

» Older Americans Month

# Jewish Observer

A publication of the Jewish Federation of Central New York

## of Central New York

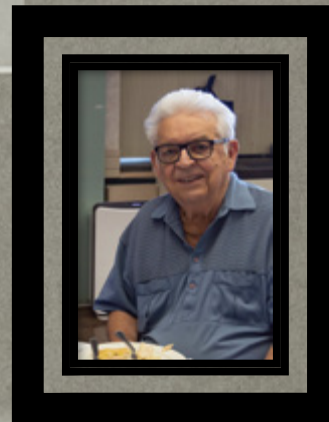
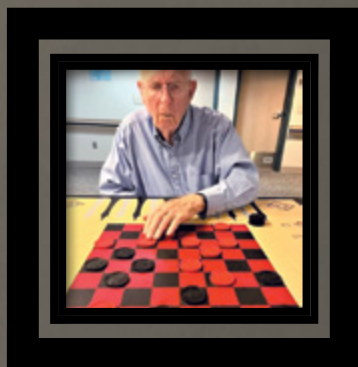
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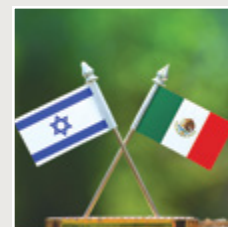
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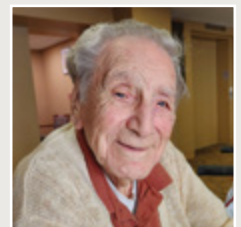
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# May 2023

## From the Editor



Barbara Davis

Beverly Gage, a professor of history at Yale, recently described illness and death as “the universals of earthly existence.” The process of aging inexorably links these two universals and is the subject of a great deal of research, writing and commentary. Our Jewish tradition calls upon us to honor the elderly: *Mipnei sayva takum, v’hadarta p’nei zaken*. You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the aged (Vayikra 19:32). It tells us to do so even when age has taken its toll: “*Be careful with an old man who has forgotten his knowledge through no fault of his own, for it was said: Both the whole tablets (the second set of the Ten Commandments) and the fragments of the tablets (which Moses shattered) were placed in the Ark. (Berakhot 8b)*”

I recently learned of a couple who faced the following situation: he has metastatic bone cancer and she has Alzheimer’s. They live in Florida and are friends of friends, so I was not in a position to do anything to help, but after losing many hours of sleep wondering how they – and I and so many others in our later years – would deal with this situation, I decided to devote an issue of the *Jewish Observer* to the topic of aging Jewishly. After all, whether we are old ourselves or have parents or other relatives who are old or are young and will get old – aging is clearly a topic of interest.

May is Older Americans Month. The Administration for Community Living, part of the Department of Health and Human Services, leads the nation’s observance of OAM. In 2023, the theme of the month is “Aging Unbound.” It seeks to explore diverse aging experiences, discuss how communities can combat stereotypes, promote flexible thinking about aging and recognize how we all benefit when older adults remain engaged, independent and included.

Judaism has a great deal to say about aging. The *Book of Job* declares, “With age comes wisdom, and length of days brings understanding.” “Elder” is used as a term of the highest respect by the Mishna and Talmud. The Rabbis are often referred to as *zekeinim* – elders. Judaism sees older people as important. “The end of the matter is better than the beginning,” says *Kohelet*. The Midrash states that the exodus from Egypt was only possible because of the elders. The Torah states several times that old age is the reward for fulfilling the mitzvot: “That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, upon the land which G-d swore to your fathers to give them, as the days of the heavens above the earth.” Old age is seen as a blessing, not a burden,

and older people are held in the highest esteem for having earned this blessing.

At the same time, Judaism is also realistic about growing older. It recognizes that aging can be a difficult and problematic process, devoid of dignity and accompanied by loneliness, dependency and loss of faculties. It considers paying attention to one’s health to be a fulfillment of the mitzvah to “guard one’s soul.” The Rambam, Maimonides, himself a physician, advocated frequently for proper eating habits, exercise and healthy living. Judaism recognizes that the lack of purpose, perhaps even more than physical disability, is the scourge of old age. Rabbi Yossi said, “A person only ever dies from having nothing to do.”

In this issue of the *Jewish Observer*, we examine several aspects of aging in our own community from a Jewish perspective. We consulted with several of our community’s elders to see what wisdom they might wish to share. We consulted with several of our community’s caregivers, both institutional and individual, to see what insights they might provide. We researched books designed to offer guidance to see what knowledge they had to offer. We hope that all of the resulting articles will prove of interest and, possibly, help for our readers.

Included in this issue are two stories about our teens engaging with our seniors. All sources, both ancient and modern, emphasize that meaningful engagement with life is what makes old age a blessing. We are proud of our community schools’ commitment to making intergenerational engagement a reality here in Central New York.

Lastly, we linked our theme to another holiday celebrated in May, *Cinco de Mayo*. Admittedly, it is a bit of a stretch, but it provided us with a unique opportunity to learn more about the Mexican Jewish community, which is small but growing, and a reason for Federation to hold a *fiesta* for the seniors at Menorah Park, open to the whole community. There is a Mexican proverb that reinforces the idea that getting older means getting wiser: *Más sabe el diablo por viejo que por diablo*, which translates as “The devil knows more by being older than by being the devil.” We hope that this issue of the *JO* will make us all, regardless of our age, a bit more knowledgeable and wiser.

Cover photos from the Senior Lunch Program at the Sam Pomeranz JCC and Menorah Park Galentine’s Day celebration, courtesy of Alec Erlebacher and Thomas Carlson.

# Jewish Observer

of Central New York

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## From the Jewish Federation of CNY President/CEO

# Age is Just a Number

This saying has a couple of variations: “Age is just a number, not a state of mind or a reason for any type of particular behavior,” said novelist Celia Ahearn. Singer Joan Collins amended the maxim to: “Age is just a number. It’s totally irrelevant, of course, unless you happen to be a bottle of wine.” I personally like this version by author Katrina Mayer, “Age is just a number we count until we know enough to know it doesn’t count.”

The world population is slowly aging and we will see a massive growth in the older adult population. By 2060, demographers project that there will be 94.7 million older adults in the United States — almost three times the number of older adults as in the year 2000. American Jews are also an aging population, with a growing number of people aged 65-74. 29% of Jewish adults are age 65 and over, compared to 20% of the general U.S. population and the median age of Jewish adults is 49, compared to 46 for the general American public.

“Aging isn’t just a biological process — it’s also very much a cultural one,” noted an article in the *Huffington Post*. “Even though the United States has an aging population, there is still a clear bias against aging and a general fear of getting old. Even though the emphasis on youth and beauty has traditionally been directed more toward females than males, we are now seeing an increasing concern with males about aging and getting old.”

In some cultures and in years past, elders were a highly respected group, esteemed for their experience and wisdom. Today we see a different attitude and ageism has become a troublesome aspect of our society. But age is not an indication of ability. Dr. Helene D. Fung, in an article in *The Gerontologist*, defines aging as “a meaning-making process.” She cites research that shows that as people perceive their futures as increasingly limited, they focus their efforts on prioritizing goals that aim at deriving emotional meaning from life. They seek to make a difference in accordance with their values. They seek to create meaningful legacies.

In our own community, we see this in practice. Many of our most active leaders and workers and volunteers are people in the seventh, eighth and even ninth decades



Michael Balanoff

of their lives. While admiring and respecting the energy, knowledge and passion of younger generations, they also know that what they have seen and heard and learned during the course of their lives is wisdom that must be passed on. It’s not a matter of “we have always done it this way,” but rather “here is what we have learned, and we want to share it with you, so you can build upon it.”

The success of our community, now and in the future, lies in intergenerational respect. Each generation has its own unique perspectives, challenges and contributions. We grow by learning from people who are different from us, whether the difference is in age, race, ethnicity, gender or background. We are stronger when we listen to one another, respect one another, learn from one another. The Torah tells us, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of each generation; ask your father, and he will tell you, your elders, and they will say to you.” We learn lessons for the future from the stories of the past. As we focus on the present and plan for the future, we are fortunate to have people of many generations to guide us along the way.



## FEDERATION 2023 CAMPAIGN UPDATE

- *Ruth Bader Ginsburg defined a meaningful life as “living not for oneself, but for one’s community.”*
- *Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks defined society as “where we come together to achieve collectively what none of us can do alone...It is the realm in which all of us is more important than any of us.”*

In Hebrew, the word “to give” is *natan*. In both Hebrew and in English, the word reads the same both forward and backward. “To give” is also “to receive.” Think about it.

As of April 11, 2023, over 550 very generous donors have contributed \$765,278 to Federation’s 2023 campaign. This is a significant increase over last year’s gifts from the same donors of \$719,734. 5% of the donors are first time contributors. We are very, very grateful for these gifts, which will provide essential support for our community’s institutions.

There are 200 donors from 2022 who have not yet made their pledges to the campaign. If you are one of them, we want to thank you for your past support and urge you to consider renewing or increasing your pledge as soon as possible at <https://jewishfederationcny.org/campaign-pledge/>. The Federation board decides in May how much money it can allocate to our community, and it cannot give what it does not expect to bring in.

Your donation supports, strengthens and secures our Jewish community. And by giving, you are also receiving. Thank you.

# The Blintz and the Jewish Problem

by Rabbi Irvin S. Beigel, Jewish Chaplain at Loretto

The cheese blintz is, of course, a delicious crepe filled with nourishing, and often sweetened, cheese. It is one of the delights enjoyed on Shavuot. I maintain, however, that the blintz offers not only a tasty treat, but that it is the key to understanding the holiday of Shavuot. It also tells us a lot about the condition of Jewish life today.

The blintz is eaten by young and old alike. It does not know from age discrimination. A golden brown blintz looks pretty good on the outside. The greater satisfaction comes from biting into it and tasting the filling inside.

Shavuot commemorates the establishment of the brit (covenant) between God and the Jewish people. That covenant is based on mutual acceptance of responsibility. God agrees to protect His treasured people from harm and to be our teacher. Every Jew, without exception, is obligated to observe the commandments that God has given to us. After all, the word mitzva means "commandment." It is not just a guideline, nor is it

a suggestion, nor is it merely a good deed. When the Jewish people stood at Mt. Sinai, God did not make any distinction between those who identified as "religious" and those who identified as "not religious." He did not exempt either the young or the old from being members of the Jewish people bound to God by the covenant affirmed at Sinai and a bond strengthened every time a mitzva is done. There are Jews who may not obey the commandments, but opting out was never an option offered to us by God. Those Jews are still our brothers and sisters. It is incumbent on us to respect them and to understand their point of view, even as we want them to understand us.



Just looking at a well-made golden blintz may bring us some happiness, but fully appreciating the blintz requires action. We need to bite into the blintz. We need to savor the taste of the whole blintz, both outer appearance and inner substance. So it is with Torah and mitzvot (commandments). We shortchange ourselves when we look only from afar at the Sabbath, the importance of family, the festival days or generous giving of resources and time to help those in need. A more complete understanding requires our action and involvement.

Mitzva is the prism through which Jews see the world and our obligations to God and to fellow human beings. Jews find joy in doing mitzvot and in

affirming through them that we are each an indispensable link connecting the Jewish past to the Jewish future. Jews, young and old, veteran blintz eaters and neophytes alike, can identify themselves with an eternal people and with enduring values that enrich our lives and the world. Just as the blintz can bring pleasure to people of all ages, so accepting the responsibilities of the brit (the sacred agreement between God and the Jewish people) can bring us joy. That joy can be most meaningful when we more completely understand what lies beneath the surface. Through action and study, we will be able to find there profound and life enhancing meaning.

Oh yes, the Jewish problem? Many Jews do not make the effort to to bite into Jewish tradition and to taste, let alone savor, what it offers. This Shavuot, let us all meet the blintz challenge. Let us all experience the sweetness and spiritual nourishment of Torah and mitzvot.

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# Words of Wisdom

**“Age 90-Plus Adults Tend to Be Resilient and Optimistic. A study finds them in better mental health than younger family members.”** A study published in the journal *International Psychogeriatrics* found that “exceptional longevity was characterized by a balance between acceptance of and grit to overcome adversities, along with a positive attitude and close ties to family, religion, and land, providing purpose in life.” For this issue about Aging Jewishly, the JO reached out to four nonagenarians in our community to ask them to share some words of wisdom with our community.



## Charlotte Chuckie Holstein

“In my 97th year, looking inward, I ask myself, ‘What have I done to make things better than they were before? Have I done anything to make improvements in our community/our neighborhood/our city and to bring social justice and human rights to all? And why is this important to me.’ Because of my beliefs and values, *tikun olam*, *tzdekah*, *l’dor v’dor*, I believe in sustainable communities where there is economic vitality, social justice, social equality and environmental stewardship. I believe the place where we live is only on loan to us from

previous generations, to protect, preserve and make even better for future generations.

I believe in the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee which holds it appropriate to think seven generations ahead and decide whether decisions made today would benefit children seven generations into the future. I believe in the Jewish tradition that teaches us to care for our planet to preserve that which God has created and that any act that damages our earth is an offense against the property of God. Judaism commands us to preserve our natural resources and generate new ones for the future. I believe that I have an obligation to make the place where I live better than I found it for future generations to thrive and enjoy.”

## Bernie Bregman

“At 91, sharing wisdom about my journey is a challenge, especially for a storyteller, but here goes. I love life and revel in it every day. These are the things that I believe contribute to my hanging in when several serious medical conditions challenged me. Nine out of ten of my wonderful four generation family are right here in Syracuse plus a grandson in California who stays very connected. The love of my life, Ona, and I have been happily married for 65 years and it keeps getting better. Valued and meaningful relationships with friends are important contributions to making life special, as was a variety of rewarding careers (just made changes when I was no longer finding emotional satisfaction). Last, but not least,



it is important to feel that one is contributing to the community and the world. I have maintained an active involvement in my synagogue and am also involved in a number of community organizations. Since my retirement at 87, I have added many hours to these activities. These are the blessings that keep me going.”

## Sidney Manes

“Getting up is usually easy. Standing up can be hard. If you do stand up, raise your fist and say, ‘Never again.’ It can make standing up less difficult.”

*Editor’s note: Dr. Alice Honig shared the words below with the Jewish Observer several weeks before she died. Her obituary appears on the Ezkera page. The JO is honored to share her wisdom with our community.*

## Alice Honig

“I have thought what makes a mensch, a good person, a good Jew, for a long time:

- First of all, *rachmonas*, compassion and empathy for others.
- Giving *tzedakah*, charity.
- Doing *mitzvahs*.
- Showing *chesed*, kindness, especially toward vulnerable others and especially toward *kinderlach*.
- Nurturing children to feel understood and well-loved.
- Trying to learn new things your whole life.



When one feels difficult emotions, such as rage, hatred, need for revenge, one needs to feel those feelings fully, wrestle with them and then let them go. They only hurt one’s soul. However, grief and loss may stay a great pain for a long time.

And try occasionally to keep your joy pipes open!”

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# Books About Aging Jewishly



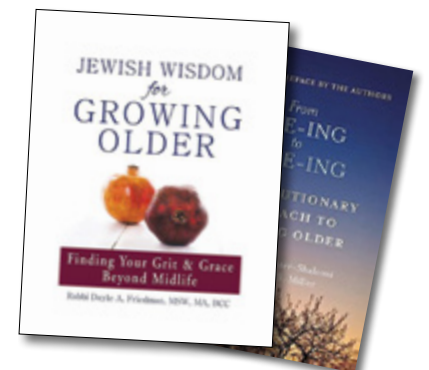
Methuselah lived 969 years. We don't know much about his life other than that he fathered a son at the age of 175, and during the subsequent 782 years had other sons and daughters. Then, probably tired of aging, he died. (This is in contrast to his father, Enoch, aged 365, who did not die but was taken by God.) Presumably Methuselah did not have a lot of information available to him about the aging process. Have things improved since then?

Sadly, not much. Amazon lists over 50,000 entries for "aging." "Aging Jewishly" yields far fewer results. Only one book was published with the title *Aging Jewishly*, and it was rejected by its prospective *JO* reviewer for being very inadequate with the notation that "it is sad that so little on the topic of Jewish elderhood is available." There are a few books that might merit a second look, however.

*Jewish Wisdom for Growing Older: Finding Your Grit and Grace Beyond Midlife*, by Rabbi Dayle Friedman, would be first in the line. The book takes on prevailing but destructive ideas about aging, looks at the possibilities that the years beyond midlife may afford and offers Jewish wisdom along the way.

*From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Revolutionary Approach to Growing Older*, by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller, offers an alternative aging narrative, one not focused on frailty, futility and fear, but rather on developing one's inner sage using tools for inner growth, such as meditation, journal writing and life review.

*Getting Over Getting Older*, by feminist Letty Cottin Pogrebin, describes her reactions to her aging self, ranging from astonishment to anger, confusion to curiosity, denial to disgust. Pogrebin explains that living beyond middle



age means learning to live with decay and growth, impermanence and immutability, losing and letting go.

*Wise Aging: Living With Joy, Resilience & Spirit*, by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Dr. Linda Thal, provides a Jewish framework for reflecting on late life and what is gained and lost during this stage of being. The book recommends developing a spiritual practice as we age and offers a range of readings, meditations and journaling exercises to help.

*Getting Good at Getting Older* by Richard Siegel and Rabbi Laura Geller, brings Jewish wisdom to the question of how to cultivate wisdom in the second half of life. The creator of the best-selling 1970s classic *The Jewish Catalog* provides those "of a certain age" with resources and skills to navigate the years between maturity and old age. A full review appears on page 5.

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## » Book Review

# Getting Good at Getting Older

## by Richard Siegel and Laura Geller

Reviewed by Pamela Wells

Married couple Richard Siegel and Laura Geller co-wrote *Getting Good at Getting Older* while both were in their sixties. Their goal: to bring wisdom to the question of how to age well and with a sense of humor. Much of their advice draws upon Judaic principles (Laura Geller is a rabbi.)

The authors reflect fondly on the 1960s, when days were filled with “marches, music, and energy” and young folks felt “invincible.” They quote a line from the popular 60s counterculture book *Whole Earth Catalog*: “We are as gods and might as well get good at it.” Playing on this “get good” theme, the authors divide their book into six parts.

The oversized, illustrated book has 304 pages devoted to helping us “get good” at:

### Gaining wisdom.

This section focuses on personal

transformation. It gives specific advice about issues like selling the family home or taking off your wedding ring after the death of a spouse.

### Getting along.

Here we learn about honoring and making decisions about your parents, including the sticky and troubling decision about when older adults should stop driving.

### Getting better.

A discussion of staying fit (interesting sidebar on Supreme Court Justice RBG’s



daily strength workout!), visiting sick friends in the hospital, deciding whether and how to reveal a critical illness, mourning.

### Getting ready.

The personal affairs organizer is not enough! Learn about advance directives, burial vs. cremation, how to talk about dying and anticipating and overcoming objections from loved ones.

### Giving back.

The book urges us to find purpose and get involved.

### Giving away.

Four ways to express your legacy through what you give away: money, things, stories and wisdom.

At the end of each section, the authors provide tools and resources to help people take action.

While the book was in progress, Richard Siegel died of cancer. In her author’s note, Laura Geller writes: “As unprepared as any of us is for a loved one to die, I was prepared. I had a list of all his passwords, I knew all his account numbers, our children knew what decisions he would make at the end of his life. That brings me comfort even as I continue the work without him.”

This book is a gentle push into topics and decisions that are fraught and challenging and that many people resist exploring. To the extent that it motivates anyone to be brave enough to accept that death has a 100% success rate in human history, and therefore should be faced with grace, dignity and lots of planning and communication, it is a book well worth reading.

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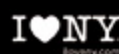
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# Jews, Tacos and *Cinco de mayo*

## Things you probably didn't know:

- There are more than 50,000 Jews living in Mexico today. They are descendants of exiles from Spain in the early 16th century. Spain had banned Judaism and forcibly converted Jews to Catholicism. Seeking religious freedom, which was allowed under the rule of Don Luis de Carvajal in Mexico, many Spanish Jews emigrated there. Although the Inquisition eventually followed, a small population of Jews remained undiscovered by authorities and kept their faith.
- *Cinco de mayo* is not Mexico's Independence Day. That holiday takes place in September. *Cinco de mayo* commemorates the Battle of Puebla, in which the Mexican army triumphed over French forces during the 1862 Franco-Mexican War. The French army was considered one of the most powerful in the world at that time, and the Mexican forces were outnumbered by a battalion twice their size. Yet the victory went to Mexico.
- Despite the victory at Puebla, the French remained in control of Mexico. But Emperor Maximilian I mandated religious tolerance and invited German Jews to Mexico. In later years, due to Mexico's history of religious tolerance, Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms and religious persecution made their way there.

Most of the Jewish population in Mexico today lives in Mexico City. They have a strong Jewish communal infrastructure and just six weeks ago laid the foundation stone for their new \$5 million Jewish center, *Kehilla Ashkenazi*.

According to the World Jewish Congress, there are 30 permanent synagogues and an



additional 20 places of worship during the High Holidays in Mexico. There are no Reform or Reconstructionist communities or synagogues. There are 16 Jewish day schools, considered among the best schools in the country. There is a Jewish Sport Center that has more than 28,000 members and is the center for sports activities as well as many social and cultural programs and services.

The community is organized by "communal identity," according to the

origin of the immigrants (Damascus, Lebanon, Central and Eastern Europe, Aleppo, Turkey, Greece, the Balkans, etc.), with each Community providing educational, religious, social and cultural services for their members. Poor Jewish families are helped with any needs they have: food, health care, medicine, rent, scholarships, etc. The communities are connected through a partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel (funded by the Jewish Federations of North America) which created a Tikkun Empowerment Network in Oaxaca to train young community leaders, help local farmers market their products, provide English and math tutoring and promote ecosystem regeneration through water recovery.

So what's the connections between Jews, tacos and *Cinco de mayo*? There's no direct link, but we are going to celebrate it at Menorah Park with music by Mexican Jewish composers, tacos, Mexican ice cream and lots of *alegria*. We are doing so to honor this Mexican holiday because our neighbor to the South made it possible for Judaism to survive.

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# CARING FOR A SIBLING: Living in the Moment

by Michael Gordon, Ph.D.

A dear friend of mine—I'll call Steve—phoned the other day to see if I had anything to offer that might help him deal with his sister's mental decline. She was at that most torturous stage of dementia – aware of her advancing limitations, but wildly unable to accept them. Even though she was no longer able to care for herself without assistance, she vigorously (and, at times, physically) protested any suggestions that involved a change in her living situation.

Steve reached out to me because he's aware that I've had my share of caretaking responsibilities for close family members. He also knows that I have a clinical background which, if nothing else, forces you to think critically about how best to formulate a treatment plan.

It's rare for me to offer detailed advice, even when solicited. The pitfalls are many. I could be dead wrong in what I suggested, making me at least partially responsible for a bad outcome. But more importantly, I know that people are far more apt to accept suggestions if they feel that they largely came up with them on their own.

What has worked for me in these circumstances has been to talk in terms of over-arching principles that guide decision-making. That's the strategy I've followed in many of the books I've written as well as in my past clinical work. If you lay out some solid guideposts, the optimal trail can be easier to discern.

Here's what I offered up to Steve. I'll warn you that nothing you're about to read is groundbreaking or especially astute. It's just the top three priorities I think are important to keep in mind as you're struggling to figure out how to proceed:

## Safety first

It's understandable that you might be inclined to hold off advocating for changes because you're concerned about your loved one's reactions to them. You might find yourself backing off from doing what's required because you assume (rightly or not) that any suggestions will be met with furious rejection.

In my opinion, what should steer Steve's decision-making is not how his sister might react to his plan. Instead, everything should follow from the answer to this question: "What does my sister need to be safe?" Are we talking daily visits from an aide? Moving in with me? A day treatment program? A move to an assisted living facility?



Once he's decided on a plan, he'll need to set about doing whatever is necessary to make it happen. Upsetting an already terrified loved one is one thing. Getting a phone call that she was found wandering the street or admitted to a hospital malnourished and dehydrated is quite another. The last thing you want is to find yourself burdened by regrets for not having focused most on ensuring health and safety. It will be much easier for Steve to deal with any caretaking fallout if he keeps reminding himself that his efforts all started from a righteous place. He might also find that, once the dust settles, his sister is calmed by knowing her brother has taken charge of the quest to make her safe.

## Don't ask a blind person to see

If you've ever tried to engage in a rational conversation with someone who no longer thinks rationally, you know how supremely frustrating it can become for everyone. I'm embarrassed to think how many times I found myself getting into a debate with my dementing relative and, worse, becoming upset with her for not accepting my superior arguments. Inevitably, I would come to my senses and back off. I'd think to myself, "Idiot, if she were able to be persuaded by fact and logic, she wouldn't be demented. She'd be *compos mentis* and fine."

So much of the decision-making around designing and enacting a treatment plan derives from answers to the question, "Am I asking a blind person to see?" You do not want to force your relative (or child or employee, or anyone else for that matter) into situations where they are overwhelmed by demands they cannot handle. You are simply setting both of you up for failure.

Not long ago I was upset with my diabetic brother when he kept forgetting to bring sugar pills with him. He just needed to put a small pill container in his pocket when he went out the door so he could avoid a hypoglycemic episode and an ambulance ride. But he has intellectual limitations that make reliable compliance with routines a challenge. I could berate him all I wanted to, but ultimately what made a difference was coming up with cuing strategies, such as a big sign on the front door that read, "Take your damned pills!" That has seemed to work just fine.

## Maximize dignity and joy

In the early stages, you find yourself constantly assessing the extent of memory loss. You'll ask if they remember going to the movies yesterday or what they had for lunch. That's all reasonable and fine.

But what isn't fair is to keep asking those kinds of questions when you know darn well they won't remember. So if you hear yourself starting sentences with the phrase, "Don't you remember...", discipline yourself to cut it out. You don't want to unintentionally embarrass a loved one who is already sufficiently humiliated by their circumstance.

I once worked hard on a dinner for my relative who has Alzheimer's. She told me

how good it was as she cleaned her plate. Not more than five minutes later, though, this is how she responded to my wife asking, "Wasn't that a great meal?" Yes, sadly, the response was, "Oh, we already ate?"

It's terribly easy to say to yourself at that point, "Why should I bother making things special if she doesn't remember it a few minutes later?" or "Why drag her on a snowy day to a concert she'll forget by the time the curtain falls?" It can seem hard to justify the effort and expense.

But then you can come to the following realization (rationalization?): What's most important to someone is their experience in the moment, not their memory of that experience down the road. If Steve prepares a great meal that his sister enjoys, if she's smiling and content, then any costs are well worth it, memories be damned.

Perhaps we could all benefit from more focus on living in the moment, even if memories of those moments come to fade.



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### CAREGIVING

# CARING FOR A PARENT: Irreplaceable Conversations

by Anonymous A

My sweet mother, as I knew her, started passing away about five years ago as she began to forget who she was and where we've been. I can't pinpoint the day she died as someone I could relate to as "Mommy," who had loved me, raised me and shared my secrets. Her mental decline was so insidious that I am unable to identify a precise date of death. But she left me bereft of her love and companionship as sure as if we had buried her and sat shiva.

I wish that I could tell you that I've handled the loss of our relationship gracefully, that I assumed responsibility for her caretaking comfortably, that I have come to terms with the sadness and frustration that too often permeates my life nowadays. It would be nice if I were able to tout my experiences as reflecting how best to cope with losing that one person who related to you as no one else could. But I can't.

To be fair, some of the hardship I've experienced over the past years regarding my mother is self-imposed. I've been successful in my life, but not because I naturally exude an abundance of patience and optimism. I'm not the sort of person who relinquishes control easily or can keep shouts of guilt, remorse and apprehension from filling my head. I'm someone who sees the glass as half-empty and about to crack because someone else is bound to be irresponsible and knock it over. That's



just who I am.

If you were to design a circumstance that broadcasts the downsides of how I tend to cope, my mother's situation would serve as the perfect template. For someone who has coveted competence and control, I now have precious little. I can't control the extent or impact of her dementia; I can't control how her care staff manage her (although, thankfully, they are extraordinarily devoted); I can't control when she'll start to fall or have a bad day. I can't even always control my own frustrations and anxiety if something goes awry when I'm with her. Caretaking in the sandwich generation is not about exerting effective control

as it is about coping competently with whatever the hell comes next.

At times I have the awful feeling that it would have been easier for both of us if her body had left with her mind. I look at the person who still resembles my mother and must keep reminding myself that she is still my mother and that she would be proud of how I've looked after her through these years. I have worked hard to enjoy the fleeting moments when her personality still shines through, when she inexplicably remembers some past event or she just seems relaxed in her peaceful world where almost every moment is new and uncomplicated.

I had to learn that my initial bouts of upset and resentment got me nowhere. They often reflected how hard it was to face the reality of what was happening to my mom. I'm still working on accepting that those emotions can nonetheless be justified and forgivable.

But I haven't been able to replace the support, comfort and wisdom that flowed from conversations I would have with my mother. That route to a sense of serenity and direction is irreplaceable and, for me, gone forever. It's the part of getting older that most pains me – the inevitability that the sweetest and longest relationships we have had in our lives are those most likely to end in the nearer term. And that's what I grieve most, even as I work hard to keep that sadness contained and my mother enveloped in a sense of warmth and care.



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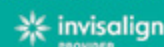


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# CARING FOR A SPOUSE: Caretaker Guilt

by Anonymous B

My husband had Parkinson's disease. There are more than ten million people worldwide living with this illness and men are 1.5 times more likely to have Parkinson's than women. In married couples, a wife is thus statistically more likely than a husband to be a caregiver. Such is the case for me. I was seventy-five years old and my husband was seventy-seven. He had had Parkinson's for over twenty years.

My husband did not want to get Parkinson's, and he was not happy that he had it. There is no doubt that the burden of the person with Parkinson's is far greater than that of the caregiver. But the caregiver experience is not an easy one, particularly if the caregiver is a wife. Some have even suggested that the stronger the marital bond, the more difficult the challenge. My husband and I had been married for over fifty-five years. We had wonderful children and delightful grandchildren. We both had had fulfilling careers and enjoyed life. Parkinson's changed all that, not all at once, but gradually and inexorably.

Becoming a Parkinson's caregiver was uncharted territory for me. I am not particularly suited to the role by temperament, and certainly not by training. I remember telling a friend, whose husband had had the disease and recently passed away, that my husband also had it. She embraced me sorrowfully and said, "Oh, my dear. What a journey you are about to undertake." She was correct. Parkinson's is a journey with few signposts and few guides. Because the disease affects people so differently, because treatments that help one person are ineffective with another, because people are so different, it is very hard to generalize about Parkinson's.

But one thing I noticed is that caregiving spouses are not given much attention. Clearly the focus in the medical community must be on the patient; clearly the expectation in the larger community is that a wife will be there for her husband in sickness and in health, and vice versa. Thus, a spouse is somehow expected to know what to do, expected to bear the burdens without complaint, expected to be strong and capable and loving.

Family caregiving is still primarily gender-based. Women are the major



providers of long-term care. Two-thirds of caregivers are female, and it is estimated that they spend as much as 50 percent more time providing care than their male counterparts. Men and women deal differently with caregiving responsibilities. Men tend to feel responsible for shouldering the financial burdens associated with long-term care and to work more or longer to meet these burdens. Women tend to stay home to provide hands-on care. As a result, women experience greater physical and mental strain and caregiver stress, exacerbated by social isolation and the reduction or loss of income from employment. This exacts a toll on their health, depresses their outlook on life and increases their need for support.

It is well known that the spouses of patients with chronic or acute illnesses experience high levels of stress as a result of fear, uncertainty about the future and the dramatic revisions they must make in their daily existence and in their long- and short-term life plans. But I found that one of the most agonizing aspects of being a care partner was the feeling that I had no idea what I was doing and that no one could help me.

Guilt and caregiving go hand in hand. It helps to know that there is actually something called "caretaker guilt." Caretakers are generally generous, kind and loving people, but there is no question that, at some level, they want/expect/need recognition and appreciation of what they do. Often, with any chronic debilitating condition, this is not forthcoming. "Resentment is the caregiver's dirty little secret,"

wrote Lisa Hutchison. "When one is in a caretaking position long term, the expressions of gratitude may arrive less and less. A part of that is we get comfortable with one another. Knowing that it is not intentional often does not erase the anger that is felt from being unrecognized."

One day I found a very helpful quote online: "Unwarranted or inappropriate guilt truly serves no one. It will also suck the life and energy out of you. Refusing to be ruled by caretaker guilt is part of taking care of you!" That woke me up. The site went on to say, "The caregiving journey is destined to be one of angst and suffering if you let guilt move in and stay. While you do not necessarily have to kick it all the way to the curb, caregiver guilt should at the very least be shown to the door." This made me realize that a caregiving spouse really does have more control over the situation than I had formerly believed.

Chronic illnesses present you with a whole new vocabulary. The average person has probably never heard the words dystonia, bradykinesia and ataxia. But, as a Parkinson's spouse, these words become part of your everyday vocabulary. Then there's the D word. Most people don't even associate dementia with Parkinson's, but it has been estimated that 50 to 80 percent of those with Parkinson's will develop dementia as their disease progresses. It takes about ten years from the onset of the disease for dementia to develop, but when it comes, it brings with it a burden that is far more difficult for the caretaker to bear than the physical challenges of Parkinson's. And you have to be prepared for all of this.

I often think about my husband as he was years ago: a scientist, a photographer, a composer. He played in an orchestra; he loved to go to concerts and the opera; he read Torah; he was an involved father; he loved expensive cars. As Parkinson's took its toll, he mostly sat and read or watched television for hours.

We would still go to the movies or the occasional concert. Our family came often to visit, and he loved that. But he was not the man he used to be, and, as a result, I was not the woman I used to be. So many books and articles about chronic illness promise hope, but there are no imminent advances in Parkinson's treatments. Maybe someday there will be a breakthrough, but for now, there is only acceptance and living in those moments when you can experience something approaching happiness, pleasure and maybe even joy.

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# Help is At Hand

by Ellen Somers

**Dear Ellen:**

*My mother has Alzheimer's and my father was recently diagnosed with cancer. They live in Syracuse, and I live in California. My father has been taking care of my mother for the last 5 years, but now he's too ill himself. Even though he says he doesn't need any help, he's getting weaker and I'm afraid he's going to get injured if he keeps trying to do all of this himself. Plus, he really needs to focus on his own health. My husband and I have two children, so I can't keep flying back and forth to Syracuse to help out. I don't have any siblings. I'm feeling totally overwhelmed. I don't know what to do. Can you give me any suggestions?*  
**Overwhelmed in CA**

While this might sound like a worst-case scenario, based on the phone calls and e-mails Syracuse Jewish Family Service (SJFS) has received over the years, I'm certain many people will be able to relate to it at some point in their lives. In today's world, we're all pulled in many directions. Caring for a family member, whether near or far, can stretch us to our limits. The good news is that there are resources, even in relatively small cities like Syracuse, that can help families to more smoothly and effectively navigate this journey.

## Getting started

**Start by thinking realistically about what you both can and want to do to assist your family member(s).** Your situation is unique. Don't get pulled into the "shoulds" that others try to place on you. Consider what makes sense for you. Your ability to jump into various caregiving tasks will be impacted by your own temperament, your financial situation, the nature of your relationship with your family member, your work situation and your loved one's needs. Your priority is to find the best fit between what you can/want to do and the person's needs. Then you can assess what needs are best met by engaging others in their care.

**To the extent possible, be proactive in learning about local resources that assist with caregiving.** It always makes sense to do your research before a crisis happens. While we can't predict the future, we can still get a good picture of the types of resources that might be available in the event that help is needed. Look at the range of resources, including a) the different types of housing/residential programs (e.g. independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing), b) home-based services (such as home aides, care management services); and c) community-based services (e.g. adult day programs; respite services.)

Resources can be available through a

local government, such as the Onondaga County Office for Aging. National organizations also offer resource information. For example, the Aging Life Care Association's website allows you to search for geriatric care managers in your area.

Non-profit human service organizations can provide an array of services. In Central New York, Syracuse Jewish Family Service offers services for older adults and their care network that address cognitive issues, mental health concerns and the practical challenges associated with aging (such as assistance with financial management, identifying appropriate housing or coordination of resources.)

There are also local disease-specific organizations, such as the Alzheimer's Association of CNY and Empower Parkinson that offer a range of services, including support groups and educational and wellness programs.

**Conduct a "scan" of your and your family members' network.** Keep an open mind and cast a wide net when thinking about all the potential people already in your network that could be helpful. Aside from the usual suspects (e.g. family members, neighbors, friends and faith-based settings), consider the many professionals and informal contacts that might play a supporting role (e.g. a hairdresser/barber, the mail carrier, a financial advisor, an attorney, a housekeeper, participants in a social club etc.). Then, map this all out by gathering contact information for these people and identifying their specific skills/knowledge and then determining what they are able to do that is helpful.

**Prepare your family member.** Talk to your loved ones about your concerns, be honest and open about your own limitations, and ask for their help in accepting some services for the benefit of everyone. Try to avoid any promises

(e.g. "I'll never place you in a nursing home)...no one can predict the future, and sometimes our perceptions about what will or won't be good options down the road may not be correct. Talking more broadly about someone's wishes (e.g. how they'd like to be cared for or more generally about what would make a

living situation acceptable) might prove more helpful. If you find it challenging to reach an understanding with your family member(s) consider engaging a counselor, mediator or care manager. Sometimes having an outsider facilitate or mediate these discussions can be very useful.

## About Syracuse Jewish Family Service

Since 1891, SJFS has been a trusted source of support for residents of Central New York. Our integrated services work to build well-being, reframe aging and create community for individuals of all ages. A multi-faceted social service agency, SJFS works with individuals and families of any faith to maximize their self-determination and live with dignity. SJFS' unique array of programs address the needs of people with cognitive or mental health concerns, help older adults and their family members navigate transitions and provide practical support. *SJFS's core services include:*

## Cognitive Enhancement Services

**M-Power U:** a learning community for early memory loss: a weekly, group-based program that meets at The Oaks on the campus of Menorah Park from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm. The group employs a holistic approach to memory care through memory and cognitive training, coping strategies, lifestyle skills, physical exercise, creative self-expression and educational presentations. Pre-screening is required.

**Mind Aerobics™:** a fun, research-based, award-winning suite of programs designed to provide comprehensive mental workouts across six cognitive domains and maximize mental functioning. This can be offered individually or in a group setting.

## Mental Health and Wellness programs

**Counseling Services:** individual, couples and family counseling through its licensed clinicians as well as graduate-level interns (social work and mental health counseling).

**CNY PEARLS:** an evidence-based, in-home intervention for older adults (60 years and older) who are experiencing depression.

**Activity Companion:** the SJFS activity companion is focused on bringing your loved one joy, connection and stimulation with the visit, all tailored to your loved one's interests and abilities.

## Practical Assistance for Navigating the Journey of Aging

**Kosher Meals On Wheels:** provides delicious, nutritious, affordable kosher meals home-delivered across the Greater Syracuse area, prepared under the supervision of the Syracuse Va'ad Ha'ir in Menorah Park's kitchens.

**AgeWise Care Solutions:** care management services tailored to your needs. May include assistance with bill paying/financial management, identifying new housing, assisting with benefit applications, provision of emotional support and connections with other community resources.

**Expanded In-Home Services for the Aging:** provides non-medical case management to help seniors retain their independence and live in their own homes. Case managers coordinate personal care, light housekeeping and ancillary services. It is administered through a contract with Onondaga County Department of Adult & Long Term Care Services.

**For more information about SJFS, please visit [www.sjfs.org](http://www.sjfs.org) or contact Ellen Somers, Assistant Director at 315-446-9111 ext. 225 or [SomersE@sjfs.org](mailto:SomersE@sjfs.org).**



# The Red Tea Tin

by Virginia Morrisette

Early in 1944, when I was a little girl around three, I went with my mother to my grandmother's apartment above a kosher delicatessen in East Cleveland. How high the stairs seemed to me as I climbed them behind my mother, holding onto the wall beside me as there were no railings. The stairs were a dark color, a walnut stain, and they were worn in the middle. The smell of years of cooking crept out from under apartment doors. Grandma's apartment was on the second floor. She stood in the doorway, her grayish brown hair framed in the light of a bare bulb glowing above her. She wore her usual flowered house dress. Her large dark eyes met my mother's blue myopic ones. My mother greeted her, seeming to completely forget I was there.

I looked around and wandered into the kitchen where I spotted some wooden shelves. On these shelves were two items I remember clearly—a jar of kosher pickles (Polski Weinraub) and a little red tin box painted to look like a pirate's chest. The red tin box was emblazoned with a foreign script and underneath it, "Zvetouchny Tea" (in a later version, "sweet-touch-née tea") which, I learned, translated as "blossom tea." According to an article on Wikipedia I read a few years ago, now vanished from the site, this tea was the choice of traditional Jews, while Wissotzky tea was the choice of the radicals, all who sipped their brew in the Russian Tea Room in New York.



I never went more than a handful of times to see my grandmother before her death. I recall not liking to go there because in that place I felt so suddenly abandoned by my mother. Years later, I realized that there was a reason beyond the way my grandmother's eyes locked onto my mother's, like a victim in danger of drowning. The reason was language. They were speaking Yiddish.

What I know from my mother's stories is that my grandmother's life in America was a string of bitter disappointments, one after the other. She never climbed out of grinding poverty. In Cleveland she married a man more than ten years her senior, alternately a day laborer, a junk dealer and a peddler, who never made enough money to provide for his growing family. After her credit was gone, my grandmother had to beg the grocer for something to feed her children because there was often no food in the house. My mother described a time she felt guilty because she and her siblings were so hungry that they ripped from her mother's shopping bag the overripe bananas the grocer had given her and ate them all before they got home. The family frequently had to move because they couldn't pay the rent. They would sell their possessions at the curb to get enough for a deposit on another apartment. My grandmother "always looked for one near a school because she knew her children would be safe there," my

mother said. My mother and her older brother got various jobs to try to help. But they were only kids, so the crystal radio, the victrola, the piano and the sewing machine were all repossessed. In 1930, the two youngest children went to the Jewish Orphan Home, and soon, the next two followed. Grandma was devastated. My mother said her mother had to walk all the way to the next town to see her children.

My grandmother never had the satisfaction of being able to give her children the material things she herself never had. But if she had one thing to be proud of, it was that despite (or perhaps because of) her total lack of formal education, she instilled in her children the desire to learn. Thus, she may have had a sense of fulfillment when her older two, as a result of their learning, achieved the stability she had always yearned for: my mother as a teacher and her older brother as a lawyer.

After her mother's death, my mother kept two of those red Sweet-touch-nee tins in her top dresser



drawer. They held different sizes of safety pins. Today I look at the larger one with the script of the old Russian Empire on its lid and I think of my grandmother, Perl Singer, who came from Husiatyn, a good-sized shtetl near the Zbruch River at the southeastern edge of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My seventeen-year-old future grandmother arrived at Ellis Island alone in 1907 on the SS Petersburg. And I think of my mother's words shortly before she died just shy of 92: "My poor mother never had a sweet taste in her mouth her whole life long."

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# HEALTHY AGING IN ISRAEL



**Never too late to move to Israel.** Last week a 100-year-old Israeli man got married. This week 101-year-old Sandy Goldstein and his 97-year-old wife Rosalie made Aliyah to Netanya from New Jersey. They join their daughter Risa, five grandchildren and their spouses, and 12 great grandchildren, all of whom live in Israel. <https://unitedwithisrael.org/never-too-late-101-year-old-man-immigrates-to-israel/> <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/368181>

**A new target for protection against Alzheimer's.** Researchers at Israel's Ben-Gurion University found a new approach for treating Alzheimer's disease. They developed a new molecule VBIT-4 that prevents the over-expression

of the protein VDAC1, which controls mitochondrial activity and cell life and death. <https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/pages/news/Alzheimer-VDAC1.aspx>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36578022/>

<https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/mind-and-spirit/article-732059>

**Protein trigger for brain cancer.** Tel Aviv University researchers have discovered that the secreted protein LCN2 facilitates the formation of aggressive brain metastases (secondary cancers). In lab tests, reducing LCN2 in the blood halts the advance of the inflammatory process that causes tumors in the brain. <https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/article-732284> [https://english.tau.ac.il/lcn2\\_brain\\_metastases](https://english.tau.ac.il/lcn2_brain_metastases)

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s43018-023-00519-w>

**Medication that gets directly to the problem.** Israel's LDS Biotech has developed the Lyotropic treatment delivery system. Medications can be applied directly to the problem area without causing damage to organs such as the liver. It was successful in compassionate use, and clinical (human) trials are being planned. <https://www.israel21c.org/chemist-turns-injections-into-oral-meds-and-skin-gels/>

**Computer-designed antibodies.** AION Labs, the Israeli innovation lab for startups has helped launch DenovAI – a startup that will harness artificial intelligence and biophysics to build a platform for computer-designed antibodies from the start, geared to the development of new treatments.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-lab-backed-by-pharma-giants-mints-startup-for-computer-designed-antibodies/>

<https://denovai.com/>

**A virtual dentist.** Israel's Grin is literally changing the face of dental visits. Why waste time with a face-to-face appointment with your dentist or orthodontist when they just want to see your teeth. Sign up, send off for the Grin Scope, download the Grin App, scan your teeth and schedule a virtual meeting with your dentist. <https://www.israel21c.org/sink-your-teeth-into-9-hot-dental-innovations-from-israel/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JylypegYqzw>

**Scanning the eye in Massachusetts.** Israel's AEYE Health is trialing its AI-based retinal camera on 500 patients at UMass (University of Massachusetts Amhurst) Medical School. The camera detects retinopathy and is operated by a family doctor or nurse without the need for an eye specialist. <https://www.umassmed.edu/news/news-archives/2023/02/umass-chan-aeye-health-researching-use-of-ai-based-retinal-camera-screenings-in-primary-care-practice/>

**AI to help you live longer.** Several Israeli startups are involved in helping people to live longer. Longevity. AI has developed a comprehensive system for hospitals, health funds, and other medical organizations that allows them to track and monitor the health of their patients in real-time. It says it is never too early to grow younger. <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctechnews/article/p3db2hais> <https://www.longevity-ai.com/>

**Keeping an eye on your loved ones.** Israel's SenterCare claims to have the only un-obstructive technology that can differentiate between people in the same home. It notifies about safety incidents, with AI to predict falls and recommend interventions. Its aim is to preserve and prolong the senior's quality of life and reduce health costs. <https://www.sentercare.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEjk7SpAgll>



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# Students and Seniors

## SCHS Legos and Letters

The desire for social connection is a driving force within all members of a community, regardless of age. Direct involvement with children and teens helps older adults stay active and connected to their community and provides opportunities for them to reduce a sense of loss or isolation. Involvement in meaningful work increases each participant's sense of personal fulfillment and self-worth.

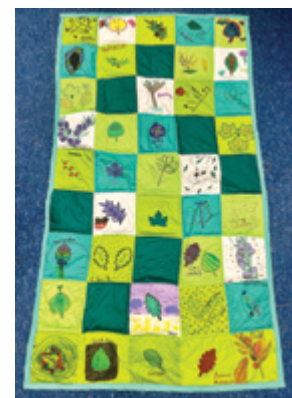
A partnership between the Syracuse Community Hebrew School and Syracuse Jewish Family Service is making this happen for seniors participating in the early memory loss group at Menorah Park. Alise Gemmell, LMSW, challenged students to explore their sources of Jewish pride while highlighting the importance of social connections within the community, especially for elders. Students engaged in creating Lego sculptures and letter writing to pen pals at Menorah Park. Lego sculptures were sent to Menorah Park, where early memory loss group participants added to the sculptures and responded to their student pen pals. The project was funded by a grant awarded to SCHS and SJFS from Better Together, a national movement involving 3,000 teens and 2,500 seniors each year.



## SCHS Tu b'Shevat-Pesach Intergenerational Quilt Project

by Leah Eve Jezer-Nelson

The Tu b'shvat-Pesach Intergenerational Quilt Project is part of the Syracuse Community Hebrew School's continued dedication to innovative and experiential learning. Quilts are patchwork pieces composed of unique scraps. When in a bin, these little shreds of fabric don't look like much. When sewn together with a careful eye and a keen heart, they are so much more than the sum of their parts. Who better to show our students the value of community and the beauty of our story than those who have helped to build that legend? We owe so much of our foundations to our elders who worked tirelessly so we might be able to one day provide this sort of connection.



"Imagine a quilt made up of the centuries of experiences our collective community has to offer," says SCHS administrator Ora Jezer. "Each square is decorated by hand, with hopeful interpretations of what

this spring could look like. On their own, they might not look like much more than a scrap of fabric with colorful scribbles. Sewn together by the expert hand of fabric artist Kayla Graber, they build a story of our community, of the people who live now and the stories that are yet to be told as the generations continue to be born."

Jezer goes on to explain that "part of our educational programming this year is impressing a key Jewish value on our students: the value of our elderly. No



## Teens Making a Difference

by Rachel Pettiford and Cara Engel

**We had an experience at the Syracuse Community Hebrew School that we will never forget. We worked with elders via Zoom and loved it. We wanted to do more.**

For two months, we volunteered with Syracuse Jewish Family Service's M-Power U (MPU) and Minds Program. It is located at the Oaks and is for older adults with

early memory loss. The main objective of the class was to learn and do art as a means of self-exploration and self-expression. We also learned about different cultures and their traditions. The class took place every Friday under the direction of Alise Gemmel and Gillian Riggall.

We helped the class with many projects, but our favorite was the African mask. We learned about cultures, color theory and motion throughout the course of the summer. We had fascinating discussions during our lunch break, where we learned about each other. One of the fun activities we recall doing was chair African Dance, in which we tapped our feet in different directions to the rhythm of a song.

We learned a lot about art, history and community. While we were doing this, we realized how much older citizens have to offer about the world. We got to bond with a different generation and learned to see the world through other eyes. We realized that if you engage with your community, you learn more about others as well as about yourself. We know that we did.



## Purim @ Chabad



leaf is more or less valuable, irrespective of its owner's age or life experience, and each tells its own history. Jews have for millennia looked to our elders to guide and shape the future of our communities. They are living repositories of our history and individuals whose lived experiences are far outside of our students' easy comprehension."

On the surface, sewing a quilt is something quaint. It is unique and unusual. Looking beneath the surface, however, reveals more to be seen. Each leaf represents a single person with a constellation of stories to their name. Alone, they are beautiful in their individuality. Together, they compose a song with an endless number of voices singing our story. Even when slightly discordant, perhaps some of the voices a little out of tune, it's a history of our own making.



# JCC Annual Meeting and Gala June 4

by Sarah Collins

The JCC's Annual Meeting and Gala is happening Sunday, June 4 at 11 am at Owera Vineyards in Cazenovia. The organization's largest fundraiser of the year, this celebration will mark the 160th anniversary of the event.

The Annual Meeting and Gala funds various scholarships that support the Early Childhood Development Program, summer camp including support for children with special needs, the after-school program and more. At the meeting, outgoing board members will be recognized and new officers will be sworn in, including a new incoming president. The event will be Va'ad supervised, and back by popular demand, a deli meal will be catered by Essen NY Deli.

The JCC is looking forward to another successful Annual Meeting and Gala. "As our largest fundraiser of the year, it is important that we come together to recognize the hard work of our volunteers as well as raise money to help defray the costs of the many scholarships that we award each year," says Executive Director Marci Erlebacher. "This is a bittersweet year for the JCC and especially important as we recognize Steven Sisskind and his ten years of service as president of the board. He will be passing the torch of leadership to incoming president, Phillip Rubenstein."

The highlight of the night is recognizing community members as honorees for their service, dedication and contributions to the JCC. This year's honorees are:



**Steven Wladis, who will be receiving the Kovod Gadol award.** Kovod Gadol 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. Wladis is the Managing Principal at OneDigital, the VP of finance for Congregation Beth Shalom-Chevre Shas, is actively involved with The Wladis Hats & Gloves Foundation and has served on the JCC Board of Directors for nearly 20 years. A graduate of Babson College, Wladis currently resides in Fayetteville with his family. "This is a huge honor for me," Wladis said. "Growing up, we were raised to help others and give back when we could. I'm not one to seek out recognition, and it's a little



uncomfortable to receive it, but this honor is greatly appreciated."

**Shai Jaffe, who will be receiving the Kovod award.** 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. Jaffe is a native of Syracuse who currently works at the JCC with the ECDP, after school program and summer day camp. A graduate of the Syracuse Hebrew Day School, Jaffe was a camper at the JCC for many years before transitioning to the role of a camp counselor. "I am happy to receive this award," Jaffe said. "It makes me proud to know that I am doing a good job and I am helping others."

**Steven Sisskind, who will be receiving the Hall of Fame award.**



The Hall of Fame was established in 2009. It was set up to recognize and celebrate individuals who have dedicated themselves to the Syracuse Jewish community and to the advancement of the JCC. Sisskind is the owner of Sisskind Funeral Service, LLC, and has served as president of the JCC's Board of Directors for the last decade. He is a graduate of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University and Simmons School of Mortuary Science and has been a Syracuse resident ever since college. "Anytime you receive recognition from your community is special," Sisskind said. "It's personal satisfaction to know that you've made a difference. But what is especially humbling is to receive such an honor from the true heart of my chosen home."

The JCC will also honor Sisskind as outgoing president of the Board. He will be recognized for his outstanding service to the organization. "I've witnessed our JCC grow, endowments and membership multiply and our ECDP and children's programs flourish," he said. "We have an incredible team, and they make me extremely proud." Phillip Rubenstein, president of Syracuse's United Radio and current president-elect of the JCC board, will be sworn in as the new board president.

*For more information on the event and to purchase tickets visit [www.jccsy.org/jcc-annual-meeting-and-gala-2023](http://www.jccsy.org/jcc-annual-meeting-and-gala-2023). Contact Erin Hart at [gala@jccsy.org](mailto:gala@jccsy.org) or 315-445-2360 ext. 112 with any questions.*

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# Andre Ivory Comes to Central New York

The Jewish community welcomed Andre Ivory, a dynamic, experiential educator in honor of Black History Month. Ivory is currently the director of education at Congregation Or Tzion in Scottsdale, AZ. He focuses on building strong Jewish identity, acknowledging diversity and building self-esteem. The Syracuse Hebrew Day School was the recipient of a Philip L. Holstein Community Program Fund grant from the Jewish Federation of Central New York which enabled this special scholar-in-residence weekend.



Ivory spoke at a breakfast with parents from the Syracuse Hebrew Day School, the JCC Early Childhood Development Program and the Rothschild Early Childhood Center about "A Beautiful Mosaic: How to Talk to Kids about Diversity, Antisemitism, Racism, and Inclusivity." He also spoke with children and teens in schools and synagogues



about *b'tzelem elokim* and "how we all bring our differences to the table but are all really a creation of God." He also led a community educator lunch and program about "How to Create a Positive Space for Diversity and Inclusivity."

Ivory's visit to the Central New York community attracted hundreds of participants over the course of the weekend. There was a community lunch at the Jewish Community Center where he spoke eloquently about "Seeing Humanity: A conversation about race and religion through the eyes of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel." Ivory also led a Shabbat lunch and learn talk at Temple Adath Yeshurun on "Dr. King, the civil rights movement, and the Book of Isaiah." The residents of The Oaks on the Menorah Park Campus had the pleasure of hearing him speak on the topic of "Jew by Choice — Belief, Belonging, and Behavior: A personal journey with Andre Ivory."

Michael Ferman, SHDS head of school, noted that "It was important that we engage in conversations within the community about diversity, racism, and Jewish inclusivity. These were critical conversations that engaged community members of varied ages and stages."

## Joint Syracuse/Binghamton *Tu b'Shevat*



In celebration of *Tu b'Shevat*, the Jewish New Year of the Trees, students from the Syracuse Hebrew Day School traveled to Schaefer's Gardens in Chenango Forks for a joint initiative with Hillel Academy of Broome County in Binghamton. They held a *Tu b'Shevat* seder led by students from both schools, toured the greenhouses

inside the nursery, learned about technological developments and enjoyed planting together. SHDS Head Michael Ferman noted, "The creative experience enabled students in two communities to come together and celebrate the holiday while learning about ecological awareness in an immersive, hands-on manner."

The novel, first-time-ever

collaboration was made possible by the Jewish Federation of Central New York's Philip L. Holstein Community Program Fund. This event expanded the definition of community by including Syracuse's neighbors to the south and enabled students to share a special holiday experience together.

*Tu b'Shevat* is a reminder of our responsibility to take care of the earth. It is also the season when the earliest blooming trees begin a new fruit-bearing cycle in Israel. Hillel Academy's Rabbi Moshe Shmaryahu noted, "The next generation, our leaders, we want them to take care of our world, and trees are very important."

# Portrait of a Centenarian: Barret Silverman

The wonderful novel, *The One-Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared*, by Jonas Jonasson, recounts the adventures of centenarian Allan Karlsson who decides to escape from his nursing home, climbing out of the window in his slippers and embarking on a hilarious and entirely unexpected journey.

Barret Silverman is also one hundred years old. He lives in Menorah Park, but he has no plans to climb out the window like his fictional counterpart. He is quite happy with his life. "The people here are very nice," he says.

Barret was born in Newark, NJ in 1923, but moved to Gloversville, NY when he was eight years old. He attended school in Gloversville, the leather glove capital of the nation, but went to college in Alabama "to get as far away from Gloversville as possible." He had originally intended to go to medical school but, as a "Northerner," found that admission was denied him. So he returned to Gloversville, the hub of the United States glove making industry, to work at Wilson Tanning, one of the two hundred manufacturers, tanneries and stitcheries in town. Barret eventually went on to own Wilson Tanning.

From the late 1800s until the 1950s, Gloversville produced the majority of gloves sold in the United States. A large percentage of the population was involved in glove-making and a significant proportion of them were Jewish. *Shtetl in the Adirondacks: The Story of Gloversville and Its Jews* by Herbert M. Engel, describes the world in which Barret and his wife Ruth lived for sixty-five years and raised their family of three sons, two of whom, Hal and Russell, today live in Central New York.

"I'm a family man," says Barret. His great-grandfather came from a family of 18 children, nine of whom came to the United States. The family grew, and by the end of WW II there were 400 members of the family circle, all living in Newark and Elizabeth. Barret's own family includes his sons and six grandchildren, and he notes that "in five generations, there are only two females." In addition to his work and his family, Barret, who piloted a B-17 while in the Air Force, enjoyed traveling with his wife after he retired in 1970. He joined the International Executive Service Corps and travelled to many countries to share his business expertise with people in Pakistan, Mexico, the Philippines, Portugal, Indonesia, India and Egypt.

Reflecting on his one hundred years of living, Barret said, "I don't feel it." He is a generally positive person ("most of the time"), even though he has seen a lot of hard times (war, the Depression, bread lines). Asked if he had a wish on the occasion of his hundredth birthday, Barret replied, "I would wish for everyone to be happy and healthy."



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EZKERA / REMEMBERING

DR. ALICE STERLING HONIG

March 7, 2023



Dr. Alice Sterling Honig, 93, died on March 7 in Michigan, where she was with her daughter's family after a very independent old age. She was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1929 to Jewish immigrants Ida Bender and William Sterling. A little girl who loved big books, she was valedictorian of her class at Erasmus High school, and attended Cornell University where she married fellow student Arny Honig after meeting at a piano recital where they both performed, followed by much folk-singing together.

She obtained her BA degree from Barnard College and MA from Columbia University before raising children and completing her PhD at Syracuse University. She embarked on a prolific and influential career working with Bettye Caldwell as program director for Syracuse's pioneering Children's Center, as SU Professor of Child Development, and as a licensed clinical psychologist. She loved teaching and writing about language and social development, including over a dozen books, received numerous awards including Barnard Alumnae 2015 Woman of Achievement Award and trained childcare staff all over the world in her inimitable vivacious, warm style.

She is survived by her three children Larry, Madeleine (Richard), and Jonathan (Eveline); grandchildren Daniel (Elena), Shoshannah (Sam), Natalie (Dan), Naftali (Sarah), Ben, Ofira, Tamar, Maija and Edouardo; five great grandchildren; her sister Theresa Knoblock; Arne and Tanya, the children of her predeceased partner Arthur Komar; and many extended family members.

Contributions in lieu of flowers may be made to a charity of your choice, especially supporting families and child development.

[www.sisskindfuneralservice.com](https://www.sisskindfuneralservice.com)

STEVEN RICHARD LUTWIN

March 14, 2023

Steven Richard Lutwin, 79, passed away gracefully at home on March 14 (Pi Day) 2023 with Paige, his loving and devoted wife of almost 54 years by his side. Steve was born in Asbury Park, NJ and relocated to Rome, NY at the age of nine. Steve was a 1961 graduate of Rome Free Academy, and went on to graduate from Clarkson University in 1965 with a degree in mechanical engineering. He also held an MBA and an educational administrative degree from Syracuse University. Engineering led him to his true calling, teaching, while helping a secretary's son with his algebra homework.

He was predeceased by his parents, Edward Lutwin and Felicia Lutwin. Steve settled into a beautiful and rewarding life by his own design, grilling chicken, playing catch with his kids and soaking up the rays on his back porch. A 2008 retiree, Steve spent 40 years teaching math in the Syracuse City School District, with his longest stints at Shea Middle School and Corcoran High School. He was also the modified cross-country coach at Corcoran, organized the Shea/Corcoran Ski Clubs and generated thousands of dollars in fundraising money to bring students to Toronto and Cedar Point. He was also heavily involved volunteering

his time at Temple Beth El.

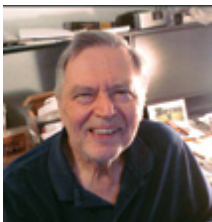
The past 15 years were spent traveling the world with Paige, his family and his mini Leg Lamp from "A Christmas Story." Steve is survived by his adoring wife, Paige, his four beloved children: daughters Erika of Syracuse, Bethany, of Cleveland, OH, and sons Gabe (Rachel) of Marcellus and Adam (Molly) of Syracuse; his seven treasured grandchildren, Ella, Jack, James, Mary Grace, George, Katherine and Henry and his dear younger sister, Sali Lutwin.

Steve was a voracious learner and probably the kindest person you have ever met. His positivity was infectious, and he loved teaching and creating experiences for thousands of students. Steve was a baker, an avid Yankee fan and an inspiration to all who were lucky enough to know him. Steve's humor and wit kept him in and out of trouble all his life and at 5 feet 7 inches on a good day, he was a GIANT in his home, schools and community.

The loss of Steve Lutwin will reverberate across generations for years to come. Words cannot accurately depict his impact, and he will be missed beyond measure. We honor Steve's memory by striving to be more caring, more thoughtful and more genuine each day. "Heroes get remembered, but legends never die."

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**ROBERT D. BUCK**  
**March 23, 2023**


Robert D. Buck, 89, of Fayetteville, died at Menorah Park on March 23. He was born in Syracuse to the late Meyer and Fannie Buck.

Robert graduated from Le Moyne College with a bachelor's degree in education. He pursued his career as a teacher for the Syracuse City School District. Shortly after graduation, he married Ruth Rothman and they started their family. Unfortunately, Ruth died in 1975. Robert met and married Sonia Gold. They moved to Fayetteville where they continued raising their family. He later changed careers and became a probation officer for Onondaga County until his retirement in 1991 after over 30 years of service.

He was a faithful SU basketball fan, appreciated music, spending time with his family and, of course, playing with his dogs. He was predeceased by his brother Samuel Buck.

Surviving are his sons, Neil and Edwin (Cathy) Buck, stepdaughters, Tandy (Dan) Camilli and Robyn (Brett Peruvzi) Gold, and grandchildren, Angela Buck and Andrew Buck.

Contributions in Robert's memory may be made to your local SPCA.

*Birnbaum Funeral Service*

**NORMA GROSKIN**  
**MARCH 13, 2023**

Norma Groskin passed away peacefully on March 13, at the age of 96, surrounded by love from friends and relatives, both near and far. People who knew Norma felt close to her, each in their own special, personal way.

Norma lived her life as an Orthodox Jew. It gave meaning to her life, and she in turn helped others to understand what being a mensch as a Jew really meant. Norma's entire working career was at Lincoln Supply Company where she helped manage their huge parts and equipment catalog. It was a three-inch-thick catalog containing every tool and part that could be found in a hardware store. She knew the catalog better than anyone else who worked there. She also made lifelong friends there, friends of all religions and walks of life. To Norma, all people were special, their value being measured in the way they conducted themselves in their interactions with others.

Norma loved and cared for her mother and sister as they aged and died. She has now joined them.

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*Steven L. Sisskind*

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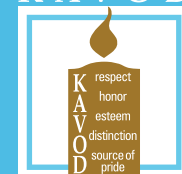
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Now, as a parent myself, teaching my own children our traditions, I think about my mother often. How would she feel about the Jewish home I've created?

How am I honoring her memory, her legacy, in the way I bring her values and history to the next generation of our family?

Jewish tradition teaches us to think about the people who made us who we are today and to ask ourselves how we are honoring their legacies. How can we ensure that the causes they cared about continue to thrive?

An endowment fund at the Jewish Community Foundation of Central New York can provide a way to do just that, preserving and protecting our Jewish community and honoring the legacy of our families.

Contact Michael Balanoff, Foundation Executive Director, at [mbalanoff@jewishfoundationcny.org](mailto:mbalanoff@jewishfoundationcny.org) or 315-445-0270 to discuss how you can honor your family, your community and your values now and in the future.

