

Spring 2022/5782

Congregation Etz Chaim**Inside this issue:**

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Upcoming Annual Meeting 2022/5782*By David Strassler*

Shalom, y'all,

In my 40 years as a member of Congregation Etz Chaim, I do not recall having a formal annual meeting. "So why start now?" you are probably asking. Because we are *so different* now than we were then, or even 5 years ago. We are still located in our beautiful, historic building, serving the York County Jewish Community for almost 120 years.

Presently, our membership is made up of 100 families. We have our first paid, ordained spiritual leader, Cantor Beth Strassler, in 60 years. We have a robust Board of Directors, with 12 members. We have services, events and celebrations throughout the year. The "silver lining" of the COVID pandemic is that we now offer High Holiday Services and other events both in-person and virtually, via Zoom and Facebook.

An annual meeting on Zoom will be scheduled in the next few months for synagogue members. This meeting will include the following agenda:

- Introduction, by President David Strassler.
- Opening, by Cantor Beth Strassler.
- Special Presentation: A Brief History of Congregation Etz Chaim, by Jennie Aranovitch.
- Treasurer's report, by Faye Cialfi.
- Recent and future building projects update, by Jeff Levy, Vice President.
- Security update, by Cynthia Kurtz.
- Samuel Osher Memorial Library update, by Maureen King.
- Vote on Congregation Etz Chaim's Bylaws changes.
- Question & Answer session

You will receive additional information about this meeting in the coming months. I look forward to seeing everyone there.

And may I be the first to wish you all a Happy Passover!

How will our Seder Nights be the Same or Different from all other Seder Nights?

By Cantor Beth Strassler

At this time of year, we are reading the portion of the Torah that tells the story of our Exodus from Egypt. That's Exodus with a capital "E", because the series of events that occurred in the desert is paramount to our identity as Jews.

We read it *now* to remind us that the anniversary—Passover/Pesach—will arrive sooner than we expect. Traditionally, this time is filled with a tremendous amount of preparation, both in the synagogue, at home and even in our hearts.

In the synagogue: There are four special haftarah readings that lead up to Pesach. This means that the "regular" haftarah is put aside for the week in lieu of reading one of the four special shabbats that precede the holiday.

During the eight days of the holiday, we also have special readings for Erev Pesach, Day 1, Day 2, Shabbat during Pesach and the eighth (final) day. We recite the same Yizkor service that is recited on Yom Kippur on the last day.

In the home: The traditional house cleaning that precedes the holiday is like no ordinary house cleaning. For traditionalists, it begins in January when the reading of the story in the Torah begins. This is "top down to the kitchen" house cleaning that culminates in a ceremonial final search for the last crumb of non-kosher for Passover food.

One of our family's trips to Israel was during Passover. We agreed to meet our secular Israeli cousins for Pesach, but we were curious how they would celebrate the event.

"With a seder, of course!" was the reply. OF COURSE! The seder tells an important part of the history of the Jewish people and this is common to everyone. We found Maxwell House Haggadahs on the table, just as they may be found all over the world in the kosher for Passover food section, next to the coffee. The words and tunes were familiar because they came from our common Ashkenazi cousins.

How will our Seder Nights be the Same or Different from all other Seder Nights? (cont.)

By Cantor Beth Strassler

BUT, one of our cousins married into a family that celebrates the Sephardic Jewish traditions. His mother cooked for the seder, so the foods were delightfully different from our traditional Ashkenazi dishes: More nuts, more fruit. Rice, peas, beans and lentils are on the menu. It was delicious. Even the charoset is different! You will find a recipe included in this newsletter.

As we gather around the dinner table once again this year, multiple generations will gather around the family table. We know the story, but we tell it again, and discuss it as if we, ourselves, were slaves in Egypt so long ago. And through this experience, we search for more meaning in our lives.

How will we conduct our seder? This question is answered before each seder begins. Which parts will we keep, and which will we drop to adapt to the interests of our participants? Which rituals/prayers/psalms will be kept as meaningful to our family? Will we use a published seder book (Haggadah), or create our family's own version?

Research shows that the Passover seder is the most celebrated Jewish ritual, performed by Jews all over the world. Perhaps because we celebrate in our own homes, on our own terms, and often with a family history in the ritual. Many families write their own seder books to pass down their own rituals or create new ones that they find meaningful.

Probably the best-known part of the seder is hiding the piece of matzah called the Afikomen. How will each of us use the Afikomen in the seder? However we use it, the presence of this ritual is a living memorial that we, the Jewish people, are still here, and still vibrant, no matter the conditions of our lives through the centuries.

We all pray that we will meet in person this year, but as I write, it is only February, so it is unclear what will be safe in our COVID world.

Wishing you a meaningful Passover holiday, with new and familiar experiences, enjoying your celebration with family and friends.



Sephardic Charoset Recipe

Serves 16-20

Provided by Cantor Beth Strassler

<https://www.seriousseats.com/how-to-make-sephardic-charoset-haroset-dried-fruit-recipe-passover>

"Sephardic" is a somewhat complicated term when talking about food, as there are few culinary constants across cuisines from Iran to the Iberian Peninsula. "Sephardic" has become something of a catch-all to mean "not Ashkenazi," which is a discussion for another time.

The individual components are completely up to you. Prunes and candied ginger make fine additions; almonds can be replaced or supplemented with pistachios, walnuts, or pecans. Feel free to jazz things up with cardamom or coriander.

- 1 1/2 cups red wine (cabernet sauvignon or Manischewitz)
- 1 pound (2 1/2 cups) red or yellow raisins
- 8 ounces (1 1/2 cups) dried dates, chopped fine
- 4 ounces (3/4 cup) dried apricots, chopped fine
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, or more to taste
- 8 ounces (1 1/2 cups) roasted almonds
- 1 teaspoon orange blossom water (optional)



Directions

1. Bring wine to a light simmer on medium heat, then stir in fruit and spices. Cook uncovered until fruit is well hydrated and wine has reduced to a thick syrup, about 15 minutes. Add salt to taste and set aside.
2. In a food processor, roughly chop almonds in short pulses. There should be no whole almonds remaining; a mix of large chunks and small crumbs is preferable. Remove almonds from food processor and transfer to a large mixing bowl.
3. Add fruit mixture to food processor and pulse until fruit just begins to come together into a paste, 2 to 3 one-second pulses. Do not overprocess—large chunks of fruit should be intact.
4. Transfer fruit to mixing bowl and combine well with almonds. Stir in orange blossom water and additional salt if needed. Flavor of charoset will improve over time. Serve warm or at room temperature.



Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Women's Book Club

Reading together since January 2018!

By Maureen King

The Women's Book Club has begun their fourth year of reading together! The group has enjoyed sharing thought-provoking books once a month, with *The Hidden Palace* by Helene Wecker and *The World That We Knew* by Alice Hoffman rising to "favorites" status this past season. Being able to meet from home has its advantages of no parking issues and no worries about bad weather; the group has agreed to continue Zoom meetings this spring.

The Women's Book Club goal is to read books with a Jewish connection about women by female authors. Book Club members choose each quarter's book selections from suggestions provided by the members and the Library. Genres range from memoirs to fiction to non-fiction, and many of the books are National Jewish Book Award winners. The Book Club is so grateful for Susan Pierce's great leadership, as she makes every discussion interesting, even if the book doesn't make every member's "favorite" list.

This spring's upcoming selections are:

March 10 at 6:30 PM: *97 Orchard: An edible history of five immigrant families in one New York tenement* by Jane Ziegelman

April 7 at 7 PM: *You Made Me Love You* by Joanna Goodman

May 12 at 6:30 PM: *As Close to Us As Breathing* by Elizabeth Poliner

June 9 at 6:30 PM: *Last Summer at the Golden Hotel* by Elyssa Friedland

For more information about the Women's Book Club, email Susan Pierce (spierce1115@gmail.com) or Maureen King (somlibrarymaine@gmail.com).

Zoom links are sent out the day of each meeting.



Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Wednesday Library Coffee

Missing your mid-morning coffee break? Take it with the Library on Zoom!

By Maureen King

During the pandemic, many of us weren't able to socialize much. The Library was closed and we missed seeing our volunteers and our patrons. A coffee break Zoom sounded like a good way to stay in touch while minding the Covid protocols. And here we are still enjoying Wednesday Library Coffees!

Join us for morning coffee on **Wednesdays between 9:00 and 10:00 AM EST** for a quick break or the whole hour. Bring your favorite beverage!
We talk about books, movies, culture, education, what's happening locally, and many other topics of interest!

(No Library Coffees on March 30 and April 6.)

Email Maureen at somlibrarymaine@gmail.com for more information and dates.
We will email the link by Tuesday evening and then you can just log in Wednesday morning whenever you're ready for your coffee break.



The Cantor's Corner: The Jewish Community We Build Together

by Cantor Beth Strassler



The Torah portion named Ki Tissa was read this year on February 19th. It included the dramatic event of the Israelites building a golden calf while they waited for Moses to return from atop Mount Sinai. They had no idea what was taking Moses so long, they were idle, and they began to panic. If Moses did not return, how would they deal with the frighteningly powerful presence of God in their lives? Up to that moment, that was solely Moses' job.

They had benefitted from amazing miracles to handle their difficulties up to then: The parting of the Reed Sea, the appearance of water and food in the middle of the desert, God speaking to them at Sinai. Yet, their satisfaction with each miracle waned and they soon found a new complaint.

When Moses finally returned and saw the golden calf, he was so enraged that he smashed the two tablets God just finished writing for them. God was so angry that he threatened to destroy the people.

Moses deals with the people with a firm hand; punishments were meted out. But Moses also continuously pleaded with God not to destroy the people. More time passed. Heads cooled. God listened. Before inviting Moses to the top of the mountain for another session, God instructed him:

"Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered." Exodus 34:1.

The second set of tablets travelled with the Jewish people through history. Why did these tablets survive while the first two did not?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out that the first tablets were created entirely by God. Moses watched and received, but was not part their making. These were God's tablets. All Moses had to do was quietly standby and reach out to receive them.

But then, Aha! God realized the importance of having the community build something together! The second time around, Moses was part of the process of making the tablets. Later, the people became part of the process, by following instructions to build the Mishkan (portable sanctuary) to carry the tablets. God and the Israelites formed a partnership. God gave everybody something to do, a part in their making, an investment of self and work. As a result, everyone literally had a part in building their future by building the Mishkan.



The Cantor's Corner: The Jewish Community We Build Together, cont.

by Cantor Beth Strassler

For a long time, I dismissed these chapters about building the Tabernacle as dull and boring. They include detailed descriptions of minute details of color, measurement, form of metal and wood. Much of their importance was lost on me until I began to see them as a time when Israelites and God listened to each other and began to build a community together.

The Jewish Mystics differentiate between two types of God-human encounters:

itaruta de-l'eylah—an awakening from above. This is a supernatural, spectacular event that seems impossible, yet **it is done for us**. We invest no planning, no energy, no work. We watch it happen. When the event is finished, we go back to being the same as we were before it happened. Its effect is temporary. Examples: The Reed Sea is parted, water and food are provided in the desert, God appears at Sinai and the people continue to complain.

itaruta deletata—an awakening from below. There is no grandeur to this event: **It is a human action that changes human nature**. During the building of the Mishkan, the people work together for a common goal and there is no bickering.

Our Jewish communities are stronger when the members work together and invest part of themselves. Yes, that often means contributing money, but it additionally includes a personal investment from each person to do the work, expend the energy and complete the task. When we are standing shoulder to shoulder working toward a common goal, it is easier to talk and listen to each other. We are busy, engaged with others and we change.

Here's to Spring! May the warmer weather bring us more opportunities to be outside to enjoy nature and engage with, and listen to, each other.

Beth

Resource:

Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan. (2010). Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible. Exodus: The Book of Redemption. Maggid Books of Koren Publishers: Jerusalem.

Delightful Winter Reading:

My Wild Garden: Notes from a Writer's Eden (2020) by Meir Shalev

Schocken Books: New York.

Supplied by Cantor Beth Strassler

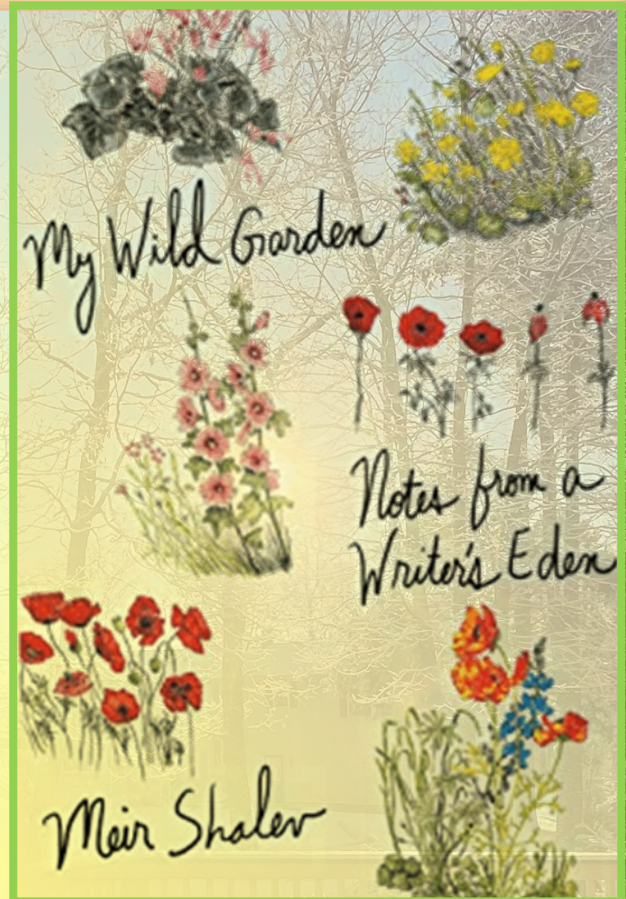
If you attended the Tu b'Shevat seder this year, you heard me refer to this delightful little book. What a joy to read about gardening while the snow, ice and gray sky surround us in Maine! Each time I read a portion, it brought sunshine and a breath of fresh air into my life.

The author describes how he found his "small, meager house, the kind that looks like what were once called Jewish Agency houses". He is referring to a time when the international Jewish Agency helped those making Aliyah to Israel by providing basic, transitional housing. He describes the types of trees and vegetation surrounding the house. He weaves family gardening, knowledge of middle eastern gardening, general Israeli history with gardening references in literature, and even the history of some of his garden disasters. He completes the picture of creating a home for himself by including some of the work he did to improve the inside of the house.

The book is totally charming (not a word I use often). When he decides to plant a fig tree after beetle larvae killed the first one, he writes:

Meir Shalev is a well-known Israeli novelist. His honors include the National Jewish Book Award and Israel's Brenner Prize for A Pigeon and a Boy. Set in the time of Israel's 1948 war for Independence, the book's romantic tale includes the story of how homing pigeons were used to deliver battlefield messages. A second love story includes a modern-day bird watcher and his journey to make his life the one he never thought possible.

When not writing about gardens, Shalev's novels include a touch of the fantastic, which I did not detect in this book. Then again, I have never seen his gardens....



Facilities Committee: The Chandelier is Clean and Bright

By Beth Strassler

Members of the Facilities Committee took advantage of this quiet time in our sanctuary to complete the project of cleaning our beautiful chandelier.

Todah Rabbah M'od/Thank you very much goes to Anthony Allen, Nick Weiner and Frank Federman for their persistence in a job well done.

As you can see from the pictures, the project involved setting up and dismantling scaffolding, brute strength and ingenuity. All light bulbs were changed to more efficient and brighter LED's.



Provided by
Cantor Beth Strassler



We are so happy to welcome Eliana Allen to our membership! She was born on February 2 at 11:34 pm and weighing in at 7 lbs. 10 oz.

Mazal tov to her proud parents, Jessica & Anthony Allen, and Uncle Nick Weiner.

We can't wait to safely meet her in person!

Synagogue Upkeep Update

By Jeff Levy

Keeping up with the structure of Etz Chaim, a building that has housed our synagogue since 1906, has kept us busy. Over the last several years we have painted, transitioned to a gas furnace, installed a new roof, carpeted and updated the seating in the sanctuary, replaced the floors in the Shapiro room and bathroom, and renovated the kitchen.

In addition to all that has been done, we have major updates in our sights to create security and provide more comfort. We have a front door committee that will be replacing our front door, addressing functional, security and safety issues. We have started planning toward creating a second egress from the second floor, again addressing safety and security concerns. Finally, we are exploring the feasibility of cooling the sanctuary during those excruciatingly hot summer days - wouldn't that be wonderful!

We have taken so many steps forward, but twice now we have taken a couple of temporary steps backward. We dealt with flooding in late 2019 due to a failed drainage pipe during torrential rains, and are currently dealing with the effects of another flood that occurred during a furnace failure and frozen pipes. I am pleased to report that during both of these challenges, our insurance has and will cover the majority of the repairs. The insurance company has recognized our proactive efforts of upkeep, and in each case the building was damaged due to natural disasters rather than lack of care.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the tireless efforts that David Strassler has invested in the physical structure of our building, and the management of these recent damage events. Much thanks to Frank Federman for his ongoing work as handyman-in-chief of the synagogue and his ongoing dedication to the building. I would also like to thank Andrea Mabee, the Chair, and the entire door committee for their persistent efforts addressing the significant challenge of bringing an aged front door up to current standards.

Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Book Hour

Join our discussions of compelling books on timely topics!

By Maureen King

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library hosts a monthly Zoom Book Hour to discuss books highlighted by the Jewish Book Council. Choose to participate in sessions that most interest you or attend them all. The Library will have at least one copy of the book available for borrowing (pickups and drop offs can be arranged) and will help you locate a book elsewhere if necessary.

Our last two meetings about *Jew(ish): A primer, a memoir, a manual, a plea* by Matt Greene led to some fascinating conversations about what it means to be Jewish. Greene began the exploration of his Jew(ish)ness near the birth of his son, and “offers a fresh voice for the generations of Jews who were born after the Holocaust”. (Goodreads)

Meetings are held on Zoom from 6:30 to 7:30 PM on the fourth Wednesday of the month.

Book Hour Schedule:

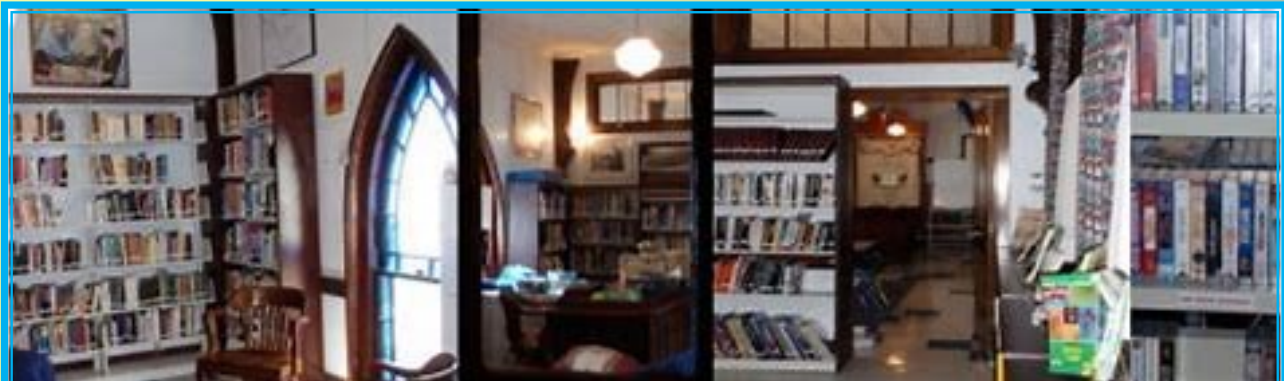
March 23: *Remix Judaism: Preserving Tradition in a Diverse World*
by Roberta Rosenthal Kwall

April 27: *Radical Inclusion: Engaging Interfaith Families for a Thriving Jewish Future*
by Edmund Case

May 25: TBD

June 22: TBD

Please email somlibrarymaine@gmail.com for questions, sign up for the Book Hour notifications, Book Hour Zoom links, and arrange for book borrowing.



Our Visit to Congregation Mickve Israel in Savannah, GA

by Beth & David Strassler



Forty-one settlers arrived in the five month old Georgia colony from London aboard the ship the *William and Sarah*, on July 11, 1733. The group included 34 Sephardim who had recently escaped from the Inquisition in Portugal and 8 Ashkenazim of German ancestry, with one death during the voyage. They brought a circumcision kit and a Sefer Torah, which is now one of the oldest Torahs in America.

By 1741, the battle for trade between the British and Spanish was in full swing in the West Indies, Florida, and Georgia. Because it looked doubtful that Britain would win the war, the Sephardim colonists fled north. With Portuguese-converso backgrounds, they were concerned about being captured by the Spanish army and convicted of heresy.

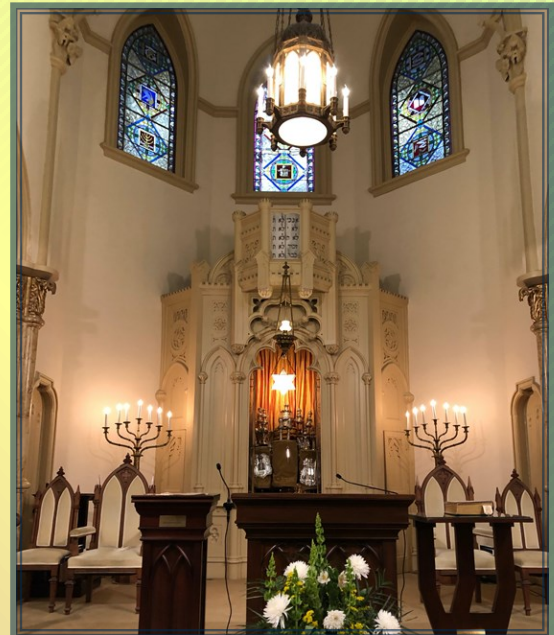
Congregation Mickve Israel was the first synagogue building in the state of Georgia, built in 1820. Although it was destroyed by fire in 1829, the Torahs and the Ark were saved!

The congregation welcomed large numbers of German Jews between 1840 and 1874. When the second building became too small for the large membership, they began construction on the current sanctuary on March 1, 1876.

As you can see, the structure is magnificent! It was designed by New York architect Henry G. Harrison in the Neo-Gothic style. The acoustics are beautiful (Beth tried them out).

In 1868, several changes in Jewish practice were begun that moved the congregation toward Reform Judaism, including mixed seating in the sanctuary. In 1880, confirmation for young women was instituted. By 1904, the religious school educated both boys and girls.

In 1975, the congregation opened a museum filled with photographs, documents, and treasures. During our visit, we discovered a rich, 200+ year old history of an evolving Jewish congregation well integrated and supported by its surrounding community.



Reflections on Tu B'shvat 5782

Jennie E. Aranovitch



On January 21, my family participated in Congregation Etz Chaim's annual Tu B'shvat seder — one of many that we have participated in over the years and the second one that we joined via Zoom. Unfortunately, my teenage son had been called in to work, so it ended up being a cozy mother and daughter seder for two (not counting all the other participants gathered around the virtual table).

As the seder got underway, my mind drifted back to my first Tu B'shvat seder at the shul, which happened to be the very first Tu B'shvat seder I had ever attended. I remembered my feelings at the time: not knowing quite what to expect. It was a seder but not a Passover seder. It seemed a curiosity.

To my surprise, Tu B'shvat almost instantly became one of my favorite Jewish holidays. I was taken by the beauty of the symbolic four cups of wine that progress in color from white to light pink to light red, to dark red, correlating with each passing season of a year. And the opportunity to sample tasty treats like almonds, dates, and carob, representing different categories of fruits, was reason enough to embrace it wholeheartedly.

But when I really stop to think about it, I believe I took so enthusiastically to the holiday because of the environmental message that it sends — the call to remember our charge as good stewards of the Earth.

As a child, growing up with a mother who was a former bona fide hippie (the real deal who moved to San Francisco in the 60s and surely wore flowers in her hair), I was raised with a set of values that are epitomized in the Tu B'shvat holiday and captured in the 1960s folk songs that we sang at that seder so many years ago. They were songs by the same artists whose music filled my childhood home and whom I later "rediscovered" in my teenage years, when I listened to them incessantly.

Still relatively new to the congregation (post-revitalization) at the time I attended my first Tu B'shvat seder, I found that these songs instantly made me feel at home, and, having been raised with a strong cultural tie to Judaism but no religious one, I realized how Jews must feel when they are far from home in a shul not their own and they hear the familiar prayers and songs sung in the melodies that they grew up with.

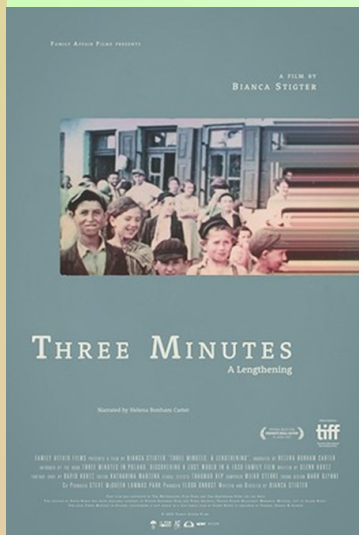
In the past several months, my 14-year-old daughter has latched on to 60s folk music with the same vigor I did at her age. The shared appreciation has led to lengthy "hang-out" sessions: the two of us sitting on the couch, getting lost in the music together — something that I realize not every mother of a teenage girl is fortunate enough to experience.

Just like at my first Tu B'shvat seder, on January 21st, those same 60s folk songs were sung by Cantor Strassler, and I found myself overwhelmingly glad for the continuity, glad that the songs appeared reliably like the fruits of the almond trees in Israel every spring. I was thankful to have my daughter sitting by my side and thankful for the mute button on my computer screen that allowed me, in all of my horrid tone-deafness, to sing boldly along with her.

Tu B'shvat is, of course, about celebrating trees and the life-sustaining fruits they give us; Jewish texts are replete with references to trees and our obligation to revere them. But on this past Tu B'shvat, for me, hearing those 60s folk songs, which were introduced to me by my mother and which I was now singing with my daughter, the holiday was not just a literal celebration of trees, but a symbolic celebration of family trees and the handing down of Jewish values.

When I think of Tu B'shvat, my mind instantly goes to the song written by Pete Seeger and made famous by the Byrds' version, "Turn! Turn! Turn!" whose lyrics are based on Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8. I think of the seasons of a tree's life, going from a state of barrenness to one bursting with fruit. And I think of the seasons of my own family's life — from that of childhood, to parenthood, to grandparenthood: all of us at various points along the continuum of time existing as branches of the same tree and anchored by the same roots that stretch from Russia to Maine ... and, yes, with a few even reaching San Francisco.

Previous CEC guest speaker's book now a film:
Three Minutes: A Lengthening
Provided by Cynthia Kurtz



Three Minutes: A Lengthening is a new documentary film that gives a rare look at Jewish life in a small town in Poland just before the Holocaust.

Based on Glenn Kurtz's acclaimed book **Three Minutes in Poland**, named a Best Book of 2014 by The New Yorker, The Boston Globe, NPR, and others, the film details the compelling and unexpected story of Kurtz's discovery of rare, nearly decayed pre-war film footage of a small shtetl in Poland, taken on a family vacation, and the fascinating journey of meticulous research on which he embarked, to resurrect and reconstruct its history and significance.

It is a poignant tale of memory, vitality, and loss, reconstructing in minute detail the moment just before the shadow fell on Europe.

Three Minutes: A Lengthening premiered at The Venice Film Festival and has screened at The Toronto International Film Festival, The Sundance Film Festival and others. It had its New York premiere at Doc NYC. Wider national distribution is coming in June.

- ◆ Sundance.org: "A cinematic meditation on memory and loss"
- ◆ Nominated for the ICS Award for Best Documentary (International Cinephile Society Awards 2022)
- ◆ Roger Ebert: "A powerful, essential piece of filmmaking."

Written and Directed by Bianca Stigter
Co-Produced by Steve McQueen (*12 Years a Slave*)
Narrated by Helena Bonham Carter
Based on the book *Three Minutes in Poland* by Glenn Kurtz

In May 2016 CEC was pleased to host Glenn Kurtz for his warmly received book presentation. For more information visit www.glennkurtz.com.

Ways to Honor Our Ancestors at Congregation Etz Chaim

by David Strassler

Honor your father and your mother, in order that your days be lengthened on the land that the Lord, your God, is giving you. Exodus 20:12

My father died when I was 15 years old. To honor him, I went to the synagogue almost every morning to say Kaddish. I was taught that by my saying Kaddish for those 11 months, I would help my father's soul get to heaven. Having gone to services for many years, I was familiar with the prayer and easily recited it.

It wasn't until a few months after his death that I decided to read the translation. I was shocked that there was nothing in the prayer about death or my father. The Kaddish prayer is all about "G-d is great". My reaction was anger. Angry that G-d took my father away from me at such a young age.

But I continued my daily ritual amongst members of my community. And over time, came to understand that I was also healing myself, with the support of my Jewish brethren.

Congregation Etz Chaim helps our community honor those who have passed away. I want to share with you several ways we are expanding our offerings to help you with this tradition.

- **Yahrzeit reminders:** Request a letter to be sent to you to remind you when your loved one passed away (the Hebrew anniversary of their death), so you can say Kaddish and/or light a memorial candle at home. Please email Jennie Aranovitch at yahrzeit@etzchaimme.org with your loved one's name, date of death and relationship to you.
- **Yizkor service:** There will be a Shabbat service on the last day of this Passover, Saturday, April 23rd, with a Yizkor service at 11 am, led by Cantor Strassler.
- **Memorial Board:** We will place a new Memorial Board in the back of the sanctuary, thanks to the generosity of the Nathanson Family. We were running out of spaces for new plaques on the existing four boards. Each person remembered has a light on during the Jewish month of their death, has their name read at the Shabbat service during the Jewish month they passed away, and has their name read/remembered at our Yom Kippur Yizkor service. If you would like to purchase a memorial plaque (for \$250), please contact David Strassler at: strassler@roadrunner.com.
- **Kaddish:** If you would like to say Kaddish, and need help gathering a minyan or learning the prayer, please contact David Strassler at: strassler@roadrunner.com.



Community Outreach Committee Update

By Denise Hammond

We've spent a few months planning and organizing in the Community Outreach Committee. We are a small but mighty group of Congregation members that wants to work at supporting our community. These past few months, committee members supported our members by writing sympathy cards and supporting one of our members after the death of her brother by bringing food, and being there to sit shiva.

It means so much to our members when others reach out, share their thoughts and empathy, and help make a minyan. Much of what we do is behind the scenes. We want to support those individuals who need us quietly and in the most supportive manner we can.

This time, I received one of those sympathy cards. While I'm so busy supporting others, to have someone acknowledge and send kindness to me felt like a warm blanket. We are here to support anyone in need, and if you know of someone who could use support or want to celebrate something wonderful, please reach out.

We are working hard to implement a form on our website, but for now, reach out to me: dghammond@roadrunner.com.

Thanks for reading!

Bella Cowan, Part III

College and Marriage

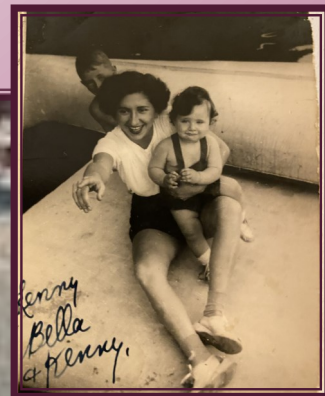
By Ellie Rolnick

Bella's mother passed away the day of her high school graduation. Bella walked to the high school alone to attend her graduation as the rest of her family began Shiva. She recalls how she cried all the way home. Not only had Bella lost her mother, but she also had lost her best friend.

Education was very important in the Rolnick family and there was no doubt that Bella would continue her schooling. Bella and her sister Mildred were also very close. Mildred and her husband, Harold Nelson, lived in Portland at that time and Bella would visit frequently. When it came time to decide where to go to school, Millie suggested that Bella come to Portland and go a new school, Westbrook Junior College, and study to be a medical secretary. A small life insurance policy from her mother's passing enabled Bella to travel south and go to college, with the added bonus of being closer to her older sister.

Bella was an excellent student and passed through her studies with flying colors. It was not long out of college that she started working for a medical office. Although enjoying being closer to her sister, Bella moved back to Bangor. She got a job in an office collecting money from people who were buying things 'on time'. Her meticulous abilities made this a great job for Bella, and a perfect training ground for the future, when she would become a business owner. Over the years, Bella was a regular attendee of the Westbrook College annual reunions, and as time passed, she was the oldest alumna to attend.

Harold Cowan, originally from Massachusetts, was working in Bangor for New England Pipe and Supply Company, owned by his Uncle. He learned of a dance being held at the Jewish Community Center and attended. This is where he and Bella first met. Harold was smitten. Bella, not so much. Bella recalls going on a date to the movies. She was watching the movie but realized that Harold spent the entire time watching her! They dated for a short while, then Bella broke off the relationship. One day, the doorbell rang and Harold was standing at the door. She was dumbstruck as she thought she had broken things off. He assured her that he was not there to see her, but that her father, Osher Rolnick, had invited him. Osher was fond of Harold and thought he and Bella would be a good match. Over time, Bella agreed. Osher offered to pay for their wedding or give them cash to start their life together. They opted for elopement and the cash!



Bella Cowan, Part III, cont.

College and Marriage

By Ellie Rolnick

World War II was coming, and Harold knew that if he didn't enlist in the service, he would be drafted. He chose the Navy and attended the Wentworth Institute in Massachusetts to learn pipe fitting and was stationed at the Boston Shipyard. While he was at school, Bella worked in a factory in Bangor, then eventually moved to Massachusetts to join him. They lived with Harold's sister and her family. Bella tried to find a job in the Boston area but sadly, although she had excellent skills, when perspective employers realized she was Jewish, they didn't hire her. She ultimately cared for her sister-in-law's home and children, while the rest of the family worked.

Harold was then stationed in England and Bella moved back to Bangor. When he returned from the war, he got a job as a traveling salesman, and he and Bella lived with her sister and brother-in-law. When they were ready to build a house, they had a piece of land but limited funds. Bella told a story of how the architect designed the house in exchange for Harold's grandfather's watch. After the house was built, they started their family. Bella and Harold had two sons, David and Bernard. Bella was very active in the Jewish community in Bangor, being a member of Hadassah and B'nai B'rith. She loved playing Bridge and Mahjong and spending time with her friends. Many of those friends were lifelong relationships. She had several nieces and nephews in Bangor and she was everyone's favorite Aunt – especially mine!

Harold had an opportunity to buy a luncheonette, so was able to end his on the road career and spend more time with the family. In the mid 60's, however, difficulties began to arise, and circumstances caused them to lose the luncheonette. Other plans needed to be made.

Harold Nelson had a friend, Barney Osher, who was looking to sell his business, a hardware store called 'Sam's Place'. He connected with his friend and brother-in-law, and soon Bella was transplanted to Saco! The next installment will be about Bella's life in Southern Maine.





Teen Class Dilemma

By David Strassler

This winter, I was trying to figure out what book my Congregation Etz Chaim teen class would read next. The choice became easy when I read the article in our local newspaper that *Maus I* by Art Spiegelman was being removed from a school curriculum in Tennessee. I immediately went to one of our many bookshelves to look for our copy. It was nowhere to be found, which means that it was a donated elsewhere when we downsized our book collection. I looked on Amazon and it was “sold out” with a few months wait. Ugh! Next, I went to our Samuel Osher Memorial Library. Eureka! There was one copy. Thankfully, one of the students also had a copy. I then sent an email request to about 20 people I knew, to see if they had a copy. I struck out. Lastly, I contacted my local library, and they found a copy at the Baxter Memorial Library in Gorham—with a 3 week wait.

We finished the book, which led to some great discussions. Now onto *Maus II*. Thankfully, one our congregation members has a copy of that one, along with our library and one of our teens.

Read below for a more in-depth article about “what’s all the fuss?”.

Banning ‘Maus’ only exposes the significance of this searing graphic novel about the Holocaust From The Conversation - February 8, 2022

A school board in Tennessee voted unanimously in favour of removing the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman from its Grade 8 language arts curriculum in January 2022. *Maus* is based on interviews with Spiegelman’s father, Vladek Spiegelman, a Polish Jew and Auschwitz survivor, and won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for its searing and innovative visual and narrative exploration of the darkest period of German history. The McMinn County’s Board of Education cited “rough, objectionable language” and the cartoon drawing of a nude woman as their primary objections.

However, with editions flying off the shelves and comic book stores giving away copies, the McMinn County school board has, in fact, improved *Maus*’s distribution, getting it into the hands of more readers.

Graphic novel and historical representation

Maus explores Spiegelman’s parents’ life in Poland and their internment at Auschwitz. Vladek Spiegelman’s experience of the Holocaust and its aftermath — including the 1968 suicide of Art Spiegelman’s mother, Vladek’s wife, Anja — is filtered through cartoonist’s narrative and visual account. He portrays the Holocaust as a conflict between cats, mice, and pigs where Jews are drawn as mice, Germans as cats and Poles as pigs.

Spiegelman’s use of animals met some controversy including among some Polish readers, as well as some in the Jewish community who saw in mice the stereotype of Jews as pathetic and defenseless creatures. Yet Spiegelman noted that his anthropomorphized mice intentionally challenged Nazi propaganda that likened Jews to rats. For example, a teaching guide characterizes Spiegelman’s Jewish mice as “a barbed response to Hitler’s statement ‘The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.’” His mice, Spiegelman wrote, “stand upright and affirm their humanity.”

Maus was first published in Françoise Mouly and Spiegelman’s comics anthology RAW from 1980 onward, before the first six chapters were published in 1986 as *Maus I: A Survivor’s Tale* and the latter five chapters were published in 1991 as *Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale: And Here My Troubles*.

The graphic novel’s 1992 Pulitzer Prize win (in the “Special Citations and Awards” category) drew academics’ attention to the comics medium for the first time.

Teen Class Dilemma, cont.

By David Strassler

Now heralded as one of the greatest graphic novels of all time, *Maus* successfully established comics as an important feature of contemporary culture and historical representation. It opened the floodgates to comics addressing serious subject matter and changed the medium's relationship with history.

Ethics of representing the Holocaust

While some may be encountering *Maus* for the first time in their newsfeeds, comics fans, teachers and literary and cultural studies scholars have known the importance of *Maus* in teaching and learning for decades.

Maus made comic books visible and legitimate in ways that had been previously inconceivable. As my research has explored, *Maus* also redefined the medium's potential through its engagement with what is known in Germany as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, overcoming the past or coming to terms with the history of Nazism. At the same time, *Maus* prompted important popular and scholarly debates on the ethics of representing the Holocaust.

For example, literature professor Marianne Hirsch examined the role of photography in *Maus* in a 1992 essay, providing the scholarly foundation for her subsequent work on transgenerational trauma.

German and comparative literature professor Andreas Huyssen examined the ethics and esthetics of remembering the Holocaust by looking at *Maus*'s narrative strategies. In particular, Huyssen turned to *Maus* as an important example of how to move debates on representing the Holocaust beyond a focus on the "proper" depiction of historical trauma. Instead, Huyssen analyzed *Maus*'s ability to shock and jar its reader "through ruptures in narrative." As Huyssen notes:

"[T]he telling of this traumatic past ... is interrupted time and again by banal everyday events in the New York present. This cross-cutting of past and present, by which the frame keeps intruding into the narrative ... points in a variety of ways to how this past holds the present captive, independently of whether this knotting of past into present is being talked about or repressed."

Huyssen found that *Maus* demonstrated the power of modernist Holocaust commemorations that steer clear of "official Holocaust memory" and its rituals while incorporating a critique of representation itself.

Similarly, historian Hayden White looked to *Maus* as a case study in his discussion on the relationship between history and narrative.

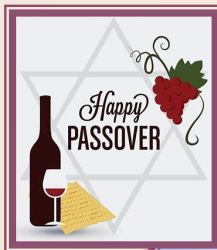
White questioned the belief that the uniqueness of Naziism and the Nazi "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" — the mass genocide of Jews — might set limits on its portrayal, insisting that there are no unacceptable modes of historical narrative. White argued that the destabilizing of the division between fact and fiction, as seen in *Maus* is well-suited to representing what may otherwise seem "unrepresentable," namely, the Holocaust, as well as the experience of it.



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Samuel Osher Memorial Library
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Jewish Books, Music & Movies
for the
York County Community



Happy Passover!

The Board of Directors and
Cantor Strassler would like to wish
you and your
family a very

Happy Passover!

York County (YC) Jewish Community Newsletter

This newsletter is published twice each year. It is intended to announce and report on Jewish community events in York County, and especially at Congregation Etz Chaim in Biddeford.

The newsletter offers local perspectives on historical and contemporary aspects of Jewish life.

Adrienne Levy, Editor. Articles submitted by Board members at
mail@etzchaimme.org

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Just write to our mail address:

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PO Box 905

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Our Synagogue

Our community programs are available to all members of **the York County Jewish Community and are driven by the following mission statement:**

"We promote Jewish cultural, social, educational and religious activities in southern Maine. Our primary goal is to make available a range of activities that facilitate the expression of what each individual finds valuable in the Jewish experience.

We attempt to accommodate individuals along the entire spectrum of Jewish practice and theology. We value and support the existence of a local formal congregation, but view our community programs as open to all interested people, regardless of whether or to what congregation they may be formally affiliated."

Synagogue Contacts

Please mail Donations or Membership dues to:

PO Box 905

Kennebunk, ME 04043

Lifecycle events, pastoral counseling:

Community Outreach request:

Yahrzeit reminders:

Memorial Plaques:

Hebrew School/Services:

Prayer Books:

Library:

Cantor Beth Strassler 967-5833 or cantor@etzchaimme.org

Denise Hammond dghammond@roadrunner.com

Jennie Aranovitch yahrzeit@etzchaim.org

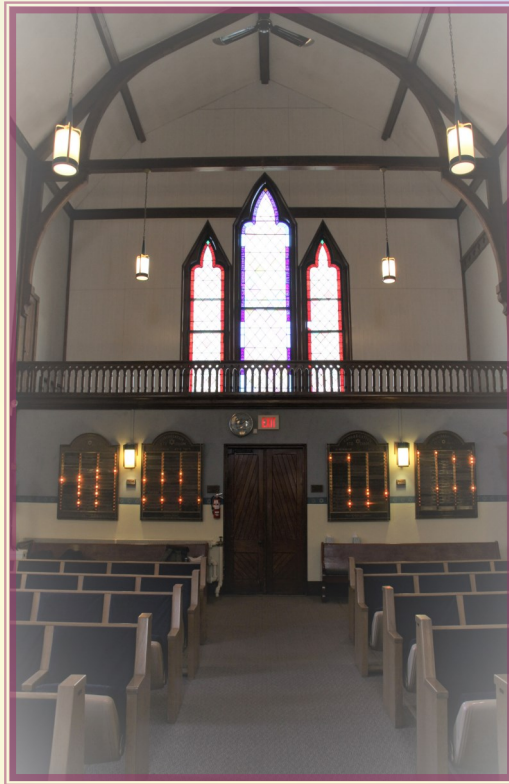
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York County Jewish Community News



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