

Fall 2023/5784

**Congregation Etz Chaim**



**HIGH HOLY DAYS**

5784: FALL 2023

AT CONGREGATION ETZ CHAIM  
ON BACON STREET IN BIDDEFORD

**Rosh Hashanah, Friday, September 15**

Evening Service: 6:45 pm

**Saturday, September 16: RH Day 1**

Preliminary Service: 8:45 am  
Morning Service: 9:00 am  
Services Conclude: 12 noon

*Reminder: No shofar blowing  
or Tashlich on this day (Shabbat)*

**Sunday, September 17: RH Day 2**

Preliminary Service: 8:45  
Morning Service: 9:00 am  
Services Conclude: 12 noon

Tashlich at Saco River: approx. 12:15 pm

**Yom Kippur, Sunday, September 24**

Kol Nidre: 6:15 pm

**Monday Morning, September 25**

Preliminary Service: 8:45 am  
Morning Service: 9:00 am  
Yizkor: 11:00 am  
Services Conclude: 12:30 pm

**Monday Afternoon, September 25**

Services Resume: 4:30 pm  
Torah Reading: 4:30 pm

**Break Fast at conclusion: approx. 6:50 pm**

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*The Cantor's Corner  
High Holidays 5784*

It's THAT time of year again!  
I hope you are able to join us in person  
for some fabulous music!

The High Holidays are all about standing together, shoulder to shoulder, to pray for ourselves and our community. It is the only way to bring our voices together while hearing each other sing.



See how a shofar is made at  
<https://torahlive.com/courses/shofar/visit-shofar-factory>

Dr. Gold will be in excellent form, our Vocal Choir will be tuned up, and I will be warmed up and ready for Day One of Rosh Hashanah. The services will continue to be hybrid to accommodate those unable to attend in person.

**Shofar:** I smile every time I hear the shofar blown. It is such a unique sound in today's world, although it was used as a fairly common "trumpet" to capture attention during ancient times for public announcements. It touches me deeply, deeper than spoken prayer or even music. It tells me to Wake Up! Pay Attention! What is Going On Here is Important!

**Tashlich:** What better way to commemorate the Earth's Birthday than going to a body of water, from where it all began? Symbolic pieces of bread or even stones, have been used since the Middle Ages to signify the important role of "throwing away our sins". But going to the water is not enough: I am supposed to actually do the work of reviewing my actions of the past year and preparing myself not to make the same mistakes again. Baruch HaShem — our God recognizes the nature of humans.

**Please remember:** The first day of RH this year is on Shabbat. This means that both Tashlich and Shofar blowing will only be during the Second Day of services, Sunday September 17th. We do not participate in either on Shabbat, September 16th.

Lshannah Tovah umetucha! May your New Year be a good and sweet year. See you in shul, Beth

## Back to the Sources

“The highest form of wisdom is kindness.” From the Talmud

By David Strassler



Rabbi Yosef Kleiner

This summer, as I was recuperating from my hip replacement, I decided to spend time accomplishing things that I have put off in the past. Time is what I had a lot of, since I was laid up from my usual active lifestyle.

Since my retirement two and a half years ago, I had wanted to go through communications I had received from patients, students, and friends--collected over my almost 40 years of practicing medicine.

I first came across a note that a student had sent me many years ago, thanking me for our time while she was learning in my family practice office. I kept this specific note card because I liked what it said. I appreciated that this student recognized both my Jewish heritage and the important lesson I was hoping to teach her. “The highest form of wisdom is kindness.” -from the Talmud.

I still like this quote, but I do not recall it in the Talmud. In my retirement, I have time to explore questions that interest me.

The Talmud is mostly made up of Jewish laws (halacha), that were written more than 1500 years ago, called the Oral Torah. There is a small section of the Talmud that deals with ethics, moral values, and wisdom called Pirkei Avot: Ethics of Our Fathers.

Over the past decade, I have been studying Pirkei Avot intensely. I recently began teaching Pirkei Avot to our Congregation Etz Chaim community. We have discussed wisdom. We have discussed kindness. But never both together.

I typed this quote into the Google search engine and found out that my hunch was correct. This quote is not from the Talmud, but **was** written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and is of Spanish Christian origin.

A blog by Rabbi Yosef Kleiner sums this up well.

*“The Jewish conception of kindness does not make of it a kind of wisdom; neither the highest, nor the lowest. Kindness is a great gift, but it is never related to wisdom. Wisdom is intellect; kindness is feeling. Both are important, but one is not the consequence of the other...”* <http://dialorapia.com/archives/365>

What is the moral to this story? I like the essence of the “quote” on this note card. And I like that it gave me another excuse to research and study the roots of my morals.

Here are two more quotes from Pirkei Avot that continue the thread:

***“Who is wise? Those who learn from every person.” -Ben Zoma***

***“The world stands on three things: Torah, divine work and acts of loving kindness.” -Shimon the Righteous***

Have a Happy, Healthy and Sweet New Year.

David Strassler, President

## *My Trip to Poland to Help Ukrainian Refugees, Part II*

*By Leah Macomber*

We left Siedlce at the end of Part I in the Fall Newsletter, if you recall, and made our way to our next stop, Przemysl (“prashe-metz-l”), a city about seven miles from the Ukrainian border, where we volunteered with another amazing organization: World Central Kitchen (WCK).

We met our team at the main kitchen in Przemysl, and the overall setting couldn’t have been more of a contrast to the quiet countryside manor in Siedlce. The kitchen was a huge warehouse where two groups of volunteers worked separately to provide 15,000 (or more) meals a day for Ukrainian refugees and support personnel. One group of volunteers were the chefs — actual chefs from around the world who wanted to help the Ukrainian people. The other group were the non-chefs — people from around the world, like us, who just wanted to help. The chefs prepared hot meals and the non-chefs prepared sandwiches and salads to feed people at different distribution sites on the border. With the kitchen abuzz, we jumped in the sandwich making assembly line and helped make and wrap 5,000 thousand sandwiches in just a few hours!

After the last sandwich was wrapped, the salads, soups, main dishes, fruits and breakfast cakes were all cooked and packaged for delivery, it was still daylight, and my energetic dad was not ready to call it a day. So we decided to check out two of the nearby distribution points, to better understand the WCK mission.

The first distribution site was a massive refugee center at a converted Tesco store (akin to a warehouse store like Costco or Sam’s Club) in the city of Przemysl. Inside the entrance were hundreds of people sitting with their families, suitcases, and pets, or walking to the food areas or other stations that offered various types of support. There were dozens of international relief organizations offering asylum and travel assistance, a medical clinic, a section to pick up a pair of shoes or a bar of soap or other necessities, and in the middle were 500 small cots, each covered with a blanket and pillow.

After handing out water bottles and working a sandwich shift at Tesco, my dad was still not tired. So, after dinner we went to the second distribution point — the Przemysl train station. We were told that hundreds of people came to Przemysl by train every day, and at 9:00 p.m. we should be prepared to feed hungry people who had just made the eight-hour train ride from Kyiv, Ukraine, which at the time was under direct attack from Russian forces.

We heated coffee and soup, toasted sandwiches, chilled water bottles, and waited for the 9:00 train, which was late getting in. After serving the crowd, which was smaller than we expected, we walked around a little, saw a line of baby strollers, wheelchairs and walkers left for Ukrainians to use when they arrived. When we left around 11:30, we saw something we didn’t expect. Outside the train station, there were hundreds of people —over 600 people — women and children (even pets) standing with their suitcases, waiting in line to ride the train back to Kyiv. Why were they going back? Was the war over? We wondered. The next morning, we read in a global newspaper that thousands of Ukrainians were returning home – not because they thought Ukraine was safe, but because they refused to be apart from their country, or their loved ones, any longer.

## *My Trip to Poland to Help Ukrainian Refugees, Part II, cont.*

For the next two days, we spent our time volunteering with WCK directly at the border. There were dozens of humanitarian organizations to help with medical supplies, baby care, pet care, free SIM cards, immigration details, food and other necessities. The WCK tent was always busy, as food came from the main kitchen in Przemysl, it went out to the refugees and other workers. People were very kind and appreciative of our time, the food, our smiles. We learned how to say “you’re welcome” in Ukrainian so we could respond to “thank you”.

Here we saw other evidence that the Ukrainians were eager to return home. As we drove to and from the border crossing area those two days, we passed a huge line of cars and trucks headed into Ukraine, waiting to pass through customs. We heard the locals note the line was “three days long” and Ukrainians didn’t mind, as long as they were going home.

We took a train from Przemysl to Krakow for one last night before returning to the U.S. There we had dinner with two young women and their kids who had fled Ukraine. They greeted us with hand-made birthday cards for my dad, which reminded me again of the Etz Chaim Hebrew School kids, our community, and the bounty of freedom, safety, and love we sometimes take for granted. One of the women spoke English and told us the stories of their families separated by the war — their husbands were in the army and their parents refused to leave their homes. I played patty-cake with one of the little ones and she later curled up next to me and showed me a picture of her smiling father on her mom’s phone. I didn’t need an interpreter to know how much she missed him.

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



Samuel Osher Memorial Library  
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## Women's Book Club

*Reading together since January 2018!**By Maureen King*

The Women's Book Club has begun their fifth year of reading together! The Women's Book Club goal is to read books with a Jewish connection about women, and by female authors. Book Club members choose each quarter's book selections from suggestions provided by the members and the Samuel Osher Memorial 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 "favorites" list.

On an overcast Sunday afternoon in July 2023, the group met in person for the first time since March 2020 and discussed *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin. It was wonderful to join together in person, but the group also appreciates being able to meet from home. The advantages of no parking issues, no worries about bad weather, and no travel time have the group agreeing to continue Zoom meetings in the future, while working in an occasional in-person event for variety.

Upcoming selections are:

- ◆ September 14 at 6:30 PM: *Kantika: A Novel* by Elizabeth Graver;
- ◆ October 12 at 6:30 PM: *The Women of Rothschild: The Untold Story of the World's Most Famous Dynasty* by Natalie Livingstone.

Winter book selections will be chosen just prior to the October meeting.

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

Zoom links are sent out the day of the meeting.





## Congregation Etz Chaim: My Family Tree of Life

By Eva Aranovitch



Photo: Aranovitch presenting her essay on July 22 at the Biddeford Historical Society's July meeting.

**Recent graduate of Congregation Etz Chaim's Teen Class, Eva Aranovitch, was awarded second place in the Biddeford Historical Society's Annual Biddeford History essay contest for the following piece.**

My family has lived in the Biddeford area for over 100 years. My great-great grandfather moved from Belarus to New York to finally Biddeford in 1904, and his wife and first daughter arrived two years later. Since the first days of Congregation Etz Chaim ("Tree of Life") in Biddeford, my family has been a part of it. My mother has done countless presentations on Etz Chaim's history, so I consider it part of my legacy to share the synagogue's story in my own words.

The first Jewish wave that came to Biddeford occurred in the 1880s. Since there was no synagogue at the time, male Jews from Biddeford would meet in members' apartments to study Torah and participate in services. In 1894, services began taking place in St. Anthoine's hall, but as more Jews came to the Biddeford area, the need for a synagogue grew. In the summer of 1907, the Jewish community was able to raise the little over 4,000 dollars they needed to buy the Episcopalian Church on Bacon Street. The synagogue officially became Congregation Etz Chaim in 1910. Although the synagogue was Orthodox, as most synagogues were at the time, it was untraditional in the fact that it had no permanent rabbi or cantor.

The synagogue's peak occurred in the period from the 1920's through the 1960's. During this period a Hebrew school was formed, building renovations occurred, the mortgage was paid off, over 125 families were registered members, and the Jewish community in Biddeford forged a strong communal identity. However, when the last full-time Rabbi in Etz Chaim history left in 1967, the synagogue started going downhill. Membership rates dropped, Hebrew school was discontinued, and the synagogue was only open for High Holiday services. There were even suggestions that the synagogue be closed permanently.

Despite the hardships, in the 1980s, new life was brought to the community with the arrival of young Jewish families. Newcomers to the area, Beth and David Strassler, joined forces with the synagogue president and other longtime members to improve Etz Chaim. During this revitalization, there was still no spiritual leader. The lack of a rabbi, the need for more members, and a rise in Reform Judaism caused Congregation Etz Chaim to discontinue its Orthodox affiliation and instead become an unaffiliated synagogue.

This bright new age of the synagogue is still present today, even after COVID-19's effects. The Hebrew school, which was restarted in 1988, is still alive through the Teen Class Program and once-a-month activities for younger children. Shabbat Services are held regularly and include members who can't be in person through Zoom. Parties and gatherings are frequently held in the social hall for holidays. I feel so grateful to be a part of this kehillah kedosha (sacred community) and a part of important Biddeford history. The Jewish community in Biddeford and the Southern Maine area is still proudly alive after over 100 years. L'Chaim, Etz Chaim!

### Sources

- \* Aranovitch, J. E. (n.d.). *A Century of Jewish Life in Biddeford-Saco: an Introduction*. Media - Documenting Maine Jewry. <https://mainejews.org/photo.php?photoid=18515>
- \* Aranovitch, J. E. (n.d.). *From Roots to Regeneration*. Media - Documenting Maine Jewry. <https://mainejews.org/photo.php?photoid=18515>
- \* *Our history*. Congregation Etz Chaim. (n.d.). <https://etzchaimme.org/history/>

# Facilities Report

By Jeff Levy

We have made major updates to our synagogue over the past year.

Perhaps the most significant update is the brand-new Central Air System we had installed in our sanctuary. The unit is amazing, for those of you who remember experiencing a major heat wave during the High Holidays.... In the future, if it is 90 degrees out on Yom Kippur, we will only suffer our hunger pains and not from an overheated synagogue. It was Jack Schraeter who did the research, and David Strassler and Frank Federman who oversaw the project.

The other major improvements were to the safety and security of our building. To augment our new secure door that was installed last year, we have added a high-tech lock that records who enters the building with their code and a video screen, so we can see who is knocking on the door before we open it. Additionally, we have added several new security cameras around the synagogue. We have added a new fire alarm and smoke detectors; high moisture and low temperature detectors are designed to minimize risk to our structure due to fire, flooding, or frozen pipes.

Maintaining a building that is well over a century old comes with its challenges. Over the last several years, we have updated our kitchen and function room. We have painted the entire exterior and re-shingled our roof. In this coming year, we have planned a major renovation which will create a second egress from the upstairs; this is done with security and safety in mind. The project will be paid for by a major grant that was written for our synagogue by Board Member Elyse Oliver.

It takes a village to maintain our building. Our community is so fortunate to have David Strassler overseeing the care of our building, ensuring the building is safe and functional. Frank Federman as our "handyman in chief" and will either do the maintenance himself or oversee that the projects are done properly. Anthony Allen, who is one of our "first responders", helping out whenever needed.

## Di Tzenerlingen Klas Gei in Yidish Bukh Tzenter (Teen Class Goes to the Yiddish Book Center) By Jennie Aranovitch

On March 12, Congregation Etz Chaim's Teen Class embarked on a special field trip to the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. A nonprofit organization founded in 1980 to recover, celebrate, and regenerate Yiddish language, literature, and culture, the center houses more than one million books published in Yiddish, most of which were acquired through rescue missions and donations.

After about a four-hour journey, including a stop for lunch at a Texas Roadhouse restaurant, where our waitress, to our surprise and delight, threw in a Yiddish word to her welcome, the four Teen Class students (Eva Aranovitch, Emilee Davis, and Noah and Sam Hammond), David Strassler, Ethan Davis, and I arrived at the Yiddish Book Center with full bellies and curious minds. We began our visit by watching a short documentary, *A Bridge of Books*, which tells the story of the founding of the center by Aaron Lansky, a then 24-year-old graduate student of Yiddish literature (and now the president of the center). Lansky and his group of zamlers (volunteer book collectors) traveled throughout North America to save at-risk Yiddish books – many of which came from bubbes' attics and zaydes' basements. In 1980, experts estimated that the number of Yiddish books still in existence in North America was likely around 70,000. The center collected 70,000 in 1980 alone.

After the film, we were given a private tour of the center. Highlights included the Yiddish Print Shop exhibit, featuring the last Yiddish linotype machine, which was rescued from the *Forverts* newspaper in New York City in 1991; an exhibit of photographs collected by ethnographer S. An-sky, who traveled through Ukraine from 1912 to 1914, documenting Jewish cultural life; an exhibit exploring the depiction of the modern Jewish home in literature, film, photography, television, and music; the Applebaum-Driker Theater, a mini-movie theater where visitors can watch clips from Yiddish movies and listen to Yiddish music and radio; and an interactive exhibit with games, such as English/Yiddish "mad libs;" and a temporary exhibit of monoprint collages that explore superstitions, precautions, and religious practices associated with pregnancy and childbirth in the Russian Pale of Settlement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

But the main attraction was the books – rows upon rows of shelving units full of Yiddish books, which compose only a fraction of the number of books the center houses. At the conclusion of our tour, our guide showed us such gems as a volume of Shakespeare's work translated into Yiddish and a copy of a Yiddish newspaper announcing Hitler's death as the frontpage headline.

For me, as someone who is currently learning the Yiddish language, the best part of our time at the Yiddish Book Center was the free time to explore on our own. I cornered our tour guide, explained that I have been learning Yiddish on my own through the Duolingo app, and asked if there were any books at the center written at an elementary school level (ones that I could actually read without much trouble). He graciously went in the warehouse and came back with several primers that had been used in American Yiddish schools. Because the Yiddish Book Center is part museum, part library, and part bookstore, you can actually ask to purchase books on the shelves for the reasonable price of \$12 per volume. (They won't let go of their rare copies, but with tons of duplicate printings in the center's holdings, the staff are more than happy to sell a good many titles.) I got back on the van for the ride home having scored three primers -- one each from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s; a classic Yiddish textbook published in 1994 by the Workman's Circle; and a brand-new two-volume textbook set from the center's book shop.



## Di Tzenerlingen Klas Gei in Yidish Bukh Tzenter, cont. (Teen Class Goes to the Yiddish Book Center) By Jennie Aranovitch

As a student of Yiddish, this trip enabled me to access Yiddish texts that will undoubtedly further my studies in significant ways. As an Ashkenazi Jew, it warmed my heart to see the care and dedication that has been put into preserving Yiddish language and culture. And, perhaps most importantly, as a mother, it filled me with gratitude to Congregation Etz Chaim and the Sam Cohen Foundation for the opportunity to introduce our community's teens to the richness of the language and culture of their forbears and acquaint them with an invaluable resource of Yiddishkeit right here in New England.

### Captions:

The last Yiddish linotype machine, which is on display at the Yiddish Book Center. This machine was used to print the New York City Yiddish newspaper the *Forverts*.

A Yiddish newspaper housed at the Yiddish Book Center. The headline reads, "Hitler Toyt" ("Hitler Dead").

### Vos Zogen di Talmidim? (What Do the Students Say?)

"Each book on those shelves has their own, unique, amazing history and to see them all in one place along with all the other artifacts was quite an experience." — Emilee Davis

"I liked how there were so many Yiddish books in one place, which I have never seen before."  
Noah Hammond

"My overall favorite part was the many exhibits they had displaying different things, such as postcards of many different temples."  
— Sam Hammond

"The trip to the Yiddish Book Center gave us an opportunity to connect with a part of our heritage that is unfortunately largely forgotten among our generation. It was a good feeling to be at a place that is making such a big effort to keep Yiddish alive."  
— Eva Aranovitch



## Etz Chaim Teen Class Visit to the Holocaust and Human Rights Center, Spring 2023

Written and submitted by Ethan Davis

On Sunday, April 23 – last day of Spring Break for several of the teen class members – we took a field trip to the Michael Klahr Holocaust and Human Rights Center (HHRC) in Augusta. Early that morning several of us met at the Biddeford Park and Ride for the ride up, including David Strassler, who was driving, myself and my daughter Emilee, Noah Hammond, and Jennie Aranovitch and her daughter Eva. Although the ride itself was only an hour or so, it was a nice time to visit and we had some enjoyable conversations along the way.

When we arrived at HHRC, we were met by Erica Nadelhaft, who is the Education Coordinator for the Center, as well as Philip Fishman, the Operations Manager. They welcomed us into a large open room, well-lit with daylight coming through the large windows that lined the walls.

Emilee had this to say about what we found in that room ... "The Holocaust and Human Rights Center contained many important and fascinating artifacts, most of which had an expectedly grim past. However, one exhibit that stuck out to me was not one of historical significance. It was a Ukrainian art form called Pysanky. The process of creating these beautiful works of art begins by putting wax on eggs, dipping them in dye, and then melting off the wax. This is repeated until the design is complete. The exhibit also included paintings of the eggs. The paintings were of the pysanky in different scenes, including a woman holding an egg just below her stomach, representing fertility. Both the eggs themselves and the paintings were beautiful, but something that struck me was the meaning behind the exhibit. Most of these pieces were done as tribute to the awful events taking place in Ukraine. Not only did this exhibit display a beautiful part of Ukraine. To me, it also held a light up to current events and the strength that people hold through their most difficult times."

We spent a half hour or so with the display. Erica and Philip then gave us a brief description of what else there was to see, and suggested that we stroll through the Center and take a look on our own. In an hour's time, we'd meet in the conference room for a presentation on Jewish resistance to the Nazis in World War II. Particularly striking was a video and display describing the harrowing story of Michael Klahr, whose parents were killed during the war, but he survived by living hidden in a rabbit pen. After the war, he learned of his parents' fate and was given his father's wallet, recovered from his father's body after he was killed by the Germans at a café. A bullet had passed through the wallet and through several pictures of Michael. In spite of all this, Michael managed to go on and make a life for himself in the United States, eventually going on to found the Center.

In one room, a striking series of collages were on display, which presented many aspects of the immigration experience of the artist's family in the early 1900s, from Czarist Russian Ukraine and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, up through the Great Depression and both World Wars, and how it influenced her life up to the present, as the parent of two children, who are Black and Jewish.

## Etz Chaim Teen Class Visit to the Holocaust and Human Right Center, Spring 2023, cont.

Written and submitted by Ethan Davis

We returned to the conference room, where Erica presented the program on Jewish Resistance in WWII, mentioning that contrary to common perception that the Jews caught up in World War II did little to resist, Jewish resistance took many forms. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising was one such act of resistance, in which a relatively small number of Jews remaining in the ghetto after most inhabitants had been deported to concentration camps were able to hold off the Nazi troops for about a month. Others played a notable role in Partisan resistance groups and were able to fight against the Nazis in that way. She also described revolts and escape attempts from concentration camps. Despite the small number of people who successfully managed to escape from the camps, a significant number of such attempts did occur. Other forms of resistance included continuing to run underground schools and teach Jewish children, despite such practices being outlawed. She described Jewish youth groups - run by teenagers - having taken the lead in this effort. Underground concerts and plays - also outlawed, were a way that Jews resisted and attempted to maintain some sense of normalcy.

At the conclusion of the presentation, we thanked our hosts and headed outside to take a group photo and have a brief discussion about what we had just experienced. A point brought up during the discussion that really resonated with me (perhaps due to my role as an educator?) had to do with the significance of continuing to educate the youth during so much turmoil; educated individuals are much more difficult to dominate than those who remain uneducated. I now realize that this was recognized by both the Nazis who attempted to outlaw educating Jews, and by the Jews who resisted and continued to educate their youth - and who still exist.

It was then around noontime, and before returning home we went to a local diner and enjoyed a fine meal, and more visiting time and conversation.

Noah summarized the trip this way, "The human rights center was a very interesting and amazing experience I had. I got to learn about all the different revolts during the Holocaust. I also got to see different art pieces that were about Ukraine and other important issues that are happening in our world. Overall, it was a very important experience I got to be a part of."

Eva had this to say "The trip to the Holocaust and Human Rights Center was very impactful. The collage artwork on display was moving and captured the artist's emotions about her family beautifully. I also really enjoyed the lecture about Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. It was inspiring to learn about and reflect on the resiliency of the Jewish people - and particularly fascinating to discover what an important role teenagers played in various forms of resistance."

Clearly, it was a worthwhile and memorable trip for all who went.

## Teen Class Grad 1: Noah Hammond

Noah Hammond 5/19/23

Teen class, for me, has been such an amazing and fun time in my life. It has taught me so much more about Jewish culture and other ideas that relate to what is happening in our world today. During my first year of teen class, we were all online since it was during COVID times. I found this year my most difficult through it all since we did read very challenging books. David tried to make us think hard about the real meanings to the questions he was asking. Although this was a very challenging year, I still found myself having a good time through it all and overall, I came out with more knowledge at the end of that year. We watched different movies as well that always tied into some form of Jewish culture reference which I did enjoy. There was one movie I distinctly remember, called "Defending Your Life". I partially like this movie because we got to have a discussion on what the Jewish afterlife is disguised to be and our thoughts on the afterlife. I thought this was super interesting and a big highlight of the year.

For my second year of teen class, COVID was just ending and the key highlight I remember is going on the Boston Trip. We first attended a tour on the freedom trail and visited the Holocaust memorial. After that, we drove to Brookline and went into gift shops, a middle eastern restaurant, and a kosher Butchery. My favorite part of that trip was walking on the freedom trail because we got to see many parts of our country's history. Another highlight of this year was reading the book, Maus. This book talked directly about the holocaust and the narrator's father's experience in it. We talked about how many people thought this book should've been banned because of some of the language, which personally seemed outrageous. I loved this discussion, as it made me think about how many people didn't want this book to be put out to kids since it talked about the Holocaust. This year was very enjoyable since we ended it by watching a show about a woman's life, living in a very orthodox town. It was particularly interesting since this was based on a real-life town, and the unimaginable pressure women in this community have to go through is astonishing.

Now we move on to my last year in teen class. This was one of my best years, since COVID was decreasing and we finally got to go on more trips. We did many exciting things, but my favorite was the recent NYC trip. Some exciting things we did was visiting the Tenement Museum, seeing the Broadway show, and Parade, and going to Ellis Island by ferry. The tenement museum was super cool because they showed us different apartments that people from across the world lived in. In one apartment was a Jewish family and in another was a Puerto Rican family. They modeled the apartments exactly like they were back when the families lived in them. Then we went to the show Parade which was about a wrongfully accused Jewish man. The singing was incredible and overall, a breathtaking experience to witness. Lastly, we went to Ellis Island and saw different exhibits and how immigrants used to come to this country. This experience was one of the best times, super fun. Other highlights about this year were that I got to pick my own movie and ask questions to have a good discussion afterward. David got me to think about this a lot more than I was expecting to. This year was especially interesting because we had different discussions about our world today, and different anti-Semitic events that have been happening. It was a fun final year, and I will remember it with a smile.

Overall, the teen class has been a very important class in my life, and I know it will help me in the future. This experience taught me to be more open-minded about subjects and events that happen in our world today. David taught us to ask questions about different topics, to have a better understanding of them. I think this class will better prepare me as a human being, since it showed me how Judaism can help me be a better person. I want to thank David for all the hard work he always puts in when preparing questions for classes, and for being an amazing teacher to all of us. He is such an amazing human being to be around and to laugh with. This class is one the greatest experiences and I will look back on it fondly in my upcoming future.

## Teen Class Grad 2: Eva Aranovitch

By Eva Aranovitch

A lot of people stop participating in Jewish traditions and engaging with Jewish values as soon as they complete their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. I didn't want that to happen to me, as being Jewish is a large part of my identity, and I always hope to be connected to this community. For the past three years, Teen Class has allowed me to maintain my relationship with Judaism through fun ways, and of course, a different pizza every week.

Since starting Teen Class, I have made new connections, learned new Jewish values, talked about topics that interest me, went on field trips, and fell asleep during a couple movies - but in my defense, the couches in the Teen room are really comfortable. Our discussions, guest speakers, and museum visits have all helped me form opinions on what Jewish customs I want to maintain to help me come into my Jewish identity.

I have learned more about important Jewish topics, such as Zionism, intermarriage and the Holocaust through this class, making me a more informed individual.

This year was particularly special to me, simply because of the bonds I formed with the other members of the Teen class. Being Jewish gives us a strong base for budding friendships, as it is understood that you share a familial bond. I never would have thought I would have hours long conversations about Bob Dylan with David, or that all of us would talk about our favorite musicals together, or that Noah and I would **still** be in an ongoing game of pigeon battle. (I will beat you one day, Noah, I promise.)

Teen class also offered me a place to talk about things I cannot discuss with other people I know. This year, we talked about our experiences of anti-Semitism in school, something that can be uncomfortable to talk about with my non-Jewish friends, but in Teen class I could talk about it openly. I could talk about Jewish books I read with people who understand the references and say that Passover desserts are the best without someone asking me what a Passover is.

Teen class gave me a chance to be Jewish and ways to continue my Jewish customs after my Bat Mitzvah. I am grateful for this opportunity, and I am so glad to have been part of this class.

Thank you, David, for making this experience possible; I will remember it for years to come.

Visit our website:  
[etzchaimme.org](http://etzchaimme.org)

Samuel Osher Memorial Library  
at Congregation Etz Chaim

Jewish Books, Music & Movies  
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York County Community

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*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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### **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.

Articles submitted by Board members at  
[mail@etzchaimme.org](mailto:mail@etzchaimme.org)

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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:  
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Kennebunk, ME 04043

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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:

*Cantor Beth Strassler: 967-5833 or [cantor@etzchaimme.org](mailto:cantor@etzchaimme.org)*

Community Outreach request:

*Denise Hammond: [communityoutreach@etzchaimme.org](mailto:communityoutreach@etzchaimme.org)*

Yahrzeit reminders:

*Jennie Aranovitch: [yahrzeit@etzchaimme.org](mailto:yahrzeit@etzchaimme.org)*

Memorial Plaques:

*David Strassler: 967-5833*

Hebrew School/Services:

*Beth & David Strassler: 967-5833*

Prayer Books:

*[mail@etzchaimme.org](mailto:mail@etzchaimme.org)*

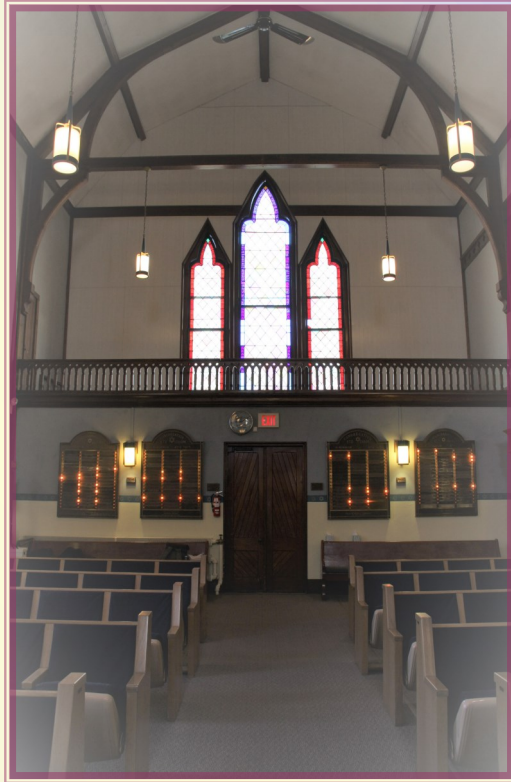
Library:

*Maureen King: 282-2907 or [somlibrary@gmail.com](mailto:somlibrary@gmail.com)*

Family education:

*Anthony & Jessica Allen: [familyed@etzchaimme.org](mailto:familyed@etzchaimme.org)*

**York County Jewish Community News**



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