

# Jewish Observer

A publication of the Jewish Federation of Central New York

## of Central New York

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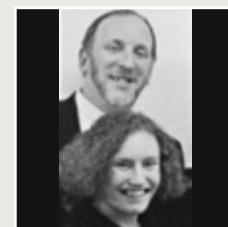
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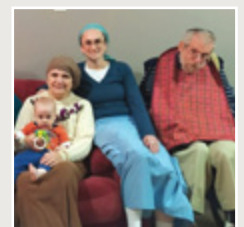
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LIVING WITH  
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# February 2023

## From the Editor



Barbara Davis

People with disabilities make up the world's largest minority group. Globally, around 10% of the world's population lives with a disability of some kind. Twenty percent of people in the U.S. have some disability, and 1 in 10 suffer from a severe disability. Over 10% of people in Israel have some form of disability that can make life's daily activities a struggle. These statistics are just the beginning. Take into account the families, friends, and loved ones of those with disabilities who are also affected, and these numbers skyrocket.

Judaism is no stranger to disability. Our tradition is replete with aphorisms and *mitzvot* regarding those with disabilities. In *Exodus*, we read, "But Moses said to the Lord, 'Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' And

the Lord said to him, 'Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?'" In *Vayikra*, we are commanded, "You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind." In *Pirkei Avot*, we read: "Ben Azzai taught: Do not disdain any person. Do not underrate the importance of anything for there is no person who does not have his hour and there is no thing without its place in the sun." And "Treat no one lightly and think nothing is useless, for everyone has a moment and everything has a place."

Yet the field of disabilities is fraught, as are most things today, with contradictions and challenges. For example, scientists have identified a gene that is a major cause of inherited deafness among Ashkenazi Jews, a group that includes 90 percent of the six million Jewish people in the United States. The discovery does not mean that deafness is any more common in Jews than in other people. In the general population, including Jews, roughly 1 in 1,000 children is born deaf, half from hereditary deafness. The new research simply identified a particular genetic mutation that is more common among deaf Jewish people than among deaf people from other backgrounds. The finding is one of several recent advances that make it possible to offer genetic tests to help people determine why they are deaf and to confirm a diagnosis of deafness in infants too young for hearing tests. But the research is controversial, because it means that fetuses can also be tested, raising the possibility that some parents might choose to abort rather than give birth to a child who cannot hear. In addition, some Jewish people fear that genetic studies involving Jews will stigmatize them by creating the false impression that they are more prone than others to hereditary disease.

Another issue that has arisen with regard to disability is nomenclature. The use of language and words describing people with disabilities has changed over time, and there are significant rules of etiquette that should be observed. The following are some specific examples:

1. Refer to a person's disability only when it is related to what you are talking about. Don't ask, "What's wrong with you?" Don't refer to people in generic terms such as "the girl in the wheelchair."
2. When talking about places with accommodations for people with disabilities, use the term "accessible" rather than "disabled" or "handicapped," e.g., an "accessible" parking space or bathroom stall rather than a "disabled" or "handicapped" parking space or stall.

3. Delete the following terms from your vocabulary: handicapped, differently abled, crippled, victim, retarded, stricken, unfortunate and special needs.
4. Just because someone has a disability, it doesn't mean they are courageous, brave, special or superhuman. People with disabilities are the same as everyone else and will have talents, skills and abilities.
5. When talking about people without disabilities, do not refer to them as "normal." This can make people with disabilities feel as though there is something wrong with them and that they are "abnormal."

The *JO* is very appreciative of the writers and people featured in this issue for their willingness to share their experiences and ideas about sensitive topics. There has been a major shift in the conversation about disability in the past few decades. Previously, disability was seen as a defect within an individual, an aberration compared to "normal" traits and characteristics. To address disability, it was believed, the defects needed to be cured, fixed or eliminated. Today, the "social model" of disability takes a different approach, viewing disability as the inability to participate fully in home and community life. The social model distinguishes between impairments and disabilities. Impairments are the effects of a given condition. Disabilities are restrictions imposed by society. To address disability under this model is not to seek to "fix" a person, but to change society by ending discrimination and oppression against people with disabilities through education, accommodation and universal design.

Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month is a call to action to each one of us, in accordance with our Jewish values, to honor the gifts and strengths that we each possess and to work together to ensure that everyone in our Jewish community is welcomed, seen, valued and appreciated. This special month reminds us that there is still much work to be done. As educator Lisa Friedman writes, "Inclusion is a way of thinking. It is how we behave and treat one another. It is a philosophy that embraces the idea that everyone has something of value to contribute and that everyone has a right to belong. When we commit ourselves to making our programs accessible—not just in the physical sense, but by ensuring that each person's participation is truly meaningful—then we can call ourselves inclusive. Then we can pat ourselves on the back and celebrate our success. But we are not there yet."

# Jewish Observer

of Central New York

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# Campaign 2023

by Anick Sinclair, Campaign Chair

The Jewish Federation of Central New York is invested in Jewish life, which is made possible by the donations of an extremely dedicated community. The extent to which the Federation supports agencies and programs in our community is phenomenal and expansive. It should NOT be taken for granted.

As we kick off our 2023 campaign, I thought it might be beneficial to share with you my thoughts about you, our donors. Your donations are imperative, yes. But it is our values, our COMMON values, our Jewish values that bind us together, not your contributions. What you, our donors, have in common is the way you view the importance of Jewry in Central New York, now and in the future.

The issue the Federation faces is that Jews today don't donate as much to Jewish entities as previous generations.



Older generations, if they had it to give, traditionally gave to Jewish agencies or synagogues. Today, Gen Z is likely to give just as much, but the total is distributed to many different causes. With the ease of online and social media giving, people are more likely to give to the local dog shelter, Greenpeace or a GoFundMe campaign as to the Jewish causes.

And Jewish charities are feeling the sting of that dilution.

But you have the power to change that. You are part of a caring, compassionate community that unites in good times and bad to take care of each other and to celebrate Jewish life together. Because of your generosity, hardship is changed into hope and creates vibrant Jewish life, engages the next generation and reinvigorates Judaism itself. You have the power to shape the future. For us, for our children and for our grandchildren.

The Federation has more than a century-old legacy of trust, of raising and distributing funds with full transparency, accountability and integrity. The annual campaigns are the most trusted fundraising vehicles in the world, raising nearly a billion dollars across North America every year to provide the basic infrastructure that supports the Jewish community locally, nationally and worldwide.

With your gift, you make a

difference. You make the world a better place. You have the power to transform the Jewish dream of a better world into reality, the power to create a world where we freely and joyously celebrate our Judaism... where Jews and our neighbors live in safety and peace... where everyone's basic needs are met.

Your gift to the 2023 campaign will allow the Federation to address the most pressing needs of Jews in our community. Because of your generosity, hardship will be changed into hope. Our work together will create vibrant Jewish life, engage the next generation and reinvigorate Judaism. Together, we can ensure that our community stays connected and Jewishly engaged. We build on every opportunity to grow and become ever stronger.

We look forward to continuing this momentum. We know you will find inspiration in all we've accomplished together and encouragement in all that's still to come. Thank you for all you do to care for, build, and enhance Jewish Central New York. Please answer the call in 2023!

## Foundation Teen Funders

Members of the Jewish Community Foundation of Central New York Linda Alexander Teen Funders program met to discuss how to allocate the funds they pool from their individual b'nai mitzvah accounts which were matched by the Pomeranz, Shankman and Martin Charitable Foundation. They decided to send donations to The CNY Diaper Bank, Yemin Orde Youth Village, On Point for College, ALEH, SHALVA, Beit Issie Shapiro and The McMahon Ryan Child Advocacy Center.



## Federation and Inclusion

Community is a core Federation value. Our tradition teaches that we are all responsible, one for another. We have a commitment to care for the wellbeing of all of our community members. Federation understands that disability awareness and inclusion is not about making space for people who have different needs. Rather, it's about recognizing that what each person contributes to our collective is vital and worthwhile. It's about making sure that everyone has the ability to live life to the fullest and is provided the support necessary to make that happen. We are fortunate that we have people and organizations in our local Jewish community who have made this work a priority. Federation salutes and supports them. In all that we do, Federation is committed to people of all abilities.



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# Arlene Kanter

Arlene Kanter has been fighting for the rights of people with disabilities for over four decades. She is the Meredith Professor of Teaching Excellence at Syracuse University and founder and director of the Disability Law and Policy Program (DLPP) at the College of Law. The DLPP houses the nation's first joint degree program in Law and Disability Studies and brings to Syracuse students with and without disabilities from all over the world who wish to pursue a career in disability law. In 2020, the DLPP was named as one of the most innovative university programs in the world by a network of renowned disability and accessibility experts.

Kanter publishes and lectures extensively on domestic and international disability law and policy. Her latest book, *The Development of Disability Rights Under International Law: From Charity to Human Rights*, traces the development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). From 2001 to 2006, Professor Kanter worked with a UN committee drafting the CRPD. Since then, she has consulted with the United Nations, governments and disability organizations on implementing the CRPD in such countries as Argentina, Brazil, China, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Peru, Turkey and Vietnam.

Arlene is also co-author of *Righting Educational Wrongs: Disability Studies in Law and Education*, the first book to bring together scholars from the fields of law, education and disability studies. She also co-authored the first law casebook on international and comparative disability law and has published numerous articles



and book chapters on human rights and comparative and international disability rights law, inclusive education and mental health law.

Kanter has been committed to disability rights since childhood. "Throughout my life, I've had neighbors, friends and family members with disabilities. I've always seen myself as an ally. After all, if we live long enough, we will all become disabled. As a child, I witnessed firsthand how children with disabilities were not only treated differently, but also actively bullied. When she was in high school, soon after the passage of laws giving students with disabilities the right to attend public school, she was "bothered to see how they [disabled students] were cordoned off from the rest of the school and taught in separate classrooms. Similarly, when I worked at a summer camp on the grounds of an institution near my home, I remember wondering why I got to go home at the end of the day to my family, but the kids I played with all day, did not."

When Kanter went to law school, her advocacy in law school clinics on behalf of people of color, immigrants and incarcerated women reminded her of the exclusion that people with disabilities faced. It was then that she decided to pursue a career in disability rights law, a field that did not even exist at that time. Soon thereafter, she got a job at the first disability rights legal organization in Washington, DC, where she represented clients with disabilities, including before the U.S. Supreme Court. In one Supreme Court case, she represented homeless people who sought to sleep in a public park across from the White House to demonstrate they had nowhere else to go. "That was in the early 1980s, and the beginning of homelessness as a social problem," she remembers. "At that time, there were calls to institutionalize homeless people – ostensibly to help them – but instead, it seemed like a way to move them out of sight and out of mind. Today, we again hear calls to institutionalize homeless people on the streets of NYC and elsewhere. Institutionalization did not work then, and it won't work now," Kanter says.

Kanter's disability law expertise is not limited to the U.S. Her research focuses on how different countries approach disability rights and inclusion, including Israel. She has worked with *Bizchut*, Israel's premier disability rights organization, since its founding to promote inclusive education, on a law introducing supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship, and challenging policies that support institutionalization rather than

community living. She is also a former Fulbright Scholar at Tel Aviv University and a frequent visiting professor of law at Hebrew University. Her experiences in Israel and elsewhere have educated her about "other ways to approach problems confronting people with disabilities and their families, besides what's offered under current U.S. law."

In Kanter's view, disability rights must embrace an interdisciplinary perspective. She writes, "Disability Studies help us to see disability as part of the human experience and to understand how the law, and society in general, view difference as a deviation from an 'unstated norm.' When the issue is disability, the able-bodied, seeing, hearing, walking, mentally healthy person with a certain score on an intelligence test is treated, but never acknowledged, as the norm, while people who communicate through sign language, use wheelchairs, or speak, think or hear 'differently,' are considered the deviation. Disability Studies helps us to understand implications of these societal preferences."

She points out that "Invisibility is a hallmark of the disability experience in America, from retail settings to restaurant tables and neighborhoods." People with disabilities are often portrayed "as victims of affliction who must be cured, helped to overcome their 'deficiencies,' cared for and pitied." These images, together "with rare glimpses of 'extraordinary' people with disabilities who, with supernatural strength appear successful in sports or other feats, [leave] most with a false image of America's disabled citizens and encourages continued oppression." She argues that "Information on people with all kinds of disabilities, their cultures, their needs, issues and concerns must be infused into all areas of life, with people with disabilities at the center of such conversations. "Nothing about us without us," is the slogan now adopted by the disability rights movement and one to which Kanter subscribes.

Kanter's latest research addresses the extent to which disabled people may benefit by the new remote workplace as a result of our recent pandemic experience. To the extent that disabled people are among the most un- and underemployed segment of the population, she argues that allowing more employees to work remotely will open up new job opportunities for disabled people who want to work but can't because of lack of accessible transportation and workplaces as well as the ongoing ableism in society.

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# Parenting a Child With a Disability

by Rabbi Evan Shore

**“Familial Dysautonomia.” When Deborah and I first heard those words, our lives were changed forever. We were at the N.Y.U. Medical Center in Manhattan. Our daughter Jessica had just completed tests that confirmed she had a neurological disorder that afflicts only Jews who descend from Eastern Europe. Familial Dysautonomia (FD) is a rare genetic disorder that affects the autonomic, sensory and peripheral nervous systems. People affected by FD courageously face life-threatening complications every day.**

Dr. Felicia Axelrod was, at that time, the medical authority on this dreaded disease. She was a wonderful, caring pediatric neurologist who in my estimation was a crucial element in Jessica’s life. However, on the day when Dr. Axelrod said in no uncertain terms that Jessica had a life expectancy of twelve years, Deborah and I were shaken to the core. We had no idea then, that only through the kindness of Hashem and Jessica’s tenacity, she would live until thirty-eight.

Being parents of a challenged child posed great difficulties, unimaginable stress and frustration. Yet Deborah and I decided we would do anything to ensure that Jessica lived a wonderful, vibrant life. An important part of this entire story is Jessica. Very rarely did she ever complain about her disease. At a very early age, she decided to face every twist and turn with grit and determination.

Having two other children posed a dilemma. We wanted to ensure that their lives were disrupted as little as possible. On many occasions when Jessica was hospitalized at NYU Medical Center, Deborah would move in with her parents in Manhattan. I would stay in Syracuse with Ari and Dov in order to keep their lives on an even keel and not miss classes at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School.

When Jessica was about nine years old, she began to experience “crises.” During times of stress, people with Familial Dysautonomia experience dramatically high blood pressure and heart rate accompanied by retching. This is known as an autonomic crisis. Jessica was in Crouse Hospital for over four weeks with a very prolonged autonomic crisis. The solution to the crisis is treatment with valium, which became part of Jessica’s prescription list for the remainder of her life.

Education, Judaic and secular, as well as socialization, were very important to us. The Day School worked with us, and Jessica developed friendships with many students. One in particular, Ariella (Goldberg) Aharon, remained one of her best friends. After Jess passed away, Ariella named one of her daughters, Yaarah Yosefa, after Jessica.

Jess was involved with NCSY, YIST\STOCS Kids and attended Epstein School when she entered seventh grade. Prior to graduating from the Day



School, Jess began a dual education program, 90% of the time at JD, the remainder as a student at SHDS.

Desiring to have Jessica experience a normal life, we began planning her *bat mitzvah*. Like all other girls at YIST/STOCS, Jessica delivered a *d’var Torah*. If I remember correctly, there was not a dry eye in shul on that snowy Shabbas morning, *Parshat Bshalach*, when Jessica spoke in front of the shul. Deborah and I always felt strongly about setting the bar very high for Jessica. A low bar translates into minimal expectations; a high bar became part of Jessica’s life until the day she passed away.

When Jessica entered her twenties we began to worry about social opportunities. We investigated many avenues. We finally decided that HASC (Hebrew Academy for Special Children) was the best option for her. She lived there until two months before her passing. HASC’s mission, “to build a brighter future for people with developmental disabilities,” is everything we wanted for our daughter.

During her fourteen years as a resident at the 50th Street residence, Jessica flourished Judaically and socially. She worked at assorted jobs under the direction of a job coach. Most importantly, she lived a

joyful, fun-filled life, facing the realities of social maturity. I remember, when I was told Jessica was “dating” someone, I asked the Residence Manager Esther Feder, “Who is going to be there for Jessica if the guy she was seeing ever broke her heart?” Esther answered quickly and forcefully, “Rabbi Shore, why did you send Jessica to HASC in the first place?” I answered, “To have real life experiences.” Esther then said, “If her heart is broken, so be it, that is part of life.” I survived the dating process.

However, as Jessica aged, her disease began to overpower her. She was susceptible to pneumonia due to aspiration. She was no longer permitted to take fluids orally. All hydration was delivered via a g-tube. For a time, her aspiration was so serious, she was off all solid food as well for a three-month period. She was hospitalized several times a year. All hydration and nutrition was given through her g-tube. With each admission, she became weaker. Though

we were 250 miles away, we would drop everything and drive to see Jessica at N.Y.U. Medical Center in Manhattan.

The last year of Jessica’s life was the most difficult, especially the last time Jess visited us in Syracuse. One could see she was failing and very weak. However, her determination, sense of humor and spirit never wavered.

The last time I saw Jessica was in a rehab center in Staten Island. She was recovering from a tracheostomy. I told her she was my superhero, and I never met a stronger person in my entire life. The next day, she developed a mucous plug that led to her death. After her passing, my wife and I both agreed that Jessica did not lose her battle; rather, FD overwhelmed her.

Our lives were made richer and far more meaningful due to having a child with special needs. Deb and I would comment many times after she passed, “What would Jessica say or do in this situation?” Though Jessica had passed, her legacy, smile and spirit live on.

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## Silent Auction



# Identity

by Rabbi Rachel Esserman

I had difficulty at first remembering the new way to speak about my disability. Instead of saying, “I am hearing impaired,” I learned I was supposed to say, “I have a hearing impairment.” The idea was to change the way I defined myself – I am a person with a disability, rather than a disabled person. This new way of speaking was for anyone with physical and developmental problems. So, it was a surprise to read a disability activist state that she and other activists prefer “identity first” language.

In “Disfigured: On Fairy Tales, Disability, and Making Space” Amanda Leduc writes not only about how fairy tales favor those who fit society’s ideas of perfection, but about her own life with cerebral palsy. She notes that she’s not writing a scholarly work on the history of fairy tales, but rather a personal take on how those tales affect people with disabilities. For example, in fairy tales, disabilities and ugliness are usually signs of a villain; if they define a hero/heroine at the beginning of the story, then they are something to overcome – just as the ugly duckling became a beautiful swan. Leduc’s book is challenging, informative and – when she tells her personal story – very moving.

What interested me was her different view on the way we should identify ourselves. She writes, “Identity first language (‘disabled person’) holds that the disabled identity is an important part of what makes someone a person in the first place, inexplicably bound up with how someone navigates the world. Person-first language, by contrast, argues that an individual must be seen as a person first and someone with a disability second (‘person with a disability’). The general consensus among disability activists is the person-first language, while well meaning,

separates disability from identity and thus continues to malign disability and perpetuate the idea that it is a negative thing.”

Is a disability a negative thing? How we feel about that certainly makes a difference in the way we define ourselves. As I was writing this article, a copy of *Hearing Health* magazine came in the mail. The cover said it was “the pediatrics issue” and talked about those “growing up with – but not defined by – hearing conditions.” I’ve heard that before from hard-of-hearing and Deaf community individuals: “We are missing nothing, we are just different.” Or, to speak about another population, some people claim they are not disabled, they are differently abled. Well, they would be if the world fulfilled Leduc’s visions: ramps everywhere for those who use wheelchairs. Movie and TV heroes would include those with a disability. Our differences would be celebrated. Instead of looking to overcome disabilities, the world would change so disabilities would just be another way for someone to live.

If you’re feeling a bit of a disconnection here, you’re not the only one. In many ways, my hearing impairment defines my life. I shocked a friend recently by saying I need this editor job because, as a hearing-impaired individual with



back and feet problems, I can’t be a receptionist in an office (I need a special phone to hear) or a greeter at Walmart (it’s difficult standing for long periods of time). So many parts of my life – social and physical – are affected because I can’t hear, but it doesn’t define my whole life. There are parts of me that have nothing to do with my hearing impairment. However, having that loss has changed how I view the world and, at times, how I feel about myself. In some ways, I am both “hearing impaired” and “an individual with a hearing impairment.” Where I differ from many is that I know what I am missing. I would love to have normal hearing, but I’ve had to adjust to life as it is because I can’t put my life on hold waiting for a miracle that may never happen. I can’t comment on what someone in a wheelchair feels: Do they wish they could walk, or do they want the world to be ramped? If the latter, is it because they know they will never walk and have accepted that, or because they feel it’s perfectly fine not to be able to walk?

Years ago, when I was dealing with other health problems, I read about a

book written by a woman about living with chronic illness. She noted that she hated the one-legged man who ran a marathon because that gave people unrealistic expectations about what one-legged men could do. Leduc seems to feel the same way in her book: she wants writers to show that the traditional happily-ever-afters are not the only good ending. She wants stories where success comes because someone had a disability, not in spite of that disability. I appreciate Leduc’s suggestions and hope that someday everyone will be accepted as they are. We’re certainly moving more in that direction. I’m also glad that she feels successful because of her disability. However, if you gave me a choice – saying my hearing impairment and other ailments could be cured – I would opt for the easier not-disabled life.

Rabbi Rachel Esserman is an award-winning writer and executive editor of *The Reporter Group* and a chaplain with the *Broome Developmental Disabilities Office*. This article was originally published in *The Reporter*, Vestal, NY.



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# Advocacy

*“A community that excludes even one of its members is not a community at all.”*

Micah Fialka-Feldman is a self-advocate, teaching assistant, outreach coordinator, national speaker and pioneer who fights for disability-pride, justice and inclusion. He is also a new member of Congregation Beth-Sholom Chevra Shas. Micah belongs to the first wave of adults with intellectual disabilities who have attended college and been fully included in school and community. Micah earned a certificate in disability studies from the Syracuse University School of Education where he co-teaches classes in inclusive education and disability studies and serves as an outreach coordinator at the Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education.

In 2009, Micah won a landmark federal lawsuit, *Fialka-Feldman v. Oakland University Board of Trustees*. The suit came about because, after being accepted to live in the dorms at Oakland University,



Micah was notified that he could not live there because of “university policy.” He sued the university for violating his rights and after over two years of advocacy court proceedings, the court ruled that Oakland University had denied Micah housing based on “prejudice, stereotypes and/or unfounded fear of persons with

disabilities.” Micah moved into the dorms in January 2010.

Micah’s story is featured in the book *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* by Syracuse University professor Mara Sapon-Shevin as well as in the award-winning documentary, “Through the Same Door: Inclusion Includes College.” Micah’s favorite quote is by Dan Wilkens, “A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all.” Micah is committed to building community for himself and for others. He will be speaking to the Central New York Jewish community about his work and his mission via Zoom at a presentation sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Central New York in observance of Jewish Disability Awareness and Inclusion Month. Announcement of the session and the Zoom link will be sent via Constant Contact as the date approaches.

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# The Day Gregory Straniere Became Bar Mitzvah

by Rabbi David Katz, Temple Society of Concord

Philip Straniere called me on the phone a year and a half before his son was to turn 13. Could we have a bar mitzvah service for him, he wanted to know. He explained that his son Gregory was autistic and, in terms of cognitive ability, functioned at about the level of a one-year-old. "Of course," I responded, "I don't see any problems with having a bar mitzvah service for Gregory."

But when I hung up the phone, I wondered whether or not the service would be authentic. What could it possibly mean in the context of the tradition? Certainly, we could integrate Gregory into the service, have him do whatever he was able to do and applaud his participation, but how far could we actually go in redefining the meaning of becoming bar mitzvah, without making it something else altogether? After all, Gregory was not going to become accomplished in Hebrew. He couldn't speak at all. Gregory was not going to lead the congregation in prayer or understand the concept of responsibility. What meaning could this service have in the context of the tradition?

In order to figure out what Gregory could do, I traveled to his special needs school, observed Gregory in class and spoke with five of his teachers. They told me that when Gregory stood for more than a few minutes he would rock back and forth, but a friendly hand on his neck would stop him. He could hit a big red button. Most of the time he could hold a cup without spilling its contents. He could sit for a fair amount of time, but sometimes he made sounds spontaneously, sounds that would be deemed inappropriate

in a normal social setting. Sometimes he had seizures.

I observed Gregory for over an hour. Even with all these limitations, there was something endearing about him. He was smaller than the average 13-year-old. He seemed very friendly in spirit. He didn't look at anyone directly, but when you were in his presence, you were in relationship. This was a surprise to me. We teach that a person's intellect is not his or her essence, but here was proof that it was true. Gregory's humanity showed through all his limitations.

One thing Gregory could do, said his teachers, was press the keys on a toy keyboard. He liked to hear the sounds. I thought that if this were the only way he could express himself, so be it. It was up to us to find a way for him to communicate.

Time passed, and the day of the service approached. His parents and I went over all the details. During the service, Gregory would sit with them in the front row of the congregation. There was a door in the sanctuary that opened directly into my study if Gregory needed to leave. He would help dress and undress the Torah, and he would join us for the parade. Gregory would be called up for an aliyah, and his parents would recite the blessings on his behalf. I would be the one to read the Torah.



Gregory would raise the cup for the *Kiddush*, and the Cantor would chant the words. It was the haftarah that Gregory himself would actually do - in his own way.

So the big day came. I was happy to see so many guests. Philip and Jennifer had wondered how big an occasion to make it, and they decided that it should be larger rather than smaller. It seemed to us that Gregory sensed the excitement. We allowed a photographer from the newspaper to take pictures of the family privately before the service. We wanted to be a model for others, but not turn the ceremony into a media event.

I began the service with a smile and noted that even those who had never been to a Jewish service knew enough to sit in the back rows where all the Jews usually found their spots. I was determined to make the service joyful and natural.

All went smoothly, and when it came time for the haftarah, I simply announced that we were going to depart from the normal reading and that I had a Chassidic story, slightly revised, to tell. Then, I asked Gregory's parent to take him to the organ. With his mom and dad sitting on either side of him, he began to play the notes.

"There was a boy," I began, "whose parents never took him to synagogue, because they knew he could not understand the prayers. He spent his time in the fields tending the sheep and playing his flute. When he turned 13, they thought it only right to take him to his first service. When he entered the synagogue, the boy was amazed at everything he heard and saw, the sounds of chanting, the sight of davening, the beauty of the people at prayer.

"When the time came to take out the Torah, the shepherd boy slipped away from his father and went up to the ark, making his way in between the leaders of the congregation so he could get a better look at what was happening. When the ark was opened,

the young boy stood in awe before the magnificent Torahs.

"Before anyone noticed he was there, he took out the flute he had hidden in his clothes and began to play.

"The people in the synagogue heard the flute and were appalled. Playing a musical instrument on Shabbat? A desecration! They knew of this boy who never came to services, and now they were surprised to see him and shocked at his behavior. Didn't he know how to act on Shabbat in the presence of God? There was horror. Then there were loud whispers.

"And just as the leader of the service stepped forward to throw out the shepherd boy, the lad looked up at the Torahs and began to speak. 'Dear God' he said, 'I do not know the meanings of these prayers. I cannot speak in the holy tongue as these other men and women can. I am ignorant of what to do. But my heart is filled with love for You. You know what is in my heart. You know my thoughts. You can see inside of me. Let this melody I play be my prayer to You. May it be acceptable, dear God.' And he played his flute, and all the people were silent."

Gregory played the soft notes of the organ through the entire story, and when I finished, I sat down, and he continued to play, and the congregation sat silently and listened.

After we put away the Torah, I spoke to Gregory and his parents. And when he began to rock back and forth, his father picked him up, and Gregory wrapped his arms and legs around him. And I told this very loving family that God expresses wisdom in Torah and also in the humanity we all share. From some people, we learn the wisdom of life not from what they say, but by their very being just by who they are. Gregory had taught his parents courage and understanding and unconditional love - all the things that make human beings noble and alive. So this would be his day to teach us all.

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# Signage Systems

The Americans with Disabilities Act, the federal law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, is comprehensive legislation with specific details on how to accomplish accessibility and inclusivity in the public sector. The two main areas of focus of the ADA are equal employment opportunities and accessibility to businesses for all. Accessibility applies to every physical business that offers services or goods to the public. ADA signage is required in certain specific spaces and to identify certain rooms or spaces within a business. ADA-compliant signage regulations may include Braille dots, visual characters, raised characters (also called tactile characters) and/or pictograms, depending on the area or room the sign is identifying.



In Central New York, one of our community's businesses that has been in the forefront of ADA-compliant signage is Signage Systems. For over 45 years, Signage Systems has been a leader in the development and production of innovative signage, donor recognition and custom graphics. Their ADA-compliant braille signage is produced on numerous materials with raised polymer, thermoplastic and UV layer printed options. All Braille symbols, whether tactile or screen-printed, meet ADA building code requirements. There are stringent ADA requirements regarding not only the signs but their placement.

As in all of the work they do, Signage Systems takes pride in doing ADA work of the highest quality. Their online reviews are very positive. "Signage Systems is a great vendor partner. They work with businesses to achieve visual communication assignment objectives. The work they produce is always of the upmost quality, proudly representing our brand to prospects and customers," wrote one satisfied customer.

Signage Systems is the source for contractors, architects, designers and engineers who demand the quality and experience they have to offer. Their 11,000 square foot facility is equipped with the latest in technology and materials to maintain the highest level of quality. Signage Systems creates donor and

recognition walls, wayfinding signage, dimensional letters and logos, post and panel signs, digital and vinyl graphics and displays in a vast array of woods, colored acrylics, plexiglass paints and much more in a variety of shapes and sizes.



Signage Systems is a family-owned and operated business, offering a complete line of services including banners, exhibits, screen printing, 3D letters and logo, trade show graphics, digital sign displays, decals, architectural signage, engraved signs, name badges, digital graphics, awards plaques and much more. President Scott Loeb is now heading the company purchased by his father Larry in 1996. Larry is "semi-retired," but still comes in to help out on a daily basis. Their corporate office is located at 6321 South Salina Street in Nedrow.

Scott says, "Recognizing the need for our products and services, we have assembled a creative staff of salespeople, graphic artists, fabricators and installers who take pride in their work and know they represent Signage Systems every time they communicate with our valued customers."

# Methuselah Lives

by Rhea Jezer



This month, we celebrate *Tu b'Shevat*, the Jewish festival of trees. It is our responsibility to protect trees in Israel and the world. Trees help clean the air, provide oxygen, food and shade, save water, prevent erosion and are vital to our very existence. The palm trees in Israel were decimated due to misuse and abuse by humans.

As we celebrate the new year of the trees, let us take heed to the words of the Psalms: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: they shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon"

Have you ever wondered what the world looked like a thousand years ago? We get a glimpse of Israel in the Torah: "A land flowing with milk and honey." Honey was often made from dates. Ancient Israel was covered with date palm trees, and their fruit was known as the embodiment of life and prosperity and valued for its taste, large size and medicinal properties.

Amazingly, today we have the opportunity to see a palm tree from over two thousand years ago. In 1963, six seeds were discovered at Masada, in a jar in Herod the Great's palace, where they had been buried for centuries. The seeds, preserved by the arid climate, were probably left there between 1500 BCE and 64 AD. For over 40 years, the seeds were kept in storage, but in 2005, Dr. Elaine Solowey, founder of the Center for Sustainable Agriculture at the Arava Institute for Environmental Research in Israel, successfully germinated one seed. The seedling was nicknamed "Methuselah" after Noah's grandfather, the oldest person mentioned in the Bible.

In 2011, Methuselah was transferred from its pot in the greenhouse and replanted in its current site at Kibbutz



Ketura, where we posed with it. Dr. Solowey has continued to grow date palms from the five other ancient seeds and is planning a date grove. In 2021, Arava Institute staff harvested three bunches of dates from the ancient date palms. Methuselah and all the ancient date trees can be visited by contacting *Keren Kolot*.

Happy *Tu b'Shevat*!



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# Jewish News from Israel

*Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former US president Barack Obama look on as disabled IDF veteran Radi Kaiuf demonstrates the ReWalk exoskeleton system. Kaiuf, who was formerly nearly fully paralyzed, completed the Israel Marathon in 2012 using the system.*



Israel is renowned for its ability to innovate. That same innovative spirit is also applied to efforts to repair disabilities in sight, movement and hearing. Oded Ben-Dov, co-founder of Sesame Enable, explained: "Being an Israeli startup helps because there is so much support in our society for people and companies whose goal is to help those in need. Not only is social tech and 'tech for good' on the rise here, but it's backed by the government. For the past year, Sesame Enable has been supported by Israel's Chief Scientist through a special program for companies offering solutions for people with special needs. My

partner, Giora Livne, is himself a quadriplegic, and I think the fact that he is Israeli made him more open to taking a risk rather than simply waiting for someone else to create a solution that would help him and others like him gain the independence he was yearning for."

Israel has an entire tech sector dedicated to enabling the disabled. The impact Israeli tech has on people is almost biblical in nature: whether it's helping quadriplegics to walk or the deaf to hear and the vision-impaired to see, Israel is a leading medical innovator. Here are some technological breakthroughs coming out of Israel that can dramatically improve the lives of people with disabilities:

## ReWalk:

When engineer Amit Goffer suffered a bad accident and was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life, he never quit dreaming of being able to walk again. In 2001, he founded ReWalk to enable people with spinal cord injuries to regain much of their natural mobility. Growing from a small research shop based in Israel, ReWalk is now a global medical technology firm. ReWalk's bionic exoskeleton is already giving paraplegics back their ability to stand and walk again. ReWalk straps on from the hips downward and is powered by a wearable battery pack. Forearm crutches help steady the user and provide additional balance. Training centers located all over the world teach clients how to use the system to meet their needs.

## Sesame Phone:

Developed by a quadriplegic IDF veteran and a young game developer, the Sesame Phone is the first completely touch-free smartphone. People who lack use of their hands can now make calls, send emails and

engage in social media using voice activation and groundbreaking head-tracking technology. The company won the Verizon Powerful Answers Award in 2014 for its game-changing mobile solution that can give 150,000 children in the U.S. without the use of their hands the opportunity to access educational opportunities previously inaccessible to them. Oded Ben-Dov, CEO & Co-Founder of Sesame Enable, the company behind the phone, said: "Despite the incredible advancements in technology today, so few are designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. The Sesame Phone is helping to create equality through technology, by opening the doors of the smartphone revolution to those who have until now been shut out: quadriplegics, people with spinal cord injuries, ALS, Cerebral Palsy, severe Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, severe arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other disabilities that limit the use of the hands and arms. This population stands to benefit the most from the independence of the smartphone, and now they can finally have access to that independence."

# JCC Of Syracuse Announces 2023 Annual Meeting and Gala Award Recipients

by Erin Hart

The JCC of Syracuse's 160<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting and Gala will be held on Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup> from 11 am to 2 pm at Ower Vineyards in Cazenovia, NY. This is the JCC's largest and most important fundraiser of the year at which they come together as a community to honor those who have been instrumental in the growth and development of the Center. This essential fundraiser raises thousands of dollars in scholarships each year allowing children to attend the JCC's summer camp, early childhood development program, after school program and programs to mainstream children with special needs. It also allows the JCC to offer discounted fitness classes to those in need and enables it to serve over 6,000 meals to senior adults each year.

The gala will once again bring the "New York City Deli Experience" to Upstate New York with the return of Yitzy of Essen New York Deli. The mouth-watering corned beef will make its much anticipated return this



year with an authentic Jewish deli brunch. The event will kick off with a cocktail hour, followed by brunch and a brief meeting and awards ceremony. New this year will be video presentations of the honorees.

This year's honorees represent a wide spectrum of dedication and support. The Kovod Award, which signifies honor and importance, is awarded annually to those members who have been active in events and programs in an outstanding way. The

JCC will be present this year's Kovod award to Shai Jaffe. Shai has grown instrumentally over the past few years working in the Children's Programming department. He will be recognized for his dedication to the JCC and for his outstanding work with children from ECDP, After School and summer camp.

The Kovod Gadol Award, which in Hebrew, translates to "great honor". This award is presented each year to honor a single individual or couple who has demonstrated, usually over a period of

years, an extraordinary degree of commitment, energy and loyalty to the JCC and greater community. This year's Kovod Gadol award will be presented to JCC Board Member and longstanding supporter, Steven Wladis. Steven has served on the JCC Board of directors for 20 years and has been the continual Annual Meeting & Gala naming sponsor.

This year's Hall of Fame award is being presented to Board President, Steven Sisskind. Steven has served as president of the Board for ten years. This is Steven's final year as Board President, and the JCC will honor the dedication and support he has shown during his tenure.

"We are delighted to honor another outstanding group of honorees this year," said the JCC's Executive Director, Marci Erlebacher. "The continued support and service that these individuals have given to the JCC, and the greater Jewish Community is truly remarkable. We look forward to honoring them all at this year's event."

**For more information on the upcoming Annual Meeting and Gala, including tickets and sponsorship opportunities, contact Erin Hart at 315-445-2360, ext. 112, or [ehart@jccsy.org](mailto:ehart@jccsy.org).**



## » Book Review

# CYCLORAMA by Adam Langer

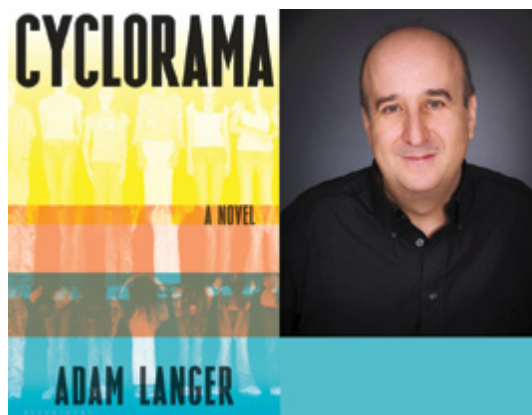
Review by Angela Locke

*Cyclorama*, by Adam Langer, is the story of ten teenagers brought together by a high school production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* that will shape and influence the rest of their lives. The Sam Pomeranz JCC is co-sponsoring a book talk about *Cyclorama* with the JCC of Palm Beaches via Zoom on Wednesday, February 22 at 7 pm. The *JO* asked Angela Locke, a frequent reviewer, to tell us about *Cyclorama*.

Thanks to the award-winning team of Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was rewritten for its 1955 Broadway debut which received a Tony Award, a Pulitzer and numerous other nominations. Since then, Anne Frank and the other occupants of the Annex in Amsterdam have been given revised and adapted life on stages around the world. Despite historical accuracy that may have been compromised, *The Diary* has introduced countless teenagers and young adults to the horrors of the Holocaust through

the words of a young girl very much like them.

This play is the backdrop in the recently published *Cyclorama* (2022 Bloomsbury) by Adam Langer, a prolific writer who is now executive director of *The Forward*, the progressive centenarian Jewish news source. In the book, a high school theatre director, circa 1982, leads his charges through the script, nearly brutalizing them into an emotionally raw presentation and exposing them to the kind of abuse #metoo has us discussing. The ten students are given to



us in sections entitled by the character they play. The plot of the first of two parts concerns these kids, their families and their mostly tumultuous, even ugly, relationships to each other. The climax of this first part is a scheme gone wrong, an attempt to expose the ugliness of their director that doesn't pan out the way it might have.

Fast forward to 2016 for the novel's second part. Our cyclorama is a collage of our current times: an unqualified candidate for president busy diminishing what was once called "discourse," immigration disasters, racial violence, homelessness and other humanitarian failures. Our high school students are adults, some successful, some leading productive lives, some gone, some wishing they were gone. In the age of social media, it doesn't take long for a story written by the student who had played Peter Van Daan, now a journalist, to post to the Internet an article, based on his research and interviews, entitled "Three And A Half Decades Later, Memories Of Abuse Still Linger." The story is tweeted and retweeted, and soon we have the plot maelstrom of the second part of the book.

Issues of import abound in this novel. What is guilt, who is guilty and who enables the guilty?

How are people built up or cut down by their cultural time? Does history change and, if so, who rewrites it? Langer creates authentic characters and doesn't stray from the complexity of relationships as he addresses these questions.

But. But. But. Do we always save the "but" for last? Other reviews have talked of Anne Frank's story reflecting our current crises or warning us about hatred and its fallout. Here's the problem: The Holocaust isn't a teenage angst drama. It's true that teenagers the world over have identified with Anne's mixed feelings about Peter, her conflict with her mother, her dreams, her intelligence. Her loneliness and *their* loneliness, her annoyance at her mother and *their* family problems, her being imprisoned in an attic and *their* being imprisoned in any number of places, and even her death and the death of someone's sister or brother—these connections are part of the power of Anne's story. But *Cyclorama* is rife with the trivialization of the scope and horror of the Holocaust. I'm sure that was not Langer's intention. But the development and implementation of a theory and method of complete annihilation of a people does not equate even to modern political realities, say nothing of to a group of ten kids coming to terms with their relatively privileged lives.

## Meira Cook to Discuss *The Full Catastrophe* at Temple Concord

by Chana Meir

On February 13 at 7 pm, Meira Cook will discuss her novel *The Full Catastrophe* as part of Temple Concord's Regina F. Goldenberg Cultural Series.

The story centers on Charlie Minkoff, a thirteen-year-old boy born with intersex traits, and his grandfather, a 96-year-old Holocaust survivor and Charlie's best friend and confidant. When Charlie discovers that his grandfather never had a *bar mitzvah* due to the war, he decides to arrange a joint *bar mitzvah* for himself and his *zeide*. Dealing with bullying at school and wondering about the Orthodox Jewish father who abandoned him, he navigates the assorted "catastrophes" in his life with the help of his makeshift family: his mother's best friend Weeza, a mysterious girl in his class with secrets of her own and his desperately needy and perpetually hungry dog, Gellman.

Cook, who resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is the author of three previous novels and five poetry collections. She has been honored with the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award and the



Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction. Prairie Books Now praised *The Full Catastrophe* as having "characters as rich and multi-faceted as life itself."

**The event is virtual and free. To receive the Zoom link, register by clicking the link on the Events Calendar at [templeconcord.org](http://templeconcord.org).**

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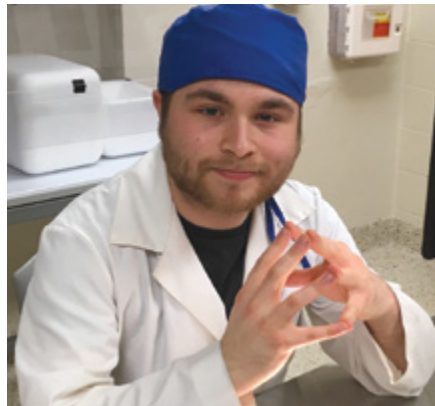
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# I have Autism!

by Julian David-Drori

There, now that I have piqued your interest, let's dive in, shall we?



These days, I do clinical work and research in the neurosciences, mainly centered around neurodevelopmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder and developmental dysgraphia. I have my MS from Columbia University in neuroscience and education. Currently, I am applying to doctoral programs with the end goal of becoming a clinical neuropsychologist specializing in neuropsychopharmacology and neurodevelopmental disabilities. Regularly, people tell my mother when they see her at one of her events through Bakergirl desserts that she should be kvelling over me and my accomplishments. However, things weren't always that way.

The way I got into my field of study was not through work, research or even reading about it in a book like many of my colleagues. My original and most impactful education came by first-hand experience. You see, I have a number of neurodevelopmental disabilities myself.

As a native of CNY, I grew up in this community and attended many of the same schools that members of your *mishpucha* attend now. Back then, we weren't as... knowledgeable about these issues as we are today. It was believed that because someone had a learning disability, they couldn't have ADHD so I was misdiagnosed as not having it and thus suffered through many years without meds. In addition, no one had heard of dysgraphia, much less had accommodations for the disorder. So many of the options available to me would be considered idiotic by today's standards. In fact, I was the first kid in the JD district to use speech-to-text software. However, the software I had was *meshugana* at best. While my family was and always has been endlessly supportive, and I definitely had supports in the world around me, I had to

do a lot of self-advocacy. With that said, I'd like to add the following: all of this took a great deal of dedication and hard work on my part. What this means is that just because your child may receive services or may receive medication, that may not solve all the issues as most of these disorders impact in more than one way.

Now, how does this relate to you, the reader, who I'm sure has been waiting on *shpilkes* as we shlepped through the above ordeal. Nowadays, there are so many supports open to individuals like me. For example, the Syracuse Hebrew Day School now offers so many more resources that make a Jewish education feasible than they had in my day. Furthermore, there is so much data available from so many sources that parents are better able to help their kids and provide them with supports.

While this is all well and good, there's still more to do. And that brings me to my main message here. Simply put, there is no one way to be a Jew or a human for that matter. As a religion, and as a community, we need to be more accepting and inclusive. In short, what I'm asking is that people be open to incorporating those of us who have different needs. At the same time, while it might be well-intentioned, please don't go up to families or individuals and give them unsolicited advice. For example: going up to individuals and their families and telling them about what your cousin's doorman's brother was able to accomplish, even though he had autism, when he went gluten-free. Still with all of this said, it's important to remember that individual issues vary widely, and some people may not want or appreciate help.



Further, I would relate that in my work, I have done a great deal of advocacy, including writing a protocol (entitled Church For All Kids or CFAK) for a church in Yonkers, which has helped them create a more inclusive environment. This document was based on an earlier work I wrote called SFAK or Synagogue For All Kids. ***If any of you would like help or resources, any help that I can render in general, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at Exnersarea@gmail.com.***

# Beit Tikvah Group Residence



**"I love Beit Tikvah!" exclaimed Elizabeth, who has lived at the group residence since its inception. "I love the house, I love the food, I love the people."**

Beit Tikvah was created by a very determined cohort of women who saw a need and did not stop until they met it. The Jewish community stepped up to help and the only Jewish group home in Central New York, and the only kosher group home in the upstate area, was established. Several of the current residents and staff members have been at Beit Tikvah since its inception. "The staff is very caring," said the mother of one of the residents. The residence exemplifies Syracuse Jewish Family Service's core values of "autonomy, diversity, and respect [which] drive our passion for serving individuals with disabilities," says SJFS executive director Joe Gross.

Beit Tikvah is the name used to refer to Menorah Park Group Residences, Inc. a group home incorporated on May 5, 2008 and housed on Jamar Drive since October 2008. Under the auspices of Menorah Park, its services and programs are provided jointly by Jewish Family Service and Menorah Park. Funding is received from New York State and from individual donations, grants from various organizations, including the Menorah Park Foundation, the Pomeranz Trust and the Jewish Federation of Central New York. These funders have been very generous over the years, and their support is much appreciated.

"It's a godsend," said Ellen Weinstein about the Beit Tikvah Group Residence for young women living with developmental disabilities where her daughter Lisa lives. "It gives us peace of mind. We can sleep well at night knowing that the young women are well taken care of."



The Beit Tikvah residence provides a comfortable environment that meets diverse developmental, emotional and physical requirements for four young women of different backgrounds. To ensure a safe environment, trained direct-care staff offer 24/7 supervision. During their time at Beit Tikvah, residents are encouraged to prepare for greater living independence. The care team works with each resident to define habilitation goals and increase autonomy and encourages community integration through a variety of unique programming. Residents and their guests partake in essential Jewish traditions and holidays providing a strong connection to their spiritual community.

During the day, the women go to "dayhab," habilitative services that are provided through group activities out of the person's home. A staff person from SJFS visits weekly, and every Friday night the residents celebrate Shabbat with Susie Drazen, who leads the group remotely from her home in Madison, Wisconsin. Rabbi Shore conducts services and leads the celebrations for holidays with Susie complementing with remote services. COVID's many restrictions put a stop to many of Beit Tikvah's social activities, but they are slowly resuming their involvement with the community. The residents welcome the opportunity to interact with others.



# I Lost My Job, I'm A Quadriplegic and I'm The Luckiest Man In The World

by Stephen Baron

*Dr. Stephen Baron lived in Syracuse and taught political science for over 20 years at SUNY-Oswego. Three years ago, he and his wife, Dr. Nancy Havernick, made aliyah and now live in Israel, close to their two daughters. Stephen was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis about 40 years ago. This is his story.*

**Disability falls into three rough categories, depending on the timing and progression. It is a bit like "greatness." Some are born with disability, others achieve disabled status and others have disability thrust upon them by an accident or severe, acute illness. I achieved mine, as described below.**

Multiple sclerosis slowly progressed, originally in fits and starts of attacks that would come and partially resolve, usually at the most inconvenient times, like sixth grade graduation for our daughter at the Syracuse Day School. Later, it just slowly progressed. I had the opportunity to teach political science for 23 years, the last 20 at SUNY Oswego. I met my wife, Nancy Havernick, when she was a neurology resident. Although it was inevitable that she would help direct the course of my treatment by asking my neurologists questions at appropriate times, doctors can't treat family members. We married in January of 1982, about a year after meeting in the context of my first recognized neurological episode. My attending physician kindly gave me a diagnosis of something that would not come back. Much to my chagrin (and his) another episode occurred six weeks after our wedding.

In addition to attitude, the support system surrounding a person with a disability makes a huge difference. I have been lucky to have a supportive wife (who nevertheless kept me grounded and didn't allow excess self-pity) and two beautiful daughters. We were all active in the Syracuse Jewish community and in our synagogue. We made aliyah just over three years ago to be closer to our daughters, who made the leap ahead of us. We are lucky enough to live across the street from Miriam and her family, including our



seven precious grandchildren. We often see Alexis, who is not too far away in Jerusalem. The Israeli health system and government encourage and facilitate the hiring of foreign workers who provide support in our home. My aid, Berto, who is from the Philippines, arrived just before Israel closed to incoming airplanes at the beginning of the COVID lockdowns. He has enriched my life as well as provided Nancy with some freedom of movement. We are blessed to have him as a part of our family.

In an article for Aish.com entitled "My MS Attitude," Stephen described the trajectory of his illness: "While I'm a quadriplegic now, it wasn't always this way. Rather, it's been a slow progression. I used to swim one kilometer each day, and walk, run or bike many miles at a time. Over the years, this yielded to a stroll around the block. I've now been in a wheelchair for almost 15 years. For 23 years, I taught political science at the college level. When it got to the point where my students were pushing me to class, signing my papers and so forth, I decided it was time to retire."

Steve addressed a very important issue in this article: "What distinguishes how I approach life?" His answer: "Two things: acceptance and reasonable expectations." Initially, acceptance was a challenge. "After all," he wrote, "none of us wants to acknowledge that we have a chronic illness, a condition which will only get worse. MS is a neurological disorder in which the insulation of the nerves (the myelin sheath) is eaten away. The electrical impulses from the brain

that make the muscles 'fire' are thus prevented from working. It's like an electrical appliance: If the insulation protecting the cord isn't there, the appliance will short circuit."

"I have no idea why I got MS," Steve wrote. "No one does. I had to accept it as a part of the grand scheme of the universe that was beyond my comprehension." But acceptance was only the beginning. Steve writes that he had to decide whether to let MS define him and pursue life as a victim or continue life as normally as possible. "As someone who's always prided himself on being independent," he writes, "the idea of defining myself by MS, as a victim, grated on me. How could I maintain my self-respect, while allowing this illness to define me?" Instead, he opted for "pursuing a life guided by reasonable expectations" beginning with "accepting the reality that we're not in any position to have unreasonable expectations. Doing so would imply that we're in control, and if MS has taught me anything, it's that God is in control."

In Steve's view, "Our situation is as good or bad as we choose to make it. Thinking less about your own condition is a good place to begin. Our natural inclination is to think that our own situation

is the worst in the world. As my doctor/wife has pointed out, no problem is small if it's your own. It is defeatist to mourn over what we used to be able to do but can't do anymore. First, it denies God's sovereignty. Second, it's an exercise in frustration -- and that's the last thing we need on top of everything else."

As a result, Steve wrote, "I'm no longer set on changing the world as I once was, as most young people are. These days I'm occupied writing, corresponding with people all over the world, reading Torah, the news, and being the best husband, father, brother and friend I can. A voice input computer and the Internet have made the first four things possible. For the immediate future, I'm intent on writing things that will help people, especially those with MS. In the long term, I'll be satisfied if my children will continue to be a credit to my name, and if people will always remember me for the good things I have done."

Stephen concluded his article with a poem that he had written:

## I'M TIRED

Of being a quadriplegic  
Of always having to sit in my wheelchair  
Of needing someone to dress me every day  
Of needing someone to feed me every day  
Of not being able to sign my name  
Of not being able to hold the telephone  
Of needing someone to push my wheelchair  
Of needing someone to toilet me  
Of needing my wife to roll me over in bed  
Of not being able to hug my wife or children

But I'm also very grateful for  
A loving wife  
Two beautiful daughters  
Seven wonderful grandchildren  
A wonderfully supportive extended family  
Good friends  
Being able to write things that people find interesting  
A voice input computer that allows me to write  
All things considered, I'm the luckiest man in the world.



# Working Together

So many of our community's agencies and organizations have been increasing their interactions with one another.



The JCC's executive director Marci Erlebacher showed members of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School's Student Council how to make and braid dough for challah. The school's student body enjoyed the delicious fresh challah at their Friday all-school Shabbat celebration.



Fifth to 7th grade students from the Syracuse Community Hebrew School have been connecting with Menorah Park residents through regular Zoom calls and large-scale events like challah braiding and holiday celebrations. Students were able to share their creations with a 90-year old Holocaust survivor, and the impact was not lost on the students. Cara Graham and Rachel Pettiford, for example, reported that "If you engage with your community, you could learn more about others, as well as yourself." Gary, a resident at Menorah Park, shared that he was "especially impressed with the fact that the rabbi came to talk to the students about their religious practices regarding Jewish holidays and the challah bread and matzah... I feel it's so important that young people hear the story of their faith and the saga that goes along with it."



Members of the NexGen group went to the Everson Museum to help the community celebrate festivals of trees and lights and then held their own celebration of the winter holidays.



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# Day School Plans Three Exciting Spring Events

by Melissa Klemperer

## Adventure With Nature

On Sunday, February 5 from 3:30 to 5 pm, prospective and current Day School families are invited to celebrate *Tu b'Shevat*, the Jewish New Year for the Trees. *Tu b'Shevat* marks the importance of ecological awareness and reminds us of our responsibility to take care of the earth. It is also the season when the earliest blooming trees will begin a new fruit-bearing cycle in Israel. Participants will engage in activities that celebrate the Earth's gifts and create art pieces inspired by nature. They will sample symbolic foods in honor of the holiday and have the opportunity to join faculty and current students in their classrooms for planting and music. RSVP by January 30 by clicking on the accompanying QR code. The cost is \$10 per family, including snacks.

## Cheer for the Crunch

On Sunday, March 26 at 5 pm, the entire community is invited to a Syracuse Crunch versus Utica Comets hockey game. Cheer on the home team as the Syracuse Hebrew Day School stands proudly on the ice and sings the national anthem. For tickets, visit [syracusecrunch.com](http://syracusecrunch.com) and enter the code "SHDS" to access preferred rates. Register by February 7 to be entered to win a super early bird draw for a signed team hockey stick. (How many Syracuse Crunch players' signatures can you count on the stick?) Plus, register by March 1 and be entered to win an early bird draw for a worn Syracuse Crunch team practice jersey. (If you register by February 7, you will be entered into both draws.)

For SHDS alumni, there is a special on-ice opportunity. No skates required. Contact [info@shds.org](mailto:info@shds.org) for details. Also, have you—or your child or grandchild—ever dreamed of riding the Zamboni during a hockey game intermission? Visit [www.facebook.com/SyracuseHebrewDaySchool](http://www.facebook.com/SyracuseHebrewDaySchool) for details on how to enter this raffle. Lastly, there will be an



SHDS student performance in Memorial Hall—just outside the rink—beginning at 4 pm, which is when doors open for the game.

## Casino Night Fundraiser

SHDS is proud to invite all alumni, parents, friends and the community for a Casino Night Fundraiser on Sunday, April 30 at 5 pm. This adults-only event will

celebrate SHDS' past and inspire guests about SHDS' future, while having a blast playing the casino to support our beloved day school. There will be food, fun, games and more. This is going to be a special not to be missed event.

SHDS Head of School Michael Ferman commented, "We hope everyone will get out their calendar and note these three really amazing events. While you are doing so, send a calendar invite to your family and friends. We want to share our pride in our community's Day School with the whole community. SHDS is a joyful and warm learning environment with a close-knit, collaborative and diverse community. Students benefit from a rigorous dual-curricular program that also teaches decision-making and social responsibility. SHDS educates the mind and spirit through a curriculum based on Jewish tradition and values. Our gem of a school is truly unparalleled in Central New York. Come and connect with us at these fun events and learn about the SHDS difference."

# Bringing History to Life at Temple Adath Yeshurun

by Sonali McIntyre

Temple Adath Yeshurun has been celebrating its 150th anniversary as a congregation, and its 50th anniversary (two years delayed due to the pandemic) of its residence on Kimber Road. To honor this milestone, TAY kicked off its celebrations with a concert in November featuring renowned Jewish Bluegrass band Nefesh Mountain, honoring Barbara Simon's retirement and officially welcoming Rabbi Moshe and Meira Saks.

During the evening celebration, a display of some historic Temple artifacts was set up, with which guests could interact in the Solomon and Lillian Spector Hall. Items included trophies, celebration books, certificates and declarations, an old chuppah, deposit books from the 1920s, a ceremonial shovel from the groundbreaking for the Kimber Road location and more. The collection is only a small percentage of items found thus far through the efforts of Margaret Taeler, a TAY Board member.

"Temple Adath Yeshurun possesses a wealth of historic material, including documents, photos and Judaica, potentially



dating back to early in its 150-year history," stated Taeler. "We are currently attempting to locate, sort and identify these materials – a monumental task! We will then need to archive our treasure trove to preserve



it for future generations. This project is important not only to illuminate Adath's history, but also to document the history of Jews in Syracuse and, by extension, in the United States."

Taeler volunteers countless hours in the Temple Adath Yeshurun office to pour over and sort the items she has uncovered. Others interested in volunteering time towards the TAY 150 Archive project are welcome to come to TAY every other Thursday (including February 9 and February 23) from 11 am to 1 pm to assist with finding, sorting and preparing various archival items for events where guests can experience TAY's history. **For more information, email [info@adath.org](mailto:info@adath.org).**

## ATTENTION SNOWBIRDS!

**Due to postal regulations, the *Jewish Observer* will no longer be forwarded to temporary change addresses.**

If you plan to be away from your permanent address and are having your first class mail forwarded to your temporary address and would like to continue to receive the *JO* while you are out of town, **please call Amy Bates at 315-445-0161** to give us your temporary address. Thank you!



# A Place Where Everyone Belongs

One of the catchphrases of the Sam Pomeranz JCC is “a place where everyone belongs.” In all of its children’s programming, the JCC is committed to providing the best possible experience and ensuring the best possible outcomes. Because of this, in both its early childhood, school age and camp programs, the Center seeks to help children live up to their full potential. According to the Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “in the first few years of life, more than one million new neural connections form every second.” As a result, early identification of developmental problems during the first five years can make a big difference in changing the trajectory of a child’s life.

In the JCC’s Early Childhood Development Program, the services of the Children’s Therapy Network are utilized for parents and teachers to provide an individualized support system for children who need it. The JCC’s support program includes two speech therapists, an occupational therapist, two physical therapists and a special education teacher. They work with the children and their families. Support is provided by the county and local school districts for children who qualify for early intervention. Amy Bisnett, associate director of children’s programming, adds, “We, as educators, know how important it is for young children to receive additional support. Our teachers are well versed in childhood development and assessment. Working with the parents, we can advocate through early intervention and pre-school services. The goal is to help support the children in their early developing years, so they are well prepared and ready for kindergarten.”



The Center also provides accommodations for school-age children in its After School Program, making modifications in the program that allow for participation of children with special needs, while also providing them with opportunities to socialize with their peers.



The *Yachad*/Together program is the J’s Camp Romano’s inclusion program for children with autism. It’s designed to create a sense of community among participants and help campers develop feelings of belonging and independence. *Yachad* provides a fun camp experience modified to the camper’s needs, with trained support staff who work to improve social interactions and social skills among the campers and facilitate friendships.

The JCC strives to promote a culture of inclusion and diversity within the Jewish community and welcomes and supports individuals of all abilities and their families. “An inclusive community is a stronger community,” said Marci Erlebacher, JCC executive director. “Jewish individuals with disabilities and their families have needs that are universal to all families.”



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## IDA MESCON November 12, 2022

Ida Mescon was a celebrated and revered teacher, singer, community theater actor, a volunteer who sang for elderly patients at local nursing and veterans' homes and a role model for anyone who met her.

Ida grew up on her family's farm in Cardiff, NY, doing her chores before first light and then walking two miles to school. Her work ethic was learned at home and used throughout her long and admirable 93-year life. A graduate of Central City Business Institute in Syracuse, she secured her first job as executive secretary for Otis and Charles Brannock, inventors of the Brannock Device.

She studied at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore and toured with the Geraldine Arnold Singers until she met and married David Mescon and started a family of four children. To fulfill her dream of becoming a schoolteacher, Ida went back to Onondaga Community College and Syracuse University to get a degree in education. She earned her master's degree in education through her joint work with Johns Hopkins University where she helped develop and test a Cross-Age Tutoring Program with her students. She taught at Moses Dewitt School until 1994 and then substitute taught for another decade.

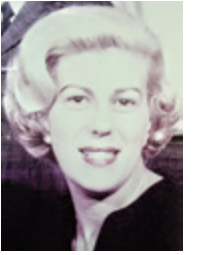
Ida led her own household with confidence after the early deaths of her husband and her son Kirk, to whom she had donated one of her kidneys. She did what had to be

done under challenging circumstances. She is survived by her daughters Elisa Mescon and Cynthia Jasper, and her son Scott (Nancy) Mescon, her grandsons, David Jasper and Steven Jasper and her great-granddaughter Sephina Jasper. Her children were proud to have such an example of accomplishment earned through hard work, a woman with the esteem of the community as an educator and a person with the quiet sophistication in which she interacted with people.

Ida adamantly directed that there be no formal funeral for her. A private remembrance will take place at the family's discretion. However, she made the decision to donate her body to her son Kirk's medical school after hearing him talk about a critical lack of cadavers on which to train medical students. She was very proud of this and would encourage others to make such anatomical gifts.

She spent her last year at Menorah Park Skilled Nursing Facility where her family visited her every day. She became a favorite of staff for her wonderful sense of humor, her infectious smile and the love and respect she returned to her caregivers. Her family feels blessed to have had such caring people taking care of Ida in her final days. Donations may be given in her honor to the Menorah Park Fund for Employees, c/o Director of Human Resources.

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## CAROL SOLOMON ROTHCHILD

Carol Solomon Rothchild, 80, of Fayetteville, NY died in Syracuse, NY. Carol graduated from Pebble Hill School and Syracuse University. She was previously on the board and vice president of Temple Concord in Syracuse. Carol was a volunteer in various organizations throughout her life. She was predeceased by her parents Harris A. and Estelle S. Solomon of Syracuse. Surviving are her husband Gerald W., daughter Laura, and granddaughter Emma. Services private.



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**ELEANOR GROSS**  
**November 19, 2022**

Eleanor Gross of 116 Hillsboro Parkway, in Syracuse, died on November 19 at the age of 96, leaving behind two sons, Mark of New York City and Richard of Auburn and a daughter, Yoheved Polowin of Montreal, Canada, as well as 30 grandchildren, great and great-great grandchildren, all of whom mourn her passing.

The funeral was held in Brooklyn, where Eleanor was temporarily residing, so she could be near her grandchildren while recovering from a fractured rib. She is buried in Mt. Hebron cemetery in Flushing, near her uncles, Lazer and Lepkie Funk, and her aunt Ida, whom she used to visit when she was growing up on Georgia Avenue in East New York, around the corner from Fortunoff's when it was still a five and dime store.

Eleanor was a depository of memory, a chronicler of the Jewish community of Syracuse and New York City in stories going back almost a century, and if she exaggerated a little, that was all the more appreciated. Eleanor played violin as a teenager. Her accompanist on piano was Gordon McRae, as they had the same music teacher. Eleanor seemed headed for Juilliard and a career in music until she met Philip Gross who was visiting from Milwaukee and later became the local TV repairman, to whom Eleanor was married for 65 years. As a novice housewife, Eleanor was featured in the "Pie of the Month" column in the Syracuse Herald-Journal as shown in the accompanying photo. Along with her mother, Julia Vann, Eleanor won a plethora of awards over the years at the New York State Fair for knitting and baking. Eleanor seemed to know everybody. She was also known for her brownies. Ultimately, her real and lasting talent was one of affection, of linking people together in a confederacy of hearts.

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**PHYLLIS A. BERINSTEIN**  
**January 1, 2023**

Phyllis A. Berinstein, 84, died on January 1. Phyllis was born on May 21, 1938 in Detroit, to Dr. Raphael and Dorothy Altman. She was a graduate of the University of Michigan and earned her master's degree at Wayne State University. She met her future husband William in Detroit where they were set up by a mutual friend. Bill proposed two weeks after that first date. August 22 would have been their 59th anniversary.

Phyllis was the owner of Phyllis Berinstein Interiors. She worked with countless families to create beautiful, tasteful and creative interiors all reflecting the family's individual taste and style. Phyllis and her family were lifetime members of Temple Concord. The Benjamin Berinstein Chapel at Temple Concord was her design and donated by the family. It is a beautiful and sacred space.

Phyllis was the former president of the Brockway Farms Garden Club.

Her family includes her beloved and devoted husband Bill, their son Ben and his wife Ilana and their children Jason, Jeffrey and Tammy; their daughter Dorothy and her husband Peter and their children Graham and Minna; her sister Carol Bromberg; her brother-in-law and sister-in-law Henry and Ronney; her niece Jennifer and her husband Nels; and her nephews David and Daniel and his wife Sophie.

Contributions in her memory may be made to The Berinstein Chapel at Temple Concord, 910 Madison Street, Syracuse, NY 13210.

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**MATEELE S. KALL**  
**January 5, 2023**

Mateele S. Kall, 81, passed away peacefully with her family by her side on January 5. Born on March 23, 1941 in Tupper Lake to Joseph and Anecy Shaheen, she had been a resident of Syracuse for more than 65 years. She was a graduate of the Syracuse University School of Business. She earned her CPA license in 1986 and practiced her profession in Syracuse with her partner and husband Sheldon for more than 40 years. She was the managing partner.

Mateele had been an adjunct instructor of accounting at Cazenovia College. She was a member of the board of the Jewish Community Center, volunteered with the Senior Meal Program at the JCC and delivered for Kosher Meals on Wheels. Mateele was a passionate bridge player and especially proud to have the status of a life master.

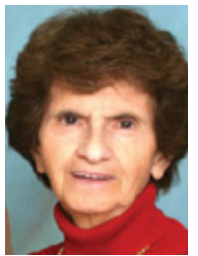
Mateele and her husband Sheldon were the founding trustees of the Pomeranz, Shankman, Martin Charitable Trust. The trust, under their capable guidance, has funded Central New York Jewish agencies

for the past 20 years and will continue to do so. Mateele and Sheldon were honored with the Kovod Gadol award from the JCC in recognition of their dedication to the Jewish community. Mateele and Sheldon were the first people to be awarded the President's Award by Temple Concord. Mateele was also very proud to be a Lion of Judah.

Mateele was the youngest of six children, and the only daughter. Her family includes her husband Sheldon of 57 years, their children Deborah (Joseph) Schaal, Jacquelyn (Steven) Miron, and Matthew (Naomi); grandchildren Jimmy, Rachel, Danny, Sophie, Abby, Hannah and Lucy, her brother Ayupe Shaheen and many beloved nieces and nephews.

Contributions in lieu of flowers may be made to a Jewish agency in the spirit of tikun olam or to The Wild Center of Tupper Lake, NY.

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**REGINA PERELMUT**  
**December 12, 2022**

Regina Perelmut, 94, died December 12 in The Villages, in Florida. Born in Philadelphia on August 30, 1928, she had moved to Syracuse as a teenager with her mother, Helen Rosenberg.

In 1950, Regina married Lester Perelmut, the love of her life. She started enjoying golf when they belonged to Cazenovia Country Club and then at Lafayette Country Club where they enjoyed many years with great friends. Regina loved playing mah jongg, canasta and bridge with her friends. Lester and Regina lived in Syracuse until 1992 when they moved to South Florida. In 2017, Regina decided to move to The Villages to be closer to her daughter. Her family was the most important thing in her life.

Her family includes her son Rick (Janet), her daughter Sherrie (John) Adams, grandchildren Craig (Jenny), Jamie (Stacy), Neil, Staci (Ken), Robbie (Alisan), and Chad, and great-grandchildren Kylie, Juliet, and Teddy.

Contributions may be made to The National Fragile X Foundation: <https://fragilex.org>.

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The coins we dropped in for "charity" were our first introduction to Jewish philanthropy. From early childhood, we learned our responsibility to care for other Jews in need.

Today, Jewish philanthropy has evolved.

It goes far beyond the act of dropping loose change into the pushke. Now it's a dynamic process that requires forethought and careful planning. The children who once saved their pennies for tzedakah are now planning endowments to provide a continuing legacy for living.

The Jewish Community Foundation of Central New York was formed to respond to this evolution. We match a donor's philanthropic interests to the causes they prefer. Today's donors are more involved and creative than ever before, and the Foundation is here to accommodate the new realities of Jewish philanthropy.

For more information about how you can realize your philanthropic intentions, please contact Michael Balanoff at [mbalanoff@jewishfoundationcny.org](mailto:mbalanoff@jewishfoundationcny.org) or call 315-445-0270.



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