her.

In addition to doubts related to their Judaism, Shlomo says there also remain far greater misperceptions regarding their race. "Some people assume that if you're black, then you have less ability. This belief can come from anyone, it's not necessarily related to Judaism."

He and Lekenesh have certainly proved the cynics wrong. A Fulbright, post-doctoral scholar now studying at UCSB, Shlomo met Lekenesh when they were university students in Haifa. Shlomo studied electrical engineering at the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and Lekenesh received her master's degree in social work at the University of Haifa.

The couple have two children—two-year-old daughter, Shaked, and six-month-old son Ofek—and they've lived in Santa Barbara for nearly two years, while Shlomo fulfills his Fulbright scholarship and completes post-doctoral studies on materials research optics, investigating the efficiency of lasers in replacing LED lighting.

Their daughter Shaked attends Beit HaYeladim (BHY) preschool, which Lekenesh says has provided her family with a new Jewish home. "I think here is the first time and the first place

that I don't feel different. CBB offers a house for everyone; here we can express our Judaism the way it should be, without judgment," she explains. "At CBB we are not treated as different—we are all equal."

She also appreciates the Friday Shabbat celebrations at BHY. "In Santa Barbara, it feels less like Shabbat than in Israel where you feel that Shabbat is coming—there is something in the air—yet at the preschool the children welcome Shabbat with song, prayer and freshly baked challah."

Lekenesh comes from a very observant family and was raised following the law as written in the Torah. However, as she's aged she has become less strict in her observance. In Ethiopia, Judaism is practiced according to ancient tradition, and Lekenesh recalls how people would pray to go to Israel. Now, in Israel, they pray to remember those lost in the flight to freedom.

Another Ethiopian Jewish ritual that's still observed in Israel is the separating of newborns and their mothers from others. In the case of girls, the mother and daughter remain sequestered for 80 days; for a son it is a 40-day separation. Adhering to custom, Lekenesh's father did abstain from holding Shaked or hugging Lekenesh for 40 days, as the 80-day requirement was extremely difficult.

Shlomo and Lekenesh's son Ofek was born in Santa Barbara, adding to the multiculturalism of the Mehari family. In Hebrew, "Ofek" means horizon, and their son's name reminds Shlomo and Lekenesh of how far they are from home and how much they miss their family.

Ofek also has an Ethiopian Jewish name given to him by his grandparents; he is called Avera, meaning "brought light." Shlomo's mother calls Shaked, Desallay, which means "you brought joy to my life."

While both the Mehari children bring joy to their family, they also carry the responsibility of maintaining a connection to their heritage. "We are defined by our parents' house, and that is Ethiopian Jews. We must always remember where we came from," explains Shlomo. ■

*Ann Pieramici is a public relations consultant and frequent contributor to VOICES.*



## "You're Jewish?", continued from pg. 11

in Eastern Europe, or wherever it was. I still don't know where I'm from. I vaguely thought one set of grandparents were from Kiev until a few years ago a cousin mentioned that she thought maybe they were from Latvia. Latvia? That country had never been mentioned in my home. In my home there was no discussion whatsoever about our past, and asking about it never occurred to me.

My father was always flabbergasted on holidays abroad when we met friendly Americans who shortly after meeting would ask, "So, what do you do?" My father always turned bright pink and stammered some noncommittal reply. Later he reported incredulity that a near perfect stranger would ask such an intensely personal question, and in public!

Don't get me wrong. The Jewish past was often discussed, to encourage a full embrace of Jewish identity, but only in abstract terms. I was left with a compartmentalized view of my past — seemingly as if we had been English for generations, but also knowing perfectly well my grandparents were from some vague area of Eastern Europe. Our pride in being Jewish, our support of Israel, our Jewish philanthropy, that was all 100%. But fitting in as English was equally important.

Where did all this leave me regarding Jewish identity? I felt 100% Jewish, but it was a very private feeling. Nothing I ever had to hide, but nothing I had to particularly proclaim. I just assumed people knew I was Jewish from my appearance, even though my demeanor and behaviour were as English as possible. It's perhaps summed by my experience of the private "prep school" I attended from ages 7 to 11. This was the school with the highest academic standard in our part of London that happened to be owned and run by devout Catholics, with hymns and prayers at morning assembly.

There was not a trace of bias or different treatment of the Jewish kids — we knew we were Jewish and the Catholic kids knew they were Catholic. Best of all, us Jewish kids were only there half the week. The school took every saints day off which seemed like one or two a week — and we got to take off every single Jewish holiday as well!

After 40 years in different parts of America I now feel immensely fortunate to have found CBB as a Jewish home that requires no compartmentalization or subtle navigation with my daily life. I no longer feel that being Jewish is such a private matter, and I find myself talking with non-Jewish friends about CBB, the activities and volunteering I am becoming involved in, and especially our particular passion — Rabbi Cohen's amazing Torah study. This may not sound very remarkable, but it is a whole new and liberating experience for this very English Jew. ■

*Nick Woolf moved to the U.S. in 1976, eventually settling in Iowa for 20 years. Nick and his wife Sara moved to Santa Barbara 20 years ago for a new career as a qualitative researcher, educator, and consultant. In 2017, he published a textbook on qualitative research, and is now happily retired.*

## Welcome Leo Baeck Students from Haifa



Every summer since 2012, our community has been lucky to

host the most amazing students from Leo Baeck Education Center in Haifa, Israel, in partnership with Congregation B'nai B'rith and Camp Haverim.

These students volunteer for two weeks as *madrichim* (counselors) at Camp Haverim. During their time there, they plan programs, play games, and patiently and thoughtfully answer many questions about their lives in Israel. More than a few families at CBB have had the opportunity to host these wonderful students for a week at a time and have been able to get to know them well.

This summer we are delighted to welcome four more counselors from the Leo Baeck Education Center: Dan Ben Chaim, Ori Shumacher, Shay Carmi, and Yotam Klein. Don't miss your opportunity to hear from these students at Friday Night Services on Friday, July 20 and August 4.



PHOTOS (clockwise from left): Dan Ben Chaim, Shay Carmi, Yotam Klein, Ori Shumacher





# Mitzvah Day 2017

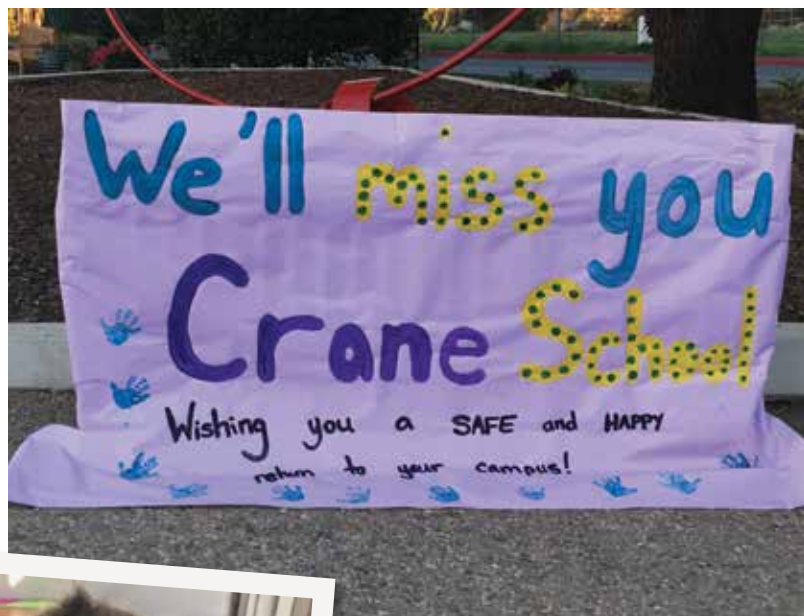
On Sunday, October 22, 2017 over 300 volunteers and 150 Netivot students gathered together at CBB and locations through Santa Barbara to complete 20 social action projects. For more photos, check out our gallery at [cbbsb.org](http://cbbsb.org).

**Don't forget to mark your calendars for the next Mitzvah Day: November 18, 2018.**





# CBB Welcomes Crane Country Day School



In the wake of the January 9th Montecito debris flow, students and teachers of Crane Country Day School stayed with us for three weeks. In addition to using our classrooms, the K-3 level Crane students gathered with our BHY preschoolers for a special Tu B'Shvat program, and also joined CBB staff for a farewell luncheon on February 9th.







# *Purim* *After Dark*

On Saturday, February 24, our social hall was transformed into a fantastical land of Shushan Purim (evening before Purim), complete with aerial acrobats, casino tables, live music, great food, and more. Proceeds went to help support our education programs.

See more photos at [cbbbs.org/galleries](http://cbbbs.org/galleries)









# Purim

Our annual CBB Purim Spiel & Carnival,  
February 25th.







## *Yom Ha'atzmaut*

On Saturday, April 21, some 300 people gathered at CBB to celebrate Israel's 70th birthday. Activities included silk painting, a children's parade, a Israeli sing-along and dance party, and real Israeli food. The festivities were made all the sweeter by the participation of many Israeli families who've recently joined CBB.

# Three Weeks in Montecito

By Rebecca Lee Moody

After the January 9th Montecito debris flow, resident Rebecca Lee Moody spent the next three weeks inside the evacuation zone. Beginning from nearly the first day, Rebecca stayed in touch with both Rabbi Cohen and Cantor Childs by email, recounting what she saw. This led to her providing a vital link between CBB relief efforts and the needs of first responders.

We've compiled several of her emails to clergy, which open a window into a community utterly cut off from the rest of the world—and provide a testament to how even one person can make a difference in a time of need.

—The Editor

*Thank you to all of the CBB community members who offered help, housing, financial assistance, and loving support!*



Rebecca gets help picking up CBB lunches from Cpt. Drue Holthe of the Montecito Fire Department

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 2018

Dear Cantor Mark,

I have been in the middle of the flood disaster zone since it started. That is ok, the house and I are both fine, but within a very short walk around every corner, not so much. I walked around all day long yesterday with the firemen and their shovels.

They are going on foot to every address and digging for bodies where they find collapsed houses. I spoke to a group of sheriffs, too. One told me he had "put four children in body bags yesterday." Many

of them want and need to talk so I have found a way to be helpful, which is simply to be there to listen to each I encounter.

I was on a street where all 10 houses were destroyed, every house looked like these images. The firemen I was with at the time said there are bodies in there. They asked if I knew who lived there, which I did. I can't even explain what it is like to witness.

I stood with the men and looked at these houses as they shared with me what this



experience is like for them personally, what they are finding. And how many.

I was at La Casa De Maria when firemen first arrived and asked me to lead them around and say where there had been buildings and which had had residents in them, so that they could start digging through the collapsed ones. They didn't know, as they were from out of town.

I was walking on East Valley Road and saw a man, dazed and confused looking, covered in mud and with a suitcase. I stopped and asked if he was okay and he said he had just gone to find his mother's house and both it and she were gone.

It is so much worse from the inside than is seen on the news. These heroic men going around with their shovels are traumatized, dedicated, tired, and totally focused on finding bodies in the debris.

It is the most tragically breathtaking thing I've ever seen first-hand.

The details aren't so relevant but please pray for them, with the Shabbat community tomorrow evening; for those doing the work, for the people whose lives were lost, for their families.

I know you were already planning to. I just wanted to add my voice from the trenches.

— Rebecca

#### THURSDAY, JANUARY 18

Dear Rabbi Steve,

I am wondering if CBB would be willing to donate any food for the responder-personnel.

I am still in Montecito and have been helping a guy down the road, who owns a snack shop, who's been making and giving away hundreds of sandwiches, coffee, chips, fruit, etc. to whoever shows

up, which, now that almost all residents are gone, includes very hungry police, sheriffs, road workers, etc.

He charges them nothing and they are free to have whatever they want. They are really grateful.

We have also been making up sack lunches, driving around and into the disaster spots and giving them out to any and all who are up for some sustenance while digging.

I will be going out through the "Berlin Wall" into Santa Barbara with the owner to get some things at Smart & Final later today. And maybe tomorrow, too.

If there would be anything available to donate, and someone could drive it down to meet us at Smart & Final, and pass it off to us, I could get it in.

— Rebecca



**Top-bottom: Young men on a crew from Riverside, all of whom told Rebecca they'd never seen a disaster like this; Delivery of a cooler with 100 sandwich lunches from CBB.**

#### FRIDAY, JANUARY 19

Dear Cantor and Rabbi,

Good news concerning the successful delivery of 100 CBB care package bags, which got through the "Berlin Wall" blockade here yesterday!

All involved there did just a phenomenal and fast job. I walked all around Montecito passing out [the care bags] to delighted disaster personnel. They were so happy with the packs and all said to thank y'all profusely!

Thank you for your kind words. I am so happy to be doing this, I can hardly breathe. Many of these disaster control personnel are young men, so I feel like a mom of many sons, whose eyes light up when they see sandwiches.

I'm attaching some photos. The policeman



**Elderly resident received regular visits and lunches from Rebecca.**

was so happy he took a whole box of care bags. And the lady here is someone I heard was alone in her house, so I walked there last night and gave her 3. She didn't have much food in her house and is 82 years old so said she was very grateful to CBB.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rebecca

**MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 2018**

Dear Rabbi Steve,

They are hiding...that's what I've discovered. And those that did not evacuate are almost exclusively elderly people. Maybe 15 percent of residents over 75 are still here. Law enforcement wishes they weren't, but they are not leaving.

"If this is how I'm going to go, so be it," is what I hear from them.

It is an odd and unprecedented situation. No one is allowed to be on the streets, so these folks have no way to get food.



*As I walked her down the hill, we talked about how we all feel like war vets, strangers two weeks ago, now friends for life, who've shared this experience in the same foxhole."*

Because I was out on the streets so early/often — right in the first few days — I got known and sort of 'grandfathered' in. Now law enforcement just stop and say, 'Hi Backpack Girl!' and offer me a ride.

The seniors don't leave their homes because they are afraid they will be forced to evacuate or arrested or something. The CHP, sheriff & police are patrolling everywhere because of looters — an older man I visited two days ago had had one in his backyard! — and also because there's an enormous amount of huge equipment on the roads and they don't want people to get in the way and run over or get injured.

I always ask what compelled someone to not evacuate. Almost universally they say that after the [Thomas] fire evacuations, they just do not want to. Most of them also don't quite realize the magnitude of the event. With the power outages, no TV still in many areas, etc. the reality of it all is somewhat unknown.

A lady I encountered yesterday, and gave sandwiches to, said, "You are spoiling me now!" She had been living on oatmeal and sweet potatoes.

— Rebecca

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2018**

Dear Rabbi Steve,

While walking last night I ran into a lady in front of her house (untouched by the flood). She was sad and down, dying to get off her property where she's been nearly 2 weeks, so I invited her to walk with me. I knew that area was less-frequently patrolled and it might just work to take her along.

As we went up the road she became silent and reached for my hand, not in a romantic gesture way, but one of those 'we are strangers connected here in this experience' things. We stopped to look at a flooded, ruined area still untouched by clean-up crews and she just dissolved, fell into me, arms wrapped all around me, and started crying and crying and crying, just overwhelmed by all the destruction.

It was a sight...the two of us alone in the middle of a deserted dark street; I am only 5'3" and there was this beautiful, very tall and lanky, emotional wreck draped over me sobbing...and then we started laughing. She fell in the mud, I fell trying to pull her up. She said, "How are YOU?" And then started crying again. I said, "Did you

*Continued on page 24*

## New "Shofar" Sculpture Donation at CBB

By Shari Childs

*"You have a sense of wonder. It comes free the day you're born. If you don't nourish it, it dwindles."*

~ John Stritch (1925-2014)

**YOU MAY HAVE WONDERED** about the curious new addition to our ever-evolving outdoor sculpture garden. Last January, we were graced with this generous donation — "The Shofar," by congregants Jere and Fima Lifshitz.

It was designed by their beloved friend, legendary artist John Stritch z"l. Previously a courageous flight surgeon during WWII, Stritch left that profession for his true passion — creating whimsical sculptures from up-cycled junk that John found on the defunct Bershire farm he called home.

This unique art piece was approved and coordinated by Elizabeth Gaynes, Adele Rosen, Shari Childs and Rick Heimberg through the Arts & Architecture Committee. It was subsequently transported and installed by Rick Heimberg, A & A Committee member.



**"The Shofar" by artist John Stritch z"l.**

We chose to install the minimalist sculpture on a secure base under the pepper tree in front of CBB. This helps to add a subtle splash of color and whimsy to the parking lot entrance area. CBB wishes to express our heartfelt appreciation to Jere and Fima Lifshitz for sharing this treasured sculpture as well as to the A & A committee members for their professional advice and enduring dedication to Congregation B'nai B'rith. ■

## Where You Lead I Will Follow

By Rob Raede

**Before I got into songwriting** with a spiritual message, my musical interests were varied. I grew up playing music all through school and college, and during my summers in college, I played in a 3-piece group in Europe doing Beach Boys and Beatles covers.

Later, after I retired from that group, I played guitar with the SBCC big band jazz ensemble and with the smaller groups. I studied songwriting and ended up working with some well-known song writers in Nashville. But ultimately I asked myself, who's life am I changing trying to write a country hit song?

What inspired me to explore Jewish and synagogue music as a creative outlet?

Maybe 20 years ago someone used the words from the book of Ruth in a conversation: "where you lead I will follow". And that stuck in my head. I had this chord progression. I was trying to think of something to do with, and it fit those words. So, from that came the first Jewish song I ever wrote, "Naomi's Song". And people seemed to like it, which inspired me to write more.

Also, too much of the music used in Friday night services around the US was just prayers set to 1970s folk melodies and German drinking songs from the 1800s. It seemed to me there was a lot of room for exploration and expansion of the repertoire.

Nowadays, I'm really happy that the Red Sea Rhythm Rockers just do our thing once



a month. I'm very honored and humbled by all the comments we get from constituents at the end of each service thanking us for the music, and telling us how much they enjoy it. ■

*The Red Sea Rhythm Rockers will return for 3rd Friday Ruach this fall.*



*"Three Weeks in Montecito", continued from pg. 22*

ever think this is what you would be doing in your 50s?!"

As I walked her down the hill, we talked about how we all feel like war vets, strangers two weeks ago, now friends for life, who shared this experience in the same foxhole. I think anyone either who stayed in Montecito or didn't has had some common experience wherever they were throughout this, and it forged profound bonds.

A few days earlier I'd been on my seventh hour of walking and came across a devastated house. Three weeks ago I'd met the elderly man who lived here with his dog and now it is eerily vacant and a mess. I waded through the mud out front, sat in his now-destroyed backyard for an hour where so many precious items of his life were in 4 feet of soggy debris.

It's surreal and wrenching, seeing the private contents of a person's home just out there in the mud; a box of personal files, award plaques, clothing, his new Christmas cactus plant that had been in the kitchen. The insides are all outside, exposed, which is how a lot of people feel now.

Anyhow, I just lost it that day at the old man's empty, disaster-site home. I called a friend who listened to me spill it all out, just as I did for the lady above.

This ties into your sermon from a couple weeks ago: Simple human connection.

I know that I will never be the same, too much happened, I saw too much, and experienced too much. And front and center were those moments where I handed someone a sandwich and I will now know them forever.

Thank you for stepping in and stepping up in the way that you and the others did. It wasn't just food; that offering altered the interior landscape of lives, forever.

I could not record all the expressions of deep gratitude to CBB I received. But, want you to know it repaired the world, the spirits, of so many and was a tremendous gift to me, personally, as well. I had been carrying that backpack around empty before, because you never know what you may find. Well, in filling it with those sandwiches, I found everything there is to find in life.

Thank you!

Rebecca

*Rebecca Lee Moody grew up in Montecito and is a longtime journalist. ■*

## CBB BOARD 2018/2019

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Administrative VP	Dan Rothschild
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Program VP	Rachel Wilson**
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At-Large	Dan Cerf*

WOBB (Sisterhood)	Natalie Gaynes*
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Music	Maia Lowenschuss Palmer
Shomrei HaBrit (Guardian of the Covenant)	Daniel Hochman

### Honorary Board Members

Marlyn Bernard Bernstein z"l
Aaron Ettenberg
Ruelene Hochman z"l

\* Returning or New to the Board

\*\* New Position on the Board

# Mazel Tov!

October 1, 2017 – April 30, 2018

## *In Our Lives*



**1.** To Karen & Andrew Rose on the arrival of Isabel Rose, born on October 7, 2017.



**2.** To Sophie & Alex Jones on the arrival of Virginia Jones, born on November 28, 2017.



**4.** To Cara Behan & Ryan George on the arrival of Delfina George, born on December 7, 2017.



**5.** To Lekenesh & Shlomo Mehari on the arrival of Ofek Mehari, born on December 28, 2017.



**3.** To Odeliah & Collin Greene on the arrival of River Greene, born on November 27, 2017.



**6.** To Amanda Nicolato-George & Robert George on the arrival of Eli George, born on February 9, 2018.



**8.** To Elizabeth & Asher Kupperman on the arrival of Sylvie Kupperman, born on January 5, 2018.



**7.** To Lindsay & Kyle Ratner on the arrival of Stella Ratner, born on December 22, 2017.

**9.** To Rachel & Tom Thornton on the arrival of Hugh Thornton, born on December 22, 2017.





## May Their Lives Be For A Blessing

October 1, 2017 – April 30, 2018

**Marshall Abrams**

**Myrna Childs**, mother of  
Cantor Mark Childs.

**Milt Chortkoff**, brother of Burt Chortkoff.

**Claira Cox**, mother of Paula Steinmetz.

**Kathleen Dewey**, sister of Laura Dewey.

**Ed Diamond**, brother of Lynne Glasman.

**Goldie Druyun**, mother of  
Cheryll Welkowsky.

**Gene Epstein**, wife of Ira Epstein.

**Dahlia Edelstein Gabert**,  
mother of Daryl West.

**Charles Gelman**, father of Nina  
Gelman-Gans.

**Allan Ghitlerman**, husband  
of Susan Rose.

**Berl Golomb**, father of Mikah Dusette.

**Don Habecker**, father of Dan Habecker.

**Gerald Harter**

**Harry Heithaus**, father of Ruth Rassler.

**Lois Kaufman**, mother of Scott Kaufman.

**Esther "Fira" Kovalik**,  
mother of Mark Kovalik.

**Bill Locker**, father of Brett Locker.

**Harris Meisel**, husband of Fredda Meisel.

**Martha Miller**, mother of Roslyn Bendet.

**Meldine Netz**, mother of Pam Toscher.

**Helen Rabin**, mother of Sherry Shultz.

**Rebecca Riskin**, wife of Ken Grand.

**Lenn Rosenfield**, father of Shari Guilfoyle.

**Milton Rothschild**, father  
of Dan Rothschild.

**Charlotte B. Salter**, sister-in-  
law of Natalie Myerson.

**Sally Sims**

**Howard Smith**, husband of Julia Smith.

**Doris Stein**, mother of Michael Stein.

**Vera Szanto**, mother of Tamar Goldflam.

**Howard Weinstein**, father  
of Alex Weinstein.

**Bob Zucherman**, husband  
of Patty Zucherman.

*Ha'Makom yenakhem etkhem betokh she'ar avelei Tziyon v'Yerushalayim.*

*May God console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.*

## Children of the Covenant

"A community is too heavy for any one person to carry alone." —The Midrash

Children of the Covenant honors and celebrates friends of CBB who have made a commitment, of any size, to our future sustainability by including CBB in their will or estate plans. These gifts build our endowment funds, enabling us to secure CBB's future.

Previous generations endowed our Temple with strength and vision, building a spiritual home for us. Today we have the opportunity to continue the legacy that they shaped more than 90 years ago.

Every planned gift makes a difference! We invite you to join us and as a small token of our enormous gratitude, we offer you a beautiful custom made framed ketubah.



**For more information** or to let us know you have included CBB in your plans, please contact Elizabeth Gaynes, Executive Director, [elizabeth@cbbbsb.org](mailto:elizabeth@cbbbsb.org).

## Remembering *Sylvia Glass*

BY RABBI STEPHEN COHEN

(1915-2018)

We all knew that the day would come, sooner or later. And Sylvia herself kept asking, during the past few years, why? Why is God keeping me alive? For what?!

Each of us told her, in response, that every day of her life was a gift, to us. And it was truly a privilege to be in the presence of Sylvia's incandescent life force, up to the very, very end. Now, finally, Sylvia is reunited with her mother Rachel, and her sister Lillian, and her daughter Marjorie, and with Walter and with Armando. And we all have a new firebrand advocate up in heaven, who is no doubt already standing in front of the Almighty and demanding that He improve His job performance. If anyone can make God take more responsibility for this world, it is Sylvia Glass.

Sylvia was born, according to the story that she never tired of telling, a 2-pound premature baby on June 18, 1915. Her survival was in such doubt that they waited six days before issuing a birth certificate. Her mother Rachel, a Jewish immigrant from the Pale of Settlement, wrapped her tiny daughter in swaddling and placed her on the warm stove, and waited to see if she would live. Finally, on June 25, they gave Sylvia a birth certificate.

Sylvia's father abandoned the family when she was still a toddler, so she never knew him, and Sylvia and her sister Lillian were raised by their mother Rachel, whom Sylvia worshipped. Rachel worked her whole life, running their home as a boarding house, and working as a kosher catering cook. They were desperately poor, and for years were terrified of not being able to pay their rent. In those days, if you missed your rent payment, you were thrown, with all your belongings, out on the street.

So Sylvia and Lillian began working as young women, working in a factory producing sequined monograms for women's clothing. I can say without hesitation that Sylvia had one of the most powerful intellects I have ever encountered, anywhere, but for a young woman in Sylvia's circumstances, in the mid-1930s, college was completely out of the question.



The one detail of her childhood that I have heard her describe often was of her trips to the library, where she could take out books for free. Sylvia had a life-long love affair with books and with libraries. She did attend Hebrew School, by the way, and did very well. Her daughter Nancy still has a watch that Sylvia won as a prize in Hebrew. Until Nancy showed me yesterday a picture of a youthful Sylvia, I had never seen Sylvia as a young woman. You can see that picture out in the lobby and I urge you to have a look. She was beautiful; not glamorous...but radiant.

To earn money in the summertime, and to get out of the heat of the city, Sylvia went to work at a modest hotel in the Catskills, like many young Jews of her generation. Summer in the Catskills was a highlight of Sylvia's early life. It was the era of big band jazz, with Benny Goodman and the like, and Sylvia loved to dance. Walter Glass was working as a waiter or busboy at the same hotel, and at the end of the summer, Walter accidentally left his lock on his locker at the hotel and someone suggested that Sylvia take that lock back to Walter in the Bronx, which she did, and that is when they started dating.

Nancy is pretty sure that Sylvia and Walter's wedding was a city hall wedding, and that Sylvia wore a suit and hat, and maroon gloves. The truth is that Walter's mother was not thrilled with her new daughter-in-law. Sylvia was a little too lower class, and too short for Walter, who stood 6 feet tall. But Walter must have been absolutely in love with Sylvia; not only did he marry Sylvia over





his mother's objections, but he agreed to Sylvia's unwavering requirement that her mother Rachel was part of the package and would live with them until she died. And sure enough, when Nancy and Marjorie were growing up, they shared a room with Sylvia's mother Rachel...their old-world orthodox Jewish grandmother who spoke no English and was so strictly traditional that she only once ever permitted a photograph to be taken of her.

Life was not easy. Sylvia suffered one of the most devastating losses of her life when her sister Lillian died, in her mid-20s. Love and loss was a huge theme in Sylvia's life.

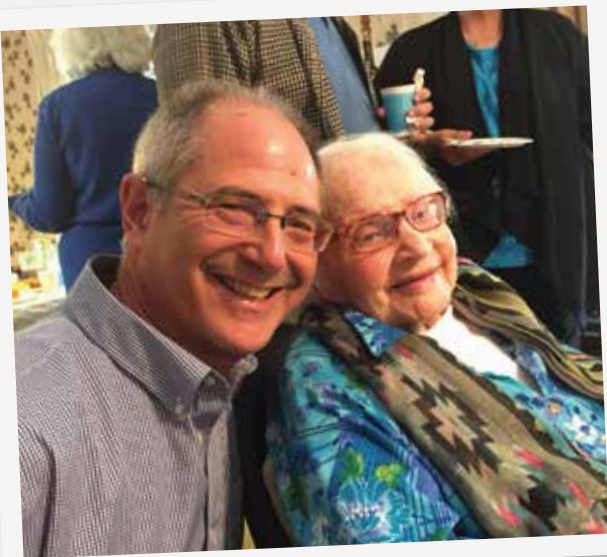
It was still the Depression in the early years of their marriage, and Walter was struggling financially. He was an

artist, extremely talented, but it was a struggle to make a living. He wound up working for the famous industrial designer Russell Wright. And then in the mid-1950s, Walter was hired by Hughes Aircraft...who recognized his remarkable innate talent for design, his ability to see in three dimensions, and hired him long distance, to come to California and work designing aircraft components.

As Nancy says, Walter had an engineer's mind and an artist's soul. So the family went out west, traveling three days by train. They left the Bronx, and the world of the Glass family, and regular family gatherings of twenty or thirty people, to come to Los Angeles, palm trees and sunshine and beautiful tall people. Nancy and Marjorie were short geeky kids with glasses and thick New York accents.... their world turned upside down.

In Los Angeles, Sylvia took the civil service exam and landed a satisfying job with the LA Unified School District, working in the audio-visual department. She always saw it as a triumph of American democracy that whoever you were, it did not matter if you had gone to college, if you scored well on the civil service exam you could get a well-paying job, with benefits. And she has continued to receive her pension from LA Unified Schools unto this very day! Sylvia also developed lifelong friendships there, with whom she never lost touch.

They lived in LA until the mid-60s, but Walter wanted to get out of the city. The smog was horrendous, and eventually, Walter lost his vision, a terrible blow for an artist, and he had to take early retirement. At that point there was nothing holding them in LA and they began to



**Top-bottom:** Sylvia signing her *Children of the Covenant* ketubah (see pg. 26); Sylvia with Rabbi Cohen at her 103rd birthday party (2016).

**Opposite:** Armando Quiros, Sylvia, and Erika Kahn (2013).

“ *The final chapter of Sylvia's life could not have been more remarkable.* ”

look up the coast for a new place to settle, and they fell in love with Santa Barbara. For Sylvia in particular, it had to be a place where a person could live as a Jew, and she fell in love with this congregation. They flourished here.

She joined the Citizens Planning Association, and developed a reputation in this town as a brilliant and passionate fighter. She would take on anyone and was not impressed with power. She got involved with the League of Women's Voters, and the Braille Institute which provided Walter with his beloved books on tape. Sylvia got involved with the Temple sisterhood, and Hadassah, and perhaps her greatest passion, the Temple library. The library was her pride and joy, and she brought it to life not just with books but with book discussions and current events discussions.

Walter's health went downhill and the year 2002 was horrible for Sylvia. Walter died and then, tragically, Marjorie died in the midst of what was supposed to be a simple eye operation. To all of us who knew her, it seemed impossible that Sylvia...then in her mid-eighties...could ever find joy in life again. But the strength of her spirit in those years became more and more miraculous. When she was awarded the Viola Girsh Award for a lifetime of service to CBB, I saw Sylvia as the living embodiment of the Biblical phrase *chazak ve'ematz*. Be strong and of good courage.

Somewhere around this time, Sylvia's daughter Nancy moved to Santa Barbara, to be near Sylvia and to help her. Nancy, I know I speak for everyone here in saying that you have been a wonderful daughter.

The final chapter of Sylvia's life could not have been more remarkable. When we renewed and rededicated our Holocaust Torah scroll, Sylvia entered the sanctuary in her wheelchair, carrying the scroll. It was not clear to me who was more honored in that moment, the scroll or Sylvia? When it became too difficult for Sylvia to come to the Temple, the weekly lunch and learn study group began meeting regularly at Sylvia's house.



As it became harder for Sylvia to get out, I would get calls...and I am certain I am not the only one. I would pick up the phone and there was Sylvia: "You have been neglecting me!" and then when I came to visit, she would declare "I love you." When I would ask Sylvia what I should talk about in my sermons, her answer was consistently: "Tell them the importance of love. It is the only thing that matters, and you can never run out of it."

It was about seven years ago, that Sylvia became involved with a younger man, the ex-Franciscan priest and wise sage of our community, Armando Quiros. It began with music, with Armando coming over on Sundays, to listen to music with Sylvia. Eventually it became every day. Armando would come before dinnertime. They would eat, listen to music, play scrabble. And Armando would leave promptly each evening at 8pm. Sylvia and Armando found love together, and she would laugh heartily and declare "I am proof that it is never too late to find love!"

When my own father came out to Santa Barbara in 2004, and met Sylvia, he told her that he was appointing her *in loco parentis*...my surrogate parent out here. For our entire community, Sylvia Glass has been closer than many of our own family members. Sylvia has been to us mother, sister, lover. Teacher. Study partner. Majestic queen. Thundering prophet. Loving friend. At last, her long wait is over, and now she is with her family on high. But her spirit is right here among us and will be as long as any of us still walk this earth. *Zecher tzadeket livracha*. The memory of Sylvia Glass, this extraordinary, righteous woman will be a blessing for all of us for the rest of our lives. ■



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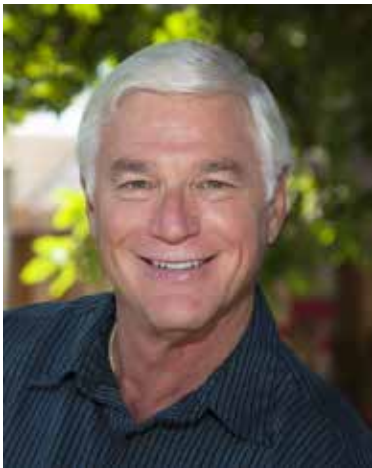


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**September 1** Selichot

**September 9** Erev Rosh Hashanah

**September 10** Rosh Hashanah

**September 18** Erev Yom Kippur

**September 19** Yom Kippur

