

Spring 2020/5780

Congregation Etz Chaim**Bella Cowan****Part 1 – Emigration from Russia to America**

by Ellie Rolnick

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Aunt Bella was the storyteller of our family. Every family should have one. Bella lived to be 100 years old and remembered everything. She was quite remarkable! Over the years she shared so many stories with me – but she wouldn't let me write anything down and she wouldn't let me record her. Only just before she passed, earlier this year, did she explain why: "If I can't say something nice about every member of our family, then I'm not going to say anything at all". She had an expression in Yiddish that translated to 'in every house there is a dark corner'. In other words, there are skeletons in everyone's closet. She felt when it came to family, that's where those skeletons should remain: in the closet.

In 2009, Bella was interviewed for the "Documenting Old Maine Jewry Oral History Project". For almost 2 hours she spoke—uncut-- on tape. She gave a glimpse of what life was like for her as a young Jewish girl in Bangor, Maine during the early 20th century. I first listened to the interview before I sat down to write this article, and I learned things I never remember Bella telling me! What I will write is a recounting of part of the interview, with a few recollections from our conversations together.

Bella is a first generation American Jew, born in 1919 in Bangor, Maine. Her father, Osher Rolnick, came from Russia in 1906. The shtetl that his family lived in was in what is now known as Belarus and was called Mistatich Gubernia. Gubernia was a word for 'County' and Mistatich was a town in that county. His original family name was Melamed.

In the Shtetel, Bella's grandmother had a leather goods shop, and her grandfather prayed and studied Talmud, sitting in a chair in the corner of the shop. The family lived a decent life. Bella's mother became a full-fledged tailor and had other women working for her. In fact, one of her first purchases in America was a brand new Singer sewing machine! Bella's grandfather died before full preparations were made for the family to move to America.

(continued on pg. 14)

The Bris Team of Southern Maine Go on the Road

By David Strassler

When I moved to Southern Maine in 1982, little did I know that I would have a second job besides being a Family Physician. I also filled a void by becoming the *Mohel* of Southern Maine. Sometimes I would do the ritual circumcision with a local rabbi. Other times I would perform the “bris” alone, doing the prayers myself along with the procedure.

Several years ago, my wife Beth joined me while she was training to become a cantor. We became a team, as we traveled to the new parents’ home on day eight of their new son’s life. Since Beth’s ordination over 2 years ago, we are now Cantor Beth and Dr. David Strassler: The *Bris Team* of Southern Maine.

A Chanukah Miracle: My nephew Jesse and his wife Christy had a baby boy on the first day of Chanukah. We received a call from Jesse to let us know that Alain was born, and to ask us if we could come to Lansing, Michigan to perform the bris. There are some things in life that are not planned, but when the opportunity presents itself, you have to be there. So, we made all of the arrangements to be sure we were there on the eighth day, which corresponded to the last day of Chanukah.

Questions went through my mind. How would I get a scalpel on the plane? I would have to check my luggage. What if the luggage got lost? I decided to bring two sets of instruments, including a scalpel, each in a separate piece of luggage. Traveling with the new security regulations has made this more complicated than when I started practicing 38 years ago.

On the eighth day of Chanukah, both sets of instruments with the scalpels arrived safely. Beth beautifully chanted the prayers with such compassion as we welcomed Alain into the world of Judaism.

And for me? How special it was to be sitting across from my brother, Robert, who served as the *sandek*, the traditional term for the person who holds the baby in his lap and keeps his legs still? Those were intimate moments as we sat facing each other playing our roles in an ancient ritual with our precious new family member between us.

The celebration was a great success, and like all Jewish events, was followed by delicious food.

Welcome to our new Board Member, Denise Hammond!

By Jeff Levy

Congregation Etz Chaim is pleased to announce the addition of our newest board member, Denise Hammond.

Denise and her family have been members of our synagogue for over 17 years. Being the niece of Barbara Simensky, Denise credits Barbara for introducing her to this warm and welcoming community. Denise has been an active participant and leader in our community. She has been running the PJ Library Outreach for our Etz Chaim for several years, leading the preschool programming, and has been a member of the Etz Chaim Education Committee for the past 5 years.

Denise and her husband Greg have always been among the first to volunteer to fill any need that exists. Denise's two eldest children, Bella and Elaina, have completed their Hebrew School Education at our Hebrew School, and celebrated their B'na Mitzvot at our Shul. Bella is a teacher at the Hebrew School. Meanwhile, her youngest two, Noah and Sam, are active students in our Hebrew School.

Denise brings a great deal of strength to our Board. She is a Social Worker who has maintained a private therapy practice for many years. For the last two years, she has been a behavioral health case manager at Martin's Point. She has great perspective as a community member, a parent and is exceptionally creative and committed.

Please join me in wishing Denise Mazel Tov on her membership to the Etz Chaim Board of Directors.

FLOOD RESTORATION & KITCHEN UPDATE

By Linda Federman

I'm sure, by now, everyone has heard about our unfortunate flood. All the flooring on the bottom floor had to be ripped up before clean-up could be started. The good news is that the process went quickly and efficiently, and we are now in the last stages of having new flooring throughout.

For those who haven't yet had a chance to see the entire kitchen update, we now have new cabinets and countertops, as well as new flooring, and a beautiful new stainless steel island.

I want to thank everyone for their patience and understanding during our restoration. By the time you receive this, all should be complete and back to normal. Also, I'd like to thank everyone who tirelessly helped to get our kitchen ready for it's update.

I'm sad that both our Hanukkah party and Tu B'shevat Service had to be canceled due to weather, but our Purim service was a huge success, complete with Megillah reading and was well attended. We look forward to many upcoming, interesting speakers and exciting events.

A Brief History of Jewish Prayer

by Cantor Beth Strassler

Prayer has taken on many forms throughout the history of the Jewish people. During the times of Abraham or King David, prayer was spontaneous and personal. We don't know what text or melodies were used. There was no book from which to read. We do believe that King David was busy writing psalms (*beginning 1000 BCE*), which became the cornerstones of our prayer books (*siddurim*) today.

The First Temple (*1,000 BCE - 586 BCE*) became THE place to offer up a proper animal or grain sacrifice in worship to God. While the *Kohanim* (Priests) presided over the sacrifices, the *Levites* led an abundance of music. This music consisted of recitations, communal responses, and choral pieces which were accompanied by various instruments. The Shema Yisrael and the Ten Commandments were recited daily. At this time in history, it was not even considered that a service consisting of ONLY prayer and Torah, with no sacrifice, would be sufficient.

Then the Temple was destroyed. There was no longer a place to offer sacrifices.

One theory of when the change from prayer with sacrifice to prayer of speech alone occurred after the Temple was destroyed (*586 BCE*). The Jews were exiled to Babylon (*approx. 597 BCE to 537 BCE*). No Temple meant no place to offer the animal sacrifices. Yet the identity of the Jewish community survived, which indicates that they held onto traditions and gathered regularly in some form of worship.

According to a different theory, the Jews returned to Jerusalem (*539 BCE*) and the Second Temple was built (*516 BCE to 70 CE*). The communal worship to God again included prayers and animal sacrifices. The Priests of the Second Temple were in charge of the intricate process, with the assistance of townspeople. Annual schedules dictated when each town's representative would go to the Temple with the community's precious cargo, of the community's carefully selected animals for sacrifice.

During the representative's absence, those remaining in his town would gather to read Torah, recite Psalms and other prayers until his successful return. This model of interweaving prayer and study into a unit of worship was begun as it continues today.

Each community developed its own unique style of prayer service: Its preferences for which prayers to include, which rituals to follow. Travel among communities was not easy. When a person moved to live in another community, he was expected to adopt the prayer service of his new home community. Local custom (*minhag*) was paramount.

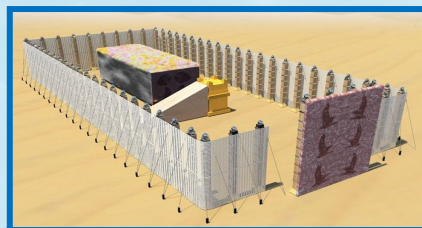
This continued until the time when regional Rabbis began to travel among the independent communities (*approx 200-600 CE*). These writers of the Talmud conducted their own surveys of the customs and worship practices of each community. They recognized how difficult it was for each regional Rabbi to know the many communities' unique customs. They convinced the communities to accept the Rabbi's version of the service and melodies. In this way, community services became "code-ified" according to the preferences of the regional Rabbi.

(Continued on page 6)



Seeking God's Face

Parshat Ki Tisa: Exodus 30:11-34:35



Mishkan in Eretz Yisrael from ou.org

Adapted by Cantor Beth Strassler from the Hebrew College Weekly Column *70 Faces of Torah*:
 "Seeking God's Face in the Age of Coronavirus" by Cantor Ken Richmond, Hebrew College News & Views, March 13, 2020

As I write this on Saturday evening, March 14, it is hard to believe that the Jewish world celebrated Purim at the beginning of last week. It feels like a month ago, doesn't it? The story of that upside down, crazy holiday doesn't even mention God once. Were the plot twists involving Esther, the King and the Jews directed by God or sheer luck? The question seems more poignant this year as people of all religious and political persuasions unite against the common enemy of the COVID-19 virus, and the community holiday of joy was celebrated, by many, in isolation.

The Torah portion of the week, Ki Tissa, highlights both God's presence and absence. First, God has an intimate discussion with the Jewish community about how to build the mishkan. The community building experience is accomplished through each person's generosity and efforts of giving. The goal: To build a place where God may dwell among the people on earth.

Next, Moses is communing with God on Mount Sinai as the tablets of the Ten Commandments are created. Meanwhile, the people think it is taking a long time, and experience a lack of the Divine Presence among them. Building the golden calf is an attempt to fill this void.

Moses asks God to return the Divine Presence to the people, and to help him to understand God's ways. In Exodus 33:18, Moses asks "Please, show me your Presence." God explains that "...you will see my back, but my face will not be seen."

It is moving that Moses, who has an incomparably close relationship with God, yearns to be closer still. Cantor Richmond refers to the writings of Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, in which he describes such a spiritual quest as Moses': It begins from a place of doubt, a challenge that a person's mind cannot resolve. Through searching and struggle, the person may find some resolution to the doubt. However, this only clears the way for a new doubt, a new challenge, and perhaps another insight and resolution. As the process repeats, the person ascends higher on the rungs of a ladder. Reb Nachman concludes: "The end of knowledge is that we do not know."

Many commentators have weighed in on the meaning of "God's back", which we humans may comprehend as opposed to "God's face", which we humans may never comprehend. Here, Cantor Richmond refers to the Kotzker Rebbe, who says that everything puzzling and confusing that people are able to see is "God's back". However, no person may see God's face, where everything is in harmony.

In many ways, our present reality feels like a world like that of the Purim story: God's presence is hard to find, and we are constantly pushed around by forces beyond our control. This is exactly when it is important to search for God. Our fear at feeling God's absence may become the catalyst for finding God's presence in unexpected places. This is where we find people caring for each other, putting forth their best efforts to keep each other safe, and finding important ways to connect within the age of "social distancing".

We may have to settle for seeing God's back, where everything seems puzzling and confusing. But we need to follow Moses's lead to keep striving to see God's face, where everything is in harmony, even if it feels just a bit out of reach. May Moses' example remind us, especially in this time of uncertainty, to strive to come closer to the Divine. This will lead us to come closer to other people. In the process, we have an opportunity to turn fear into caring, anxiety into moments of joy, and God's hiddenness into revealing aspects of God we otherwise would not find.

b'Shalom,

Beth

A Brief History of Jewish Prayer (cont. from p. 4)

by Cantor Beth Strassler

Prayers were first written by hand, which led to many errors. Even the first printing presses were complicated, also resulting in many errors. The first prayers to be included were Shema Israel (*Deuteronomy* 6:4), the Priestly Blessing (*Numbers* 6:23–27) and The Ten Commandments (*Exodus* 20:1–17). The Shemonah Esreh or the Amidah was composed especially for the written prayer book.

Meanwhile, the Enlightenment in Europe and Russia (approx. 1688 CE to 1789 CE) provided access to secular education for many Jews. The literacy rate among Jews rose and the first accurately mass produced printing of the siddur came out in 1865.

In her book *The Service of the Heart*, Evelyn Garfiel describes the development of the Jewish prayer service as a process of democratization. She points out that the emphasis is on the people, ten to be precise, and not on a building. She points out: "The Synagogue is essentially a *Minyan*, not a building...". Once there were no more sacrifices, there was no more need for a Priest to lead a service. The service could be led by a layman, a representative of the community.

I appreciate Garfiel's comments that the prayer book (siddur) is a living Jewish history book. It was not a one-time creation, but developed over generations, and is always changing! It is a book that is used daily, and chronicles Jewish history. It is offered in Hebrew and Aramaic, but has been translated into many languages.

BCE = Before the Common Era of the Jews and Christians, sometimes referred to as CE or AD
 Garfiel, Evelyn. (1975 edition). *The Service of the Heart: A Guide to the Jewish Prayer Book*.
 N. Hollywood, CA: Wilshire Book Company.

The Gold-Strassler Collaboration: Making Prayer More Meaningful

"And you shall love the Lord, our God with all your heart, with all your soul
 and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

"What is the service of the heart?.....It is prayer." (*Ta'anit 2a, Mishnah*)

The Ritual Committee, backed by the synagogue's board of directors, has requested that Dr. Gold and I revise Congregation Etz Chaim's prayer services.

This endeavor focuses on:

1. Collecting printed music, according to how our traditions have evolved over the last 20-30 years. There is no one place to find the text and music for the service exactly as we conduct it in Biddeford. Finding our unique combination of melodies and texts (newer *and* older) involves taking one from Source A, taking the next from Source B, taking the third again from Source A, the fourth from Source D, and so on.

The process reminds me of how the prayer book was first printed: It involves the written compilation of our service into an organized format. We are code-ifying the Biddeford, ME service to be available for the next generations. We are also returning to an ancient practice of creating the unique service that works best for our community.

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A Brief History of Jewish Prayer (cont. from p. 6)

by Cantor Beth Strassler

2. Revising the service. We have already set precedents in revising our High Holiday services by choosing user-friendly prayer books, eliminating prayer repetition, using more English text, updating prayer melodies, including keyboard accompaniment and forming a choir. Music means a lot to us in Biddeford, and the melodies of the prayers are important vehicles to reach our hearts and encourage everyone's participation.
3. Conducting prayer in a way that is meaningful for our participants. We are rejecting the school of thought that requires us to do the majority of the prayers in the siddur, just because they are there. We are choosing to do fewer prayers and to do each with meaning.

What makes a prayer meaningful? Here are some examples:

A melody that is familiar and joyful: Think Adon Olam or Yigdal.

A new melody that brings new meaning to a familiar prayer: Think of our Mi Shebeirach prayer.

A familiar or new melody that brings the emotion of the prayer straight to your heart: For me, it is "Oof-rosh aleinu sukat shlomecha"—"Spread over us the canopy of Your peace."

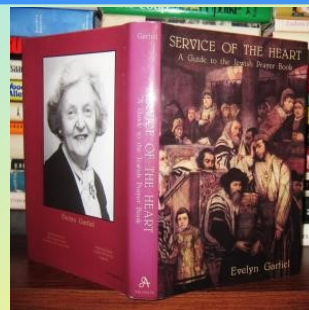
Fond childhood memories of a melody or prayer from an important time in life, or one shared with important people in life.

Relating to the history of the prayer: Think of the Shema and its long, emotional history as the first prayer a child recites and the last prayer recited by centuries of martyrs.

*Come and give us a try. Come and give us your feedback.
Help create our inclusive prayer service.*

Happy Passover!

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





The Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award

By David Strassler

History: The Arnold Shapiro Community Service Award was created to honor Arnold Shapiro's commitment and service to Congregation Etz Chaim. Arnold Shapiro was raised in Biddeford and attended Hebrew School at Congregation Etz Chaim. He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in 1944. In 1980, Arnold Shapiro became the president of Congregation Etz Chaim, at a time when other Board members wanted to close the synagogue due to a lack of membership. He spent countless hours at Congregation Etz Chaim doing everything from organizing High Holiday Services, to attending Bar and Bat Mitzvah services, to recruiting volunteers, to supervising building repairs. For over 30 years, Arnold Shapiro unselfishly guided the congregation to the vibrant community it is today.

Goal: A scholarship will be provided to a member of Congregation Etz Chaim who is a graduating high school senior, to support their post-secondary study in college, professional or trade school, or other post-secondary training or opportunities. **Amount:** \$500-\$1,000.

When: The scholarship will be awarded annually in June. Please submit your application by May 11, 2020.

Eligibility: Graduating high school seniors who have been actively involved in providing service to the Congregation Etz Chaim community.

How: To fill out the application, go the web site: <http://etzchaimme.org/highschoolaward/>

Decision: After all nominations are reviewed, the recipient will be selected by a committee, which is comprised of the President of the Etz Chaim Board of Directors, one Board member, and an Education Committee member. The Scholarship is supported by the Shapiro Family.



The Library Cookbook Needs Your RECIPES!!

By Maureen King

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library is planning to publish a cookbook! The first step will be to collect recipes, and we know the cooks and bakers of Congregation Etz Chaim have some great dishes to share! Our goal is to gather **300 recipes!**

While we are all at home, cooking and baking more often, please consider sharing those family favorites with the Library Cookbook. We would also like to know why it's special for your family, or you could make a dedication to the person who originally made it for you. Add any personal information you would like to the end of the recipe.

The Library Cookbook will feature a wide variety of the Congregation's favorite recipes. There will be many family heirlooms collected from congregation members and friends, along with Friday night potluck specialties from over the years, including the famous Etz Chaim Challah recipe and Marc's Famous Latkes. If you've got a favorite, please share it with us!!

You can send us your recipes for the Library Cookbook in three different ways:

(1) by mail, addressed to Samuel Osher Memorial Library, P. O. Box 905, Kennebunk, ME 04043; or

(2) by email (library@etzchaimme.org); or

(3) by going online to www.typensave.com. Our user name is *Library Etz Chaim* and the password to contribute recipes is *blender220*.

There is no set format for sharing a recipe by mail or email. The Library Cookbook team will organize the formats for the final version, so just send us what you have (ingredients, amounts, and clear instructions for preparing and cooking) and include your contact information, so if we have questions, we can double check with you to get it right!

The **typensave** website does have a more formal process to enter a recipe on their website, with a format and a list of preferred terms. **Use whichever of the three that works best for you!!**

We look forward to gathering Congregation Etz Chaim's recipes and sharing them with you!

Samuel Osher Memorial Library

By Maureen King

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library will be closed while our local public schools are closed, from March 16 to April 26. We will provide updates on the website and on the calendar, www.etzchaimme.org/calendar/. Our call for Library Volunteers will resume when the Library re-opens. If you would like more information, please email Maureen at library@etzchaimme.org or somlibrarymaine@gmail.com.

Biddeford Parking

By Maureen King

DOWNTOWN FREE PARKING OPTIONS

The Alfred Street Lot (located next to the Police Department) now offers your first two hours of parking FREE! Just type your license plate number into the parking kiosk to redeem your free parking. You will not need to insert your credit card into the kiosk unless you plan to park for more than two hours. Additional hours of parking beyond the first two hours can be purchased at a rate of \$2 per hour. This same policy is also in place in the parking lot on Franklin Street.

Biddeford Parking Regulations

Biddeford has instituted paid parking in the municipal lots, including the one located next to the Police Station. The cost is \$2 per hour and can be paid at the digital kiosks near the entrance to each lot. (More detailed information is available at biddefordmaine.org.)

Free parking is still available on the downtown streets, but some streets now have time limits! Bacon Street has no time limit from Foss Street to High Street; there is a two hour limit on Bacon Street in the Police Station block.

As you can imagine, on-street parking has become more challenging to find. Allow extra time to find parking, be prepared to drop people off in front of the synagogue, or be prepared to park in the paid lots (and pay if you will be longer than the free two-hour limits).

Failure to Purchase Parking Permits - A \$35 fine will be issued if you do not purchase a parking permit for permit-required municipal lots.

Congregation Etz Chaim Women's Book Group

By Maureen King

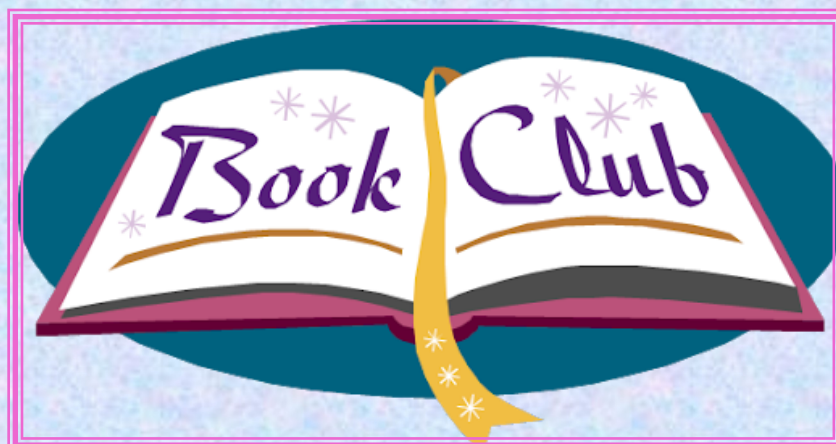
The Congregation Etz Chaim Women's Book Group began meeting on January 11, 2018. We meet monthly and work around challenges from snowstorms to floods to hot summer nights without air conditioning. On March 12, 2020, our group enthusiastically discussed our 24th book in 27 months!

Led by Susan Pierce, we have chosen memoirs, novels, and nonfiction books by Jewish writers or with Jewish themes. We have had deep discussions, heard funny anecdotes, agreed and disagreed. We encourage members to attend, even if they haven't finished or didn't read the current book, as we learn interesting things from each other every time we meet. Delicious snacks keep us fueled for lively discussions about books, authors, themes, and life. Our book group nights have become a "don't miss" on our readers' schedules.

The full list of Spring and Summer books is online and in the newsletter. Our next book is *The Lost Family* by Jenna Blum, and we plan to meet on Wednesday, April 15 at 6:30 PM. We will work out an option to meet virtually, if we can't meet in person.

Contact Susan Pierce at the_pierces@roadrunner.com or Maureen King at library@etzchaimme.org or somlibrarymaine@gmail.com for more information about the Women's Book Group.

Join us for a Jewish reading adventure and great conversation!

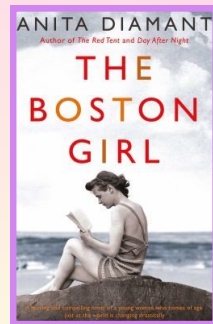
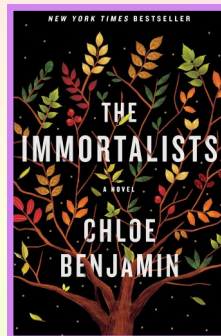
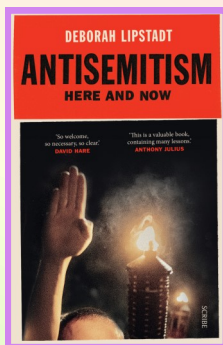
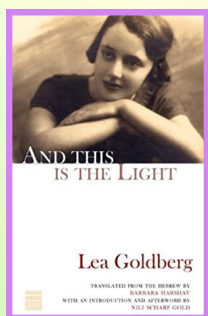


CEC Women's Reading Group Spring and Summer 2020 Book List By Maureen King

Our goal is to continue our meetings in a virtual environment.
Each meeting will begin at 6:30 PM.
We will email how to connect to the virtual group meeting.

The Samuel Osher Memorial Library has at least one copy of each book.
Contact Maureen at library@etzchaimme.org or somlibrarymaine@gmail.com
for information about the meeting or the book availability.

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| April 15, 2020 | <i>The Lost Family</i> by Jenna Blum. (novel, 1960's-80's, marriage, family, and grief) |
| May 14, 2020 | <i>And This is the Light</i> by Lea Goldberg. (novel, 1931 young woman coming of age in European society) |
| June 17, 2020 | <i>Antisemitism: Here and Now</i> by Deborah E. Lipstadt. (nonfiction; 2019 National Jewish Book Award for Education and Identity) |
| July 9, 2020 | <i>The Immortalists</i> by Chloe Benjamin. (novel, 1969-2000's, "If you knew the date of your death, how would you live your life?") |
| August 13, 2020 | <i>The Boston Girl</i> by Anita Diamant. (novel, 1985, grandmother telling her coming of age story in the early 20th century) |



Teen Class Writings provided by David Strassler

In Teen Class this year, we read *Shosha* by Isaac Bashevis Singer. The story takes place in the Chasidic quarter of the Jewish neighborhood of Warsaw during the 1930s. Included in the book were many new Yiddish words and cultural innuendos for the teens. The following is a creative writing project the students did with some of the new words they learned.

ACTUAL STORY

By Abby Davis, Thornton Academy-sophomore

Before my *Bubbe* passed away, she came with my *Zayde*, Dad, Mom sister and I to New York City.

The first person we encountered was a man running around with a *shtreimel* filled with *gefilte fish*. He was flinging the *gefilte fish* this way and that. *Zayde* whispered to me, "He is either possessed by a *dybbuk* or is just a plain *schlemiel*." I responded, "He could also be a *schnorrer* who lost his mind waiting for money."

We kept walking, when suddenly a *shiksa* with a limp came up to us and offered us *blintzes*. My *Bubbe* said, "Oy vey! Another *schnorrer*. I hope does not give us the *evil eye*. We better buy a *blintz*."

We then headed to the oldest yeshivas in the city. There, we were met by one of their *melameds*. Being the holiday of Purim, he was drunk and in a great mood. He kept saying "*mazel tov*" and "*l'chaim*". The next person we met there was proclaiming to be a *Zionist*, and offered us a map of Israel. We were confused, because he kept talking to us in *Yiddish*.

Before we left the city, we stopped by the house of *Zayde's* friend. He was sitting *shiva* for his father, who apparently died because he was *gvetching* so much, that his business partner killed him. We didn't eat any of the food there because it was *trayf*. We offered our condolences. We were surprised to see that some of the other people there were: the *schlemeil* with the gefilte fish, the *shiksa*, the drunk *melamed* and the *Zionist*.

My Jewish Friend

By Elaina Hammond-Kennebunk High School-sophomore

One day, my friend was walking down the street wearing a *shtreimel* on his head, with his *Bubbe* and *Zayde*. As he was speaking to them in *Yiddish*, they came upon a *schnorrer*, begging for money. His *Bubbe* said "Oy vey. We better give him money, or else he might wish on us the *evil eye*". *Zayde* told her to stop *gvetching*. He had a better idea and gave him some food instead-*gefilte fish* and *blintzes*. The *schnorrer* was so happy because now he had something to bring to his friends sitting *shiva*. He wished us a hearty *mazel tov*, as we fulfilled one of G-d's commandments.

They next saw a girl eating a hot dog. My friend whispered: "What a *shiksa*. She is eating *trayf*." It was weird for him to see someone not Jewish in their neighborhood. He was scared that her body was inhabited by a *dybbuk*.

Down the road, they passed by one of his *melameds*, who was trying to explain to a *schlemiel* that the coronavirus did not come from someone being only Asian. My friend could tell that he was also frustrated because this *schlemeil* was a *Zionist*, and just wanted to talk about Israel, which got boring after a while.

Lastly, they attended their cousin's wedding. At the wedding, my friend got to make a toast, as all the guests raised their glass and shouted "*L'chaim*".

My Bubbe

By Eddie Macomber-Thornton Academy-freshman

My *Bubbe* always begged me to learn *Yiddish*. It is day 3 of her *shiva* and it still seems like a bad idea.

I took another bite of my double bacon cheeseburger with extra ketchup and mayo. *Trayf*, I could hear her criticizing me and I haven't heard her voice in weeks. I had heard bits and pieces of *Yiddish* throughout my time with her.

She was always very fond of her husband, my *Zayde*. I don't remember him, since he died when I was a baby. She never married anyone else. She was always telling the story of how she finally bought the *shtreimel* he always wanted, the week of his death. I hadn't ever met him, but my Mom said he was really very unusual: a *Chasid Zionist*. In fact, he was a leader in the movement to finalize the legitimacy of Israel. He would probably think that I'm such a *schlemiel*, since I am an anti-*Zionist*. But then again, I heard he was not a very good *melamed*.

Nothing was worse than when I brought a *shiksa* to meet the family. *Bubbe* said that a *dybbuk* was inside me. She didn't say it, but I could tell she thought someone wished on me the *evil eye*. I didn't bring anyone else home for dinner again. The day slowly came to an end. After a *l'chaim* and a few *mazel tovs*, we fell asleep, with day 4 of her *shiva* starting as the sun went down.

Bella Cowan, Part 1

(continued from pg. 1)

Osher had served in the Czar's army, and recently returned to his wife and young family. Soon afterward, word got around that the Cossacks were coming through to conscript more soldiers. The fact that Osher had already served wouldn't have mattered, because the Cossacks took whomever they could. Osher had been saving money to leave for America, and had a passport that belonged to his cousin, Osher Rolnick. With passport and cash in hand, he headed east to Germany. He escaped through fields, farms and woods, often through dark of night, until finally crossing the border into Germany. Using some of his cash to bribe the border guards, he was able to safely head to Bremen. From the seaport of Bremen, he secured passage on a cattle boat, for approximately 30-50 Rubles, equivalent at the time to \$25-30. He landed in Boston and headed to Bangor, Maine, where he had another cousin who owned a bakery.

No one has ever solved the mystery of how he got his cousin's passport. I was never clear about why Osher traveled alone or how his brothers came to America and Canada. His brother Jacob Rolnick also lived in Bangor. They had another brother, Velvel, who landed in Montreal and took the last name of 'Miller'.

Osher never took back his family name and Bella's best guess is that he didn't want the Czar's army to find him. Osher did not bring up a lot of memories. He didn't want to talk about it. She did recall that although he was kosher when he was in the army, he would eat whatever he was given. He would say 'I was kosher but I wasn't crazy'.

After arriving in Bangor, Osher began to work in the bakery owned by his cousin. When the cousin saw how industrious Osher was, he was concerned that he would open up his own bakery and compete with him, so he fired him. Osher was not to be deterred. He purchased a carriage and a horse, and became a Yankee peddler. He would go through the countryside, buying junk and metal and other items to resell. The farmers knew him, and knew of his religious beliefs, so he worked from Sunday through Friday, and they knew he had to be home by Friday at sunset. The farmers were all wonderful to him. He would sleep under his wagon if the weather was good, and sleep in the farmers' barns if it was poor.

After 3 years, he saved enough to put a down payment on a house at 23 Carr Street, overlooking the Penobscot River, and enough to send money for fares to his family. He brought over his wife, his 7 year old daughter and 5 year old son, as well as his mother-in-law and his wife's teenage sister.

The Jewish immigrants believed there were only Indians in America, and that there was nothing here to set up a household, so they carried as much as they could with them e.g. clothing, bedding, and household items. Bella recalled sleeping on pillows that had come from the old country. Her mother had carried a brass mortar and pestle that her father had brought back from his trip to Palestine.

Osher had acquired a partner named Bluestein, and they bought and sold used auto parts. They found a location in Brewer, where he eventually bought out Bluestein's interest in the business. Bella mentioned that the immigrants were treated well by the banks, so I assume that he took out a loan in order to do this. I recall that this may have been because Osher was going to have 2 of his sons work for him (my father was one of them). The business name was 'O Rolnick and Sons'. Originally, they sold used car parts, but over time the building in the front (where my Dad worked), sold new auto parts, while my uncle had a building in the back that continued to sell used parts.

Bella once shared with me that there was no impact in their house from the Great Depression. Her mother was very busy as a tailor, and her father was selling used auto parts, at a time when others couldn't afford to buy a new vehicle, and therefore needed to keep their old vehicle on the road.

NEXT TIME: Bella's Childhood Memories

Bella Cowan
1919-2019



Rabbi Sandmel's Talk on Anti-Semitism

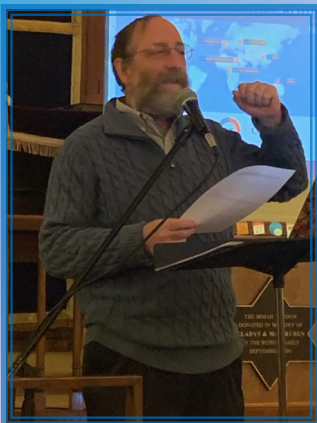
by Jeff Levy

Rabbi David Sandmel of the ADL gave a talk on Anti-Semitism at Etz Chaim in Biddeford this February. Rabbi Sandmel is currently the Director of Interreligious Engagement for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and has been a major figure on the international stage when it comes to education and engagement across the major religions of the world. He has a strong Maine connection, as a former Rabbi at Bet Ha'am Synagogue in Portland, Maine. We are all aware the violence motivated by anti-Semitism and bigotry is on the rise in this country and around the world. In just the last few years, there have been mass shootings in places of worship in Pittsburgh, Texas and California. Security and safety concerns, due to the increased presence of violence and anti-Semitism, have truly infiltrated our way of living our lives and running our synagogue. On February 27, 2020, as we welcomed Rabbi Sandmel to our Shul, we also hired a Biddeford Police Officer to provide additional security, as we have during our other major gatherings.

Rabbi Sandmel spoke to a large, well engaged audience. He talked about the difference between anti-Semitism and Anti-Israel sentiment, then he spoke at length on how they overlap and differ. There was talk about press coverage and negative Jewish stereo-types. He provided a historical perspective of anti-Semitism, and helped decipher and discern the differences between hateful ideas, and having those ideas be motivators to execute violent acts. The Rabbi emphasized that his data is based on reports of violence, and he noted that he believes there are many acts of religious violence that go unreported.

Rabbi Sandmel's presentation concluded with a lively question and answer session. There were questions about the similarity of our current national situation and pre-Nazi Germany, to which he acknowledged there are similarities, but also substantial differences.

The Board of Directors, via the sponsorship of the Sam Cohen fund, was very pleased to invite Rabbi Sandmel to present on this very important topic.



Visit our website:
etzchaimme.org

Shabbat Services

Dates and times can be found on the Congregation Etz Chaim Web Site calendar, as we are dealing with Covid-19 and using Zoom to present services.

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

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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 Membership dues to:

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Kennebunk, ME 04043*

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York County Jewish Community News



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