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Letter From the Editor

Dear JSM Readers,

In January 2021, Jewish Living of the South acquired The Hebrew Watchman to accompany Jewish Scene Magazine as Memphis' go-to source for Jewish journalism. The paper was then celebrating 95 years, and we knew the 100th Anniversary Celebration in 2025 was going to be a big deal. As it turns out, 2025 is quite the year for many Memphis and Southern-area organization anniversaries. Recently, ads for and emails and invites from various organizations have been pouring in about events, galas, and yearlong celebrations, and I realized 2025 is a bigger deal than we originally thought.

Our Jewish Scene and The Hebrew Watchman team began brainstorming about how to honor the rich history of The Hebrew Watchman along with our synagogues and organizations. So, be on the lookout for stories featuring each of these orgs along with highlights of the people who keep them running smoothly year after year.

For starters, read about the first Memphis synagogue in "Temple Israel: 170 Years and Still Going Strong" on page 12. On page 18, learn how the Unknown Child Foundation continues to educate the community about the Holocaust.

In this issue, we are featuring some Memphis celebs including GRAMMY and Emmy Winner Robert Gordon, who was just honored by his hometown with a Brass Note on Beale Street. And thanks to Liora Kelman, a recent Memphian transplant, and her daughter, Avigayil Kelman, who share their family history in "We Are Here! We Are Alive!" a book based on Alfred Sarano's diary while living in wartime Italy.


Congrats also to Sally Baer (page 10) who's been inspiring students at Bornblum Jewish Community School since its beginning 36 years ago.

Mazel tov again to the Cenker family. With Lyla's fabulous Thanksgiving weekend bat mitzvah surrounded by family and friends, (page 6) the family finished off 2024 with quite an accomplishment – all three kids' b'nai/bat mitzvahs in one year plus a trip to Israel.

Be sure to check out our Hollywood Pet Star on page 17 and Bec Brown's picks on page 20 to freshen your spring wardrobe as we finally see warmer weather.

Look for more information about The Hebrew Watchman's 100-Year Anniversary and mark your calendar for Sept. 2-12, for an exhibit at the MJCC Shainberg Art Gallery. Sponsorships are available, please contact Susan at 901-827-7244 or susan@jewishscenemagazine.com if you want more information or want to become involved!

Shalom,



Susan C. Nieman – Publisher/Editor

2 February/March 2025 | www.jewishscenemagazine.com



A Year of Celebrations

Mazel tov to the organizations celebrating anniversaries in 2025. If we left anyone off, please contact me at susan@jewishscenemagazine.com.

- The Hebrew Watchman 100 Years
- B'nai B'rith Sam Schloss Lodge 166 Years
- Memphis Jewish Federation 90 Years
- MJCC Camp 75 Years
- Beth Sholom 70 Years
- Plough Towers 45 Years
- Bornblum Jewish Community School 36 Years
- Barbara K. Lipman Early Learning Center at Temple Israel 36 Years
- Chabad of Tennessee 30 Years
- Institute for Southern Jewish Life 25 Years

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Volume 19 Number 3

February/March 2025

Shevat/Adar 5785

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Jewish Scene is published by Jewish Living of the South, Inc. Subscription rates for the U.S.: single issues \$5, annual \$25. Canada and foreign: single issues \$10, annual \$50.

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The book recounts Sarano's daring efforts to shield his community from deportation, aided by Padre Sante Raffaeli, a Franciscan abbot sheltering Jewish refugees, and Erich Eder, a Nazi Wehrmacht officer who concealed their presence.

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GRAMMY and Emmy-Winning Memphian Robert Gordon Honored with Beale Street Brass Note

Robert is quick to mention he didn't earn his Brass Note on his own. He points to family and community as strong allies in his work.



17 Hollywood Pet Star

Ashley (Ash) Schudel a Gentle "Man"

This chill, cuddly ball of fur loves to snuggle with all the Schudels, especially his bud, Remi, and baby Miri. He's also ready to jump in to play chase when his doggy cuz, Meli, comes for a visit.

18 Feature

Unknown Child Foundation's Impactful "A Night to Shine" Gala

Fifteen years ago, Mississippi middle school teachers Susan Powel and Melissa Swartz Wheeler learned that most of their students had never heard of the Holocaust. With help from volunteer Diane McNeil, The Pennies Project was born to teach the students about the 1.5 million children who were murdered by the Nazis. That project grew into the Unknown Child Foundation and keeps growing as they have their goals set for a permanent memorial and museum.

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Bec Brown shares the latest trends to get you ready for spring.

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On The Cover

Lyla Cenker: Photo by Alicia Rosner and Dave Scaglione



Contributors



Originally from Sydney, Australia, **Rebecca (Bec) Brown** currently resides in Memphis after having lived in New York, Baltimore and Chicago. By day she works as a Jewish Communal Professional but started her career in the Fashion Editorial world as the Fashion Editor for several celebrity weeklies. In her spare time, she writes fashion, beauty, gift guide, and lifestyle editorials and is thrilled to now be contributing to Jewish Scene. Bec lives with her husband and three adorable children in East Memphis.



Shoshana Y. Cenker is a word & grammar nerd with 20+ years in creative services. She's the managing editor of a media publishing firm and runs her freelance communications business, as a content writer, editor, proofreader, copywriter, marketing consultant and wordsmith extraordinaire. She and her three kiddos – twin boys Aiden and Kivi, and daughter Lyla – happily live in her hometown of Memphis, with their pup, Memphis. ShoshanaAY@gmail.com

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Matt Timberlake enjoys writing about the people and places of Memphis, with particular interest in non-profit organizations. He's an amateur musician, gardener, chef, photographer and community activist. He lives in East Memphis with his wife and two daughters.

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Lyla with her two brothers, and mom and dad.

Festive Thanksgiving Bat Mitzvah Overflowing with Gratitude & Joy

By Shoshana Cenker

The Cenker family thankfully experienced a tremendous year of simchas in 2024 – our twin boys' b'nai mitzvah in February, then our incredible Israel trip this past summer, all culminating in our daughter, Lyla's, bat mitzvah over Thanksgiving weekend this past November. We have much to be grateful for.

Having Lyla's simcha over Thanksgiving weekend enabled many family members and friends to join us in Memphis for an extra couple of days. Plus, Lyla loves all things pumpkin, so the timing was perfect.

The long weekend's festivities kicked off Thursday with a delicious Thanksgiving lunch at my house – the Thanksgiving feast is one of my tasty specialties. Spending quality time together Thursday night and Friday morning, family and out-of-towners then dressed in their best and headed to my house before early Shabbos started. Our amazing cousins, Alicia Rosner and Dave Scaglione, took wonderful photos. They were tremendously supportive throughout the entire time, helping with anything and everything.

After Kabbalas Shabbos davening, we enjoyed a delicious dinner prepared



Lyla dropping off donated items at the Humane Society of Memphis & Shelby County.



Family and friends gathered at Shoshana's before Shabbos began.

by Lyla's dad, Dovid. Guests were treated to not one but two Divrei Torah – Lyla and our dear friend, Jeff Cohen, from Atlanta each shared lovely words to enrich our simcha. Lyla was especially elated that three of her besties from Camp Darom and their dads came in to celebrate with us.

Bright and early Shabbos morning, our family had the honor of leading the whole service at Baron Hirsch Congregation (BH). Lyla's Uncle Chaim Pauli davened P'sukei D'zimra, Great Uncle Barry Yaffe davened shacharis, Zaydie Butch Yaffe leined parsha Toldos, brother Kivi read the HaftTorah, and brother Aiden davened mussaf. They all sounded amazing, enhancing services for such a fantastic occasion. It was a privilege to share many other honors with family and friends, including aliyot, opening and closing the Aron Kodesh, and carrying the Torah.

As part of his drasha, BH's Rabbi Ian Lichter shared kind words about Lyla and our family – the two had learned a bit together to finalize Lyla's d'var Torah. At the end of services, Rabbi Joel Finkelstein, our close family friend, also spoke graciously about the bat mitzvah young lady and our family. Lyla then shared some wonderful words of Torah about her parsha. She'd been learning with Dovid's sisters, Tanta Devorah Katz and Tanta Sarah Malka, over Zoom. They also helped her write her fabulous d'var Torah, which received glowing reviews from guests who noted that Lyla was poised and spoke beautifully.

The congregation then enjoyed a yummy Thanksgiving-inspired Kiddush, featuring sparkly décor in magenta and rose gold, fall accent colors, and centerpieces with leaves, acorns, and, of course, pumpkins. We also reserved a table with all the remaining hostages' names and photos, reminding us to continue davening for our Israeli brothers, sisters, and chavolim, even during a joyous simcha.

Props to Kivi and Dovid for wearing magenta suits and Aiden for gold accents with his navy suit! Family and out-of-townners then headed to my home for an open house with a light meal and, most importantly, the opportunity to catch up and laugh together.

After Shabbos, we let loose at Playhouse on the Square for a dazzling



Cenker extended family



Yaffe extended family.



Lyla, who takes vocal lessons from Aunt Guyla Wanderman, sings Fight Song at the dance party.



Lyla playing Limbo at the dance party.



Delicious desserts at the Baron Hirsch Kiddush.



Thanksgiving-themed table settings at the Kiddush.



Lyla with her Camp Darom friends.

dance party. We danced the night away as the superb DJ Timbo spun the epic playlist fam, friends, and I created, including several fun line dances and guests' song requests. Lyla also sang with a couple friends and a cousin. Cha Cha slide, Cupid Shuffle, mixed in with some current and '90s pop, plus show tunes and R&B!

Some friendly, energetic competition ensued as we played a few throwback games: Coke & Pepsi, limbo, and musical hula hoop. There were loads of delicious treats, adult beverages, fun light-up accessories, as well as board games for those who left their dancing shoes at home.

Close friend Dr. Bob Eiseman hung some festive lights, bringing even more pizzaz to the venue. The upbeat vibe was palpable! Guests signed a big board for Lyla on their way out, offering her well wishes.

Sunday morning, Bubby Betsy Cenker, Nana Pat Yaffe, and Bubby Dina Romeo hosted a grab-n-go brunch for visitors heading out of town. Those who were still around kept the fun going at escape rooms – and we escaped, hooray!

"We had an amazing time with friends and family who were able to join us for Lyla's bat mitzvah weekend," said Dovid.

Lyla embarked on two special chesed projects for her bat mitzvah. She collected pet supplies for the Humane Society of Memphis and Shelby County. Our family delivered dozens and dozens of items the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, and we got to play with many sweet dogs and cats who are up for adoption. It took loads of self-control for us not to adopt another furry friend to add our fur babies, pups Memphis and Piper, and kitty Felix.

Lyla's other mitzvah project raised funds for Pantry Packers, an organization in Israel that provides food to 34,000+ food insecure Israelis. Our family volunteered there on our trip last summer, packing food boxes. It's a very special place, and Lyla was thrilled to provide it even more support with financial donations. Lyla even made a donation in honor of everyone who attended her bat mitzvah. She didn't just meet her fundraising goal – she surpassed it! Now, a plaque with her name and project hangs in the Pantry Packers building in her honor.

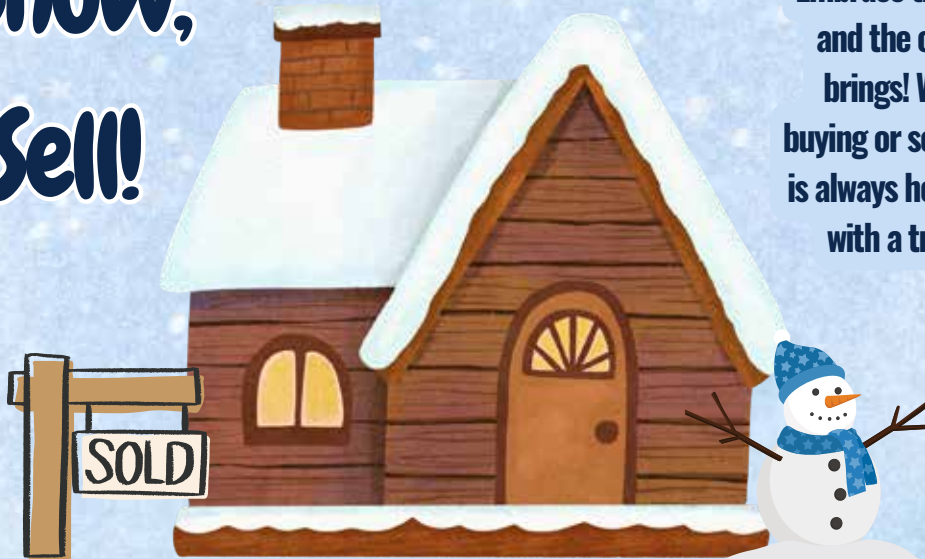
"It was nice how so many people were there just for me. I got to share my special moment with all the people I love," remembered Lyla. "It was great to learn about my parsha with my aunts and share what I learned with everyone at shul. The dance party was super fun! We got to play games and dance and sing – all the things I love, with the people I love. I was especially excited that some of my camp friends came in to celebrate."

We are so very thankful for the incredible Memphis Jewish community for helping us make our simcha special. Friends and fam provided the goodies for the hospitality bags and food for the Shabbos open house and party. Several joined us to decorate the shul's social hall for our festive Kiddush. And families opened their homes to host out-of-towners. We planted several JNF trees in Israel as thanks for the many people who volunteered their time and resources. The love and support we felt and continue to feel is immeasurable.

We could not have asked for a better simcha. The Thanksgiving theme was the central feeling of the entire weekend. Grateful to be together. Grateful for our family and friends. Grateful for our community. Grateful for our smart, beautiful, talented daughter, Lyla.

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INSPIRING LIVES: SALLY BAER

Empowering Young Minds: Passionate Educator Shapes Generations of Jewish Students

By Shoshana Cenker

For nearly four decades, Sally Baer has been and continues to be a guiding light in Memphis, inspiring countless Jewish students with unwavering dedication, wisdom, and a profound love for working with kids. This year, Sally celebrates 36 remarkable years (double chai!) at Bornblum Jewish Community School – originally called Solomon Schechter Day School, Sally's been there since Day 1.

Born in Memphis to parents, Bill and Ruth Rhodes, she and her brother, Barry, lived in a wonderful “neighborhood with other kids. I was very social, roller skating, exploring the outdoors, biking. We always played outside,” Sally remembered of her happy childhood. “My dad would whistle when it was time to come in – we could be on the other side of the block and everyone knew it was dinner time, and the kids would disperse.”

Fast-forward to college and marriage. Closing in on 50 beautiful years, Sally and Rick married in June 1976. At the time, Sally had just finished her senior year at Memphis State (now University of Memphis). A few years later, they had daughter Melissa, followed by daughter Tracy a couple years after that.

Deeply immersed in Jewish Memphis, all of Sally's initial jobs were at the Memphis Jewish Community Center (MJCC). First was overseeing the game room, then working the front desk. While in college earning her bachelor's in early childhood education, she ran Memphis State's Jewish Student Union (JSU, now Hillel). Upon graduation, she asked the MJCC's preschool director Margaret Friedman, to teach the 3-year-old kiddos. Given her first teaching job as a probationary year, Sally was thrilled. “I loved it! Racelle Mednikow was my mentor,” she recalled. “The next year I taught pre-K 4, then kindergarten, then I taught in a few public schools before joining Schechter,” in its inaugural year, mostly teaching 2nd grade.

When longtime educator Barbara Ostrow was retiring, Schechter's then head of school, Avi Halzal, asked Sally to take the role. “I said, ‘No, I love the children, I love teaching them, there's nothing like 2nd grade.’ Avi then told me, ‘If you're an administrator, you could impact the whole school and touch many lives,’” Sally remembered. “So, I became the assistant head of school under Avi, whom I thought the world of. He was a solid mentor.”

As joyful years passed, Sally decided to go back to school for her master's degree – at the age of 50! “No degree prepares you for what you do in a school. We learn from mistakes and watching other experts around us. But, being an admin, I felt like I wasn't being a role model in school with only a bachelor's. And remember, when I was an undergraduate, women didn't get master's back then,” Sally said. “So I got my master's in educational administration through the University of Phoenix. I worked at school all day, then worked on my online degree all night, for 18 months. I slept on Shabbos. Rick was patient beyond words. I have so much respect for people who work and go to school. At the time, my kids were grown, I



Sally and Rick with Melissa's family.



Tracy's family.

don't know how people do it with young kids."

While shaping the minds of future generations, Sally and Rick were quite active at Anshei Sphard Beth El Emeth Congregation, even chairing the famous kosher BBQ contest, and Rick served as president. When Anshei joined Baron Hirsch Congregation, they became members.

"We're more observant than other family members, keeping kosher," said Sally, which she'd learned from her mom. "Rick cooks most of the time, but I do Shabbos and holidays. I get pumped for holiday cooking! Everyone comes to us! We're the central place for Pesach seders, Rosh Hashana, Chanukah celebrations. Lots of Rick's family joins us. Having family together is so important."

With busy weekdays, Sally looks forward to Shabbos, so she can enjoy reading for fun, especially thrillers. She also plays Canasta with a fabulous group of friends, who've played regularly for 47 years! Family and friends are also her big focus these days, including fellow Bornblum teacher Annette Eisenberg – the two have been friends since they were toddlers.

Another hobby some might not know about: Sally is a pool shark! "I spent hours playing anyone who came in the MJCC game room when I worked there. My brother and father played pool. I really enjoy it," says the aficionado. "We have a pool table in our house. Friends come over and play. I taught my grandson, Zach, granddaughter Samantha, great-nephew Micah. It's competitive when he's in town!"

Rick also plays, but notes that when they're out and about, Sally will often be the only woman at a table full of men. And she dominates!

While the school calendar years progress, "the fun grows" for Sally as she began teaching many kids of her former students, enjoying already established relationships with those parents. "As a provider of experiences, hearing what these former students, now parents, remember and what mattered to them is so special."

Dual-titled as assistant head of school, Sally also continues to bring happiness and assistance to students as the director of student services. "Similar to a school counselor, I help parents with outside resources when needed and the kids talk to me about all kinds of things. I love these relationships," she said with sincerity. "We meet in the 'Makom Shalom' (place of peace) at school, where kids can decompress and share if they're sad, frustrated, worried – I hear everything from social to family. We have fidgets and sensory items too. I just love it," she said. "I also created 'The Baer Box.' It's a spot on the school wall with red (urgent), yellow (soon), and green (no rush) cards – students write me a private note if they need to talk. I check the box several times a day and find the right time to bring kids to Makom Shalom."

With 3 beautiful grandkids – Melissa and Julian Spector have son Hudson; Tracy and Jef Flynn have Zach and Samantha – people ask Sally when she'll retire from the profession she's had her entire adult life. "I love what I'm doing and where I am with it. Teaching was the perfect job at the time," she said with a smile, "and my passion is as director of student services now."

Excited for Bornblum's 36th anniversary gala March 30, Sally is also being honored. "Seeing students grow up to be influential in the Jewish community and keep it thriving and growing is amazing. There are so many stories!" she said proudly. "This has had me on a high this whole school year!"



Sally's The Baer Box at Bornblum.



Sally the pool shark.

Temple Israel: 170 Years and Still Going Strong

By Aida Novick :: Photos Courtesy Temple Israel

Temple Israel, originally founded in 1853 as the “Children of Israel,” is one of the earliest Jewish congregations in the region. Initially an Orthodox congregation, it transitioned to Classical Reform Judaism in the latter half of the 19th century. Its early growth mirrored the rise of Jewish communities in Memphis and across the South during that period. In 1884, the congregation dedicated its first synagogue on Main Street in downtown Memphis. This building became a central hub for Jewish life and religious practices, symbolizing the expanding presence and influence of Jewish people in the city.

By the late 1800s, Temple Israel officially embraced Reform Judaism, reflecting a broader national trend among Jewish communities in the United States. This shift was driven by a desire to modernize religious practices and integrate more fully into American society, aligning with Jewish congregations’ evolving needs and aspirations during that era. Spreading out like the spokes on a wheel, Temple Israel established connections to Jewish communities across the Mid-South, such as the Temple Beth El community in Helena, Arkansas, that remain to this day.

In 1941, Temple Israel relocated to a new synagogue on Poplar Avenue, which became a central gathering place for the congregation. This move marked a significant milestone in the synagogue’s history as it continued to grow and attract members from across Memphis. The new location solidified Temple Israel’s role as a vital and influential part of both the Jewish and broader Memphis communities.

In 1976, responding to demographic shifts, Temple Israel relocated to a larger campus on East Massey Road in East Memphis. This new location provided ample space to accommodate the growing congregation and featured expanded facilities, including a sanctuary, educational spaces, and community areas. The move underscored the synagogue’s commitment to serving the evolving needs of its members and fostering a vibrant community.

From the 1990s onward, Temple Israel became renowned for its emphasis on social action and community engagement. The congregation developed a range of programs focused on social justice, interfaith collaboration, and community service, positioning itself as a leader in these efforts within Memphis. In 2013, Temple Israel celebrated its 160th anniversary, marking over a century and a half of service, faith, and involvement in the community. This significant milestone was commemorated with a series of events that honored the congregation’s rich history and its contributions to both the Memphis and Southern Jewish communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Temple Israel adapted by expanding its digital services and online programs, enabling the congregation to stay connected with members virtually. This innovation has continued into the 2020s, with virtual Torah studies, live-streamed Shabbat services, and other digital initiatives broadening the synagogue’s reach within Memphis and beyond. This emphasis on technology has allowed members who have moved to other parts of the country an avenue to stay connected to Temple and maintain their roots in this community.

Temple Israel remains a dynamic and growing congregation committed to preserving its rich history while embracing new technologies and programming. Its ongoing contributions to Jewish life in Memphis and its leadership in faith, social justice, and community engagement testify to the synagogue’s resilience and commitment to its mission.

Temple Israel celebrated its 170th anniversary in 2024. In the early days of 2025, it continues to focus on growth and



Rabbi James A. Wax and Abe Plough at the groundbreaking at the current Temple Israel site.



Temple Israel at Poplar Avenue and Montgomery St.



Rabbi James A. Wax, Rabbi Harry W. Ettelson and Rabbi William H. Fineshriber in 1953.

fostering a deep sense of connectedness among its members and the larger Jewish community. By leveraging technology and designing innovative programming for all ages, the congregation is expanding its reach and creating opportunities for engagement across the region and the country. With an ongoing commitment to social justice, faith, and community, Temple Israel is poised to remain a dynamic force in Memphis, ensuring its members find meaningful ways to connect, learn, and serve together. As it adapts to the evolving needs of its congregation, Temple Israel will continue to build a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient community for generations to come.



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Congratulations to my beautiful wife, Sally Baer, for being chosen as an "Inspiring Person" by the Jewish Scene Magazine.

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-Papa Baer



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A REMARKABLE, UNTOLD HOLOCAUST STORY: “The Diary of Alfredo Sarano: We Are Here! We Are Alive!”

By Shoshana Cenker

“We Are Here! We Are Alive!” is the English translation of “Siamo Qui, Siamo Vivi” (San Paolo Press, 2017), the wartime diary of Alfredo Sarano (1906–1990), secretary of the Jewish Community of Milan, Italy. The book is about recent Memphis transplant, Liora Kelman’s nonna and nonna (grandparents), and was translated into English by Liora’s daughter, Avigayil Kelman, who also created the book jacket.

With commentary by historian Roberto Mazzoli, the book recounts Sarano’s daring efforts to shield his community from deportation, aided by Padre Sante Raffaelli, a Franciscan abbot sheltering Jewish refugees, and Erich Eder, a Nazi Wehrmacht officer who concealed their presence.

The riveting memoir explores vibrant Italian–Jewish life in the 1930s, bombings of Milan, the Jewish Brigade, and survival under Nazi occupation, culminating in the convergence of Sarano, Sante, and Eder in Mombaroccio, a critical site during the Battle for Italy. “We Are Here!” offers a vivid portrait of resilience, humanity, and the extraordinary courage of selfless, ordinary individuals.

*Responses by Avigayil. Answers have been edited for brevity.

1. Tell us about “We Are Here! We Are Alive!”

It’s the diary of my great-grandfather, Alfredo Sarano, with historical commentary by Roberto Mazzoli. Sarano served the Jewish community of Milan as an accountant and statistician and, after the Shoah, as the Segretario (Secretary), like a chief administrator.

This is the story of his efforts to protect his community from the ravages of the Shoah and his family’s survival in the Italian region of the Marche, thanks to a handful of Franciscan friars and farmers. The book covers the Saranos’ day-to-day lives in Milan and in the Nazi-occupied countryside where they were hiding – discovered by a Wehrmacht officer who plays a key role – as well as their experiences with the Jewish Brigade

and Allies, and how they rebuilt their community after the war.

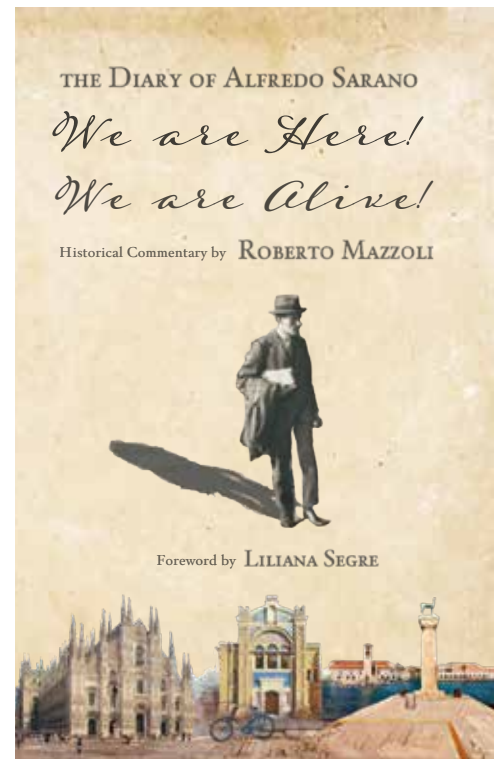
2. What was Italian–Jewish society like in the 1930s?

It was a vibrant community with a significant political, academic, and cultural presence in larger Italian society, although the Italian Jewish ghettos had only been abolished in 1860s and ’70s. The Milan community was growing rapidly as a major economic hub in Europe, becoming an attractive destination for Italian and foreign Jews – some fleeing persecution in Austria, Germany, other parts of Europe, and the Balkans.

Italian communities were expanding in general, with the big-city communities absorbing small rural ones under Mussolini’s policies, partly to consolidate the Jewish community structure and make it easier to control and monitor. Italian communities had tons of events and educational initiatives: the Maccabiah games, ADEI (a women’s organization akin to Hadassah), and holiday activities like Purim plays, Chanukah parties, and student Pesach seders. Italy was also at the forefront of the early Zionist movement, operating branches of Keren Kayemeth L’Israel (now JNF), participating in the Zionist Congress, preparing the Hebrew–Italian dictionary, and sending shlichim to other Jewish communities, as far off as the Belgian Congo. As émigrés fleeing persecutions joined Italian Jewish communities, numerous aid organizations sprang up to help them integrate and find work.

3. Share some of the remarkable details about Alfredo Sarano, Padre Sante Raffaelli, and Erich Eder.

Before the war, Sarano was a clerk for Milan’s Jewish community and, by the late ’30s, he began to feel uneasy about the monitoring of the Community members by the Fascist government. When he was tasked with assisting the Municipality to compare its Jewish lists with the Community’s, he only pretended to update it, secretly manipulating the data. When the Nazis invaded, he personally hid the Community’s lists.



The Franciscan Guardian of the Beato Sante Convent, Padre Sante, who helped hide the Saranos, was placed before a Fascist firing squad for harboring fugitives (Jews and partisans) in his parish – miraculously, he escaped. In 1969, he visited the Saranos in their Bnei Barak home; they’d made aliyah.

Erich Eder, the 18-year-old Wehrmacht officer, discovered the Jewish fugitives, including the Saranos, but hid them from his superiors. Also extraordinary: Eder’s own family hid and saved Betty Greif, a Jewish woman from their Bavarian hometown. Though he mentions the young officer in his diary, Sarano never knew what Eder had done for his family – we only know thanks to the author and historian/researcher Mazzoli.

4. Talk about the Jewish Brigade’s presence in Italy.

The Jewish Brigade was integral in liberating Italy and the rest of Europe from the Germans. It was officially established in 1944, however, other units of Jews from the British Mandate of Palestine were already operating within the Allied armies in various European campaigns. Later, these men, including many European Jewish partisans, were absorbed by the Jewish Brigade. These “forgotten Allies” were instrumental.

Besides fighting on the battlefield, they rebuilt destroyed infrastructure, held training courses for the Allies in their

areas of expertise (i.e., camouflage and engineering), and greatly raised the morale of Jews devastated by the Shoah. In fact, the first time the Israeli flag was ever hoisted was on an Italian battlefield, at Brisighella – it was personally brought by Moshe Sharett, with the approval of Churchill and Roosevelt. Sarano describes his encounters with the Jewish units and his great emotion and pride at seeing Jewish soldiers come to the rescue.

5. What do you hope readers will take away from the book?

That it's key to be aware of history and its lessons. That it's paramount to never think you are the exception and won't be touched by the capricious winds of change. And to act in life as if these ancestral stories of heroism and survival are more than stories, but a guide to ideal ways of operating in this world.

Plus, the value of proactivity and flexibility in the face of hardship – to never despair. Sarano wasn't a glamorous figure, and until the war, he appeared to be leading a quiet life, but it was anything but. The effects of his industry and activity for the Jewish people – his lifetime's work – will reverberate endlessly. The diary highlights that it is key to never fall into complacency, because it brings paralysis. Simply moving forward – whatever comes one's way – and putting one foot before the other, can be heroic.

6. What has this project meant to your family?

The descendants of Alfredo Sarano, Erich Eder, and Igino and Annetta Ciaffoni (the family who hid the Saranos in their farmhouse) have met in person, and we are all in contact – that's really special for us and a wonderful way to continue my great-grandfather's legacy.

After surviving the war, he sent the Ciaffonis a Christmas basket every year for the rest of his life as a small thanks. Members from all our families traveled to Israel in 2022 to meet President Herzog in honor of the Hebrew publication of this book. It's like having an extended family, which is the perfect way to honor our ancestors and their courage and faith. Furthermore, the Eder and Ciaffoni families have been extremely supportive since Oct. 7.

7. Anything else you'd like to share?

The relationship between the Italian Jewish community and the Vatican during the Shoah is a complicated and painful chapter. Given the broader context of the war and the actions of various institutions, there are some who are reserved about highlighting actions of clerical or Catholic individuals who helped Jews.

Even Italian Senator Liliana Segre, in her preface, explains that at first, it was tough to engage with stories of "righteous" figures due the profound trauma she personally endured at the hands of her Italian and German persecutors. Yet, it's vital to preserve and amplify these stories of courage and compassion that have been somewhat lost to time. Whether grand or modest, the acts of those who risked their lives to help others must be remembered, as a reminder of our own standards. Though it may seem counterintuitive, the Jewish people have had – and continue to have – some remarkable friends. Jewish persecution has been the norm rather than the exception throughout history. Those who support us are rare, exceptional people. In light of events since Oct. 7, those who stand with us are undoubtedly special – their solidarity mustn't be seen as something prosaic, but immensely important.



Alfredo Sarano holds up with satisfaction the parchment inaugurating the reconstruction of the Synagogue of via Guastalla in Milan (September 13, 1951).



Alfredo Sarano in his office at via Unione, 5, circa 1950, in the newly established premises of the Jewish community.



The Sarano sisters in Milan, 1946.



Sarano family at their apartment on via Innocenzo Isimbardi in 1960. Inside, from right: Alfredo, Miriam, and Diana. Outside, from right: Matilde and Vittoria.

GRAMMY and Emmy-Winning Memphian Robert Gordon Honored with Beale Street Brass Note

By Matt Timberlake :: Photos by Dean Deyo

In November, Memphis-based writer, filmmaker, and cultural chronicler Robert Gordon took his spot among the legends who have inspired his work when his Beale Street Brass Note was unveiled in a ceremony at A. Schwab.

"I think I got the Brass Note because of the sum total of my previous work and the ongoing contributions I make to sharing Memphis' history and music scene and feel and vibe and mojo," said Robert.

"One foundational event for me was seeing Furry Lewis at the Rolling Stones show in 1977. I described this in the opening pages of 'It Came from Memphis,'" he said, referencing his debut book, published in 1995. "Growing up, a lot of my friends would say, 'I can't wait to get out of this town.' And I was going, 'you guys, there's great stuff here. What are you talking about?'"

Gordon did leave Memphis for about a decade, heading out for college and the first handful of years of his career, before returning to Memphis in the 80s to edit a film. His return was supposed to last 15 weeks, but projects kept finding him. He had been right all along; Memphis is a fascinating place filled with spellbinding stories. He made a career here, telling these stories in books, films, box set liner notes, magazines and more.

"I bring a certain framing to it. For one thing, I've got a national perspective, an international perspective, but Memphis origins," he said. "A lot of it goes back to visiting Furry Lewis's duplex when I was in 10th or 11th grade and a seeing a living situation that was so foreign to me because I was an East Memphis white, Jewish boy trying to understand how someone could live in conditions like that, or even just understand living conditions like that."

Gordon's work has been described by others as "focused on the American South – its music, art, and politics – to create an insider's portrait of his home, both nuanced and ribald" and it's the balanced combination of historical accuracy and gifted storytelling that has led to nominations for major awards.

His first GRAMMY nomination came in 1997 for his liner notes for Al Green's "Anthology" box set, with his first win coming from the Big Star set "Keep an Eye on the Sky" in 2011. In 2024, he won two GRAMMYS for his work on "Written In Their Soul: The Stax Songwriter Demos." He's also nabbed several GRAMMY noms for Best Long Form Music Video for his work behind the camera. In 2017, he won an Emmy for his documentary "Best of Enemies: Buckley vs. Vidal," which breaks out of the American South to tell the story of the televised debates between liberal Gore Vidal and conservative William F. Buckley. But, he says, the Brass Note hits different.



Award-winning author Robert Gordon smiles at long-time collaborator and Stax Records icon Deanie Parker at the event unveiling his Beale Street Brass Note, which was unveiled late last year.



Memphis-based author Robert Gordon shows off his Beale Street Brass Note at a November ceremony at A.Schwab, the 150-year old family-owned general store that anchors the iconic strip in downtown Memphis.

"Getting recognized in my hometown was a different kind of honor and extra special. I didn't expect it to be, but it definitely was," he said. "In my hometown everything that goes on that's related to any of the work I do, I want to be part of and responsible for it and leading it. I'm like; 'oh, man, how could they do that without me?' I like to contribute to that stuff. To have that feeling countered by this particular recognition is super great."

He was also quick to mention he didn't earn his Brass Note on his own. He points to family and community as strong allies in his work.

"I'll tell you what my secret weapon is, absolutely my wife, Tara McAdams. She's my front line," said Robert. "We were friends for 10 years before we started dating. What a foundation she was already back then. She was reading my stuff and giving me feedback with absolute sincerity and full awareness."

"There's been a consistent branch of the Jewish community that has always been drawn to the arts, to music," he said. "And Memphis is a place where that kind of interest can be brought out more so than if you're in some town where music doesn't thrive."

Ashley (Ash) Schudel a Gentle “Man”

By Susan C. Nieman

From a skinny kitten of the streets to a regal, Southern gentleman, Ash Schudel pulled out all the cutest looks to land in the home of this Savannah family.

When Rebecca and Jeremie Schudel began creating their own family unit in 2021, this loving cat showed up right in time with big, bright blue eyes, perfect gray stripes, a single pink toe bean (the rest are gray), and a personality to melt anyone’s heart. That hot day in July, as they were picking their child up at their co-parent’s house, Ash fearlessly came up to everyone for belly rubs and water. “There’s no way we were leaving that cobbled backstreet without him,” says Rebecca, a Memphis native.

When asked their favorite thing about their pet, Remi (10-years-old) says, “Everything!” To say Remi is obsessed with Ash is putting it mildly. “He sleeps in the sink sometimes like a little burrito and skitters around our home in the middle of the night, but we love him so much! We rarely call him Ash unless he’s in trouble. We call him ‘Mr. Man’ because he’s a little gentleman. He loves keeping my top bunk warm while I’m at school.”

“He puts up with everything,” says Jeremie, “We have a 2-year-old now, and she is constantly booping his nose or trying to eat his tail. He just sits there patiently. He even likes playing with dogs!”

LOVE MOST

How sweet, welcoming and gentle our cat is with our kids as well as everyone who enters our home.

PET PEEVE

Night zoomies. Also, Ash loves to eat so we have to make sure he’s only getting fed at the right time of day by ONE person. It’s Remi’s job to feed the cat but our 2-year-old has recently taken to helping as well.

TIDBITS

The Schudels love the “Evil Dead” franchise and named Ash after Ashley “Ash” Williams.



Remi and Ash



Ash loves to hang in the bathroom sink



Ash cuddles with 2-year-old Miriam



Holocaust survivor Jack Cohen, daughter Sara Beth Cohen-Wilcox and son-in-law Philip Wilcox with Priscilla Presley.

Unknown Child Foundation's Impactful "A Night to Shine" Gala

By Shoshana Cenker, 3rd-generation Holocaust survivor :: Photos by Lillia Osadzinski

It's a sight you might not expect: non-Jews – adults and students – gathering in the Deep South of Southaven, Mississippi, to honor Jewish children lost in the Holocaust. On a brisk night in December 2024, they joined Holocaust survivors, Jews, guest speaker Priscilla Presley, clergy, parents, teachers, mayors, members of state and U.S. legislature, and others for the Unknown Child Foundation's (UCF) "A Night to Shine" gala.

See, 15 years ago, Horn Lake Middle School teachers Susan Powell and Melissa (Swartz) Wheeler were struck by how little their students knew about the Holocaust. Along with volunteer Diane McNeil, the women created the "The Pennies Project" to make this history tangible. Students began collecting one penny for every Jewish child murdered in the Holocaust – 1.5 million in total.

Then, Gen SC, a Germantown, TN-based homeschool group, heard about the project and enthusiastically joined. They even honored Jack Cohen, a Memphis-based Holocaust survivor who'd shared his story with them, raising \$25,000 to present him with a maquette (small model) of the heartbreaking Unknown Child sculpture as a touching tribute.

Wanting to share what they'd learned, the students formed the Unknown Child Foundation and created "The Unknown Child Holocaust Exhibit." On display at the DeSoto County Museum in Hernando, it's a look at the Holocaust through the eyes of children. It's both

exquisite and painful, each aspect meticulously thought out.

Since then, the UCF has worked tirelessly on its mission: to bring people together to honor and never forget the 1.5 million Jewish children whose lives were stolen. That includes plans to build a stunning memorial park and museum in honor of Holocaust victims.

"Our goal of A Night to Shine was to create broader awareness of Unknown Child to both the Jewish and Christian communities and to begin a fundraising campaign for future initiatives," explained Peter Felsenthal, UCF board member. "It's important to understand that the Unknown Child Foundation was founded by members of the Christian community, initially through the Pennies Project. [The students] strongly desired to honor the 1.5 million children who perished during the Holocaust, but most importantly to make sure they are never forgotten. The history of these children and, frankly, all those who perished during the Holocaust is something that



Gen SC students and parents with Priscilla Presley.

must be understood by Christians and Jews alike, as not just a moment in time but as a stark reminder of what can happen to any class or background of individuals due to hatred, intolerance, a lack of empathy, and a complete disregard for human life."

The evening's compelling program incorporated several exceptional speakers including the curator of the Historic DeSoto Foundation/DeSoto County Museum, prayers by Jewish and non-Jewish clergy, messages from the UCF Board of Directors president, details about the Pennies Project, recognition of Holocaust, 2nd-, and 3rd-generation



Audience with Holocaust survivor Friderica Saharovichi with son Livio Saharovichi and Priscilla Presley.

survivors, special guest speaker Priscilla Presley, what's next for UCF, and closing remarks.

"A Night to Shine was such a blessing for us, honoring the memory of the children who perished in the Holocaust. I am thankful for our social media manager, Board, and all who volunteered to make this happen," said Susan Powell. "It was an honor to have Priscilla Presley join us and share our passion for this special project. So thankful for all who heard our message and are joining us to continue to Never Forget."

So, how did Priscilla get involved? Her name was one of several the UCF Board discussed. "One of the connections of Priscilla to the organization is the potential site of the [UCF] memorial and museum, which is Circle G Ranch in Horn Lake, Mississippi. This site just so happens to be property previously owned by Elvis Presley and is where Elvis and Priscilla spent quite a bit of time riding horses and enjoying time away from Graceland. It was also where they honeymooned following their return from Las Vegas," explained Peter. "We also felt the cause might resonate with her, so we thought we would at least give it a shot. Through a friend, we managed to make contact with Priscilla, and as they say, the rest is history!"

Priscilla was incredibly gracious, attending a VIP reception, mingling with the crowd, taking photos with VIP attendees and their guests, and signing copies of her book "Elvis and Me" for major sponsors.

The event also included a silent auction to raise additional funds for UCF. And a thrilling highlight came when Gen SC presented a \$13,000 gift to UCF.

"We were not in a Christian environment or a Jewish environment. We all had a common goal: lifting up the murdered children of the Holocaust and elevating them to a prominent position for all to see, remember and revere," said Diane McNeil, president, UCF Board of Directors. "This is obviously extremely important to Jewish people, and what a blessing that those in attendance witnessed that it was extremely important to Christians as well."

There was a defining moment during Mississippi Governor Reeves' video message, when he proclaimed Dec. 16, 2024, as Mississippi's Unknown Child Holocaust Day. "To recognize the important work of the UCF was not only impactful but showed both a personal and state commitment to the cause," added Peter. "One of the goals of the Unknown Child Foundation is to assist with the establishment of a Mississippi Holocaust Commission, and now understanding the Governor's

commitment to the cause gives us a much greater sense of hope for the establishment of such a commission."

There's much to be done for UCF. The group is working toward building a permanent memorial and museum, as it continues to educate about the 1.5 million children lost – through events, social media, and promoting visits to the temporary exhibit at the DeSoto County Museum.

"Our plan is to also create a traveling exhibit to expand the reach of our organization. We believe a traveling exhibit will not only help us educate more people about the children but also assist us in raising additional funds for the permanent memorial and museum," Peter noted. "The building of the memorial and museum is an ambitious project, and a very strong focus will be working to secure major donors and raising funds through ongoing fundraising events. Finally, and of great importance, we are currently working on expanding our Board and hiring our first executive director, both of which are critical as we look ahead to continuing the mission of the UCF."

UCF hopes that by teaching about the Holocaust and sharing the stories of today's children remembering yesterday's fallen children, legacies will inspire awareness, peace, and understanding.

"The event was inspiring," said Memphian Adam Exelbierd, Tennessee Holocaust Commission commissioner, 3rd-generation survivor, and A Night to Shine planning committee member, who shared stories from his survivor grandparents, the importance of educating future generations, and gratitude for UCF. "Lately, with so much antisemitism, it's gotten hard. But to see this group of non-Jewish people and their dedication to remembering the children lost is something special."

"What was incredibly heartwarming about the event was the amazing sense of unity about the importance of the Unknown Child Foundation and its cause," echoed Peter. "This came from Christian and Jewish attendees, both of which were well represented at the event. We could just sense and became even more energized from both comments received and the interaction of those in attendance that once our mission is understood, the support – whether financial or otherwise – would follow."

To learn more or donate to the UCF's memorial park fundraiser: unknownchild.org



Tennessee Holocaust Commission Commissioner and 3rd generation Holocaust survivor Adam Exelbierd, with wife Meredith and Priscilla Presley.

Spring Fashion

By Rebecca Brown

The scent of spring is in the air and while we may not be quite ready to pack away our outerwear, we can certainly start curating our spring wardrobe edit. This season, delicate pastels and floral prints are a welcome change of scenery from fall's jewel tones. There's also a newfound lightness to be felt with woven textures, like raffia accessories and straw hats, incorporated into our ensembles. Pink – from powder to fuchsia – is the real star of the season. Embrace it and its undeniable positivity. After the past few months, aren't you ready to put a spring back in your step? Get started with our roundup of must-haves, below.



TIJN: Vespera
Sunglasses \$125



Marc Fisher:
Caddy \$170



J.Crew: Packable Straw Hat \$69.50



Foreign Fare: Jetsetter Jacket \$198



Earth: Flurry Woven
Slide Sandal \$89



Rails: Serenity
Dress in
Amaranth
\$258



Grey Bandit:
Martha Sweater
\$65



France Luxe:
Aruba Jaw
Clip \$18



J.Crew: Drapey
Pleated Shirt
Dress \$188



Marc Fisher:
Kodie \$130

CROSSROADS: Chance or Destiny?

By Harry Samuels

This collection of connection stories is a follow up to Harry's first book, *Beshert*, which Jewish Scene readers enjoyed years ago. I hope you enjoy them as much as I do.

All of us have the ability to experience the synchronicity that is often the result of reaching out to others. ~ Harry Samuels

THE PACKAGE

As told to Harry Samuels by Rabbi Manis Friedman

Rabbi Manis Friedman told this story at a religious retreat last year. The rabbi in the story was the father of Rabbi Friedman's teacher.

"Many years ago, the atheistic government of Russia banned religious practices. One day, a pious Jew was caught building a Mikvah (ritual bath) and was exiled to live in the Arctic for twelve years.

During that arduous period, he was determined to observe his religious practices. The Arctic natives, who saw him, called him a holy man. They invited him to live in their shelter, curtaining off a space for him with a reindeer skin. On Friday nights, they gave him a kerosene lamp to light, symbolic of the Sabbath candles that are traditionally lit at that time.

Soon Pesach (Passover) was approaching. In years past, the rabbi's wife sent him matzos (unleavened bread) to eat, but this year the matzos didn't come.

The natives knew his food consisted only of bread and without the matzo substitute, they feared the Rabbi might starve. Each day they checked for the missing package.

The day before Pesach, a message came to the government headquarters that an official was arriving that day by ship. Someone was needed to drive a sled to the dock and pick him up. As it was the beginning of spring, the ice was melting, and it was dangerous to drive a heavy load. The driver was instructed NOT to bring any packages from the post office.

As the driver was ready to return with his passenger, the postman stopped him and said, 'you must take this package with you. It is the most important-looking package I have ever seen. Look at all the official stamps on it. If you don't take it, we might all be in trouble.' Reluctantly, the driver took the box and delivered it to his outpost. It was the Rabbi's matzos.

The reason for the mysterious stamps was this: The Russian officials who mailed the package didn't want it to arrive on time. Anticipating this, the rabbi's wife mailed it several months in advance. Instead of sending the package north, the quickest route, it was intentionally misdirected to the south by the authorities. At every postal stop, the package was stamped. By the time it reached the Arctic, it was completely covered and most impressive looking."

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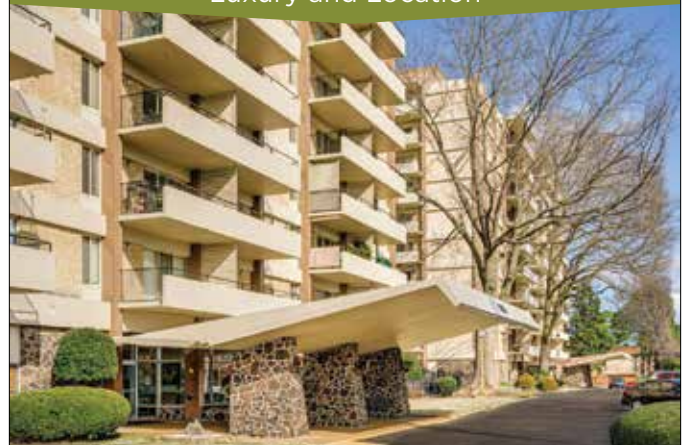
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