

Fall 2022/5783

Congregation Etz Chaim

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September 25, Sunday: Erev RH
Evening Service: 6:45 pm

September 26, Monday: RH Day 1
Preliminary Service: 9:15 am
Morning Service: 9:30 am
Tashlich at Saco River: 12:40 pm

September 27, Tuesday: RH Day 2
Preliminary Service: 9:15 am
Morning Service: 9:30 am

October 4, Tuesday: Kol Nidre: 6:15 pm

October 5, Wednesday: Yom Kippur
Preliminary Service: 9:15 am
Morning Service: 9:30 am
Yizkor: 11:15 am
Afternoon Service: 4:30 pm
Break Fast: 6:30 pm at conclusion of services

Schedule for High Holiday Services 2022/5783

Congregation Etz Chaim
on Bacon Street in Biddeford, ME
www.etzchaimme.org

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

by Cantor Beth Strassler



Before modern day sirens, there were shofar: An ancient alert produced by the blowing of a ram's horn that rang out from the Jerusalem Temple on various occasions, and on a daily basis. The sound reported a time of day and often, an event. (Where I grew up in a small upstate NY town, the daily community signal was the volunteer fireman's siren announcing noon. Hmm...interesting parallel because both are sounds that make you look up and pay attention.)

The shofar sounded out from the Jerusalem Temple each day to announce the opening of the gates for worship, as an alarm clock for the priests before services, and to accompany both the morning and afternoon sacrificial offerings.

Each Friday eve, six notes were blown to announce the approach of Shabbat. At the first note, laborers in the fields stopped work and started home. At the second, the shops closed and businesses came to a halt. The third signaled the time to light the Shabbat candles. Then, there was a pause before three more notes were sounded to announce the beginning of Shabbat.

The shofar blast announced the moment of Israel's attack in battle. It was the sound that helped Joshua to bring down the walls of Jericho. The alarming sound of many shofars helped Gideon and his small regimen trick a vast army of Midianites into believing they were more numerous than they really were.

The shofar was blown at the beginning of the Jubilee year to announce the year of release of all slaves. In fact, the old Hebrew word for "ram's horn" is translated as "Jubilee".

On fasting days, its sound encouraged people to repent. Rosh Hashanah was designated as the "day of blowing (the shofar)" in Numbers 29:1. This is the ancient custom we have retained to this day.

There are four shofar sounds heard daily on Rosh Hashanah, for a total of 100 notes:

Tekiah: is a plain, steady note that begins and ends each section.

Shevarim: means broken, and the sound is broken into three short blasts.

Teru'ah: consists of nine brief notes formed by the tongue and shofar.

Tekiah G'dolah: One, as-long-as-you-have-breath-note sounded at the end of each daily session.

At Congregation Etz Chaim, our Shofar Choir does the honors. Each blast has a powerful, unique sound that combines the qualities of each shofar and each shofar blower. May you be inspired by the sounds of the shofar during the holiday season. And may its message(s) resonate with you long after you hear the final blast at the end of Yom Kippur.

Shanah Tovah, Beth

Source: Cohen, Dr. Jeffrey M. (1983). *Understanding the High Holyday Services*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Tikkun Olam: Helping Ukrainian Refugees, Part I

By Leah Macomber



The Russian invasion of Ukraine started Feb 24, 2022. Most of the world was shocked at the sudden, unprovoked attack on this peaceful nation. As the invasion continued, news came that millions of Ukrainian people were fleeing the country for their own safety, and support mounted from around the world. My dad, whose 80th birthday was around the corner, asked me and my sister Lisa, to join him on a trip to neighboring Poland, to do whatever we could to help. This is how he wanted to spend his birthday. My dad is not a stranger to humanitarian efforts, so knew it would take some logistical expertise to get there quickly and safely, and to be useful in some way, as we had no real transferrable skills besides our open hearts.

We hurriedly made plans and announced to friends and family (and Etz Chaim) that we were leaving in 10 days. During this time, support for our trip came flooding in. Etz Chaim members sent money and so many good wishes. People stopped by to drop off all kinds of supplies to help meet the needs of desperate women and children. Children from the Etz Chaim Hebrew School brought over 100 hand-made bracelets and necklaces, and hand-made cards and signs promising solidarity and hoping for peace. Joe Strassler designed some beautiful digital cards, and Beth printed the designs on t-shirts. Overall, we collected several thousand dollars in donations and four large duffel bags filled with supplies donated from people across the US. Seventy-one days after the invasion began, I boarded a plane to Warsaw with my dad and sister, and also carried with me a whole community of big open hearts.

We arrived in Warsaw on May 6, met our Global Volunteers cohort, our Polish guide, and a Ukrainian/Polish/English translator who introduced us to the Global Volunteers program on a bus ride from Warsaw to Siedlce (pronounced – “se-dul-che”), a small city in the Polish countryside. I thought Ukrainians and Poles spoke the same language, but I was mistaken. Ukrainians speak Ukrainian and Poles speak Polish. There is some overlap, but not much, which underscored the tragedy of the Ukrainian refugees in Poland – a language barrier to conquer.

Although we knew a volatile war raged less than 500 miles to our east, we weren’t nervous. As we rode through the countryside, through the forests of Poland, it was as if we were on a mission, not just for Ukrainian people, but also to live the post-Holocaust motto, “Never Again.” That the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, is not only Jewish, but had a grandfather and great uncles who fought against Nazis in WWII, made this feeling of solidarity especially visceral.

Siedlce has a long Jewish history, like much of Poland, and up to WWII, there were 15,000 Jews living peacefully there. However, when the war began, the German army entered the town, forced excessive fines on the Jews, burned down the synagogue, created a barbed-wire ghetto, forced starvation, and eventually killed or deported Jews to the Treblinka death camp. Some Jews escaped the Germans by hiding in the forests, but most were killed or died of cold or starvation. Many stories have been told about Jews hiding in the forests, these forests. Riding through the countryside was eerie -- it was easy to imagine persecuted Jews hiding in the beeches and poplars.

When we arrived at our facility, a sprawling 19th century manor 12 miles outside the city center, the Polish and Ukrainian staff met us on the front steps with a traditional Polish greeting of bread & salt (gesturing that you will never be hungry) and a shot of Polish vodka. We toured the grounds, which included outdoor fields, sports and playground equipment, eating areas and conference rooms. We also saw huge stork nests! Fun fact – they say one in four storks in the world live in Poland.

Our guide explained the Global Volunteers mission in Poland, and soon our first week of volunteer work became clear. We would help renovate an old primary school into living quarters for six Ukrainian refugee families. Each night we would host Ukrainian mothers and children at the manor by engaging in fun activities, and dinner. Then, we would teach English to Polish students at various classrooms in the city (or as we learned later, we would “speak American” to Polish students, as most already knew English, but appreciated hearing it spoken natively.) There were 20 Americans in our cohort, and we went right to work.

Tikkun Olam: Helping Ukrainian Refugees, Part I, cont.

By Leah Macomber

The “Refugee House” is an old primary school with six classrooms, two multi-stall bathrooms, a common area and small kitchen. Families live in the classrooms, sleeping on donated beds and cots. Each family is a little different – mom and two or three kids, mom and kids and grandmom, etc. Some kids go to school nearby, some do not. Some moms have jobs, most do not. They tell us that it’s better to live there than live with Polish families and feel dependent on them or feel like a burden. They all insist their situation is temporary, and they will go back to their own homes soon. They call their husbands, brothers, fathers every day...they miss their friends and lives in Ukraine... they curse the war and thank us for being there... they are so very much like you and me.

While some of the volunteers sanded and painted walls, or repaired woodwork or plumbing, I inspected the site, and worked with the interpreter to talk to families about what else they needed. With some of the generous monetary donations we collected in the US we purchased items that would help meet their basic needs: from cookware, to sheets and towels, to personal hygiene needs and baby formula.

Hosting other Ukrainian families at the Global Volunteers manor was rewarding. Every night a group would come to the manor. Some volunteers played various outdoor or board games, or made creative crafts with the children. The kids ran around playing and laughed and laughed. Some of us spent time with the mothers, who were grateful to have some adult time. They talked about their struggles as refugees, how badly they missed their men, their fears about the fate of Ukraine and the soldiers. With all the toiletries and hair ribbons and perfume we brought, we created “beauty bags” and gave them to the women. They appreciated the gifts but were even more grateful for our presence. As one mom said, “you came all this way to comfort strangers and we will never forget it”.

One night for dinner we cooked Polish sausages on sticks over an open campfire. Global Volunteers had mentioned in an email that they were planning this special diversion and we might bring marshmallows and graham crackers from the US, so of course we did. This was their first experience eating smores and they loved them! Everyone was having a great time when the Ukrainian teenagers started to sing. For a moment, we thought it was a “good ole campfire song”, but then all the Ukrainians stopped what they were doing and joined in. Out came a beautiful and somber melody and tears came to their eyes as they sang a beautiful, slow chorus. The interpreter, with tears in her eyes, explained that it was a popular old Ukrainian patriotic song, and it is sung to show pride in Ukraine and its resistance to foreign aggression and hopes for peace. You can look up “Kalyna” on YouTube to hear it for yourself, but it wouldn’t be as raw and real as it was on this night, sung by Ukrainian refugees in the Polish countryside.

We left Siedlce with full hearts, and made our way to our next stop, Przemysl (“pra-she-metz-l”) a city about 7 miles from the Ukrainian border, where we volunteered with another amazing organization: World Central Kitchen (WCK).

Of note: As of August 30, it’s been 188 days since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. According to the UN Refugee Agency, over 5 million people have crossed over the border from Ukraine to Poland, and almost 4 million people have crossed back.

My heart overflows with love, respect and hope for the Ukrainian people, and I want to thank Etz Chaim for your generous, caring support.

Part II will follow in the Spring newsletter.





Photos from Leah's Poland Trip



The Jewish Origins of Good Behavior by David Strassler

A Taste of Pirkei Avot (four 1 hour sessions)

Thursdays, October 20, 27; November 3, 10
6:30-7:30 pm on ZOOM. Free for Congregation Etz Chaim members

During my high school classes, I learned about some influential philosophers: Hobbes believed that humans were naturally selfish, greedy, and cruel. Locke contended that people were naturally reasonable and moral. Rousseau was convinced that we are good by nature but corrupted by society. On my own, I gravitated to Herman Hesse, whose book's major theme was existentialism: "a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will." This did not seem to fit with my Jewish education, which described an "all powerful G-d".

After pondering these thoughts for many years, I realized that my basic question boiled down to: "Why do I want to be a good person?" I gave my parents most of the credit for this, but where did they learn this. In other words where did my ancestors pick up their good habits?

In my Jewish studies, as an adult, I came across Pirkei Avot...and found my answer.

Pirkei Avot translates to mean the Ethics (Chapters) of the Fathers. This a relatively short section of the Talmud that specifically deals with ethical issues, while the rest of the Talmud deals with Jewish laws. It is approximately a 500 year compilation of wisdom from Jewish sages that was finally written down by Judah ha-Nasi in about 200 CE. Most famous among these sages was Rabbi Hillel, who is the author of one of my favorite quotes: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And being for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

I have formally studied Pirkei Avot three times, and always glean new insights about the history about my behavior and values. I also have used Pirkei Avot to teach these Jewish values through famous movies, with follow-up discussions in our Teen Class.

My most recent course on Pirkei Avot was this summer with Joseph Rosenstein, in a virtual 6 week class. This is the same Joseph Rosenstein who is responsible for authoring our Shabbat and High Holiday prayers books, Eit Ratzon. This year, he published his own Reflections on Pirkei Avot: Not Just What My Rebbe Taught Me. His knowledge and insight are remarkable. He leads stimulating class discussions, and his writing (all 423 pages) is thought-provoking, besides helping me to practice my Hebrew translation skills. From these writings, it is clear that human nature has not changed in the past 2,000 years.

Examples of some of my favorites:

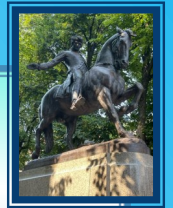
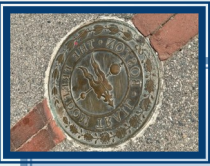
- ◆ "Who is wise? Those who learn from every person?...Who is mighty? Those who subdue their evil inclination?...Who is rich? Those who rejoice in what they have..." (4:1)
- ◆ "Say little and do much." (1:15)
- ◆ "The more charity, the more peace." (2:8)
- ◆ "Everything is foreseen yet freedom of choice is granted" (3:19)

I am excited to share my knowledge of Pirkei Avot with our community this fall. We will meet, as noted above, for four 1-hour sessions on ZOOM. I hope to facilitate discussions about these ethical values and your own experiences. There will be recommended readings before class.

To register, email David by October 10 at: strassler@roadrunner.com

Congregation Etz Chaim members: free

Non-members: \$50



Boston Teen Trip

by Noah Hammond

The Congregation Etz Chaim Teen class went on a trip to Boston this past April. We were given a tour of the Freedom Trail, including The New England Holocaust Memorial. After that we drove to Brookline and went into gift shops, a middle eastern restaurant, and a kosher grocery store/butcher.

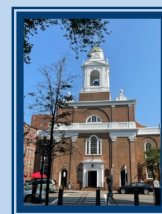
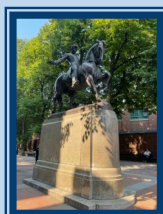
On the Freedom Trail, we first visited the Boston Common and learned that there were Native Americans who lived there before colonists came to Boston and took it over. It is also the oldest public park in America. Another place on the Freedom Trail we visited was the Granary Burying Ground. There we saw the graves of Paul Revere, and John Hancock. Something I thought was cool was that all the tombs were facing one direction and that on the table like tombs there were coins thrown onto it. Another place we visited was the Old State House. This is the oldest surviving building in Boston. In front of the State House was where the Boston Massacre happened. I also thought it was cool to be standing on a very important landmark in our country's history towards independence.

At the end of the tour, we visited The New England Holocaust Memorial. For Teen Class this year, we read From Broken Glass, by Steve Ross. It was great to get to see this memorial landmark we studied. The memorial had big glass walls that you could walk through, and when walking through, there were gas vents coming from the bottom to signify the gas chambers during the Holocaust. On the glass wall, there were the numbers of the victims of the Holocaust. On the ground, before each wall, was a name of each concentration camp. Also on the wall were stories about survivors' experiences during the Holocaust. It was nice to see a Holocaust memorial for the first time, and I thought it was really cool how there were stories of some past experiences of the Holocaust. It also made me very sad seeing all the numbers of the people lost on the walls.

Afterwards, we made our way to Brookline. We first got lunch at a Middle Eastern-Israeli restaurant called Rami's, which had many foods, such as falafel, shawarma, kabobs, and schnitzel. After we ate, we went to a Jewish bookstore-Israeli Book Shop. I saw many Jewish items, such as shofars, seder plates, shabbat candles, and kippahs. This was new to me because before this, I hadn't seen very many Jewish stores like this. When we were in the store, David invited Eva and me to pick out a shofar for ourselves. This was a kind gesture from him and was very special to me. Next, we went to the Butcherie. There, we got different kosher goods that are harder to find in Maine, such as kosher chicken, spices, and pre-made kosher meals. It was cool to see all these new foods in one store that I had never seen before.

Thank you to Congregation Etz Chaim and the Sam L. Cohen Foundation for this experience, and I would highly recommend others to go to all of these fun places.

To see the pictorial presentation of this trip, including a video of The England Holocaust Memorial, go to: <https://etzchaimme.org/Teentripboston2022>



Community Corner!

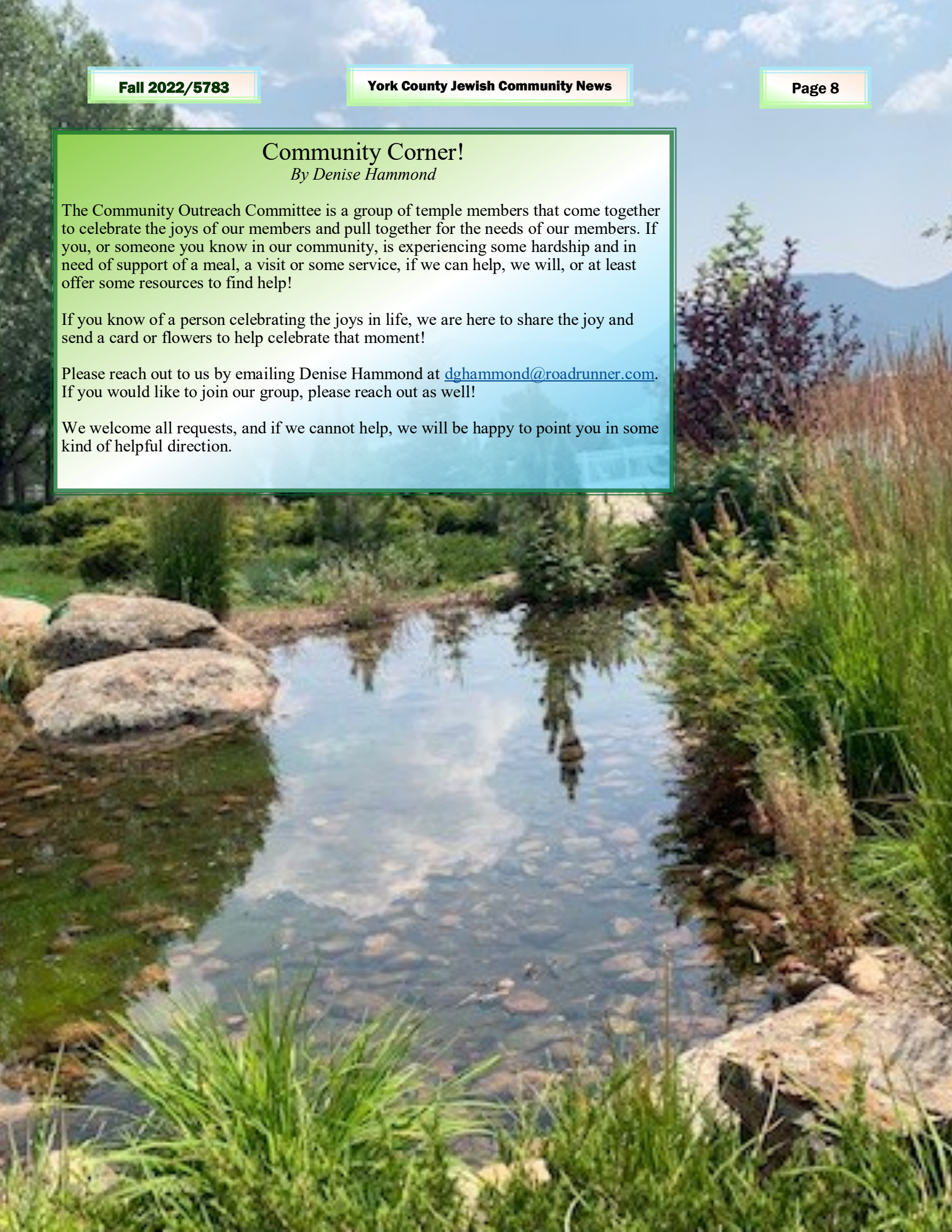
By Denise Hammond

The Community Outreach Committee is a group of temple members that come together to celebrate the joys of our members and pull together for the needs of our members. If you, or someone you know in our community, is experiencing some hardship and in need of support of a meal, a visit or some service, if we can help, we will, or at least offer some resources to find help!

If you know of a person celebrating the joys in life, we are here to share the joy and send a card or flowers to help celebrate that moment!

Please reach out to us by emailing Denise Hammond at dghammond@roadrunner.com. If you would like to join our group, please reach out as well!

We welcome all requests, and if we cannot help, we will be happy to point you in some kind of helpful direction.



Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award—2022 Essay

By Josiah Aranovitch (attending Worcester Polytechnical Institute this Fall)

They say that the most important years in a child's development are from birth to age five. Fortunately for me, Congregation Etz Chaim was a big part of my life for these years — as well as for the next five years after that.

I was officially welcomed into the Etz Chaim community at my bris, when members gathered at my parents' house on King Street in Saco, and David Strassler, then-vice president of the shul and now president, did the ... honors. Just three days later, at eleven days old, I took one of my very first outings in life to the Strassler's home for my first Passover Seder. Of course, I didn't know it then, but I was so fortunate to begin life already a part of this Jewish community.

A whole lot of Chanukah parties, Purim celebrations, community Tu B'shvat Seders, Sunday School sessions, and Friday night potluck dinners, as well as the congregation's 100th anniversary celebration, came and went. While there are some aspects of these events that I don't remember and have only been shown pictures of or was told about (like Beth Strassler and Barbara Shapiro taking turns holding me as an infant so my mom could actually eat a meal in peace), "dancing" up a storm on the lawn of the Saco Museum at age two, or climbing up and down the stairs of the bimah during my sister's naming ceremony, there is much that I actually do recall, and I do so fondly: jumping down the stairs of the social hall, playing Haman to my sister's Queen Esther for the annual Purim play, decorating the indoor sukkah, making various arts and crafts projects, like painted candlesticks, tzedakah boxes, and apple prints, and demonstrating my knowledge of capital cities around the world on stage at the talent show.

Of course, a big part of those memories are the ones from my days at Hebrew School. Congregation Etz Chaim was where I learned to read Hebrew, where I learned the most fundamental prayers of Judaism, such as Mah Tovu, that I will know for the rest of my life. I learned songs, such as Adon Olam, and Biblical stories, such as Noah's Arc — essentially, where my Jewish identity was formed.

But my path in Hebrew School, unfortunately, did not stay on the same path as the ones of most of my classmates. At the age of ten, I was forced to leave Maine, forced to leave my mother, my school, my friends, my extra-curricular activities, and my Jewish community. In my new life in northern Virginia, in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., I found a comparable school, comparable friends, comparable activities, but I did not find a comparable Jewish community. Yes, I belonged to a synagogue, and yes, I attended Hebrew School. But it was not the same as Congregation Etz Chaim. Not by a long shot. I don't remember learning much of anything that really stuck with me in Hebrew School there. The synagogue there was very large in terms of membership, but I didn't feel like I was a major part of it. While some of that feeling may have been the result of the fact that I was a newcomer, part of me feels as if I never would have felt the way about that congregation as I do about Etz Chaim, even if I had grown up there from birth. It did not have a homey feeling. I did not feel at home.

The thing about Congregation Etz Chaim is that everyone is a big fish in a small pond. And by that, I don't mean that people are full of a sense of self-importance. I mean that in such a small Jewish community, everyone feels special and is made to feel that their presence and participation matter ... because they *do*, actually, matter. When my sister and I were asked, spur of the moment, to hold Torahs at this past Rosh Hashanah evening service, it wasn't because we, at 17 and 14, had made big financial contributions or had paid specifically for the honor, as is the custom in many large synagogues. We were asked, I assume, simply because we are part of the community, and we are valued.

When I was finally able to come back to Congregation Etz Chaim, after six long years of being away and living in two different states, it was a true homecoming. Perhaps partly because the timing coincided with my sister's Bat Mitzvah preparations, I felt like I jumped right back into being part of the community, or at least to the extent possible under COVID restrictions. During that time, I was surprised by how many members still remembered my sister and me and by how welcoming they were.

In some ways, COVID probably resulted in me having a bigger role in my sister's Bat Mitzvah than I ordinarily would have had. Hers was the first Zoom-Mitzvah for Congregation Etz Chaim, and our immediate family members were the only ones allowed in the synagogue on that day, which meant there were plenty of honors for us to go around. I will always remember lifting the Torah for her.

Cont. next page

Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award—2022 Essay, cont.

By Josiah Aranovitch (attending Worcester Polytechnical Institute this Fall)

Not all aspects of COVID had a silver lining, but we did make the best of it. The in-person parties and potluck dinners I remembered from my childhood were replaced with masked visits at the Strassler's for Bat Mitzvah planning, outdoor shofar blowing sessions, an outdoor Friday night service, socially distanced High Holiday services, and Zoom. Lots and lots of Zoom.

I feel like I was gone from Congregation Etz Chaim during the very years that most kids are mature enough to give back to their community, and when I finally returned at age 16, COVID had put up barriers to many of the ways people normally help out. I was glad, though, that a new volunteer task emerged that I was able to participate in: delivering holiday bags to community members, to get them what they needed so they could participate fully in Zoom events. I volunteered for Purim, Tu B'shvat, and Pesach deliveries.

While in some ways COVID, by its nature as a contagious disease, has made it harder to show that you care by participating in community events, it was unexpectedly something that happened during the pandemic that reinforced for me the specialness of our community. When one member lost a close relative who she wanted to say Kaddish for, the rest of the community made sure that there was a minyan at her house all week long. While it probably isn't a big deal in large Jewish populations, for a community of our size, I feel like it showed that the true family spirit of Congregation Etz Chaim that I knew from my youth was still very much alive and well, despite the pandemic. And while the occasion was not a happy one, I was glad to realize that, as a grown up now, I was contributing to making Congregation Etz Chaim the place of warmth and comfort that it is, not just benefitting from it.

As I've gotten older, my appreciation of Congregation Etz Chaim, and my place in it, has matured, and part of that is realizing how truly unique it is, in this day and age, to have the kind of roots at your synagogue as I have at Congregation Etz Chaim. As a fifth-generation member, I am incredibly proud to call home the shul that my great-great-grandparents joined at its founding, and which they gave to selflessly of themselves throughout their lives. I'm not sure that I will ever become the president of the congregation like my great-great-grandfather (though anything is possible!), but I do fully expect to be a member for the rest of my life. After graduating from college and earning my master's degree, my hope is to be able to find a job in my field in Southern Maine, where I hope to raise children who will be sixth-generation members of Congregation Etz Chaim, who will one day have Mitzvahs and become Jewish adults, as my ancestors did.

Who knows how things will be at that point in time, but I can only hope that we will be back to potluck dinners, in-person Purim spiels, and Chanukah parties. I hope that my babies will be greeted by old Jewish ladies who call them by their Yiddish nicknames and knit them baby booties, as was done for me. I hope that as school-aged children, they will learn to read Hebrew in the same rooms where I once did. And I hope that as teenagers, they will be called up to the bimah to hold the Torahs on Rosh Hashanah—just because they are valued for being there. In short, I hope all the things that make Congregation Etz Chaim so special will live on, because future generations should know the comfort of what it's like to be at home in their shul and to be part of a community that exists as an extended Jewish family.

Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award - 2022 Essay

By Elaina Hammond (attending Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts this Fall)

As long as I can remember, I have been going to Congregation Etz Chaim. On Thursdays, we had Hebrew school, which wasn't my favorite activity... but I learned to love it. When I was younger, and not old enough to learn the alphabet, I got to sit with this other girl and play with toys in the library, or look at pictures in the books. Looking back, I can still remember the different books that I loved to look at and eventually read, books about the holidays I celebrated, or about my history. The night always ended with a short evening service with all the kids in Hebrew school.

As I grew older and moved past the basic classes, such as learning to read Hebrew, I began taking classes about the history of Judaism, which was my favorite class. We learned about the creation of Israel, the many wars revolving around that history, as well as further back during the creation of Judaism and the Diaspora. All this information about my people made me feel special, since I had a history to relate to, a shared history with the people at this small synagogue that connected all of us together.

After my Bat Mitzvah, I attended Teen class, which was different than any of my classes before. In this class, we discussed not only history, but also ideology. Though it took me a while to get used to this new structure, I enjoyed these talks since it made me feel more comfortable and connected to my faith. From my teacher, I was able to learn the true meaning of Judaism, which is to question and think. To question if there is a God or where we go when we die. To think and ponder about how God is connected to us and what meaning he has in our lives. Even though I have graduated from that class, I still think about such questions. Such as: when someone dies, when someone is born, when I don't get accepted into a college. This congregation has given me the room and comfort to explore such thoughts.

It's hard to list everything this synagogue has done for me. It has given me family, a community, and a safe place where I feel comfortable. It has also given me the ability to decide my faith without pushing me into it, and the understanding of the history of my people. I only hope that I have returned the favor. I hope that they valued my participation throughout the years, on Thursdays and during holiday celebrations. Even during Covid, I was able to make packages and distribute them during the holidays.

Though this congregation has given more to me than I have been able to give back, I hope to always be connected with this, my community, even as I move on to college. I hope to take the lessons that David and Beth taught me and pay it forward. Lessons about community, kindness, and service to others.

Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Wednesday Library Coffee

*Missing your mid-morning coffee break? Take it with the Library on Zoom!
Library Coffee breaks will begin November 16.*

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!

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.



Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Women's Book Club

Reading together since January 2018!

In June, the Women's Book Club met on Zoom with author Elyssa Friedland to discuss *Last Summer at the Golden Hotel*. The novel traces two families who own the last remaining family-owned Catskills resort, as the three generations make decisions about the fate of the resort. Ms. Friedland talked about *Last Summer*, her writing process, her undergraduate writing course at Yale, and her fifth novel, *The Most Likely Club*, published on September 6, 2022. The convenience of Zoom allowed her to meet with the Book Club while she was waiting for the Rangers' play-off game to start (she was in her parked car); her anticipation for the game did not diminish her enthusiasm for our book discussion.

The summer books were *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem* (and the Israeli series on Netflix) and *The Last Rose of Shanghai*. Both books provided interesting perspectives about women and their roles in the years leading up to Israel's independence and in Shanghai during and after World War II. The Netflix version of *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem* drove a lively conversation with a good part of the discussion centering on the fidelity of film adaptations of novels.

The Women's Book Club reads books with a Jewish connection about women, by women authors. The members choose the book selections by popular vote from a list of members' suggestions. The Club reads across genres, and have sampled memoirs, fiction, and non-fiction books during their five years of reading together. Many books are National Jewish Book Award winners. Moderator Susan Pierce inspires the group's readers, as she makes every discussion interesting, even when the book doesn't make every member's "favorites" list!

Fall and winter dates are:

September 8 at 6:30 PM: *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* by Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper.

October 13 at 6:30 PM: *The Fortune Cookie Writer* by Nina Navisky.

Books will be determined at the October meeting for these dates:

November 10 at 6:30 PM

December 8 at 6:30 PM

January 12 at 6:30 PM

February 9 at 6:30 PM

March 9 at 6:30 PM

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

The Women's Book Club has chosen to continue to meet on Zoom. Zoom links are sent out the day of the meeting.

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library will reopen soon!

By Maureen King

Curbside pickup and in-person book borrowing will be available for the High Holidays.

Due to the Library's small size and poor air circulation, masks will be required.

All other synagogue health and safety protocols will be followed.

Days and times to be announced.

The Library will be opening for regular hours after the High Holidays.

For volunteering and questions, contact Maureen at

somlibrarymaine@gmail.com.

Fall 2022 Samuel Osher Memorial Library News

By Maureen King

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library currently holds approximately 4000 items, and includes historical items from our own archives, movies, music, children's books and games, and adult fiction and non-fiction. Items chosen for inclusion in the collection represent Judaism in subject matter or by author, and reflect a wide variety of Jewish viewpoints.

To provide better stewardship and use of this unique Judaic collection, the Library Committee has prepared a grant application for three years of library expenses. The grant would include funding for paid staff to implement the Library Management System to protect and manage the collection, provide new and ongoing services to members, and improve the congregation's access to Jewish literature.

During the Library's 24 years, supporters include bar/bat mitzvah families, private libraries and estates, and many families to honor teachers and family members. The library has been generously supported by these organizations: Congregation Etz Chaim, The Mary L. and William J. Osher Foundation, Ogunquit Summer Congregation, The Sam L. Cohen Foundation, Leo Lamson Memorial Fund of the Holocaust Human Rights Center of Maine, The Law Offices of Joe Bornstein, Jewish Literacy Project, and PJ Library.

In 1998, the library was founded in collaboration with the York County Jewish Community Council and named for Samuel Osher, who died of cancer at age 43. The Library Committee formed. Led by Paula Osher, the small shul was reconfigured to house the library. The following year it opened, with about 500 donated books and videos, with shelving donated by the Nathansons. Volunteers cataloged and organized the collection for use.

We applied for funding for upgraded shelving in 2004 and received the first grant from Mary L. and William J. Osher Foundation. Once installed, volunteers quickly filled the new shelves with more donated materials.

In 2018, the Women's Book Club met for the first time. The group continues to meet monthly to discuss books written about, and by, Jewish women. The women have met 53 times since that first January meeting, using the Zoom platform during the pandemic. They decided to continue to meet on Zoom (no parking issues, no weather cancellations, and no night driving).

Also in 2018, the library received its second Mary L. and William J. Osher Foundation Grant. This funding will automate our circulation and establish an online catalog, with paid staff to set up the new system and complete book cataloging. At that point, the backlog of uncatalogued items was about 1500 books, videos, and CD's. Work got underway with a part-time Library Director and many volunteers. When the pandemic closed the synagogue, and all meetings moved online in 2020, the Library Director sponsored and ran an online weekly Library Coffee Hour to meet and chat on Zoom. Wednesday Coffee Zooms will continue during Maine's winter weather months. In 2021, another monthly book discussion started—the Book Hour. The Library Director leads this online group discussion about books recommended by the Jewish Book Council.

During the pandemic High Holidays preparations, the Library volunteers organized, packed, distributed, and retrieved 125 machzor in 2020, 100 machzor in 2021, and 25 Shabbat siddur in the past year. Prayer book distributions will continue as the synagogue continues to offer both Zoom and in-person services.

The Library Committee hopes that new grant funding will assist in expanding our offerings, at the same time the synagogue is expanding services and outreach. Our library can be another important connection point for new people looking for a Jewish community, as well as for our present membership, to enhance their Jewish literacy and knowledge.

The Controversy of *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman

Review by Eva Aranovitch

This past spring in Teen Class, we read *Maus* and *Maus II*, graphic novels by Art Spiegelman that tell the story of Spiegelman's parents, Polish Jews who survived the holocaust. The book's cartoon format and its depiction of various ethnic groups as different animals (Jews as mice and Germans as cats, for example) creates a juxtaposition between a medium that most people have come to know as fun and lighthearted, with a plot that is extremely dark and heavy. Despite winning a Pulitzer Prize for the author in 1992, the book recently made headlines again earlier this year when a public school board in Tennessee voted unanimously to ban it from the eighth-grade curriculum after complaints from parents and teachers.

Maus is a story within a story, giving the reader both the perspective of Spiegelman's father, Vladek, who shares with his son the tales of his life in concentration camps, and the perspective of the son (Spiegelman) who shares his own account of learning about his father's experiences. Through Art's frustrations with his father, we see the long-term psychological damage to Vladek of living through the holocaust. Spiegelman somehow manages to portray the man's brokenness in a way that is simultaneously depressing and yet uncomfortably comical at times, such as when he insists that he cannot go on with his story until his son takes him to the grocery store so that he can attempt to get his money back for a half-eaten box of cereal.

The school board of McMinn County in Tennessee objected to the book's "rough language" (a total of eight words that surely every eighth grader has heard before), "nudity," which consisted of one tiny, non-sexualized drawing of a naked woman-mouse (Spiegelman's mother Anja) lying dead in the bathtub after having slit her wrists, and the overall depictions of violence. The school board concluded that the subject matter was too mature in nature for eighth graders.

There was a lot of controversy about the banning of this book, and I think the outrage over its removal from the curriculum was justified. It is important for children to learn about the horrors of the holocaust, just as it is important for them to learn of all atrocities that humans commit against one another and the planet. By learning about these events in a school setting, children can then have adult-guided conversations about these things, mentally process how these events came to be, and hopefully grow up to be adults who do not allow these episodes in history to ever repeat.

I believe that *Maus* is the *perfect* book through which to introduce middle-school aged children to the Holocaust. The fact that the book is illustrated with drawings rather than displaying actual photographs of the holocaust, and the fact that the drawings of "people" are cartoon animals, put a considerable amount of distance between the reader and reality. Without sanitizing the holocaust or painting rainbows and butterflies over it, the book masterfully softens the impact of the brutality of the subject matter — both visually and emotionally — just enough that it achieves a goal of making the reader feel emotional distress but not so much that children reading the book would become overwhelmed with the serious content matter.

Family Education Sunday

Calling all families with children of all ages to join a new program at Congregation Etz Chaim.

One Sunday a month, we will gather together at our synagogue for stories, singing, crafts, food and fun.

First session - Save the date: Sunday, October 16 from 10:00 - 12:00

Holiday theme: Sukkot & Simchat Torah

Please RSVP to, or ask questions of, Anthony & Jessica Allen via email:
anthonyallenco@gmail.com

Shlepping My Way to Yiddish Proficiency (and Getting a Big Head Start from Duolingo)

By Jennie E. Aranovitch

Like most Jews of Eastern-European ancestry, I grew up in a household where Yiddish words and phrases peppered the daily dialogue. I was told to turn off the *licht* when I left a room, to only add a *bisel* of vanilla when helping my mom bake, and to use a *shmatte* to wipe the *shmutz* off of *tshotckes* when cleaning the house. I always regretted that my comprehension of Yiddish didn't go much beyond a word or two here and a word or two there.

My mother had been raised for the first four years of her life by her grandparents, Jennie and Harry, and her aunt Eva, as her mother had entered a sanitarium as a tuberculosis patient shortly after her birth, and her father had been drafted to serve in WWII. Reared by Russian Jewish immigrants, my mother was bilingual in her early years. She was spoken to in Yiddish and answered in English or, sometimes, Yinglish. I always wished that she had retained more of the Yiddish that she once knew so that she could have passed it on to me, but since that was not the case (and since I wasn't about to join a Hasidic community), I had pretty much resigned myself to the fact that I would never be able to truly become a Yiddish speaker.

A couple of years ago, my interest in Yiddish was rekindled when I was asked, as the only Jewish board member of the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center (BCHC), to transcribe an oral history by longtime resident of Saco and member of Congregation Etz Chaim, Bella Cowan. Bella, as she always did, lapsed into Yiddish phrases throughout her interview, and the BCHC volunteer who usually transcribes the oral histories did not know how to handle the transcription. I muddled through the Yiddish sentences with my limited knowledge of the language and whatever resources I could find online. For a handful of phrases that I just couldn't crack, I sent my best guesses at the phonetic spellings to my nonagenarian great-aunt Fran, who resides in a retirement community in Peabody, Massachusetts. She worked with some of her fellow Jewish residents there to figure it out as best they could.

My inability to transcribe the sentences myself and the hoops that I had to jump through in order to get the job done upset me and angered me. Why did Ashkenazi Jews let this happen? How did we allow such a rich and colorful language to slip through our fingers and become lost to all but a few very specific and closed-off communities? Bella had since passed away (at the age of 100). Aunt Fran, then 95, and her contemporaries, would not be around forever. While I know there are many scholars who have preserved Yiddish, and who study it like an artifact on a shelf, I could not understand how, collectively, Ashkenazim, outside of the Hasidic community, could have permitted the language of our forebears to fizzle out as a language of daily life. The Holocaust, of course, had greatly reduced the number of speakers, but wouldn't that have been even more of an incentive to keep the language alive?

Coincidentally, not long after this frustrating experience, my daughter, Eva, informed me that the free language-learning app, Duolingo, which she had used in the past to acquire some knowledge of Russian and Dutch, had recently come out with a beta-version of a Yiddish program. I did not even consider waiting for the final version to be released; I jumped right on and started learning. That was 16 months ago. Within this time, I have completed three-fifths of the course and have gone from only knowing a few words and phrases in Yiddish (and not being able to read it at all) to understanding, reading, and speaking (with some mistakes) full sentences.

The program is not perfect; one does not have the ability to choose which dialect one learns, as only the Mideastern sub-dialect (known as the *Poylish* or *Paylish* dialect) of the Southern dialect is available. As I wished to learn the Northern (*Litvish*) dialect of my own family, I researched the main differences in pronunciation, and I try my best to alter what I learn in accordance with those differences.

As a program still in the beta phase, there are other occasional challenges. Some words are missing their audio component, so there is no way to hear them spoken. But since I often pronounce words differently anyway because of my preferred dialect, I always keep handy a dictionary of "standard" Yiddish (whose pronunciations are almost identical to Litvish Yiddish) so I can confirm the pronunciation of words that I suspect, based on my knowledge of dialectal rules, are spoken differently from their Paylish Yiddish counterparts.

Shlepping My Way to Yiddish Proficiency (and Getting a Big Head Start from Duolingo), cont. *By Jennie E. Aranovitch*

As with any app-based program, one does not have the benefit of a live teacher who can correct pronunciation or explain why an irregularity is the way it is. There is a message board feature to ask questions of fellow learners, though, and I've been surprised to find there are some fluent Yiddish speakers on the app who can clarify things.

The program is also relatively weak on grammar, mainly because demonstration of English to Yiddish skills rely on choosing the right words from a bank of words written in Yiddish, and the program does not often try to trip up the learner by offering choices that are very similar to the correct word but of a different gender or appropriate to a different case. The result is that one becomes much better at understanding Yiddish than speaking it, particularly speaking it with impeccable grammar.

Despite all of its shortcomings, in less than a year and a half, I have, for free, and at my own pace, gotten to a point where I feel like I could get by in a Yiddish speaking community if I were banned from communicating in English — that is, I could get my basic needs met and converse, albeit at a slow pace and with grammatical errors galore, about some basic, everyday things. While I do not think it is possible for one to become truly “fluent” through Duolingo (at least in Yiddish, as the program currently exists), I feel that by the time I finish the program, I will have enough of a solid base to graduate to self-teaching with text books and then, perhaps, to taking online classes with an actual instructor.

In the meantime, I've become a bit of a Duolingo fanatic. My end-of-year Duolingo progress report for 2021 noted that I was in the top 2% of the 491,000 Yiddish learners. The program is designed to keep you motivated by your own progress. Visuals track the number of lessons you've completed within each theme, how many themes you've completed within each level, and how many levels you've completed in the entire program. Furthermore, progress is incentivized through weekly assignments to differently ranked leagues, as well as through a daily ranking of learners from one to 30 within each league. Consistent, daily use is rewarded by racking up a high “streak”, the number of consecutive days on which you have completed at least one lesson. (As I write this, I'm on a 330-day streak, which, if it hadn't been for a loss of internet service for two days about a year ago, would be a 473-day streak.) In short, for a highly driven, competitive, type-A perfectionist like me, it's a great method for learning a language.

For my family, who often competes with Duolingo for my attention in the evenings, it's not always so great. My son, Josiah, now recently gone off to college, incessantly teased me for my Duolingo addiction, often wondering, in a rather out loud way, why I put so much time and effort into something that I'm not going to “do” anything with. “It's not like you're going to go to Brooklyn and hang out with Hasidim,” he would say. “You have no one to talk to in Yiddish, so why spend all this time?” My best answer so far has been “*Vayl eyn tog ven ich bin a bubbie, ken ich leren mayne eyniklech di mama loshen* (Because one day if I am a grandmother, I can teach my grandchildren the mother tongue.)” He didn't know what to say to that.



A Nostalgic Visit to Congregation Etz Chaim

By Stuart Ruben

On August 29, 2022, at 11:00 am, I pulled up to Congregation Etz Chaim, 34 Bacon Street, Biddeford, Maine, a location I've known since 1945, when my parents, Max & Gladys Ruben, moved from Belfast to Saco, along with my brother Bruce and myself, Stuart (Stu or Stuey). With me during this visit were my wife Sharon, my daughter Tara Ruben Ciscone, her husband Dominic, and my grandkids, Jax and Brody Ciscone. My son Todd, unfortunately, had to return to New York for work the same morning. Waiting in front of the synagogue for us to arrive was Dr. David Strassler, to lead us all on a tour.

I had visited the synagogue several times over the years, since I left for college and then settled for the hustle & bustle of the New York City metro area, and although my kids & grandkids had been to Etz Chaim before, they were too young to relish the history of the synagogue. I wanted my family to know about my heritage and what the synagogue meant to me.

As David conducted the tour, we started in the vestry (now called the Shapiro Room) where so many things took place: celebrations, dances, Chanuka and Passover plays, that I as a kid participated in along with my contemporaries, Herb Sandler, Jimmy & Elaine Sandler, brother Bruce, Ellen & Leslie Haas, Linda Spill, Jeff Sneider, Leah Aranovitch, Harvey Shaw, Irma Weinstein, Larry Chelder, Lynnn Carp & her brother, Charles Rosen, Phillip Saperia, Eddie & Melvin Simensky, Rosemary & Bobby Aaron and Sharon & Cary Sneider. I haven't seen or heard from most of them since I left for college. I left a few out, so forgive me; it was a long time ago.

Also in the vestry was the Rabbi's office. To the right of the stage stairs, first occupied by Rabbi Nice, followed by Rabbi Gottlieb, who was the Rabbi that officiated my bother Bruce's and my Bar Mitzvahs (1954 & 1956), as well as most of my contemporaries. Incidentally, after leaving the Biddeford/Saco area for a pulpit in Suffolk County, NY years later, Rabbi Gottlieb officiated at our weddings in New York in 1968. The vestry was also used for Board, B'nai B'rith, Hadassah, and Young Judea meetings. But most of all, it was the place where us kids were rewarded for coming to Saturday Shabbat services. Charley & Henry Cohen, who owned a small grocery on the southeast corner of Alfred & Main Streets, always had snacks for us, and Sam & Bernard Cohen provided soda from their Casco Bay bottling company. Also provided for Shabbat and any other event was the most wonderful homemade and best tasting danish I ever had by the elderly Nettie Shapiro.

Next, we walked the original steps to the everyday minyan room, now part library, as well as where most Saturday Shabbat services took place to the left of the main sanctuary. It was also where Hebrew School took place three afternoons a week for most of us. Truthfully, the rabbis' acting as teachers were not very interesting. Most of the boys were more interested in playing ball than more school. The thing I remember most is incurring a record of writing 13,500 "I will be good". Mom & Dad were not very happy with me.

The main sanctuary: I remember in the early 50's heated discussions to convince the board to allow men & women to sit together, the men having to cross from the right side of the sanctuary to the left side where the women sat. My mom, Gladys, was the central force behind this change. I remember the benches being tough on our behinds! When Rosh Hashana & Yom Kippur arrived, the world series was taking place, and us boys and some of the men were talking baseball and Red Sox throughout the services. Sitting behind us, kids for holidays and Saturday services, you would find Sam & Bernard Cohen, & Barney Osher. They always took pleasure in snapping our little ears ("ouch") from time to time. On Yom Kippur, it was always interesting and if my memory serves me correctly, I think it was Leo Simensky who announced the donations, which at that time was in barrels of oil.

I remember my Bar Mitzvah. I was so short that I barely reached the top of the lectern standing on a stool. My Bar Mitzvah was on one of the hottest days in June, and Mom & Dad had me in a new wool suit. I was shvitzing the entire service. I also had one of the longest Haftorah's to read. What a day!



A Nostalgic Visit to Congregation Etz Chaim, cont.

By Stuart Ruben

I remember well the stained-glass window Star of David sitting high above the “bimmer”. I remember my father & mothers funerals in 2005 and 2006.

I was standing outside Etz Chaim after my dad’s funeral, talking to Arnold Shapiro and I noted my wife, Sharon & I should become members and he said if we did, we’d become the 100th family member and we said DONE. Later on, in another conversation with Arnold, he was telling me about the issues with the cost of renovating the stained-glass Star of David. After speaking with Sharon and brothers, Bruce & Mathew, and wives Ellen & Nancy, we were proud to donate the money needed to renovate the window in honor of our parents. During the tour, you would not believe how proud my family was to see the window and plaque honoring “Gladys & Max Ruben by the Ruben Family”.

Thank you again to Dr. David Strassler for giving us the tour and discussing much history of Etz Chaim Synagogue. And most of all and thankfully, my grandkids were totally interested in all they learned.

Below is a paragraph written by my 14-year-old grandson, Jax Ciscone,
about his visit to Etz Chaim:

It was a really great experience seeing what my Grandfather’s Synagogue looked and felt like compared to my own. I felt the rich history throughout the place and how much my grandfather and his family were part of it. When he told me stories about events that happened in the Synagogue, I could imagine and picture what happened so clearly, and it made me think about how many great times there were (and still are). The highlight of the trip was seeing the stained-glass window that my grandfather’s family repaired! It symbolizes how much people care about a community one is part of!

Note: We are hoping to arrange a presentation this fall, with Stuart Ruben and some of his contemporaries, to share with our community their Jewish experiences while living in the Biddeford-Saco area in the 1950’s-60’s. Stay tuned.

Bella Cowen, Part IV – Life in Southern Maine

By Ellie Rolnick

In 1965 Bella and Harold, along with their younger son, Bernard, moved to Saco Maine. Their older son, David, stayed in Bangor, at our house, to finish his senior year in high school. Their store, Sam's place, was over the river on Alfred Street in Biddeford. A fire and a flood forced them to change location to Main Street in Saco. They removed the hardware aspect of the store and specialized in paint and wallpaper, window treatments and framing, as well as art supplies. The business flourished and Bella and Harold became more enmeshed in the community. They sparked the idea for the Saco Sidewalk Art Festival, which continues to this day. As they settled into the area, they made friends with other Jewish couples and joined Etz Chaim.

Harold passed away in 1975, just after the birth of their only granddaughter, Anne. Newly widowed, Bella was not one to sit back and feel sorry for herself. With the help of Bernard, she carried on with the running of Sam's Place and created a very fulfilling life for herself. For years, she worked six days a week and said Sunday was her house-cleaning day. She eventually took Saturdays off and, until she sold the store, would continue to go in to work a few hours every day. She said that getting up in the morning, making her bed, getting dressed and out of the house was part of her living such a long and healthy life.

Dogs seemed to land in Bella's lap from unexpected places. Her last dog I recall her bringing to the store was 'Spotty', a miniature fox terrier who would howl with me when I'd sing 'Home on the Range'. Spotty was spoiled, subsisting on a diet of homemade chicken soup! Her last dog was a one-eyed dachshund mix who she inherited from her neighbors who moved away. She had a soft spot in her heart for all animals, and they loved her in return. She also adopted a part feral cat who would eat at her doorstep and sometimes come in the house. She was known to leave cat food on the doorstep that would attract a multitude of wild animals.

Bella loved playing Bridge and Mah Jongh games, regularly hosting them in her home. She was a wonderful hostess and cook, known especially for her 'lovin' chicken' and orzo dishes, as well as being famous for her rugalach and cinnamon swirls and so much more!

Bella had been a member of the Hadassah Club in Bangor and continued that membership in Southern Maine, remaining active in the York County Chapter until it fizzled out, then remotely connected to the Portland chapter after that.

Over the years at Etz Chaim, Bella witnessed the ups and downs of the congregation, and became a big supporter as a new generation of young Jewish couples moving to the area initiated efforts to help the congregation bloom and grow to what it is now. As those who are reading this know, Bella became a beloved matriarch of this congregation.

Bella was an avid reader, reading several books at any one time – one on the kitchen table, one in the living room, one in the bathroom and one by her bed. The Dyer Library was one of her favorite places to visit, and she later became a volunteer once a week.

In the 1970's a group of women got together to create an Altrusa Club. Bella was one of the founding members. Altrusa was founded in the early 20th Century, at a time when other civic organizations were for 'men only'. Altrusa members are women business owners, or women in management positions, with only two women of any category in the group at one time. The focus of the club was literacy. Bella once told me "In my wildest dreams, I could never imagine being close friends with two doctors, a pharmacist, teachers – so many I would never have been acquainted with had I not been part of a club like that." Bella rarely missed a meeting and hosted meetings at her home as well. She invited me to join when I first moved to the area, and I had a chance to participate in the good work that they did.

Bella's sister Millie, and later her sister Violet, lived in Portland, as well as many nieces and nephews. She became involved with the Portland Jewish community as well, and made many lifelong friends. At one time, she had a regular canasta game in Portland that was a highlight of her week. I recall a story she told of driving home late at night from a game when she got stopped by police. I wish I could recall her comment to the police officer. I do recall that whatever she said, he gave her a warning and off she went. Mind you, she was in her 80's when this happened!

Bella Cowen, Part IV – Life in Southern Maine, cont.

By Ellie Rolnick

Bella became involved in bowling. I recall her marveling at one of the members of her team who was closing in on 100 years old. I think she aspired to continue to bowl as long as she could. She bowled just shy of her 100th birthday. Until the last year of her life, she drove herself there week after week. Although she still drove around town, she finally agreed to let others drive her into Portland.

Through the years, Bella traveled a lot. She went to Egypt twice, Israel, Argentina, Chili, Uruguay, Greece, Great Britain, Japan, Hong Kong, Canton, and Korea. On one trip her luggage was lost. It came home with multiple tags on it – seemed like it had traveled to more places than she had! Although she enjoyed traveling, her biggest fears were meeting communism and antisemitism. She was fortunate to travel safely and unhindered wherever she went.

In 2008, Bella was invited to move to South Carolina, to live closer to David, her granddaughter and her two great-granddaughters. She sold the store and her house, and was off on her next adventure. Going away parties abounded. I recall the Altrusa Club presenting her with a wonderful photo album with shared memories. Former and active members alike came to wish her well. Similar farewells occurred from her bowling league, the library, the synagogue, and her friends. Everyone would miss Bella.

Less than a year later, my cousin Bette and I got a call from her, asking us to find her a new place to live. to come pick her up and bring her home. She was homesick for the northeast. Bette and I found her a new home in Saco quickly, then flew down to drive her back. We were thrilled to have our favorite Aunt back in Southern Maine where she belonged. In no time at all, this 90-year-old was back to her bowling league, her canasta game, volunteering at the library and going to Altrusa meetings (not to mention volunteering to ‘man a table’ at events, as needed). She became involved in Etz Chaim once again, attending many events, giving rides to ‘older’ folks who weren’t driving anymore! Her newest role was teaching Bridge at the Ross Center in Biddeford. This became another thing to look forward to every week. Bette’s family Passover Seders were once again complete with Bella at the table, regaling us with stories of times gone by.

Aunt Bella was our family storyteller. She wouldn’t allow us to write stories down or record any of her tales. She was mindful of how the truth in what she said could entertain one person, while hurting the feelings of another. As time passes from her passing, my recollections grow dimmer. What I will always remember about Aunt Bella is how she made every niece and nephew feel like they were her favorite when in her presence. I imagine she made every acquaintance, colleague and friend feel the same.

Although she slowed down only slightly in the last 10 years of her life, she continued to live as full a life as one can imagine. Her 100th Birthday celebration in October of 2019 was something she truly looked forward to. She relished in the attention and visiting with so many of her family and friends. A week-long celebration ensued, from family gatherings to the big party in a hotel ballroom, to smaller celebrations with Altrusa, the library, the bridge club, and the bowling league. At the big party, she was interviewed by Channel 6 news. This was nothing new for Bella, as she graced the front cover of local newspapers several times through the years!

To see Channel 6 Interview (link): Saco resident Bella Cowan turned 100 on Oct. 13, but certainly isn't feeling her age: <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/community/saco-woman-turns-100/97-d9b30690-2fb2-4dbb-8a07-7709adb0835f>

Welcome to our New Etz Chaim Board Members

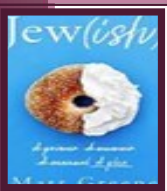
By Jeff Levy

As Vice President, I am pleased to welcome Anthony and Jessica Allen to the Etz Chaim Board of Directors. They joined our synagogue when they moved to Maine in 2020, after reviewing the Shul's website and speaking with Cantor Beth Strassler. At the time, Covid was in its' early stages, and they began attending online services, Torah Study, as well as in person when the temple opened for hybrid services and holiday celebrations.

In February of this year, the synagogue welcomed our youngest member, with the birth of their beautiful daughter Eliana. Anthony and Jessica report that being part of a vibrant Jewish community is especially important to their family.

Anthony has worked as a sales and marketing consultant for the last 18 years and will bring technological and sales knowledge to help our synagogue reach out and connect with Jewish families in southern Maine. He also has demonstrated his handyman skills by assisting the Building Committee on several Etz Chaim repair projects. Jessica is an insurance broker, working in the commercial sector, she will help the Board evaluate liabilities and help us make safe and sound decisions on those fronts.

Simply put, Anthony and Jessica, as members of the Etz Chaim Board of Directors, plan to aid in developing the infrastructure of our synagogue in any shape or form. They intend to help improve the physical building, grow the congregation, and be a living example of a wholesome Jewish family in the community.



Samuel Osher Memorial Library

Book Hour

Join our discussions of compelling books on timely topics!



The Samuel Osher Memorial Library hosts a monthly Zoom Book Hour to discuss books highlighted by the Jewish Book Council. This past winter, the group read *Jew(ish): A primer, a memoir, a manual, a plea* by Matt Greene and *Remix Judaism: Preserving Tradition in a Diverse World* by Roberta Rosenthal Kwall. The discussions on traditions, member engagement, and creating a culture were fascinating.

In April, author Edmund Case joined Book Hour attendees on Zoom to discuss his book, *Radical Inclusion: Engaging Interfaith Families for a Thriving Jewish Future*. Ed is a summer resident in the area and is familiar with Congregation Etz Chaim. He is a founder of Interfaith Families (now 18Doors) and of the Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism. That meeting ran well over its hour time slot with deep discussions on member engagement, the latest Pew Report on American Judaism, and books and resources from congregations working on similar issues. All attending left with renewed inspiration.

Choose the sessions that most interest you or attend them all. The Library will have at least one copy of the book available for borrowing (pick-ups and drop offs can be arranged) and will help you locate a book elsewhere if necessary.

Book Hour Schedule:

Meetings are held on Zoom from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.

October 19: *All About Me! My Remarkable Life in Show Business*, by Mel Brooks

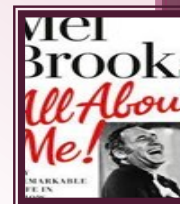
November 30: TBD

December 21: TBD Chanukah-themed book/stories (for adults)

January 25: *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present*, by Dara Horn

February 22: TBD

March 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.

Visit our website:
etzchaimme.org

Our Wish To You

The entire leadership of
Congregation Etz Chaim
wishes you and your
family a year of safety,
good health, happiness
and prosperity.

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Samuel Osher Memorial Library
at Congregation Etz Chaim

Jewish Books, Music & Movies
for the
York County Community

York County (YC) Jewish Community Newsletter

This newsletter is currently 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 and Design, and
Consultants: Board members at
mail@etzchaimme.org

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ **Go Green!!!** \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

You can save trees and reduce costs by receiving your newsletter, and all Jewish community announcements, electronically (save our trees!).

Just write to our mail address:

Congregation Etz Chaim

PO Box 905

Kennebunk, ME 04043

or send an email:

Email: mail@etzchaimme.org

and ask to:

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$ **"Go Green!!!"** \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

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: **Congregation Etz Chaim**
PO Box 905
Kennebunk, ME 04043

Community Outreach request:	Denise Hammond dghammond@roadrunner.com
Yahrzeit reminders:	Jennie Aranovitch yahrzeit@etzchaim.org
Memorial Plaques:	David Strassler: 967-5833
Hebrew School/Services:	Beth & David Strassler: 967-5833
Prayer Books:	Maureen King 282-2907 or somlibrary@gmail.com
Library:	Maureen King 282-2907 or somlibrary@gmail.com

York County Jewish Community News



*Congregation Etz Chaim
PO Box 905
Kennebunk, ME 04043*

