

# VOICES

Congregation B'nai B'rith

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## FOCUS: YEAR OF STORIES

### Where I Came From

Sara Miller McCune, Founder of Sage Publishing and Philanthropist, Looks Back

*Interview by Rabbi Steve Cohen*

This summer, Sara Miller McCune and I managed to find some time together, for a relaxed conversation about her Jewish background and how it has shaped her, and her thoughts about Judaism's wisdom for our generation. Although Sara and I have known each other for over twenty years, I was surprised and delighted by many of her reminiscences. We are honored and grateful to Sara for allowing us to share some of her story with the rest of the CBB family.

**Sara, I'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about your Jewish upbringing. Could you tell me a little bit about your parents and where they came from, and where did you come from?**

I was born in New York City as were both my parents, Rose Glass Miller and Nat Miller. Their parents on both sides had immigrated; on my mother's side, from a small town outside of Warsaw, and my dad's side from Georgia (Russia).

My maternal grandfather had been the kind of lumberjack in Poland who could look at a tree and estimate how many board feet of lumber you could get from it. But there wasn't much business



of that type to be had in New York City. He traveled as far as Texas but had no luck, and so returned to New York and learned a new trade as a kosher butcher, which he remained all his working life. He was a Kohen and proud of it, and very devoted to his religious observance.

My paternal grandfather, Benjamin Miller, was a tailor and came to this country with my grandmother Ester Miller, who was five-foot tall and ruled the entire family. With my grandmother's drive, they bought the brownstone buildings housing the tailor shop.

**So how did your parents meet?**

My mother grew up in Far Rockaway in Long Island. They went out on a blind date, but did not at first continue dating. Then she was in a car accident and had broken some ribs. Since my dad had sort of liked her personality, he came around to see what she looked like after she got out of her casts. Well, he liked what he saw and he stuck around for the better part of two years until my mother's mother said, "you know you're taking up a

*Continued on page 12*



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# CBB Resource Guide

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# Stories *and* *the* Meaning *of* Our Lives

By Rabbi Steve Cohen



**LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY**, in the old world, before we crossed the sea to America, a Jew woke at sunrise to greet the day. It might have been a freezing cold morning in a small village in Romania. Or perhaps an already warm morning in Morocco, and quickly becoming hot. It was anywhere in the old world. The Jew woke and washed his face and hands, and began the early morning prayers.

First, a prayer thanking God for restoring his soul to his body. Then, another giving thanks that his body was still functioning. Next, a series of blessings tracking the slow but steady return of consciousness. A blessing taking note of the crowing of the rooster.

Followed by others paying close attention to the simple acts of opening the eyes, of taking the first steps of the day, of getting dressed.

A blessing for each one of these moments, nothing taken for granted.

And then, every morning, still half asleep, the old world Jew would read, or recite by heart, a story. The story we read every Rosh Hashanah, the Binding of Isaac. Every single day of his or her life, from early childhood until the day he or she died, the Jew began the day with this story.

This is an historical fact. In century after century, in every corner of the globe, Jews began every day of their life by reciting the story of the Binding of Isaac. What a strange and terrifying way to start the day! Here is the story, distilled down into a single sentence: God tells Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son and then at the very last moment says "Stop. Don't do it."

That's it!.....Have great day!

What happens to a people who for one thousand years reads this story every morning, upon waking up, before starting their day? How does a story shape a people? How can a story change life, even today in Santa Barbara, California?

My view is that stories and storytelling are fundamental to our existence as human beings. Each one of us needs strong, complex, deeply true stories to survive and to thrive, just as surely as we need food and water. For most of the 100,000 years of human evolution, we *homo sapiens* have gathered in our families under the shade of a tree, or around the fire, and told each other old stories. Myths and legends. Folk tales and fairy tales. For tens of thousands of years. We walked together out of Africa, across Europe, across Asia. And as we walked we told each other stories. At the end of every day, we put our children to bed, and told them stories.

Our stories connected us to each other, to our ancestors, to our own subconscious minds, and to the divine. Human beings, all of us, are storytellers and story lovers. Storytelling must be embedded in our human DNA.

In our particular case, the Jews, the stories of the Torah—Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Joseph and his brothers, Jacob's Dream, Moses in the bulrushes, and perhaps most shockingly and most fundamentally, Abraham and the Binding of Isaac — these stories held us together as a people, across the centuries as we spread out across the continents. Everywhere we went, we told these stories. We passed them down to our children and grandchildren. They were our treasure, our heritage, our shared language and our eternal source of meaning.

In every generation, our own physical bodies eventually grew old and died. But our stories remained vibrantly alive. Our stories

lived forever.

But then we came to America, where the technology and commerce of modern life have shattered the traditional rhythms of Jewish life. We no longer begin our day with prayer or with story. The first hours of our day, in fact of our days, are consumed by email and smartphones, by Facebook and by television. What has become of our stories?

We are story-starved, desperately hungry for old stories, home-grown stories, sweet and spicy, even bitter stories. Stories that rise up from the depths of the human soul, rich with mystery and ambiguity, resonant with unanswered questions and the strivings of the human spirit. This is our hunger. The vast majority of stories offered by popular American culture are the literary equivalent of Twinkies, processed potato chips, and candy bars. Narrative junk food is everywhere we turn. Reality TV. Simplistic, formulaic movies created for the sole purpose of making money.

Now let me be clear, I watch junk TV every day at the gym! I'm happy to watch *Law and Order*, or *NCIS*, or *Friends*, or whatever installment of *Rambo* or *Iron Man* happens to be on the movie channel. I enjoy them....but I also enjoy candy bars. Ask anyone who knows me!

We consume all this junk because we are starving for meaningful stories...but they fill us with empty calories. They do not satisfy our spiritual hunger.

I wonder whether this spiritual hunger might partly explain why our national political discourse has become so shallow, so empty, and so angry. Starved for meaning and nourishment, we snarl and snap at each other. Our physical bellies are full, but a deeper hunger makes us miserable.

In this time of famine, I think that here at Congregation B'nai B'rith, we can feed each other. We feed each other in Mashey Bernstein's short story group, in our Netivot classes, in the many book groups around town (at least the ones where they actually talk about books!), and especially in our Shabbat Torah study, we are diving down into the old stories of our people, stories that some of us have been reading together for 30 years. And the stories bind us together.

We are Jews. We know the spiritual power of story. This year at CBB, we are stepping up our efforts to provide alternatives to the American narrative junk food diet. This will be "the Year of the Story." We will come together here in this building and in each other's homes, to tell stories. The old stories of our people. And the stories of our own lives. Watch for details. ■

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# “Father, Who Am I?”

By Marina Stephens

“Are you a Jew or a Kike?” the girl asks me as soon as she approaches, point blank, in a conversational, friendly tone.

**I LOOK HER OVER.** She is taller than me by a couple of inches. Her hair of settled dry hay is pulled back into a spunky ponytail. The eyes of the North, those grey-blue Nordic eyes belonging to most Slavic people, appraise me in return with child-like curiosity. And why should they not?

This is our first day of the first grade at school in Leningrad, and it is 1967. We are all new here, taking stock of one another.

At six, I have never heard the word “Kike” before. I hesitate. I have no idea what she is talking about. Kike sounds like just another blah-blah adult word I have no use for and which no one bothered to explain, like “license.” On the other hand, no first grader attired in a brand-new uniform brown dress with starched white collar and equally blindingly white apron, would freely admit ignorance of any subject to a classmate she just met. The future lawyer in me suggested subtle evasion.

“Which one are you?” I answer with a question, nonchalantly.

“Neither. I am Russian.” The girl replies

with admirable conviction.

“Me too.” I say to end the conversation. The girl is not to be deterred, though. She takes a step back and takes me all in, appraising me from head to toe.

“I don’t think so.” She states unequivocally, like a doctor giving you a more than certain diagnosis. No second opinion necessary. “You look like a Jew.”

“How is that?” I ask, now curious myself.

“Well, you know,” she says after slight hesitation, “dark hair, dark eyes...”

The girl speaks the truth. I do have dark curly hair and brown eyes. I shrug my shoulders, getting tired of the whole thing.

“So, maybe you are right, maybe I am a Jew.” I say and then ask as an afterthought. “What’s a Kike?”

“A Kike is a bad Jew.” The girl explains patiently. Then adds diplomatically. “But most Jews are just Jews. I don’t think you are a Kike.”

“There are five Jews in our class. You included.” She points them out to me one by one. “But luckily only one Kike, I think. That fat one, Leo Goldstein.” We both stare at the boy who is blissfully picking his nose in total ignorance of being judged.

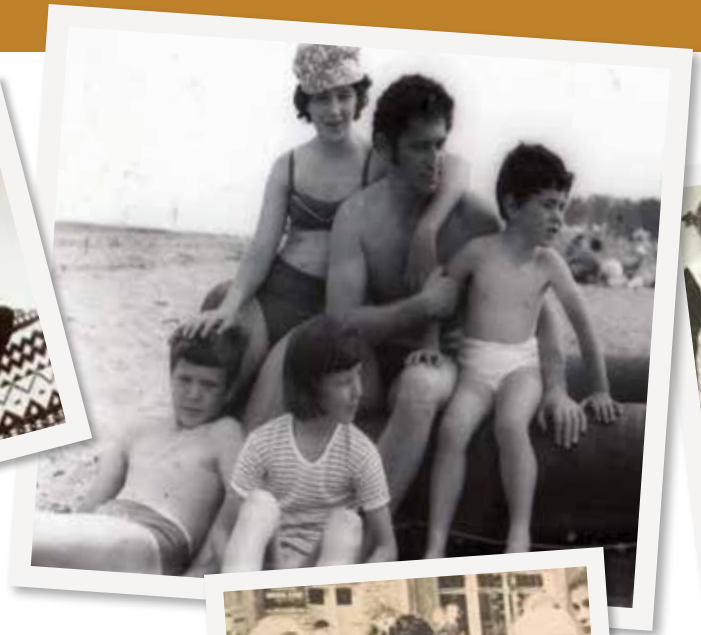
“He may be a Kike.” I agree.

The girl seems wise to me beyond our years, full of mysteriously learned knowledge.

“How do you know all this?” I finally ask, admitting her superiority.

“My mother is a teacher here in school.” She says proudly. “History.”

That explains it. My father is a geologist, and so I know a lot about rocks and geo-







**Left side:** George Mirkin (Marina's father) c. 1970; Marina with her father, brother, and cousins in the Gulf of Finland, c. 1972; Marina on the first day of 1st grade, 1967, Leningrad, USSR. **Right side:** School #318, Leningrad, USSR, Grade 2b, 1970; Marina's exit visit from the USSR, December 1978.

logical ages, and even what plate tectonics is, which I am sure no one else in my grade would know.

"So, do you want to be friends?" The girl asks. "I am Helena."

"Sure." I say without any hesitation. "I am Marina."

By the end of the day we agree to become best friends. The subject matter of our first conversation all but behind us.

My father picks me up from school and

we walk, hand in hand, seven blocks home along a wide boulevard lined with still green linden trees, quick to shed a few yellow leaves first kissed by the early September fall. Dad is my walking encyclopedia, my prototype of Google, yet to come. He has a photographic memory and knows everything about everything, at least as far as his six-year-old daughter is concerned. There is no question he cannot answer.

"Dad, am I a Jew?" I ask.

Father skips a step. As the matter of fact, he stops entirely and lets go of my hand. Another first.

A moment later he reclaims my hand and propels me forward.

"Why do you ask?" He looks into my face intently, and all of a sudden I realize that this is something important, something I need to pay attention to. I stop.

"You are a Jew. We all are. The entire family. And a

lot of our friends. We are an ancient and exceptional people, with a long and dramatic history. Do you know that we gave the world some of the most admired and influential men and women? Let me tell you all about it..."

I could not wait to get to school the next day. I was bursting with pride for being a Jew. I shared with Helena all that I learned, and after some consideration she decided that being Jewish was much better than she ever thought, despite what

## The Only Jew

By Ruby Campbell, Age 10

**I have lived in** lots of different places. In England, Barbados and here, Santa Barbara. But in my Barbados years, almost all locals observed the Christian faith, making me one of about 10 Jewish kids on the island.

Every Tuesday at school, we were given a religious speech/story on "The power of Christ." We would then say The Lord's Prayer. I didn't say this prayer for the last year, the year when I told the teachers that because I was Jewish I was uncomfortable saying the prayer. I would just sit there while everyone else bowed down and prayed.

And before snack and lunch breaks, we would say another prayer thanking G-d for our food. I said those ones. We also said another prayer at the end of the day, before we were dismissed. I think there was something about rising to sunlight.

There was also no Hebrew school there for me to attend. So I took a two-year break from learning Hebrew. Believe it or not, despite the lack of Jews, Barbados hosts one of the oldest Jewish temples in the western hemisphere. But it wasn't very, well, congregated or religious exactly.

So maybe there were 50 Jews on the island. So maybe there are two temples on it. So maybe I said Christian prayers four times a day. But I was a Jewish person all the way through. ■

*Born and raised in London, England till age 7, Ruby spent two years in Barbados and has lived in Santa Barbara with her family since 2016. She loves rock climbing and horseback riding.*

Continued on page 24

# Jewish Storytelling Is My Inheritance

By Rebekah Lovejoy



My own relationship to story telling is deeply impacted by my relationship to film, and to the film industry. I come from a blacklisted Hollywood family, my grandfather was a screen writer during the HUAC era.

**HAVING BEEN RAISED** with a deep connection to film, it made sense that I would go to film school. My second year there, I found myself in a class on Hollywood Exiles. These were filmmakers that had come to the United States from Europe and transformed the film industry with a particular Central European sensibility.

What I found especially fascinating was that I was not only learning about the specific relationship between Hollywood Cinema and a strand of European storytelling, I was also as it turns out, learning about Jewish film history. This particular topic is dear to me, as all of my Jewish roots are couched in my mother's red diaper Hollywood upbringing.

I often describe myself as coming from "the other Jews." Meaning secular Marxist Jews. But in many ways I also mean Hollywood. Which brings me to the question, why do Judaism, Hollywood, and Marxism seem to move in the same company so easily? So much so that the Marxist Hollywood Intellectual Jew is a stereotype found laced throughout popular culture?

I posit that it is an aspect of Jewish storytelling that makes this true. In graduate school I studied Mythology. A myth is a story by which a particular culture defines its worldview. In our class on Judaism the professor pointed out that Jewish mythology does not look like mythology, but in fact reads like linear history. She noted that this move to write an origin narrative as history,

is in fact a part of the mythology and worldview of Judaism.

No culture prior had an origin myth like the Torah, in which the characters and the actions described read as a linear documentation of real human action. When we add the primary belief of free will, and the notion that we are in co-creation with God, what develops is a way of thinking and being in the world that shapes our assumptions, our directives, and our story telling that is identifiably Jewish.

We have a notion of social justice because our mythology tells us that we can make a difference. We emphasize narratives of memory, and we track the lives of our congregations, births, and deaths, because each individual is a part of the story, each psyche and their behavior within the community, impacts the thriving of the community, and alters the human story and the future, in one direction or another. Therefore each individual life is uniquely important. We don't deal in cycles of karma, or fate, we are direct actors in the progression of the universe. Our story telling and our humor reflect this.

In addition to our mythology that human history is linear, the last two thousand years of Jewish religious discourse has emphasized the juxtaposition of written and oral Torah. The tradition of Midrashic discourse has developed a strange relationship to how we reason, and argue with the questions of narrative. Unlike other traditional works, that emphasize a sort of perfect repetition, Midrash gives us an evolution, a moving conversation that never ends, and requires only our curiosity and struggle with meaning itself, informed by past conversation.

I have been thrilled to sit in Torah Study with hundreds of years of rabbinic creative thought available to me, in which the mean-

ing and possibilities of Torah unfold with the historical Rabbis' individual imaginations. Each Rabbi's current cultural moment activates their argument. This provides a relationship to narrative in which questions instead of answers, and situations rather than simply goals, are valued and given precedence.

Midrash develops a long-term dialogue, where storytellers who understand the story that came before them, and can add to that story, are the strongest narrators. Thus reference, memory, and reinvention, are leveraged as elements of Jewish creativity. This later plays in to forms of entertainment, Yiddish theater, vaudeville, comic book, and film culture.

I often joke that I am a Jew because my mother is Jewish, and my dad (who is not Jewish) is a Marxist, which makes me totally Jewish. While Marx was not Jewish (though descended from rabbis), I think of him as one of our modern day Jewish prophets. Like the prophet Amos, he insists on the redistribution of wealth as a form of sustainable social construct. Marx systematically describes in beautiful language, and minute detail, exactly how to write about the material world, "the real."

Marx is important to my story, not as a political actor, but rather as a foundation for my understanding of structured story telling. Thinking and existing within an understanding of materialism, as constructed by Marx, makes it possible to create the classical Hollywood Narrative. Materialist analysis informs the ideologies of the Modern Man, which run through the standards of American movie narrative.

Much of American Culture was invented by Jewish storytellers: the Hollywood blonde, the Modern Maverick idealist, the heroic cowboy, the American nuclear family, the creative urbanite yearning to self express, even superheroes. Popular culture is riddled with a large assimilation project, in which Jews began to fit themselves in to the American dream, using all of their story telling skills, and all of their hopes of finally finding a home in which to be safe, free, and assimilated into the larger population.

My Judaism is inextricably tied to the storytelling of film and television. I am Jewish in the way that I tell a story, and the way I experience story. My Judaism is also my media consumption. I cannot make sense of the one without the other.

My grandfather, a scrappy, intelligent kid from the Lower East Side, wrote Westerns and working class comedies. He transformed his own street wisdom into macho stories about pirates and outlaws. Hollywood is many things. Many people are deeply involved in creating the images and rituals that we experience

as our collective theater. And within this narrative pastiche is a tribal project of Jewish storytelling to weave itself into the American narrative. It is an illustration of the feedback between the outsider fantasy of belonging, and the creation of what belonging means, as it is made conscious and defined by this outsider fantasy.

We tell stories to make sense of our situation. We tell stories to change our situation. We tell stories to entertain ourselves and distract from our situation. And in all cases these stories feed the vision of what we know. Culture is the stories we tell ourselves, about us.

Never has this been more true than now, at this stage in the information age, where a large population of the planet can access any, and all, stories, that have ever been written and digitized for our consumption. Understanding our place within the experience of storytelling, and the impact storytelling has on us, is essential if we are to make sense of our current moment. ■



*Photo: Rebekah's grandparents, Mitch and Constance Lindemann, just before the 1950s Hollywood Blacklist.*

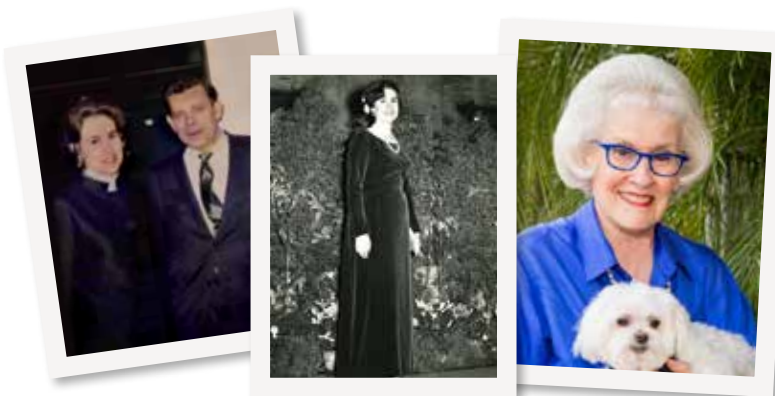


Sarah Miller McCune, *continued from cover*

lot of valuable time. Are you going to move forward with this relationship? Because if not you should move on." As a result he proposed, they got married, and they had me.

**Bravo! I guess he just needed a little encouragement. Now, can you tell me about your education?**

At that time in the 1940s, Jewish education was not a high priority for girls, particularly lower middle class girls. So I never had any Hebrew education. We moved from Manhattan to the Bronx for five years. We lived in the south Bronx, which was rapidly becoming a war zone, so we moved to Queens. And I stayed in Queens through junior high school, high school, and



then Queen's College, which became part of the City University of New York.

My high school years were devoted to two types of extracurricular activities. One was taking singing and tap dancing lessons, and even a short try at ballet. But according to my ballet teacher my knees were too protuberant. She couldn't smack them into alignment so we gave up on that.

Tap-dancing, I performed Vaudeville skits for veterans in old age homes; it was a lot of fun in its way and it gave me a good sense in timing. I was never a good tap dancer, I was an even worse singer. But I liked drama and acted in some off-Broadway plays. I even had some walk on parts on television in its early black and white days.

My other activity was getting very active with B'nai B'rith Girls.

**I was just going to ask you about that. You became International President; how did that happen?**

My mother was very active with B'nai B'rith women. My father was too busy with work. But my father's mother had donated a new Torah to our synagogue so we were pretty active in the synagogue. We observed all the Jewish holidays and festivals, and I particularly enjoyed Hanukkah, Passover and the High

Holy Days. I was counselor at Camp B'nai B'rith and learned about things like Tisha B'Av and thought that was a beautiful holiday. So my religious experience came largely through the B'nai B'rith youth program. I ultimately became International President. I remember kicking off Israeli bond campaigns in New York and making speeches all over the United States. It honed my ability to do public speaking.

**How did you get into publishing?**

After college, I worked at the Macmillan company in New York. I spent another year at Pergamum Press in Oxford, then returned to New York and opened Sage Publications.

When the company was about a year and a half old, I was persuaded by George McCune that I should move the company to California, where there were more opportunities to do academic social science publishing, and to get away from the dyed-in-the-wool "we do it this way" attitude of the New York publishers.

George and I got married about three months later. At the insistence of my parents we were married by the only rabbi in Southern California who would marry a Jew and a non-Jew, William Mordecai Kramer.

**Sara, I'd like to ask you now, not about your story, but about your thinking. About Judaism and Jewish identity.**

Even though I didn't learn the phrase *tikkun olam* until later, I always had the feeling that we Jews have had an ethical worldview. That we have good ideas to offer people as to the way good lives can be lived. To have that and to be proud of that as a part of your people's tradition always meant a lot to me.

The reason I started the magazine *Pacific Standard* was so that we could focus on journalism that explained these issues in terms the layperson could understand. What I call four justices: economic justice, educational justice, environmental justice, and social justice.

If we can have civil discourse around these ideas, we can improve upon the human situation. We can improve how our cities work. We can improve how our organizations work. We can improve how our governments work.

I don't say it in a Pollyanna sort of way. There are specific things that each and every individual can do that will help. That's why I'm in the education business. It's not just the publishing business, it's the education business.

It's why I like being a part of organizations that are trying to build and make a better world, which is what our congregation at CBB does just as surely as what a socially conscious business does. I like to encourage that and to see that. ■



# Light Drives Out the Darkness

## A Profile of the Sisters of Salaam Shalom

By Mahela Morrow-Jones

Eleven of us crowd around the kitchen table filled with notepads amid plates of hummus, *sholo zard* (Persian rice pudding), apple cake, and teacups. We take turns listening to each other's stories, poems, experiences, ideas.

**WHICH IS WHEN ONE OF US**, a Muslim sister with piercing brown-gold eyes, offers the latest example of pointless intolerance: "She was speaking Farsi with a newly-arrived friend, when two tables over a woman stood up, glared, and proclaimed, 'English only, please!' This happened right here on State Street. We were silenced."

We all cluck our tongues.

"But the Torah says when a foreigner resides among you in your land, love them as yourself; treat them as your native-born." That's one of our Jewish sisters, a Preschool teacher whose practical side helps all of us to cut to the chase.

Another sister, more boisterous than the first speaker and very active in the local Muslim community, pipes up: "And the Holy Qu'ran says to welcome the stranger

and make them feel comfortable; do not mistreat them."

"How can we rethink our reaction to this incident so the lady in the coffee shop might understand.... there is no 'us and them'? How do we eliminate the idea of the 'other' in our own hearts?"

On and on we go, a typical monthly meeting of the Santa Barbara Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. I've been a member for more than three years, ever since my friend Judy Mannenberg-Goldman, also a temple member, told me about this energetic group that had started on the East coast.

As Judy explained the goals of the National Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, an opportunity for study and commitment to "waging peace" revealed itself. Judy and I decided we had to start a chapter right then.

Ours was the first West Coast group, and, whatever your politics, it's not a surprise that given the current polarized political climate, SoSS has gained national prominence. The grassroots group now claims more than 50 chapters in 20 states, and our work was featured prominently in *The*

*New York Times* last December.

We spent eight months developing the group, creating an agenda, inviting women with the bandwidth to devote to the cause, selecting officers, and brainstorming a wide range of goals. Now, three years later, we're 13 members strong and many of us have established strong and enduring friendships outside our regular meetings.

Our process is two-fold. First, we gather in someone's home to discuss a pre-selected topic, about which we've given some thought. We learn about each other's families, origins, and our individual ways of thinking. From Rumi and Spinoza to the Qu'ran and Torah, we investigate

*Continued on page 24*



# Thomas and Sissy:

## *A Friendship*

By Franny Taran Freund



"Stop! Eat! For \$13... eat!" Thomas is abruptly interrupted by his Jewish "mother," Sissy Taran. The three of us meet at McConnell's Ice Cream and Yogurt so Thomas can have a banana split. For the past half hour, Thomas has taken me on a spiritual journey. He speaks soulfully and whole-heartedly about his relationship with Judaism, the Jewish people, and Shabbat. "Cut the banana!" Obliging, he eats a few bites and continues with his story.

**"IF YOU KEEP SHABBAT, GOD WILL KEEP YOU."** Thomas shares his motivation to attend every Friday night service at Congregation B'nai B'rith. In the past 15 years, he has missed only seven or eight services.

Thomas Alexander Connors loves Shabbat and has become a fixture at CBB Friday night services. He always sits in the front row to focus on candles, to meditate, and to pray. "I'm trying to learn and take it in."

He's always the first to arrive for Shabbat. He studies the siddur intensely. Thomas loves to listen to Cantor Mark Childs' singing and Rabbi Steve Cohen's sermons. He drinks grape juice for the Oneg Shabbat prayers and enthusiastically dances to every Israeli folk song. Thomas exemplifies how to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy as is commanded to the Jews... And he is Roman-Catholic.

How did a devout Roman-Catholic become a devout Shabbat observer? This is the question that has brought me to the ice cream parlor today. Thomas explains that in his teens he was "intrigued by 'God's chosen people.'" While studying and practicing Catholicism, he noticed that the Roman-Catholic Church was based on Jewish people. "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and all of the Apostles were Jewish." Thomas wondered, "What are they doing different from me?"

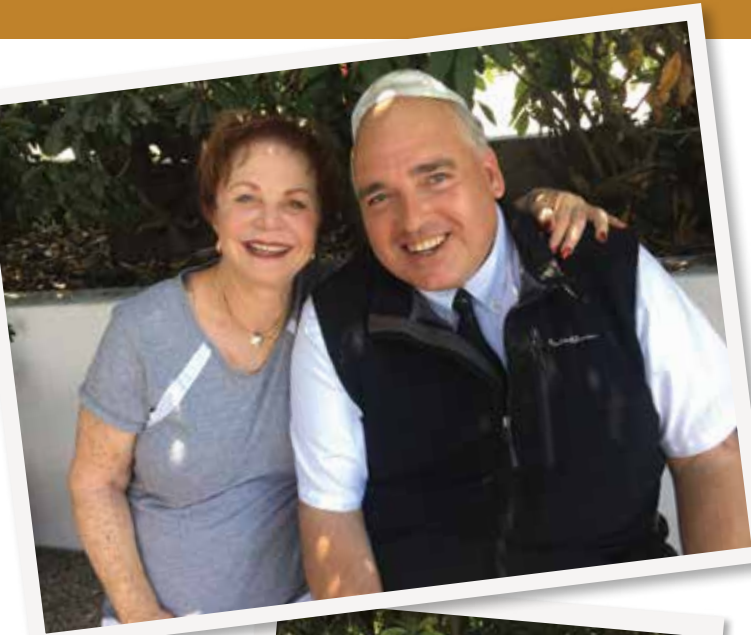
Thomas recalls in meticulous detail the first time he went to temple. *The Santa Barbara News-Press*, Section A, page 4 or 5, read "If you want to come to the Jewish temple, give us a call." Janet Laiches answered his call and took him to his first service. "I was glad to be there, nervous... I wanted to wear a yarmulke. I wasn't aware of the significance of candle lighting." Rabbi Richard Shapiro and Cantor Mark led services.

Thomas finds his own way to temple. "I catch the Line 3 near Oak Park at 12:30 or 1:00 p.m. It arrives every 30 minutes. Then I run errands - go to the bank, my mom's burial site, errands..." A few more busses, and then "I walk up Via Los Santos to CBB. About a third of the time, a temple member will pick me up and take me the rest of the way to CBB."

Listening to Thomas' journey, I am in awe of his commitment and dedication attending Shabbat services. I think the commute to temple from Carpinteria is too long.

I wonder, "Why is a devout Roman-Catholic devoting half of his Friday to Shabbat?" "I want to prepare now for the Messianic reign." Thomas believes that the Messiah is going to be Jewish. He wants to learn about Judaism and be prepared for eternal life. "The eternal life gets me up in the morning, where I hope to reunite with my mother and father."

Over the years, Thomas has immersed himself in learning about



**Left:** Sissy Taran and Thomas Connors.

**Below:** Thomas eats ice cream and dishes on his close relationship to Judaism.



Judaism. He took Introduction to Judaism and wants to take Hebrew. "I've learned about Holidays and their significance over the years. I would love to read the books in the small chapel."

"At first, I was so focused on the Jewish religion, I almost forgot about the Jewish people. But the Jewish people make up the Jewish religion." He gushes over Cantor Mark, "the one constant." "He's a people person." Thomas loves talking sports with Marshall Abrams. "He knows everything about sports," Sissy chimes in. Thomas met his Jewish "mother" in 2003 when she and Bernie started driving him home from temple. Bob Ingram and other temple members drive him home when Sissy isn't there.

The most influential CBB member in Thomas' life was Armando Quiros. He was a Franciscan priest who converted to Judaism. "Armando's journey made my journey easier." Thomas stands

for Mourner's Kaddish every Friday night to remember Armando Quiros and visits his tree in the outdoor chapel.

Elie Wiesel is one of the "top five most influential human beings I've ever met." Mr. Wiesel's autobiography, *Night*, was the first book assigned at St. Anthony's Seminary where Thomas attended high school, and Thomas was inspired by Wiesel's survival in the Holocaust. "Judaism saved his sanity. If it can heal him... imagine what Judaism can do for someone like me." In 2004 or 2005, Thomas had the honor of meeting Mr. Wiesel at the Arlington. He got his autograph and said "Thank you."

I ask Thomas if he's ever thought of converting to Judaism. "It would be difficult to give up the sacraments." He attends mass every Saturday afternoon at the Mission and has only missed four or five masses in over eighteen years. "Any void or emptiness I find from Roman-Catholicism, I get from Judaism. Some of it is difficult to put into words. It is a spiritual mystery."

Sissy grabs Thomas' hand. "You're as good a Jew as you are a Catholic. You are a bridge between the two. Stay true to who you are." Then, the Jewish mother emerges again: "You need some lotion. Your hands are rough."

"I hope you know what you have," Thomas says to me. "You're born into it... the depths of spiritual religion. Judaism is the tree trunk of all religions."

"Thomas always says 'Shabbat Shalom'. Whether it's Sunday, Monday, Tuesday..." laughs Sissy. Thomas also lights Shabbat candles at home all week long. "Shabbat means everything."

After two hours of talking and an empty ice cream bowl, we hug and say "Shabbat Shalom." (It's Thursday). I leave feeling more grateful for my own upbringing as a Jew. Who knew it would take a Roman-Catholic to inspire me to drive all the way from Carpinteria to attend Shabbat services? Thank you, Thomas and Shabbat Shalom! ■

*Franny Taran Freund joined CBB as a teen when her family moved to Santa Barbara. Now, as a mother of two, Franny engages in the community as Mitzvah Day co-chair and developing Netivot curriculum.*

# Finding a Third Way at CBB

By Monica Steiner

Juri Holmes and her husband David joined CBB two years ago when their children began attending BHY Preschool. Since then, Dave has attended nearly every Friday Shabbat service, and Juri volunteers her professional photography skills for CBB events, has connected with other preschool parents, and is a regular participant in the CBB Women of Wisdom (WoW) discussion group.

**LIKE MANY** of our most valued volunteer leaders, Juri is not Jewish and says she has no plans to convert. She grew up in Japan, and had never even heard of Judaism until she moved to the US at age nine.

"Before I met Dave, I knew nothing. I knew the word *Hanukkah*, but not the story."

Yet she recognizes that longstanding themes in her life fit right into the Jewish tradition—and into ongoing conversations at CBB: how to live an ethical life, how to raise our children well, and how to authentically connect with our heritage, each other, and our community.

As a 6th grade teacher at Foothill Elementary, Juri is curious and open, but she also qualifies her thoughts as coming from someone who "doesn't know enough to form a complete opinion."

And yet she's done a marvelous job of weaving together both her Jewish learning and her Japanese background.

Take ancestry. "I believe that people who have passed away in my family are looking after me, and I feel like I get these signs here and there. I don't literally see my ancestors or anything, but I do feel like they're protecting me.

"It seems like everyone at CBB can

understand each other because their ancestors went through a lot of harsh treatment throughout history, in Egypt all the way up to World War II and even now.

"Because of all this, I used to feel uncomfortable in services at CBB. How can I sit there and participate in this religion when nobody in my family has experienced similar mistreatment?"

At least that's how she felt when she and David first become involved at CBB. But she notices changes in herself.

"I think I've opened up a lot more. For example, I feel comfortable with Tot Shabbat because it's so short and more kid-oriented.

"When I started to read *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, by Wendy Mogel, I saw it had a lot of religiously observant language, and yet I found myself agreeing with everything — even the stories and quotes from the Torah and Talmud."

Even so, she still wrestles with God language.

In services, I've sat there and maybe twice I've felt like there's a bigger being that I'm connecting to. It makes me feel really emotional. It's almost like I don't want to let myself go to that place. I wonder, why

am I getting so emotional over something that I don't even know if I believe in?" She concludes: "I guess I'm not there yet."

But for Juri that place of "not knowing" is a starting place for exploration. As one of the leaders in creating the Women of Wisdom Passover Seder this past spring, she helped create an opportunity for the group to discuss their own journeys from "slavery" to freedom.

"I really enjoyed having that conversation: how we each wanted to be freed," she says. She told the group of women how, for the past decade she'd never used the Exodus story when she taught her students Ancient Civilizations. She used to worry it would be construed as 'too religious.' But because of the Women of Wisdom seder she had a change of heart. "I think it's important for me to teach it, especially the part about slavery."

But even as Juri confesses to the discomfort she felt with introducing these new topics into her class, I point out how it's also made her teaching richer. "Yes," she says, "one thing CBB has taught me is that it's the conversation that's the important thing." ■





# Prayer Circle



On May 24, we dedicated a new space for spiritual repose. The dozen benches were beautifully built and painted by Isaac Lewis (above) as part of his Bar Mitzvah project. This inspired our Academy students to install the Prayer Circle, located behind the patio.



# Yahrzeit Project

This summer the Men of B'nai B'rith (MOBB) installed a new elegant, expandable yahrzeit memorial plaque system, designed by congregant Steven Handelman, in the Girsh-Hochman Sanctuary. To purchase a plaque in memory of a loved one, visit [cbbsb.org/give](http://cbbsb.org/give) or contact [audrey@cbbsb.org](mailto:audrey@cbbsb.org).







# Gratitude in the Garden

Hosted by Meryl and Marc Winnikoff. A special event to thank our Covenant Giving members. Please see page 30 to learn more.





# Summer 2017



Clockwise from left: CBB hiking club, summer ceramics workshop with Kat Martin, and Love. Period celebration at Chase Palm park.





# Skofield Park Campout



Some 20 CBB families turned out to enjoy another a fantastic annual tradition of dinner and campout over Labor Day weekend, September 2-3, 2017.



# Melton: A Room in the House of Judaism

By Nona Fienberg

When I was 63, I prepared to become a Bat Mitzvah.



**EVERY DAY** I practiced my Torah portion, *Bamidbar*, when God impatiently asks Moses, whose wanderers persist in straying, “How long will

this people spurn me?” Moses’s skills as negotiator move God from anger to forgiveness. Instead of punishing the errant people, God issues the clarion call of hope Jews hear echoed each year on the High Holidays, “I pardon, as you have asked,”

I loved the challenge of learning to read the Hebrew with fluency, then to chant it with pleasure. I loved Moses’s chutzpah as he engaged God in thinking again about his troublesome people. To think that Moses’s words might change God’s judgment is a wonder! The process of becoming a Bat Mitzvah transformed me. On June 1, 2013 I celebrated at Temple Adath Yeshurun in Manchester, New Hampshire, sharing my achievement with family, colleagues, and friends.

Three years later, shortly after I retired, my husband Lorne and I moved to Santa Barbara, and joined CBB. By good fortune, our new life in Santa Barbara converged with CBB’s leap into adult Jewish learning in partnership with the Florence Melton School in fall 2016.

The seminar group gathered Thursday evenings to read texts, discuss them, and to learn from extraordinary teachers and

each other. Cantor Mark Childs and Rabbi Steve Cohen brought their cherished gifts as teachers and scholars. Because the seminar was a diverse, inclusive group, participants spoke from vibrantly different perspectives: Jews by choice, second generation Holocaust survivors, Sephardic cultural traditions.

All had made a commitment to Jewish learning, but at the beginning, few knew exactly what that meant. We quickly discovered that the Melton curriculum guides learners through a program of study with Tanakh (Torah, Prophets, Writings) as a foundation.

Each class began with brief texts from that foundation. Rabbi and Cantor challenged us to understand them freshly.

Where does the idea of Mikveh originate and what meaning can it retain today? Given the Torah’s statements about dietary practice, can those rules have contemporary relevance? What are the Mitzvot? What does it mean to be the “chosen people”?

As a college professor, I dedicated much of my career to Holocaust Studies, so when the curriculum raised the topic “Seeking Understanding after the Holocaust,” I found my own scholarly perspective tested. Among our readings, some situated the Holocaust within a historical tradition of God’s treatment of the chosen people based on whether they fully observed the mitzvot and laws.

For me, the readings seemed not to honor Jewish lives. Not to hear God’s clarion call of hope, “I pardon, as you have asked.” I sent Rabbi Steve a frustrated note, and included an essay by Rachel Auerbach, who wrote “Yizkor, 1943” during the worst days of the Warsaw Ghetto. With her catalogue of names, stories, talents, and contributions, Auerbach blesses the perished creators of a once-vibrant Jewish culture in Europe.

That evening, the Rabbi wove Auerbach’s remembrance into our class’ discussion.

Step by step, text by text, individual by individual, Melton study leads participants not to one, single answer, but to further, more informed questions, and to fuller, more informed understanding. Stories and poetry — the stuff of the Tanakh — work that way!

One friend said Melton was like doing a jigsaw puzzle together. Everyone works hard to piece together a careful frame. Sometimes the process dissolves in laughter. Then people bring their distinctive minds and energy to making the complex picture emerge.

Around the seminar table, over coffee, clementines, halvah, hummus, and cookies, Melton participants practice a kind of reading, reflecting, and respectful conversation that also encourages warm intellectual exchange. If it sounds like nosh enhances the sweetness of study, then let it be so!

Over the course of the year, our group bonded and became trusted friends and supporters. A year brings simchas and it brings sadness as well. Melton scholars supported each other around Jewish study and, through that journey, also in life.

*Continued on page 24*

# Sanctuary— *Then & Now* By Evelyn Laser Shlensky



From childhood, Jewish values have been central to my life. The values I absorbed were those I witnessed in my family. My great grandmother was defined by her devotion to *tzedakah*.

My father's volunteer work centered on raising money to bring Jewish refugees to Israel. These beloved exemplars shaped a path for me on which social justice and Judaism walked hand in hand.

That path led me to participation in the Sanctuary Movement, first in the 1980's, and again, now. Refugees and vulnerable populations have always had a special claim on my heart.

The Jewish response to the plight of refugees and immigrants is rooted in both our sacred texts and in our history. Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen wrote that with the protection of the alien (also referred to as "the stranger"), true religion began, for in the alien one discovers the idea of humanity. In other words, human responsibility takes a quantum leap when we affirm that it is not just the members of our own tribe whom we must protect.

My family arrived in Santa Barbara in 1979 just as Southern California was becoming a destination for hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees, primarily from El Salvador and Guatemala, making their way into the United States to escape persecution, atrocities, and war in their homelands. The religious response to their plight became known as the Sanctuary Movement.

After considerable study and discussion, members of the Religious Action Committee at Congregation B'nai B'rith, with important input from Rabbi Jonathan Kendall, felt that we had an obligation as Jews to offer protection to refugees. We were particularly moved by the personal history related by our member, Judith Meisel, who recalled that during World War II the Danes, among others, had given her refuge.

In 1985, the CBB Board supported a carefully worded Sanctuary Covenant. Although opposed by a few members of the congregation, this decision to become a Sanctuary Congregation evoked a great outpouring of appreciation and support.

Shortly after this, we were asked to accept into sanctuary a Guatemalan refugee and her infant son. My family offered to house them until they were ready to live on their own.

Marta's life had been rent by tragedy, creating gaps in her existence that would never be filled. Her husband had been killed in their family home because of his activity with his factory's labor union. Marta was warned that her life was in danger as well. She fled, leaving her three children with her mother, and made her way through Mexico. After surviving a gang rape, she mercifully linked up with the Sanctuary Movement's "underground railroad," which led her, by then pregnant, to the U.S.

Helping a person patch together a life is a daunting, sometimes frightening process. What remained for me after the intense initial period of involvement with Marta, her infant and their needs, was the sense that this refugee who lived with us had sanctified our home, our family, and my life.

We're now in a situation in which, once again, people are in need of protection. We hear and read frightening stories of deportation actions and threats to immigrants in the United States who have been living in our communities, working, going to school, contributing, and raising families.

We hear also of a new Sanctuary Movement, forming to protect immigrants, often people without documents, from deportation actions that would separate the immigrants from their families and communities. The fear factor accelerated after the presidential election, with increased threats to law-abiding but undocumented immigrants.

Blessedly, as the sense of fear has increased, so has the religious response. Faith groups have organized for the protection of the "strangers" in our midst. In Santa Barbara we have an Interfaith Sanctuary Alliance, which has identified steps we, as a community, can take to protect our neighbors for whom detention without access to legal counsel, deportation and return to countries where they have no ties, is a both a threat and a reality.

A group of CBB members is working with the Interfaith Sanctuary Alliance in order to be part of a protective response should our neighbors be threatened with deportation. We hope to carry the conversations we are having with one another to the congregation. We all need to learn from one another, all the more so, in frightening times. In such a way, we believe we can help replace threat and fear with refuge and sanctuary. ■

*Evelyn Laser Shlensky, a past CBB President, has for years devoted herself to the interface of social justice and Judaism. For more information on the new Sanctuary movement contact [Evelyns@gmail.com](mailto:Evelyns@gmail.com).*

# Grace Notes: Music and Judaism

By Jacob Kim-Sherman

## Harry Kirsh Scholarship Essay

The Harry Kirsh Award is presented annually to students for writing an outstanding essay and for their involvement in activities demonstrating Jewish values. Mazel Tov to Jacob Kim-Sherman, this year's recipient of the Kirsh Award.



**FROM MY EARLIEST MEMORIES**, I have been coming to Congregation B'nai B'rith. I came here for preschool, along with many of my classmates today. I came here every week, throughout my elementary school and junior high education. I grew up in this temple, and thus Judaism is ingrained into my identity.

While my experiences as a Jew have not always been completely positive, I will always see Judaism as a part of my identity. When I confirm my Jewish identity on Shavuot, I will be confirming that this long journey as a Jew has been entirely worth it.

Throughout my time as a Jew, music has been the aspect that has stood out to me the most. At the crossroads of Judaism and music, I have created many special memories, which I wish to continue making into the future. Judaism is music, and has survived for over three millennia because of it.

Along with the written Torah, the Torah has existed in the form of the chanted Torah. The Torah has been chanted for centuries, and countless traditions involve special trope melodies, including at the High Holy Days. The chanting of the Torah

enhances its meaning by giving it structure, and serves to preserve its memory. Music has touched my experience with Judaism in a profound way.

While I was in elementary school, I came to Hebrew school every week, but was not very involved at first. I remember feeling a surge of enthusiasm when, in sixth grade, we began learning to chant Torah. Music has always been a large part of my life, as I have played and practiced piano since I was five years old. Until sixth grade, however, music had not been a big part of my experience with Judaism.

When, in sixth grade, we began learning to chant the Torah, with the many different and interesting trope melodies, I felt that something had clicked. My music and Judaism had joined together, and both have become stronger as a result of this interaction. This interaction has led to some of my most significant Jewish experiences.

Since then, I have become extremely enthusiastic about chanting Torah. Since my Bar Mitzvah, I have chanted at the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, in the special High Holy Day Trope, as well as at a few other services. In the future, I hope to

keep my memory of the music of Judaism alive, and hope to continue to chant Torah periodically.

Judaism has always been a source of questions for me. Since I was in elementary school, I have always been wondering about whether I plan on raising my children as Jews, and set finding out an answer to that important question as my main goal for this year. Through my time growing up here, I have never had a certain answer. While I have always enjoyed pondering questions about the Torah and learning to chant prayers, I have been ambivalent about whether I wish my children to have such an experience.

Growing up at CBB, I often felt frustrated with having to spend time on prayers, and whether my time investment was worth it. I had often wondered about the purpose of the rituals and traditions. While they at times seemed slightly arbitrary and excessive, they have helped me to grow profoundly in my life. My Bar Mitzvah took an enormous amount of time and effort, but was completely worth it. Writing my D'var Torah, and practicing my chanting greatly improved my public speaking and writing ability. Only

*Continued on page 24*

*"Father, Who Am I?", continued from pg. 8*

her mother said.

Helena and I stayed best friends for a few years before drifting apart in middle school. My family and I immigrated to the United States in 1978. In 2007, I returned to Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) for our class reunion to celebrate 30 years since our graduation. Imagine my surprise when I met Helena and Leo Goldstein, happily married for the last 27 years, and we talked about their impending immigrating to Israel.

Life is full of beautiful ironies, isn't it? ■

*Marina Stephens is the Program VP for CBB. She is a lawyer, and together with her husband/business partner, Len Homeniuk, and three children, has lived in Santa Barbara since 2009.*

*Light That Drives Out the Darkness, continued from pg. 13*

and compare passages.

We talk about insights, travels, education, and challenges, and lay out our prejudices, fears, hopes, and where we think the world is going. These conversations can get difficult, as even very well-meaning women on every side still have their blind spots or sticky allegiances. What helps us in these times is a willingness on the part of each member to talk things through.

Secondly, we stand together, to both nurture the beauty and good we see around us, and to speak up for the vulnerable, using one voice to call out prejudice, racism, xenophobia, and homophobia. We congratulate heroes and align against hatred.

Public advocacy is a major goal. We contact our Congress representatives, attend meetings at Casa de Maria, and at LGBTQ and interfaith functions. As even the smallest communication can be vital, we snail mail personal cards and letters to Rabbis, Imams, families, and police officers. Last year's outgoing mail included a stack of Hanukkah cards to families harassed by Neo-Nazis.

Serving the local community is another major goal. Each year includes a Cooking Day at Sarah House and a Building Day at Habitat for Humanity. Two Syrian Refugee Families, in El Cahon and Azusa, have received material support, and we have shipped dozens of hand-knitted scarves and hats to several more.

We are not a social club, but as we study, work, and share meals, we get to know each other pretty well. We occasionally join for *Iftars* (dinner after the Ramadan fast), Shabbats, seders, birthdays, winter solstice celebrations, Eids, b'nai mitzvot, Ju'umah prayers, and theater performances of our kids.

My idol Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." Our Sisterhood works together with prayer and action, hoping for an era of acceptance and peace. ■

*Mahela Morrow-Jones has been happily married to a physicist for 35 years. They have three beautiful techie children.*

*Melton: A Room in the House of Judaism, continued from pg. 21*

When I think about my Jewish identity, I reflect upon my Bat Mitzvah, the preparation, the performance high, and stimulating conversations. I relish this fall's continuing adventure of learning in a committed community, as we delve into Ethics and into Jewish History. The Melton experience will continue to build a room in the house of living Judaism – the room where it happens! ■

*Nona Fienberg is a professor emerita and former Dean of Arts & Humanities at Keene State College in New Hampshire. For more information about the Melton School visit [cbbsb.org/learn/melton](http://cbbsb.org/learn/melton).*

*Grace Notes: Music and Judaism continued from pg. 23*

reflecting this past year have I have decided that this package is something I want for my children. I must continue to play the role as a child of Judaism.

While my journey with Judaism has been long and difficult, I am confirming my commitment to the Song of Judaism, and all that comes with it. I hope that my children in the future gain as much from Judaism as I have received. Confirming my Judaism has given me a time to reflect on my Jewish identity, as I enjoyed my weekly two-hour catharsis period given to me by the Confirmation Class.

I have felt many emotions over the past year as I have reflected on my life as a Jew. I hope to keep my important connection to my classmates here, to Congregation B'nai B'rith into the future, and to Judaism. Judaism will be the rock in my identity, never dwindling for the rest of my life. ■



# Mazel Tov!

## *In Our Lives*

March 1 – September 30, 2017



1

**1.** To Jillian & Greg Wittman on the arrival of Oliver Wittman, born March 9.



2

**2.** To Patty & Cody Makela on the arrival of Charlotte Makela, born March 13.



3



4

**4.** To Caitlyn & Jeremy Jacobs on the arrival of Maisie Jacobs, born May 12.



5

**5.** To Summer & James Foster on the arrival of Bixby Foster, born May 23.



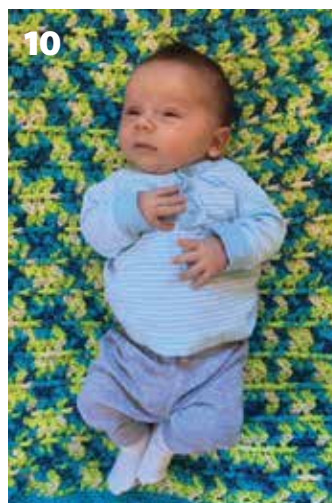
6

**3.** To Nati & Michael Smith on the arrival of Leo Smith, born March 27.



7

**7.** To Anna Keselman & Simon Kolotov on the arrival of Emmy Kolotov, born August 13.



10

**10.** To Valerie & Aaron Edelheit on the arrival of Miles Edelheit, born September 20.

**6.** To Juli & Glenn Steinbaum on the arrival of Laurel Steinbaum, born June 8.



8

**8.** To Kimiko & Gideon Cohn on the arrival of Matilda Cohn, born August 31.



9

**9.** To Melody & Joseph Delshad on the arrival of Bradley Delshad, born September 18.



# May Their Lives Be For A Blessing

March 1 – September 30, 2017

**Joseph Aleksander**, father of Alan (Sheri) and Michael (Liz), and grandfather of Daniel and Derek.

**Eric Boehm**, beloved husband & father.

**Robert Berk**, father of Perry (Ellen), and grandfather of Aaron and Emily.

**Eleanor Betz**, sister of May Karin (Bert), and aunt of Judy Karin.

**Eli Elharrar**, brother of Renee Golan.

**Mitch Englander**, husband of Sherylle Englander.

**Louise Fox**, mother of Wendy Fox, grandmother of Sara Weiner.

**William Fredericks**, father of Diane Frankel (Fred), grandfather to Alexandra and Jeremy.

**Albert Gabie**, father of Daniel Gabie.

**Sylvia Glass**, mother of Nancy Donald, grandmother of E. Josh Donald, Jonathan Antenore, and Kelly Kozak, and great grandmother of Charlie Kozak Donald, Henry Kozak Donald, and Milton Kozak Donald.

**Roberta Gersho**, wife of Allen, mother of Brian (Morna) and Marvin Gersho (Leslie), sister of Sheila Spunt and Michael Postoff, and grandmother of Sam, Michael, Emma, and Max Gersho.

**Irving Glazer**, father of Jay Glazer.

**Harold Greenspon**, uncle of Ina Ettenberg.

**Jerome Herer**, brother of Marcia Wall.

**Stephen Katz**, husband of Lauren, father of Sydney and David (Alexis), and son-in-law of Candy and Stanley Hagendorf.

**Jody Kaufman**, wife of Scott, mother of Rachel Fruchtman and Connor Kaufman, mother-in-law of Jordan Fruchtman, and grandmother of Ella and Lyla.

**Marvin Koenig**, cousin of Stephen Wiener.

**Sidney David Lavine**, father of Stephanie.

**Malca Lebell**, mother of David (Vicky), Michael (Jennifer), Jeanette, and Suzanne (Jeffrey), and grandmother of Jacob, Rachel, Ben, Quincy and Emma.

**Pauline Linden**, mother of Ruth Rubin (Lewis), grandmother of Alix Rabinowitz (Josh), Jeri Rubin (Brian Hext), Ricki Rubin, and Bobbi Pinnow (Matthew), and great-grandmother of Jesi, Rachel and Ari Rabinowitz, Siana, Elia, Zev, and Benjamin Hext, and of Addison and Hannah Pinnow.

**Gordon Locke**, father of Amy Locke.

**Fred Lowenschuss**, father of Ed, Lawrence, David and Alan, brother of Oscar, and uncle of Maia Lowenschuss Palmer.

**Michael Marcus**, father of Andrea Marcus (Geoffrey).

**Nina Morrison**, sister of Tova Morrison, mother of Sol and Shirley Morrison.

**Bernhard Penner**, beloved husband of Beverly Penner, father of Stephen, Eric, and Eileen Penner, and grandfather of Avigail, Eitan, and Gabriel.

**S. William Pattis**, beloved father of Robin (Roger), and grandfather of Rachael, Ben, Jake, and Eli.

**Bette Zoe Levin Pettis**, mother of Robin Himovitz (Roger), and grandmother of Rachael (Spencer), Benjamin, Jacob, and Eli.

**Chaim Richman**, father of Jeffrey (Kate), Steve (Deborah), Catherine (Robert), and grandfather of David and Daniel.

**Ruth Regina Schacher**, mother of Marion Anker.

**Robert Nevers**, father of Amanda Rowan (Brice), and grandfather of Elana and Naomi.

**Judith Soicher**, mother of Dean Soicher.

**Michael Towbes**, beloved husband of Anne, father of Lianne and Carrie (John Lewis), brother of Carol Lee Skinner, grandfather of Allison and Zachary, uncle of Rob Skinner (Meghan), great uncle of Natalie, Amanda and Jacob, stepfather of Michael and Nati Smith (Ella and Leo) and Jennifer and Nicholas Hale (Leighton and Carrington).

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

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

# Remembering Michael Towbes

*Eulogy by Rabbi Stephen Cohen*

The old rabbis of the Talmud taught: During the time that a righteous man is in a city, he is its glory, he is its radiance, he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its glory is diminished, its radiance is diminished, its majesty is diminished.

**MIKE TOWBES WAS**, like all of us, a flawed and imperfect human being, but he was also the glory, the radiance, and the majesty of our city. Today Santa Barbara is diminished; we are all grieving the loss of our father figure.

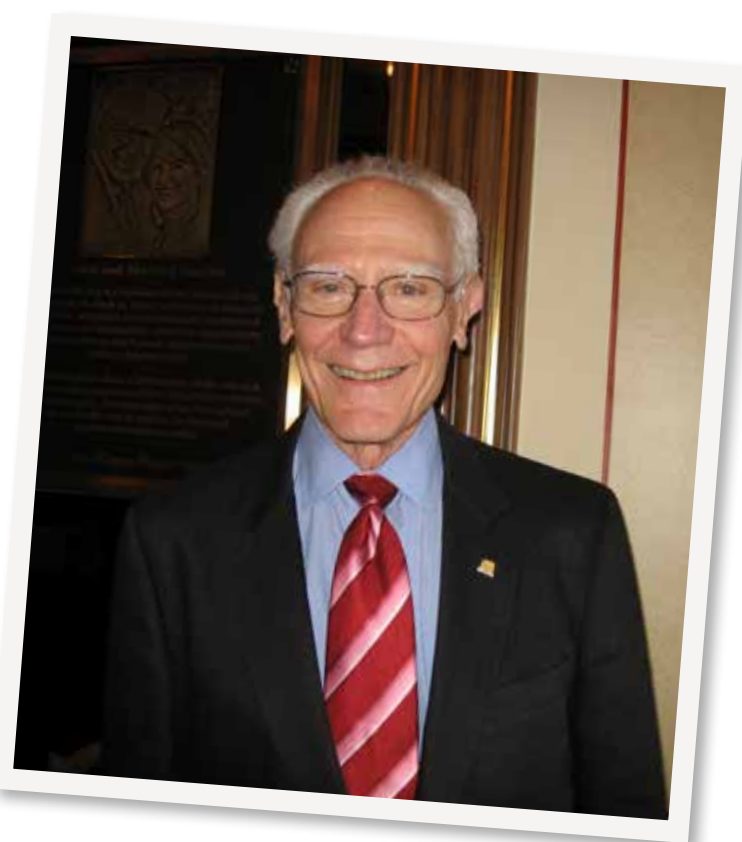
We have come here to say goodbye to Mike Towbes, to thank him, to tell a little bit of his story, and to attempt to understand something of his importance to our lives. That will not be easy.

Mike was born in Washington DC on July 17, 1929, the older child of Louis and Thelma Towbes. Mike's sister Carol Lee is a member of our community, and probably the one person who might shed some light on who Mike was as a little boy, and what the signs were early on that the little boy would one day become great. He was a serious child, who loved books. Mike never lost his lifelong passion for learning. Anne showed me some beautiful photos of Mike as a young boy, in whose face can already be seen both his reserve and his warm smile, his intelligence and his intense focus.

Mike went to college at Princeton, where he was the manager of the basketball team and graduated with a B.S.E. in Civil Engineering, Summa Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa.

Princeton, Summa Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa. To fully understand his impact in our lives, we have to absorb the fact that Mike Towbes was not just a supremely successful businessman. He was a powerfully intelligent scholar, a man of learning, culture and ideas. Mike returned to Princeton for his college reunions every five years for his entire life, and as he became one of or perhaps the leading philanthropist of Santa Barbara, he

CBB is deeply grateful for the legacy of Michael Towbes, and his visionary leadership and generosity over many years.



imparted to our entire community his own love and reverence for scholarship, for education, and the arts. Mike's values have shaped this town.

Mike's thirst for knowledge was unlimited. He loved history. He loved opera. He even loved English grammar, and was famous for his red pen, with which he made clear his intolerance for mistakes in spelling or in grammar. Anne notes that he would even correct her, and she had been an English teacher! Lianne had a game of attempting to stump him with vocabulary words and would succeed, maybe, once a year. Mike not only knew what every word meant, but could often tell you when he first learned the word, and in what context.

I think I first caught a glimpse of Mike's first rate mind at his mother Thelma's funeral, when we last stood right here together, and Mike eulogized his mother eloquently, with deep



insight and feeling, and no notes whatsoever. I thought of that moment yesterday when Carrie described to me the twice a year meetings of the entire Towbes Group, when Mike would discuss every single project, in detail, with no notes. Mike had a beautiful mind.

But it takes more than intelligence to build a business empire. Mike did not come from poverty, but neither did he come from a wealthy family. He and Carol Lee grew up in a modest row house on Varnum Street and by the end of his life, the Towbes Group had developed more than 6,000 residential units and 1.8 million square feet of commercial properties. Montecito Bank and Trust has assets of more than \$1.3 billion dollars and ten branches and gives away more than \$1.3 million annually to area non-profits. And the Towbes Foundation donates more than \$900,000 **every year** to more than 300 organizations. How does all of that happen in one lifetime?

There are a few themes that recur in conversations about Mike Towbes. First, an extraordinary work ethic. Mike loved to work, whether it was in the office he loved, surrounded by piles of paper, or in the kitchen at home going over plans with his red pen, or at his computer in the hotel room when he and Anne were on vacation. Carrie tells of one time when on seeing her for the first time in five months his first words were "where is the fax machine?" The man just had a voracious appetite for work.

And Mike had vision. He took the long view and was enormous-



ly patient. He knew that projects took years. He knew that if a project never happened, that was fine also. One of his favorite sayings was "some of my best deals were ones I did not make." Nothing fazed him. "In a hundred years," he would say, "it's not going to matter."

If you want the secret recipe for Michael Towbes' success, here

is how it begins:

A superb intelligence

A powerful work ethic

An extraordinarily calm temperament

And at least one more thing, perhaps most important of all, which is that he lived with integrity and treated people right. He was not a saint, but as he himself said: I try to do the right thing. He treated people with respect.



So many of you here today had years and years of personal and/or professional relationships with Mike. I don't want to risk leaving out anyone important so I will not mention anyone by name, except perhaps for Sandy Miller, who has worked with Mike for 48 years. Mike knew that you build an organization with loyalty and by investing in people. It sounds so simple, but

it is so rare to find in this world. Michael Towbes built a business empire with integrity and by treating people right.

And what of the private man, the father, the grandfather, the brother, the uncle, the husband? I think that Carrie probably speaks for most of the family in saying "It wasn't always easy. He was often gone. He had very high standards. He was very fair, very patient. But a word of praise from Mike was a rare and precious gift. As Rob said, when Mike offered a compliment, it really meant something."

I think it boils down to this: when a man is the father of a large company, and eventually becomes the patriarch of an entire city, that man's own immediate family sees less of him. That's just reality...and yet all of us who knew Mike are keenly aware of just how much his daughters Lianne and Carrie meant to him, and Carrie's husband John and children Allie and Zac, and his sister Carol Lee and her son Rob, who has worked so closely with Mike, and Rob's wife Meghan and Natalie and Amanda and Koby, and his step-brother Harold, with whom he was very close, and Anne's children Jennifer, and Nick, and their children Leighton and Carrington, and Michael and Nati, and Ella and Leo, whose feet Mike held at his bris not long ago. Mike wanted his family close to him. He was sometimes not able to find the words to express his love for them, but he wanted them close to him.





Coming finally to the very heart of Mike's story, we arrive at the tale of his two marriages. Two good, strong marriages, each to a woman who was for Mike an equal partner and soul-mate. First to Gail, whom he met while

stationed with the Naval Air Missile Test Center in Point Mugu and they were married on Valentine's Day 1954. Gail and Mike brought Lianne and Carrie into the world and raised them into brilliant and compassionate women. Mike and Gail established together the Towbes Foundation back in 1980, and when Gail became ill with Multiple Sclerosis, Mike was a devoted and loving husband for her over the 20 year course of her very difficult decline which ended when her illness took her in 1996.

In 2004, Mike found love a second time, falling love with the elegant and earthy Anne Smith...who had the chutzpah to make the first move on him. Back in 2007, Mike told me that the quickness with which he decided to ask her to marry him was extremely uncharacteristic for him; that he was usually a deliberative man. But he had fallen completely head over heels in love with her. The two of them were so perfectly matched, intellectually, and emotionally, and for all of us it was exhilarating just to be around her when they were together. For whatever reason, Mike had no trouble whatsoever expressing his love for Anne...it just came pouring out. How wonderful that just last year, they went to Burning Man together! The perfect passionate, shocking adventure to culminate their happy years of marriage together.

Anne, perhaps more than anyone else, for the past ten plus years you and Mike have been Santa Barbara's leading couple. We have all looked to you, of course as philanthropists, but even more so as leaders. Two human beings, with just as many problems as the rest of us, and good days and bad days, but two human beings who were willing to show up in the center of our community, and to stand up and remind everyone what civilization means.

To stand up for a community that values the arts and education.

To stand up for quality health care for everyone.

To stand up for the needy, the lonely and the broken-hearted.

With you at his side, Anne, Michael Towbes has shown us all the good things that happen when we work together with intelligence, with patience, with a sense of humor and with a firm belief in the dignity of every human being.

This town is not likely to ever have another leader like Michael Towbes again.

*Zecher tsaddik livracha.* The memory of this righteous man will be a blessing for all of us for the rest of our lives. ■



*Anne and Michael Towbes at the Dreamers Ball in January 2017.*

# Covenant Giving

We are grateful to our leading donors who make significant financial contributions to provide a solid foundation for CBB. These additional resources enable CBB to offer a vibrant place for learning and growing, celebrating and mourning, and preserving our Jewish heritage in today's modern world. CBB remains committed to being open and inclusive, welcoming all and providing extra assistance where needed. Thank you for your support this past year.

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## LEGACY CIRCLE

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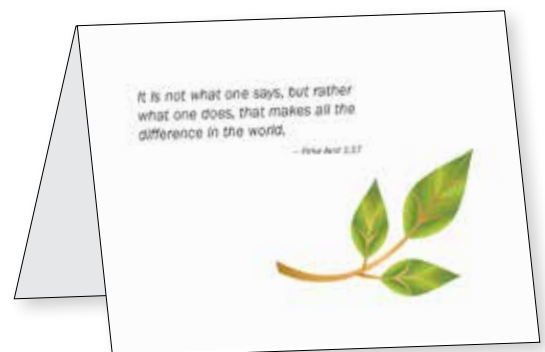
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# Children of the Covenant

Our sincere gratitude goes to members of CBB's Children of the Covenant, individuals who have made contributions directly to the CBB Endowment, or have included CBB in their will or estate planning. This act of generosity ensures that their leadership, legacy, and support of CBB will continue for future generations.

Legacy giving is the foundation to protect what we have built together today, whatever may come tomorrow. It ensures that future generations of our community will always have the foundation to dream of their future, and make that dream a reality.



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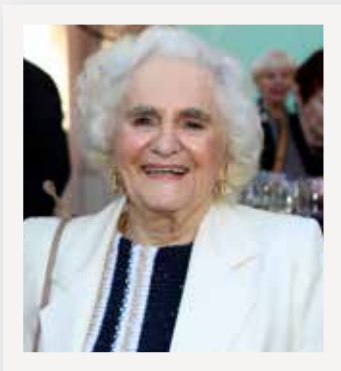
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# Making a Place For Everyone at CBB



*Halina Silverman: Inclusivity in the face of adversity.*

**WHY DOES HALINA SILVERMAN CARE SO DEEPLY ABOUT INCLUSIVITY AT CBB?** Her passionate answer stems from years of dedication to inclusion and compassion in the face of adversity.

Halina's family left Poland in the mid-1920's when she was a toddler. They had no religious affiliation when they arrived in Montreal, Canada, though they lived amongst other recent Jewish immigrants in what she calls "the Montreal ghetto." As Halina grew up she repeatedly encountered persecution from non-Jewish adults, clergy, and especially other children. "They were very hostile," she says, "It was not easy."

Halina explains that "because of being persecuted, I learned what it was like to be an outsider. It made me very receptive and very accepting of people—always. Instead of making me bitter, it did the reverse. I understood where others were coming from."

Finding and creating inclusive communities has been a theme in Halina's life. "When I was nine years old, I met another little girl

at public school who told me about a wonderful place she went on weekends." This "place" turned out to be Temple Emanu-El, a Reform congregation whose members welcomed Halina warmly when she accompanied her friend for a visit. Halina remembers that after walking home from shul that day, "I told my parents: that was a nice place—we should go there." And they did.

Halina's parents felt comfortable at Temple Emanu-El because "it was unlike the old-time shtetl mentality that they were part of when they themselves were growing up and living in Warsaw." It was also a haven from an outside world that was hostile, and too often, violent towards Jews and other minorities.

Throughout her life, Halina has worked to repair the world by helping others feel at ease, to contribute their talents, and to thrive. When she and her husband Al were living in North Carolina in the 1950s, for example, Halina helped found a Reform congregation that advocated for black Americans during the integration movement. "It's still there," she adds humbly, "I hear it's a very successful congregation."

Decades later, after moving to California, CBB became Halina's Jewish home. Not surprisingly, Halina appreciates how our congregation makes a place for everyone. "CBB makes it possible for everybody to be welcomed." She points out what a special community we have because of this. "I've experienced when

*Continued on next page*

### Inclusivity at CBB, *continued from pg.33*

there isn't this sort of commitment, and how it wasn't welcoming in the same way. People were turned away if they couldn't pay. The dollar became the important thing, rather than the people."

Halina encourages our members to learn more and to support CBB — one way is by contributing to the endowment — so we can ensure that our community continues to be a place of welcome for everyone; a warm and vibrant Jewish community for generations to come. ■

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