

# Jewish Scene

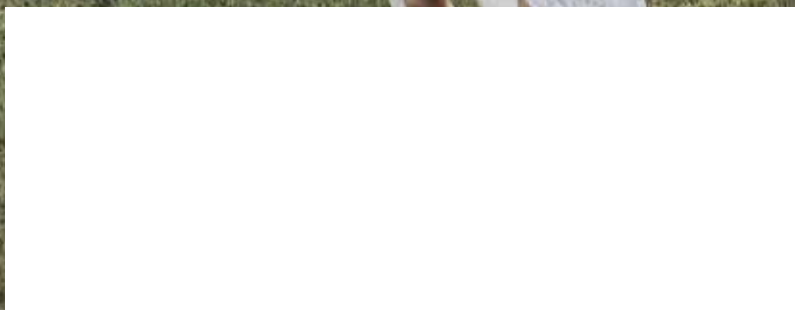
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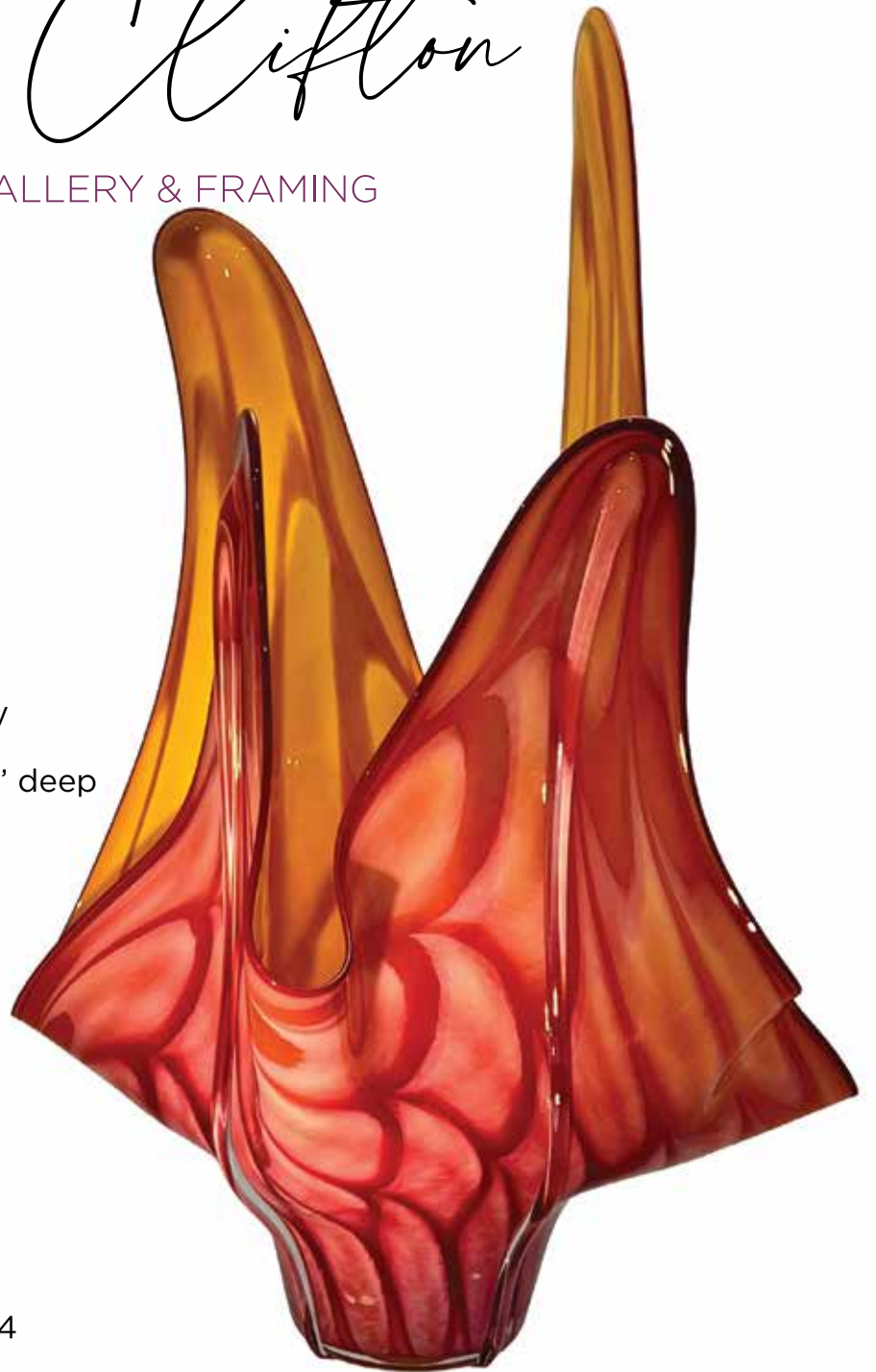
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*Liz and Sammy Rosenberg :: Photo by Wandering Creative*



# Contributors



Shoshana Y. Cenker is a word & grammar nerd with nearly 25 years in creative services. She's the founder of Wonderful Word Nerd, her freelance communications consultancy, and co-founder of Two Chicks in a Coop, a creative services agency. She brings brands to life through content strategy, writing, editing, editorial leadership and marketing communications across industries. Known for capturing a client's true voice and making complex ideas feel clear and compelling, she's built a career at the intersection of precision and storytelling. She and her three kiddos – twin boys Aiden and Kivi, and daughter Lyla – along with their pup, Jasper, and cat, Felix, happily live in her hometown of Memphis. ShoshanaAY@gmail.com



Leigh Hendry is the executive director of Plough Towers. She has over 30 years of experience in the field of elder care; ranging from adult day services, Alzheimer's care as well as many years in the not-for-profit sector. She has a degree from the University of Alabama in Criminal Justice and Sociology but found her passion working with the aging population.

A lifelong Memphian, Leigh and her husband, Rob, live with their 2 dogs, Zoe and Birdie, and have 5 grown children and 11 grandchildren.



Melinda Lejman is a lifelong Memphian and Jew by choice. She and her husband are the proud parents of three children and maintain a lively household of beloved four-legged companions.

With a professional background spanning the nonprofit and education sectors, Melinda now brings her experience and compassion to her work as a massage therapist and coach, supporting individuals and groups in cultivating balance, wellness and personal growth.

Deeply committed to animal welfare, she volunteers for local organizations and is the founder of a charitable dog treat company that reflects her passion for giving back to the community.



Baylee Less-Eiseman serves as the director of development for Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. Formerly, she's worked at Youth Villages, Temple Israel, and the Kemmons Wilson Family Foundation. Baylee serves on the Board of Directors for Music Export Memphis, and she is also pursuing a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Memphis. Baylee lives in East Memphis with her husband, Monte, daughter Dahlia, and two cats, Miso and Matcha.



Debbie Rosenthal is your luxury travel advisor with 22+ years' experience. My expertise includes luxury and small ship cruises, river cruises, private custom land tours, all-inclusive vacations, luxury villa rentals, active and wellness vacations, adventure and expedition travel, luxury hotels, spas and resorts, honeymoons, multigenerational and special interest group travel and escorted tours. 901.682.5600 \* debbie@orianatravel.com \* OrianaTravel.com

**Upcoming Issues**

Don't be left out of the 2026 Guide to Jewish Memphis  
Deadline for space is August 1, 2026

For details contact Susan Nieman  
susan@jewishscenemagazine.com

The graphic features a large black arrow pointing right, surrounded by colorful circles in yellow, orange, pink, and blue. Below the arrow, there are images of the magazine cover and a person at a booth. The magazine cover shows a menorah and the text 'GUIDE TO JEWISH MEMPHIS' and 'CHANUKA FIND'.

# Letter From the Editor

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Dear JSM Readers,

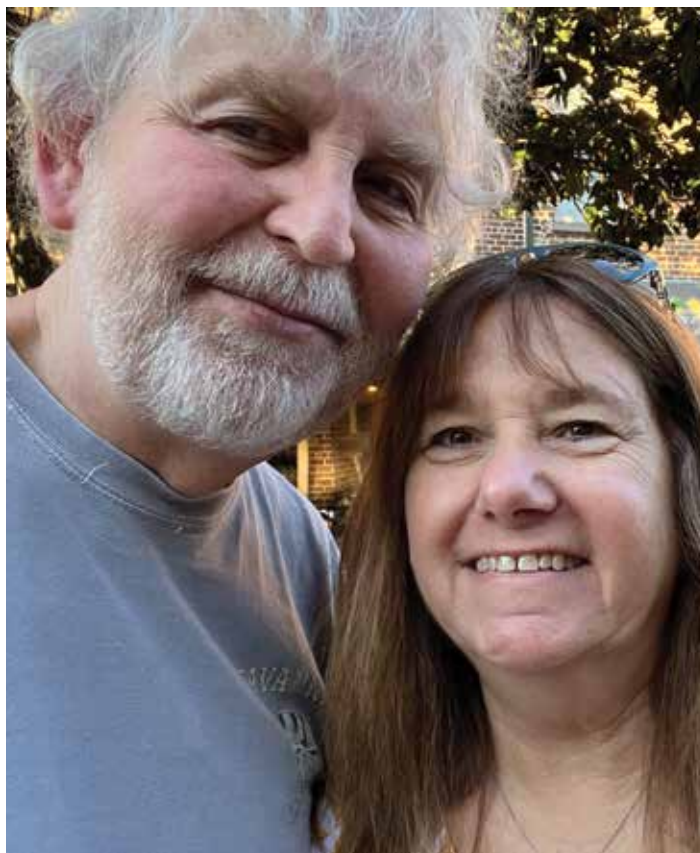
Today marks the first day of summer and plans for the fall are already in the works.

Leading up to Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab's (MJHR) 100-year-anniversary, which begins in 2027, are various events for people to help commemorate this momentous occasion. In August 2026, Community Day kicks off the celebrations at the Home. A host of all-day activities gives community members an opportunity to garden, play games or assist residents with an art project. History buffs may opt to help staff research the archives. Members of the Home's Legacy Society are invited to a special brunch, while everyone is invited to the parade at noon and party at 2 p.m. Volunteers, collaborators and sponsorship opportunities abound. On October 5, 2026, they will hold their annual Golf and Tennis Tournament. See page 23 for a list of events in 2027. If you'd like to join the festivities and to get specific information, contact Baylee Less at [bless@mepmphisjewishhome.org](mailto:bless@mepmphisjewishhome.org).

Plough Towers is excited to share that their residents have a weekly Friday night ride to Temple Israel Shabbat services thanks to a generous grant from Memphis Jewish Federation. Read more about Shabbat Shuttle, page 24, which offers residents a way to stay spiritually connected when otherwise transportation may have been an issue.

We also want to celebrate the marriage of Liz Posner and Sammy Rosenberg (page 6) whose connection happened by chance at a young adult event sponsored by Temple Israel.

Be inspired this month by Josh Gortler's remarkable Holocaust journey on page 10, Andrew Woods' healing journey on page 12, Jo Anne Fusco's journey of helping others on page 14 and Yocheved's journey to Judaism on page 20. They all have powerful stories to share.



If you're up for some adventures this summer and want to stay close to home, check out the new interactive family-friendly attraction on Mud Island. The Baron Von Opperbean and the River of Time (BVO) brings back fond memories for those who remember the old Mississippi River museum and offers a day's worth of imagination-building.

If you're more in the mood for a luxury ship experience, and want to combine some Jewish history, you'll want to check out Jewish Heritage Along the Rivers with Debbie Rosenthal on page 9.

Meet the playful Neyland Steinberg on page 21. Ney has been a constant companion of Heather Murphy's since David Steinberg's, z"l, untimely passing in 2024.

Jewish Scene is always on the lookout for inspiring people, playful pets, lives well lived and amazing organization stories. Please reach out to me, [susan@jewishscenemagazine.com](mailto:susan@jewishscenemagazine.com). All suggestions are welcome!

Shalom,

Susan C. Nieman - Publisher/Editor

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Liz and Sammy  
Rosenberg

# Celebrating Love, Family & Tradition Under the Family Chuppah

By Shoshana Censer : Photos by Wandering Creative

Some love stories begin with fireworks. Others come from blind dates. Dating apps and sites bring some couples together. Liz Posner and Sammy Rosenberg’s serendipitous journey began with an invitation from a mutual friend, then a “not-date.”

“We were both invited to Temple Israel’s ConnectTI happy hour at Wiseacre Brewery in downtown Memphis by Rabbi Jeff Dreifus in 2023,” Liz shared. “We didn’t really talk at that event, but then a few weeks later, we ran into each other at the Cooper-Young Community Farmers Market and Sammy asked for my number.”

A couple weeks later, Sammy asked Liz out to a concert at Minglewood Hall. “Liz didn’t know it as a date,” added Sammy, “but it was definitely a date.”

Fast-forward to 2025, when the couple was married on Oct. 18, at Temple Israel, surrounded by family, generations of tradition, and a wedding weekend that could not have been more Memphis if it tried.

The celebration began the night before the rehearsal dinner with a Halloween-themed event for the couple’s closest friends. “It was so much fun getting to show our out-of-town friends and family Memphis, the city we love and call home, and all of our favorite spots here,” Liz said. “A party bus took us to The Cove Bar, Wild Bill’s Juke Joint and Beale Street.”

The following night, attendees gathered downtown for a welcome party at Wiseacre,



where the couple first met, before guests headed to Earnestine & Hazel's.

The lovely couple's wedding at Temple embraced a warm autumn palette of burgundy, dusty rose, terra-cotta, and gold. "I was obsessed with the flowers," Liz shared. "We had a lot of input in the wedding planning and worked with the amazing Sheril Greenstein as our wedding planner."

An especially unforgettable highlight arrived just as the ceremony got underway.

"One of the most magical moments was the instant our ceremony began, some guests on the Rosenberg side heard a familiar voice right away," Liz explained. "It was the recording of Sammy's grandfather Seymour singing and playing, 'It Had to Be You' with his big band."

"I love how Liz and Sam workshopped every detail of their wedding," Sammy's mother, Sally Rosenberg, said. "It seemed to me that they wanted everything to have meaning for them, from the security car that delivered the rings down the aisle to the surprise second line horn section playing at the back of the sanctuary as they exited."

That special ring delivery was, indeed, a highlight. "The ring bearers, with sunglasses on, drove down the aisle in a miniature electric Lexus," Sammy said of the standout moment, "and delivered the rings to me."

Yet beneath the fun and celebration was something deeply emotional and spiritual.

"Someone asked me an interesting question: 'What was I most excited to show to our out-of-town guests about Memphis?' I knew the answer would be Rabbi Micah Greenstein, but I didn't quite expect how amazing his ceremony under the chuppah would be," Liz shared. "He created such a spiritually powerful and beautiful experience. I really felt like we were surrounded by all the generations that came before us. It was emotional standing under the chuppah that has been used in Sammy's family for generations."

"It's an adrenaline rush, while at the same time a very comforting feeling," noted Sammy. "You're nervous until you see that you're surrounded by the most important people in your life."

Watching the couple marry underneath the Rosenbergs' chuppah carried enormous meaning.

"My heart was overflowing as I watched Liz and Sam get to know each other, romance each other, fall in love with each other," Sally said, "and finally make this beautiful commitment under our family chuppah."

"Everything was wonderful. I enjoyed the traditional chair raising," shared Liz's dad, Marshall Posner. "The Rosenbergs treated us like long-lost relatives."



*Ketubah signing in the Danziger Chapel*



*Rabbi Micah Greenstein officiated as the couple stood under the Rosenberg family chuppah.*



*The rings arrive via a mini Lexus.*



*Sammy's parents, Jeff and Sally, enjoy the moment.*



*Sammy and the boys.*



*The happy couple.*



*Sammy and Liz with their parents, Jeff and Sally Rosenberg and Amy and Marshall Posner.*



*The flowers that embellished the bema and carried through to the reception hall embraced a warm autumn palette of burgundy, dusty rose, terra-cotta and gold.*



“This was the best hora ever,” added Amy Posner. “The world has never seen such a hora, not even close!”

The afterparty continued at Paula & Raiford’s Disco, while Sunday brunch at Sammy’s office in the Tennessee Brewery featured Hive Bagel & Deli before many guests wandered over to the RiverArtsFest downtown. “A perfect Memphis weekend,” Liz called it.

Throughout the festivities filled with laughter, all things Memphis, and plenty of memorable moments, the sense of family, connection, and shared joy is exactly what made the weekend feel so special.

Liz, a New Jersey native, came to Memphis through Teach For America after graduating from Brandeis University. Today, she works as a writer leading communications and marketing for a climate action nonprofit. Sammy, born and raised in Memphis, attended The Ohio State University for civil engineering and later earned his MBA in finance from the University of Memphis. He now works for Tower Ventures as a project manager and owner’s representative.

“I was overwhelmed to watch my son and my new daughter start their lives together. What a blessing!” Sammy’s dad, Jeff Rosenberg shared. “As I watched Sam and Liz admire one another, I realized that these are the moments and milestones in life that matter most.”



## JEWISH HERITAGE ALONG THE RIVERS

On one of Uniworld's Jewish Heritage cruises, you can feel the connection just stepping ashore from your ship—2,000 years of Jewish history infusing every cobblestone, leaving its mark on the history and culture of Europe at every stop.

The Jewish Heritage voyages sail two of Europe's most storied rivers, the Rhine and the Danube, connecting guests with centuries of Jewish history in cities such as Budapest, Vienna, and Cologne, while offering an all-inclusive luxury stay aboard Uniworld's floating boutique hotels.

The 2,000-year-old history of the Jewish people in Europe is an inspiring one, rife with tragedy and discrimination, as well as the endurance and profound sense of community that survived it all. Uniworld's Jewish Heritage cruises pay homage to this legacy.

The distinctive program showcases Jewish communities, highlighting positive developments and locals who are helping Jewish culture grow and thrive in the modern day. While visits to Holocaust memorials, Jewish museums, and WWII sites are an important part of this journey, Uniworld's aim is to tell the whole story—the story of a culture that flourished for centuries despite the odds.



They've designed their Jewish Heritage theme cruises to serve as cross-cultural "bridges of understanding," both for travelers looking to explore their roots and anyone who would enjoy an immersive journey through an integral aspect of European history.



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Josh & Rabbi Lau with photos of the nurse who saved him.

## FROM DEATH'S DOOR TO A PURPOSEFUL LIFE OF IMPACT:

# Josh Gortler's Remarkable Holocaust Journey Against All Odds

By Shoshana Center

Child Holocaust survivor Josh Gortler's remarkable life and success against all odds begins with tremendous uncertainty.

"My story is moving from place to place," he explained, "without knowing where I will be the next day."

Born in May 1936, in Tomaszów Lubelski, Poland, Josh was just 3 years old when Nazi forces uprooted his family. What followed was a childhood in Russia defined by constant fear and slave labor.

"My brother, my parents, and I were rounded up and taken to a ghetto," he said. "After escaping and hiding in different places, my parents found me and my brother, and we crossed over the border into Rava-Ruska. My first memory, at age 5, is being in a shelter under the Russian army. Next, we went east to Siberia, where the temperature reached 24 degrees below-zero Fahrenheit."

Josh remembers constant snow, as Jews were forced laborers, cutting down trees. "My uncle died when a tree fell on him," Josh said. "He survived the worst, just to get taken out by a tree."

"Historical documents show that 19 days after we left Siberia, Nazis came back, forcing the Jews to dig their own graves," he added. "Everyone was shot dead."

Weeks in overcrowded trains followed. "No sanitation, no food. People died inside, and their corpses were thrown out to make room." The family reached Uzbekistan, where survival in

112-degree heat became the only goal.

"What did we do there? Survive," Josh said. "We lived in a hut. My father was a genius at figuring out how to keep us alive. He worked in a bakery and came back with bread hidden inside his clothes, because our food rations were so small. He gave us first, then to other children."

Miraculously, Josh, his brother, parents, an aunt, and three cousins survived. "The rest of our family was wiped out." After liberation in 1945, Josh's family took a train to Poland where they discovered their house and belongings had been confiscated. They had nothing.

After bribing their way through Polish, Russian, French, and British zones, they ended up in an American Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Germany. It was there that 9-year-old Josh saw running water for the first time – he thought the bathroom urinal was a water fountain. With DP kids speaking various Eastern European languages, the DP school system taught secular and religious subjects in Hebrew. At 15 years old, Josh had his first bite of chocolate.

"There were many weddings in the DP camps to regenerate a generation. A women's chesed group made six wedding gowns from some white material they found," he remembered. "When a bride walked down the aisle, five other women carried empty wedding gowns, representing those who perished. Everything had meaning."

Jewish Federation and Jewish Family Service sponsored the Gortler family's immigration to the United States in 1951. First to New Orleans, then Phoenix. Once again, he started over. "My name was Szia," Josh explained. "The social worker and translator who met us at the train station in Phoenix said my name wouldn't work in America. They told me I was James. My father Yosef became Joseph; my mother Estera became Esther, and my brother Moses was Morris. ... My first day at Yeshiva University's (YU) Manhattan Talmudical Academy (MTA) high school, I said, 'My name is Jimmy.' When a rabbi asked my Hebrew name, I told him Yehoshua. He said, 'From today, you are Joshua.'"

From there, Josh rebuilt his life. He learned English, completed MTA, earned a bachelor's in psychology and a master's in social work, both from YU. While in college, he met his wife, Sarah, from Denver, who was studying at Stern. "Married in 1961, I wouldn't be Josh without her," he shared. "We have two children, Nina and Shlomo, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren."

Josh became CEO of Kline Galland, a Jewish elder services organization in Seattle. He built and managed its massive \$70 million operation in a state-of-the-art retirement facility, which included a Foundation that raised more than \$100 million and the largest private collection of Dale Chihuly glasswork.

There's one incredible story that stands out from his nearly 50 years leading Kline Galland. "A woman called asking for her non-Jewish aunt to be admitted to Kline Galland despite the yearlong waitlist. She said, 'My aunt was a Red Cross nurse during the liberation of a concentration camp. Among the people she nursed back to life were two young brothers who were skeletons when she found them. One of the boys is now the chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau. My aunt has no money. I'm her only relative. What can you do?'" Josh explained. "The next day, the woman's aunt became a resident."

It just so happened that Federation sponsored Rabbi Lau to visit Seattle as a guest speaker. The Federation rep told Josh that Rabbi Lau knew that the woman who saved his life was at Kline Galland and before meeting dignitaries in the city, he had to see the woman who saved him and his brother.

Now 90, Josh reflects on many memorable moments. Meeting the late Robert F. Kennedy, earning an honorary doctorate from YU in 2014, garnering professional awards and recognitions, writing about his journey in "Among the Remnants."

"I did not want a horror book; I wanted it to be uplifting and written on a level that students can understand. I didn't want anything about the term 'survivor.' To be a survivor is something you've done. I hadn't done anything; we were just the leftovers. In the DP camps, we were referred to as she'arit Hapleta — the remnants," Josh shared of the phrase that carries deep historical weight, tracing to the Jews' expulsion from our land and returning with Ezra and Nehemiah: 'those who remained, who endured, and who rebuilt.' "One night, I woke up and realized that's the title: 'Among the Remnants.' What happened to the people who survived? What did they do with their life? How are they impacting other people? Can you imagine if six million more survived? What this world would have been... how many artists, writers, researchers, Jewish scholars?"

Josh and Sarah, who've been married for 65 years, live a happy Orthodox life in Memphis next door to Nina's family. They have an incredible library of sefarim (religious books), many of which came from Eastern Europe, including older versions of Pirkei Avos, Gemaras, Mishnas, and Hagaddahs, one from the Föhrenwald DP camp.

Josh continues sharing his story in schools, community settings, and juvenile detention centers. "I'm here as a witness to history," he teaches groups. "From death's door to now, I had a purpose in life. I feel that Hashem has something He wanted me to accomplish. He brought me to where I am today. As the Talmud says: If you change one life, you change all of humanity."



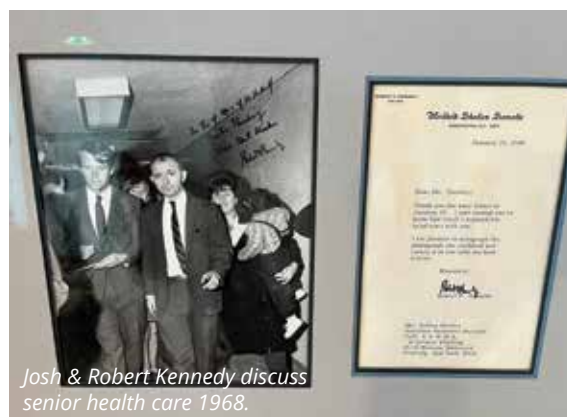
Josh's Bava Metzia, a major tractate of the Talmud, signed by classmates in the DP camp.



The Gortler and Blockman families.



Josh's Chumash printed in Munich, with a dedication from President Harry S. Truman.



Josh & Robert Kennedy discuss senior health care 1968.



Josh earns an honorary PhD from Yeshiva University, with YU president Richard Joel.

# From Grief to Grind: How Andrew Woods Found Healing in Hot Pilates

— By Melinda Lejman

By the time Andrew Woods stepped into the hot studio at Sana Yoga last year, he had already buried three loved ones, walked away from a stable “big boy job” in accounting, and quietly put on 80 pounds. He was delivering Instacart orders to make ends meet when he carried a case of water into the studio and, almost on a whim, asked about their intro deal.

That errand turned out to be a turning point.

“I knew I needed to do something,” he says. “I was just really depressed for about five years.”

Andrew, 43, is now 117 pounds lighter, a Pilates instructor, and a familiar face at Temple Israel, where he teaches Sunday school and works on the facilities team. His journey from burned-out controller to hot HIIT Pilates teacher is a story of grief, community, and slowly finding his way back into his own body.

## Grief, COVID, and the spiral

In August 2021, Andrew’s world collapsed. Within three weeks, three people close to him died: his cousin, David, his friend, Jeremy, and his friend, Rob. His friend, he recalls, weighed around 650 pounds.

“We couldn’t bury him,” Andrew says. “They were like, how are we going to get people to carry this 700, 800-pound casket? So, we had to cremate him for that reason. And I thought: if I die, I don’t want that to be a discussion – ‘We have to cremate Andrew, because how are we going to carry him?’”

At the time, Andrew was working as controller for a charter school after a decade-long career in accounting and auditing. He had built teams, optimized systems, and taken pride in getting reports out on time. But as COVID hit, his days became a blur of spreadsheets and grief. “I’d just be at my desk crying, weeping,” he says. “I took FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act), because I was literally unable to work.”

Medications meant to stabilize his mental health added another blow: “I gained like 80 pounds over a year. I stopped going to the gym and stopped working out.”

For someone who had always loved group fitness – the camaraderie of Orange Theory, the discipline of lifting with MMA fighters and bodybuilders – that isolation cut deep. He missed the noise, the sweat, the banter. “I like working out in groups, coming together for this goal” he says. “COVID happened, the



*Fitness looks good on Andrew.*

deaths happened...it was just hard.”

## Back to the mat

But being in community is not the same as feeling at home in your body, and by last year, Andrew knew he needed that, too. On that Instacart delivery to Sana Yoga, he asked about the intro special: unlimited classes for 10 days or two weeks for about \$25. His brain – trained as an accountant – instantly did the math.

“I’m cheap,” he says. “If it’s \$130 a month, I’m going every day. I’m going to get my money’s worth.”

He dove in. Hot yoga, fusion classes, hot HIIT Pilates – anything on the schedule. He’d practiced yoga off and on for 20 years, but mostly alone, stretching on his own terms. Being back in a room with people, with intentional focus and a teacher, cracked something open.

“Getting back into yoga...I mean, I needed it,” he says. “Just moving. I went to all the classes I could in that two-week period, and I realized: this is what I’ve been missing.”

The community at Sana Yoga noticed him, too. He has a big personality and a presence to match, and they made sure he knew he was seen. When he missed a few days, staff would text: “You haven’t been here in a few days, what’s going on?”

Their gentle accountability, combined with a change in his mental health medications, allowed him to start shedding the weight he’d gained. He added another gym – Grind Central Fitness in Olive Branch, a CrossFit-style program without the ropes and tire-flipping – for more structured strength work.

In total, from his highest weight of 328 pounds to a recent low

around 212, Andrew has lost 117 pounds. He's settled now somewhere near 220 on his 6' frame.

"The number doesn't matter as much anymore," he says. "I let the scale at home die, so I'd stop getting on it three times a week. It's about how I move, how I feel."

#### From student to teacher

When Sana Yoga announced an in-house Pilates teacher training, Andrew jumped at the opportunity.

By then, he'd fallen in love with Pilates, especially the studio's hot HIIT format: 20 seconds of intense work, 10 seconds of rest, repeated in sets that left his abs, quads, and solar plexus buzzing.

"Yoga is challenging, but it's about relaxing into discomfort," he explains. "In Pilates, you're working. It's time under tension. You feel exactly what you did that day, and I like that."

He signed up for the training, imagining it primarily as a way to deepen his own practice. Out of the six people in the course, he was the only one who actually wanted to teach.

"I kept thinking, who's going to want to follow me?" he says. "This fat guy who's been doing Pilates for a year? Nobody's going to want to take my class."

But as he knocked out book reports, practice classes, and tests – racing through the requirements as fast as possible – something shifted. The feedback was glowing. Students told him his voice felt "respectful," that he made them feel like they could do the exercises, but that they didn't have to. His main mentor, Margaret Albritton – who was named one of Memphis+Fitness Magazine's Personal Trainer of the Year – modeled the balance he wanted: kind and encouraging off the mat, firm and demanding in class. "There's this moment where her sweet voice turns into a growl," he laughs. "She tells you, 'Don't think about it. Just do it.'"

Andrew discovered he had his own version of that voice. And he's learning that teaching can be as transformative as taking a class. Recently, he led a Pilates session with just one student.

"I thought it'd be very awkward," he admits. "It wasn't. I was able to give very specific cues, adjust them in real time. To see their face change when they realized, 'Oh, I can do this,' that was something I never imagined could happen."

#### Fitness as medicine, community as anchor

For Andrew, movement is no longer optional. It's as crucial as his medication.

"If I miss two or three days, it's like I didn't take my meds," he says. "I'm going to be on edge. I'm going to say the wrong thing to somebody. So, on a day like today, if I know I might not make a class, I get up at 6 a.m. and run through the class I wrote for Thursday at home. I have to do something."

But what keeps him grounded isn't just the sweat; it's the people around it. The texts from Sana Yoga when he disappears. The grind of the 5 a.m. crew at Grind Central. The laughter of sixth graders at Sunday school (even when they bean him in the face with a dodgeball before he goes to yell at grown-ups in Pilates). And most of all, the love and continuing support of his wife, Laura.

He is, as he says, still a little stunned that this is his life.

"I never thought I'd be somebody people want to talk to about fitness," he says. "But having lost the weight, people see it and they're inspired. I was just trying not to be fat and die. Now I get to help other people move their bodies, get stronger, and maybe feel a little less alone. That's pretty cool."



Andrew and his wife, Laura.



Jo Anne and Jon Fusco with their family.

## A Life Gone to the Dogs: How Jo Anne Fusco and Her Golden Retrievers Help Memphis Thrive

*From Mobile, Ala., to Memphis, Tenn., Jo Anne Fusco has built a life where therapy dogs, young adults with disabilities, and the wider community all find comfort, dignity, and joy.*

— By Melinda Lejman

“Hey, JoJo! How are you?” participants call out as Executive Director Jo Anne Fusco makes her way through the bright, bustling rooms. Some are working on art projects, some are playing bingo, some are cooking or solving puzzles, and a few simply sit together coloring quietly. What they all share is a sense of belonging.

“Here they have friends,” Fusco says. “They’re not sitting at home alone, watching TV or on a computer. They’re out in the community, living life.”

Thrive Memphis (formerly The Exceptional Foundation of West Tennessee) is a nonprofit day program for teens and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Under Fusco’s leadership for the past 16 years, it has grown from fewer than 15 participants to a thriving, waitlisted community hub with a modest budget but an outsized impact.

And in typical Jo Anne fashion, there are usually dogs close by.

As co-founder of West Tennessee Therapy Dogs, Fusco has spent more than two decades bringing carefully trained therapy dogs into hospitals, schools, preschools, courts, cancer centers and Thrive itself. She’s living proof that healing and inclusion can arrive on four paws and a wagging tail.



Jon and Jo Anne

## From Mobile to Memphis

Fusco's story begins in Mobile, Alabama, in a neighborhood so picturesque it once landed her – quite literally – on the cover of a magazine.

“I grew up in a great neighborhood,” she recalls. “One day my dad bought my mom a bicycle built for two, because she couldn't ride a regular bike. My neighbor and I used to ride it up and down the street.”

A photographer from *Progressive Farmer* was in town, scouting scenes for a new publication. He spotted the two girls pedaling past a bank of lush azaleas and asked to speak to their parents. The result: Jo Anne and her friend appeared on the cover of the very first issue of *Southern Living*.

Decades later, when *Southern Living* marked its 50th anniversary, that image resurfaced online. After an avalanche of “Does anyone know where this is?” comments, a childhood friend chimed in: “That's Jo Anne Magnes and Alice McMurphy in Delwood in Mobile.” The magazine tracked Fusco down, restaged the photo – with the same bicycle she'd kept all those years – and toured the vintage bike around the country.

“I still have the bike,” she says, now parked on the terrace of her Memphis condo. “It's one of those funny things most people don't know about me.”

Fusco left Mobile to study special education at the University of Arizona but quickly realized classroom teaching wasn't her calling. After marrying Chicagoan Jon Fusco, they moved north. While he worked in his family's liquor business, she landed at the Chicago Board of Trade, working her way up on the floor as orders poured in from Tokyo, China and beyond.

“It was so exciting,” she says. “People in the pits screaming and yelling, buying pork bellies and everything else.”

After Jon's father died and the family business was sold, her own father urged them to return to the South. The young couple moved back to Mobile, where their children – Patrick, Zachary and Ryan, affectionately called “My Three Sons” – were born and raised amid Jo Anne's parents, siblings and cousins.

Leaving that close-knit world for Memphis, in 1990, was wrenching. But it came with an exciting opportunity –

opening Jenny Craig franchises.

While Jo Anne and Jon balanced their busy work schedule with raising their boys, friendships slowly began to form through their children's school, Lausanne, and then through competitive soccer, where two of her sons played with Memphis Football Club and traveled for tournaments. A neighbor, Marlene Silver, introduced her to a core group of Jewish women who remain close friends to this day.

The Fuscos joined Temple Israel, where Patrick's bar mitzvah was prepared with Cantor John Kaplan and celebrated back in Mobile, while younger brothers Zach and Ryan became b'nai mitzvah in Memphis with Rabbi Micah Greenstein and Rabbi Harry Danziger. For Jo Anne, who was very involved in the Art Patrons League and had already served as president of Sisterhood and Hadassah back in Mobile's small Jewish community, Memphis offered a much larger Jewish ecosystem – but she gravitated increasingly to broader nonprofit work.

### Discovering Pet Therapy – and a Star Named Kicker

Dogs were always part of Fusco's life – Golden Retrievers, specifically. In Chicago, she and Jon had Willie, a dark-colored golden who moved with them to Mobile. Later came Autumn, and after the family relocated to Memphis, more Golden Retrievers followed.

The one who changed everything was Kicker.

Named in honor of son Ryan's football career (he kicked at Ridgeway High School and later for the University of Tennessee), “Tanglewood's Special Team Player” – Kicker's official registered name – became Fusco's introduction to the world of animal-assisted therapy.

Determined to earn the American Kennel Club's (AKC) Canine Good Citizen certification, she began working with trainer Rob Bitler in 2002, when Kicker was just over a year old. Bitler saw immediately that this dog had something special.

“He said to me, ‘Kicker can be a fabulous therapy dog. He can go further than just AKC,’” Fusco recalls.

When Bitler moved away, he asked her to step into a larger role. She and four others began the painstaking process of convincing St. Jude Children's Research



Hospital to allow therapy dogs on campus – at a time when the idea was anything but mainstream.

“It took a long time,” Fusco says. “Therapy dogs weren't really a ‘thing’ yet. People worried about hair, about whether patients would want them there. We just kept meeting, answering questions, and showing what these dogs could do.”

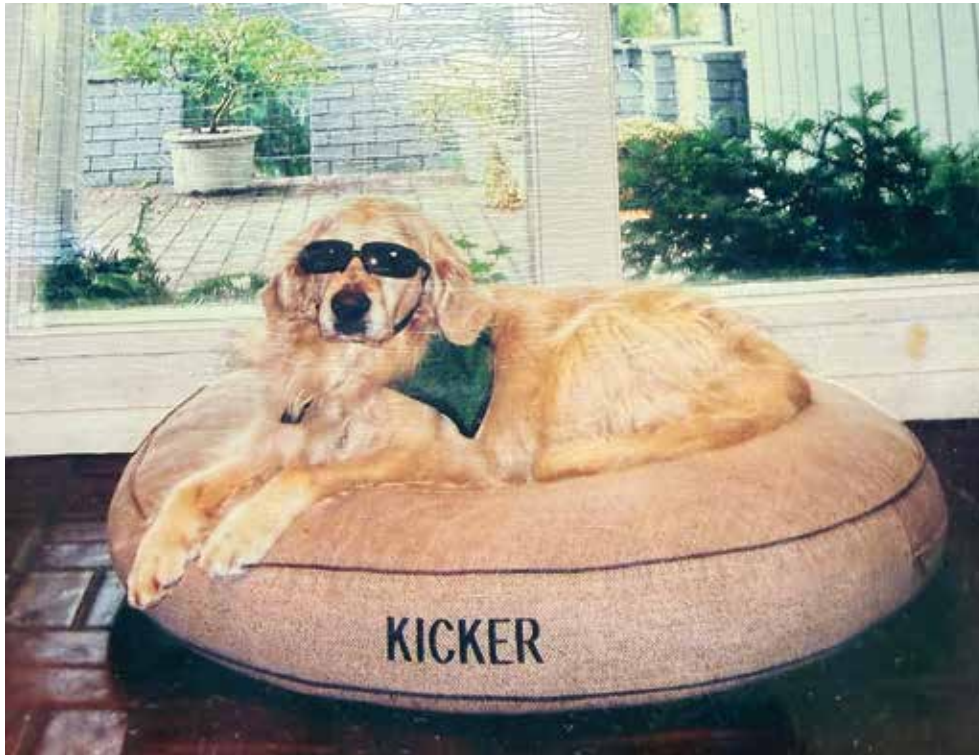
Eventually St. Jude opened its doors – not just to Fusco and Kicker, but to the idea itself. Their work helped pave the way for the hospital to later acquire its own resident facility dogs, handled by child life specialists who sit with children during treatment and procedures, just as Kicker once did.

From there, Fusco's golden retriever brigade expanded its reach to Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, West Cancer Center, nursing homes, Alzheimer's day programs, schools, reading initiatives, Temple Israel's preschool and even juvenile court.

At West Cancer Center, Kicker and the dogs who followed him became a quiet, steadfast presence for patients enduring infusions and frightening diagnoses.

“Dogs can really touch your heart in the community, doing good things,” she says. “You see someone's whole face change when a dog walks into the room.”

When Kicker died, the community's grief reflected just how deeply he had burrowed into Memphis's collective heart. Cindy Wolf of The Commercial Appeal



wrote a widely shared feature, “Farewell to Kicker,” after following Fusco and her dog through a day at West. Donations poured in. Artist Adam Exelbier painted Kicker for her. The mayor sent a letter of thanks for her service. “Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened,” the Dr. Seuss quote she chose for his urn, became a sort of family motto.

All of her dogs’ ashes, she admits, are stored in her closet. “I told my kids, if I get buried, they’re buried with me.”

### West Tennessee Therapy Dogs: Building a Community of Teams

As demand grew, it became clear Memphis needed a structured way to train, certify and coordinate pet therapy teams. Fusco and fellow dog lover Ann Weiss co-founded West Tennessee Therapy Dogs after leaving another organization, bringing many handlers and dogs with them.

Today, West Tennessee Therapy Dogs counts more than 50 registered teams. About 15–20 are very active, participating in regular visits to hospitals, schools, courts and community events. The group runs reading programs where children practice reading aloud to calm, nonjudgmental canine listeners. They appear at fundraisers and festivals. They partner with Temple Israel’s preschool, St. Mary’s Episcopal School and numerous other organizations.

One of her most memorable experiences

came when Kicker was selected, along with a St. Jude patient family, to be honored at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in New York. They flew on a private jet, toured Manhattan – FAO Schwarz included – with a van willing to ferry a Golden Retriever and then walked onto the floor at Madison Square Garden alongside therapy dogs from across the country.

“It was amazing,” she says. “To be there, to show that kind of work on that stage – it was something I’ll never forget.”

Fusco’s contributions to animal-assisted therapy have been recognized far beyond Memphis. The University of Tennessee honored her with an award for her work with pets and therapy; her whole family gathered in Nashville to celebrate.

Still, she is reluctant to boast. The framed certificates, letters from St. Jude and Le Bonheur, and even a letter from Michelle Obama – sent after Thrive participants created a garden and wrote to the White House – are tucked around her office, nearly hidden among photos of her grandchildren and Golden Retrievers.

### Helping Adults with Disabilities Thrive

By the time Kicker’s star was rising in the early 2000s, Fusco was also finding her way into what would become her second great calling: serving adults with disabilities.

She initially brought her dogs to the Exceptional Foundation (now Thrive Memphis) for a “read to the dog”

program. A young participant from that time still attends Thrive today. When board member Deborah Saharovich mentioned they were looking for an executive director, Fusco demurred.

“I said, ‘I don’t know how to be an executive director, but I can help you fundraise,’” she recalls. “And then they hired me as the executive director.”

What she walked into was a beloved but financially fragile program. A generous founding family had seeded the Exceptional Foundation; by the time Fusco arrived, much of it had been drained by steep rent on commercial space.

“The first thing I did was to lower the rent,” she says. “So, we moved into church space. Then another church. Eventually we moved here, into the Memphis Jewish Community Center. This has been such a good home for us – safe, secure, with MATApus access and a central location.”

Under her leadership, Thrive Memphis has sharpened its mission: to provide social and recreational activities – infused with life skills – for teens and adults with disabilities. Open year-round on a school-like schedule, Thrive runs a fall program, spring program and eight weeks of flexible summer camp, with early care and after care to accommodate working families.

Participants, whom Fusco affectionately calls “kids” even though they are adults, choose from cooking club, science activities, music, art, bingo, puzzles and more. They take frequent field trips: to the Memphis Zoo, the Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Crosstown Concourse, the library, pet stores and beyond.

“We try to fill the day with as many activities as we can so they’re busy,” she says. “But we’re not rigid. We don’t force anyone to participate – just encourage.”

Thrive’s criteria are simple and practical: participants should be able to feed themselves, use the restroom appropriately, and follow basic directions. Over time, some who need additional support have been “grandfathered in,” a reflection of the deep, familial relationships built there.

“We have autistic young men who wander,” Fusco explains. “We don’t make them sit still. We’re strict in the sense of safety, but we understand who they are. There’s no bullying here. Nobody’s making fun of anyone.” Many participants come from low-income

families; Thrive charges fees but offers scholarships to those who have been in the program for some time. Demand is high enough that there is currently a waiting list – something Fusco calls “a good problem to have,” but one she hopes to ease by hiring more staff.

Her team, she emphasizes, is extraordinary.

“We’re a very small nonprofit,” she says. “But some staff stay for years. They love these guys. We get calls when we’re out in the community, from people who see our vans and say, ‘Your staff is so wonderful to these kids.’ They’re not kids, they’re adults – but I’m older, so to me, they’re kids.”

Fundraising remains a constant necessity. Thrive now hosts an annual golf tournament at Windyke, a fashion show, a crawfish festival at Loflin Yard (dogs welcome, of course), and a new mahjong tournament, alongside smaller efforts such as selling Corky’s barbecue packages and Butter Braid pastries. A successful virtual farm-to-table dinner during the pandemic, featuring prominent Memphis chefs, is something Fusco hopes to revive.

“It’s harder now to get people to come to dinners,” she notes. “Everything changed after COVID. But we keep trying new things.”

Amid all of it, she still carves out time to fly to New York to visit her son, Ryan, now COO of a pet-related company, and her grandchildren there. Patrick, a well-known jazz pianist in Memphis who studied under the late Gene Rush at the University of Memphis, and Zachary, a corporate professional in the Tampa area, round out the trio of sons whose careers echo their mother’s blend of creativity, discipline and heart.

### Repairing the World, One Relationship at a Time

Though Fusco doesn’t often frame her work in explicitly religious language, her life’s through line would be instantly recognizable to any reader of Jewish Scene Magazine: chesed (kindness), kehillah (community) and tikkun olam (repairing the world).

Whether it’s comforting a child with cancer at St. Jude, easing the anxiety of a chemotherapy patient at West Cancer Center, sitting with teens in juvenile court, or opening doors to friendship and purpose for adults with disabilities at Thrive Memphis, she is consistently drawn to people who are vulnerable, overlooked, or afraid – and to the dogs who help them let down their guard.

“Dogs open doors that people can’t,” she says simply.

Fusco credits her parents for instilling a passion for philanthropy. And in a city where the needs – of humans and animals alike – can feel overwhelming, she keeps showing up with Golden Retrievers at her side, refusing to be paralyzed by the scale of the problem. Instead, she focuses on the next visit, the next participant, the next moment of eye contact between a nervous child and a steady dog.

“You can’t save them all,” she says. “But you can make a difference, one person, one dog at a time.”

In Memphis, countless families, patients, and “kids” at Thrive would agree, she already has.



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# Building Imagination: Inside Mud Island's New Interactive Family Adventure, BVO

By Shoshana Cenker

For Memphians looking to unplug from screens and reconnect through creativity, exploration, and imaginative family fun, Mud Island's newest attraction offers something increasingly rare: a place where kids and adults play together.

Baron Von Opperbean and the River of Time (BVO), which opened May 1 inside the former Mississippi River Museum space, is unlike anything else in the Mid-South. Part immersive playground, interactive art installation, live actor entertainment, video game and storytelling universe.

As you climb the old museum escalator, native Memphians' childhood memories will undoubtedly rush back, now reimagined through the adventure boldly greeting you at the top.

Inspired by immersive destinations like Santa Fe's Meow Wolf and St. Louis' City Museum, BVO's first phase features 8,000 square feet of interactive environments, hidden passageways, puzzles, climbing spaces, slides, and story-driven explorations inside the attraction's "Green Dragon Ship" experience.

Two more phases of the adaptive reuse 33,000-square-foot museum space are scheduled. The next 10,000-square-foot section will open by the end of this year, the remaining square footage, which includes the

two museum boat replicas, will be finished by the end of 2027. One of the future phases includes a cyberpunk-inspired world called "Mane City," featuring futuristic aesthetics and music influenced by Memphis rap culture.

"We feel incredibly privileged to be able to redevelop the River Museum. How many cities would even have a diamond-in-the-rough opportunity like this?" explained BVO co-founder and head of communications Marvin Stockwell, during my behind-the-scenes preview tour with my kids. "It's like an open-world video game that you can explore, except you're in a physical space."

Guests crawl through secret tunnels hidden behind bookshelves, navigate maze-like passageways, solve collaborative puzzles, and uncover hidden rooms tucked inside the old museum's original infrastructure. Visitors wear wristbands to collect digital clues and unlock portions of the evolving storyline throughout the attraction.

BVO is designed to get families moving, talking, problem-solving and imagining together in an otherworldly designed space worthy of Disney.

"Kids don't need to be told, 'have fun.' It's us parents who need the permission to play," Marvin said. "The 8-year-old Marvin inside me is having

so much fun!"

Even with the sophisticated technology powering many of BVO's interactive elements and sound effects, including projection mapping, holographic characters and game-engine animation built using Unreal Engine, the attraction's heart remains refreshingly simple: people connecting through imagination and discovery.

The attraction breathes new life into one of Memphis' most nostalgic public spaces. The Mississippi River Museum closed in 2018, leaving the Mud Island building largely unused. While many museum artifacts were relocated to the Memphis Museum of Science & History, BVO's creators preserved other museum elements as they transformed the space into something entirely new.

Mahogany wood from the old Gibson Guitar Factory was donated, as were items from the Oak Court Mall demolition and Crosstown Concourse's salvage warehouse. Giant iron entry doors were designed and crafted by Moore Tech students. BVO's repurposed and salvaged items add to the attraction's immersive, handcrafted aesthetic.

"The craftsmanship of this museum and how it was put together is not only something to be revered and respected, it's actually a huge advantage to our build. We must have respect for what

came before,” shared Marvin. “Reusing materials is good for the environment, saves money, and I just think it looks cooler. Some of these materials would’ve gone straight into landfills otherwise.”

That philosophy resonated strongly with BVO CEO Jee Vahn Knight, whose worked with NASA, the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum and Meow Wolf. As the project moved from concept to build-out, she helped translate BVO founder and chief creative officer Christopher Reyes’ original vision into an executable, scalable experience.

“The boats stopped me in my tracks. When I walked into the River Museum, I saw a space already bursting with generations of imagination and creativity – these boats, this layout, this sense of discovery,” Jee said of her first walkthrough. “Christopher had already imagined something incredibly ambitious and singular. My role has been to support that vision and help the team bring it to life. What’s special is the group he’s assembled.”

BVO is a concept by artist Christopher Reyes. After landing on the museum space, Christopher and his co-founders – Marvin, Reuben Brunson, and Kathryn Hicks – spent the next two years preparing the site with nearly 30 employees and volunteers, raising

capital and rallying community support from Memphis Tourism, the Downtown Memphis Commission, City of Memphis and Memphis River Parks.

“From the beginning,” Mayor Paul Young said, “BVO stood out as the kind of creative activation Memphis needs.”

The team’s long-term vision is for BVO to help grow Memphis’ creative economy through future educational programming, workshops, field trips, summer camps and immersive storytelling training opportunities focused on art, gaming, animation, design and technology. “We will be building an entire creative industry here in Memphis,” Marvin shared.

“Memphis has the raw ingredients – story, music, history,” Jee added, “but also the uncontainable drive to constantly create something new.”

BVO’s labyrinth also features space to host events overlooking a stunning view of the Mississippi River landscape. Before leaving, make sure to stop by the ice cream-dispensing robot.

At just \$20 per guest, BVO’s greatest magic may simply be its invitation to explore. Parents climb alongside their children. Siblings solve puzzles together. Strangers collaborate. Secret doors open unexpectedly. Hallways lead to hidden worlds.



In today’s screen-heavy culture, that sense of shared wonder may be exactly what makes Baron Von Oppenbean and the River of Time feel so special.



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# Where Judaism Came Alive for Yocheved

By Shoshana Cenker

*Writer's note: We're back with another article in our ongoing series, "Chosen Journeys," where we explore the path of conversion from several converts to Judaism. According to halacha (Jewish law), once someone has completed a conversion, they are as fully Jewish as someone born Jewish.*

....

For Yocheved Bendor, the decision to become a member of the tribe was not sudden, nor casual. It was deliberate, deeply spiritual, and rooted in both faith and legacy.

"In the summer of 2023, I decided that Judaism was the path that I wanted to take for myself, for my daughter and generations to come," she shared. "I wanted to know G-d, I wanted to follow the Torah, and I also wanted to have the opportunity to do mitzvot."

Her decision to become a participant in the covenant – not just an observer – marked the beginning of a two-year conversion process that Yocheved describes as "very challenging, rewarding and very cleansing."

Each Sunday, she joined a conversion group that met with Rabbi Joel Finkelstein, Baron Hirsch Congregation's rabbinic scholar and conversion class lead, who's led the conversions of dozens of people. The class followed the Chicago Rabbinical Council's (CRC) structured curriculum, with Rabbi Finkelstein providing "in-depth teaching about the concepts" of our faith. The classes were rigorous and intentional, designed to prepare candidates not just intellectually, but spiritually, for their eventual Beis Din (rabbinic court).

Learning, though, did not stay confined to the classroom. Before appearing in front of the Beis Din in person, Yocheved and her daughter, Naomi, were required to begin living a halachic lifestyle. Easing into the many changes they were about to embark on, they began attending shul services and meeting the Jewish community. Eventually, they moved into the eruv



Yocheved and Assaf with her daughter, Naomi.

(continuous boundary) near Baron Hirsch and started Shabbos observance, kashrus, and daily practice. Judaism was not something to be postponed until after conversion, it had to be lived.

That is where Memphis made all the difference.

"The Memphis Jewish community was a gift from Hashem. Naomi and I were treated so beautifully," Yocheved said with joy. "I especially appreciate how everyone was so willing to teach us what it means to be Jewish. Naomi and I were never alone, the women in the community always made sure that we were included. I rave so much about how the Memphis Jewish community is the light of Memphis. Naomi and I were genuinely embraced so lovingly. We learned halachot for our Beit Bin meetings, but the Memphis Jewish community actually taught us what it means to be Jewish."

There is a distinction here, between knowledge and lived experience, between laws and love. Memphis was not just a place where Yocheved converted, it was where her Judaism came alive.

The final steps of her conversion took place at the CRC in Chicago, where the Beis Din and her first dip in the mikvah formally completed the process. "Being in Chicago was extremely intense. The Beit Din was very tough, as they should have been," she explained. "I was nervous going into the mikvah for the first time. The entire mikvah process was very modest. We were given instructions every step of the way."

As part of this special transformation, Yocheved and Naomi both took new names, a requirement of the Beis Din. "We were told to choose a biblical name," she shared, "that would represent a change in spiritual status."

Officially a Jew – a rebirth not just in identity, but in soul – feels amazing for Yocheved and her daughter. "Geshmak to be a Yid!" she rejoiced. "I'm so delighted to have the opportunity to do mitzvot."

For those considering conversion, she offers clear advice: "Do not take the process lightly. We are asking Hashem for a special privilege, and it will not be given easily."

A few months after converting, Yocheved, who works as a nurse, was introduced to Assaf Bendor, originally from Israeli, by a mutual friend with deep ties to the Memphis Jewish community. After meeting in Las Vegas, where Assaf lives, they formed an instant connection, which quickly deepened. In December 2025 the happy couple was married in a stunning wedding that her Memphis kehillah (community) at Baron Hirsch brought to life.

The family of three now lives in Vegas, but Yocheved and Naomi will be forever grateful to their Memphis friends' embrace, guidance and love. "I would not be able to share my experience with such joy," she said with sincere gratitude, "if I had my conversion process in any other community."

## A Much-Loved Neyland

By Susan C. Nieman

David Steinberg, z"l, was ready to adopt a dog, but I wasn't quite there yet," said Heather Murphy. David had been looking at local shelters for months when he found Neyland (the shelter had named her Beth) at Memphis Animal Services. The shelter had her in a section where visitors could only go with management approval and with supervision from a shelter technician. She was huddled in the corner of her kennel and wouldn't make eye contact with us. Talking with Ney using a gentle tone, respecting her space and coaxing her with treats David brought, Ney came out of her corner just long enough to get the snack and retreat to the safe spot.

There is no doubt, David saved Neyland's life.

David was an avid UT Vols Football fan. As such, Neyland (the name of the team's stadium) is the name David chose, and there was no arguing that choice! Ryan, David's son, remembers the first dog bed David bought for Neyland. The cover of the bed looked like Neyland Stadium The day Tennessee beat Alabama and the fans tore down the goal posts, Neyland ripped her new bed to pieces!

*Since David's untimely death in 2024, Heather, David's ex-wife and life-partner, and Ney remain family.*

### Do you travel with your pet?

Not yet! I'd love to take her by car to a local state park with pet friendly cabin rentals one day. Neyland loves walks and being outside.

### Do you board your pet?

Never have. Never will! A close, dear friend, her husband and their dog, Lulu, live on 60 acres of land in Olive Branch. Being with Mark, Mary and Lulu at their home is Neyland's Happy Place!

### Where do you get your pet groomed?

I bathe (it's more like a wrestling match)

Ney at home or take her to the DIY bath station at Hollywood Feed. Neyland hates baths!

### Does your pet go to work with you?

I offer pet sitting services, both in my home and in clients' homes. I've learned, the only way I can do sitting in my clients' homes is if Neyland is allowed to come with me. While Ney is suspicious of people, she is AMAZING with other dogs and neither of us do very well overnight apart from each other.

### Any interesting stories you'd like to share?

Shortly after adopting Neyland, David and I quickly realized she loved snatching things and taking them out the doggie door. Whenever we couldn't find something, we learned to check the backyard first! Wallets, socks, keys, drink coasters, jeans, mail, sweatshirts, you name it, she confiscated it. Her particular favorite was the TV remote control. After many trips to the Xfinity store, the employees began to know David and started giving him several remote controls per visit so he would have plenty of backups!

### Love most:

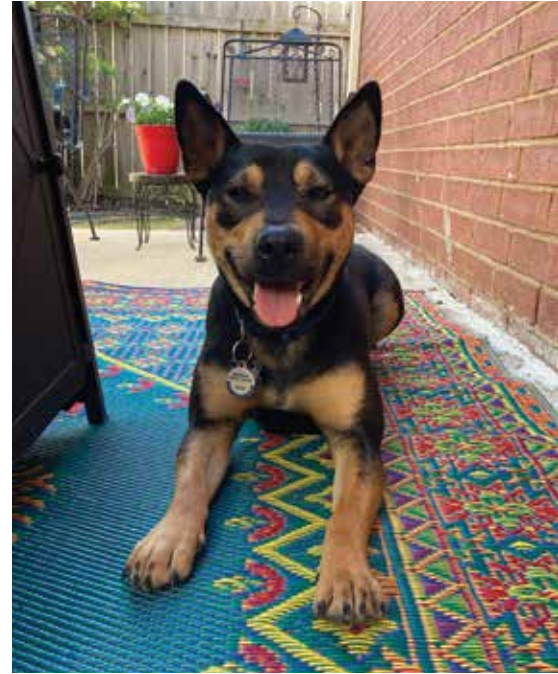
Neyland loves to be outside and enjoys being with other dogs. It's so fun to watch her run, play and be happy.

### Pet Peeve:

It takes a long time for Neyland to warm up to people. Little by little, over the past few years, she has started to trust people more.

### Special Treats:

Neyland LOVES her cookies! Anytime I'm in the Collierville area, I stop by Three Dog Bakery and pick up a personalized treat with Neyland's name on it. She also loves Bully Sticks!



Neyland and David, z"l.





Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab board at the annual meeting.

# 100 YEARS OF MEMPHIS JEWISH HOME & REHAB

— By Baylee Less

Next May, Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab will turn 100 years old – a historic anniversary for one of the oldest nursing homes in the state of Tennessee. A yearlong celebration will kick off in August with various ways to engage.

It is a testament to the strength and forward-thinking of the Memphis Jewish community that the Home still stands and operates successfully as a nonprofit nursing home. It is a challenging industry to operate in, but an important one: ensuring people are cared for with dignity and respect during their final years.

In the past four years, more than 400 nursing homes have closed their doors across the United States, and according to the Association of Jewish Aging Services, there have been many sales or closures of Jewish homes across the country including: Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Chicago. Some institutions have sold to for-profit companies, which warped their standard of care and deteriorated patient experience. It is a threat the board of directors and staff have been aware of for some time and have been working against to ensure the longevity of services.

“Our seniors will always need us, and we want to always be around for them,” said Executive Director Bobby Meadows. “It’s an important part of our model that we are a nonprofit, that we are owned and operated by the community we serve and not stakeholders who live far away. It is also an important part of our model that we serve Jewishly.”



The dedication of the B'nai B'rith Home on Tucker, 1927.

Founded as B'nai B'rith Home and Hospital for the Aged in 1927, Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab is now one of the most respected names in senior care in the Mid-South. The organization is often listed among the top nursing homes by Newsweek, Memphis Business Journal and U.S. News and World Report. Staff leaders are well-recognized in the industry and Executive Director, Bobby Meadows, currently serves as the President of the Tennessee Health Care Association (THCA).

“There is so much to be proud of and to celebrate – we really hope the entire community will join in one way or another throughout the year,” Director of Development Baylee Less explained. “The Home is a special place, but the magic of it is most palpable when you’re here with our residents, with our families and with our staff.”

Already underway to mark the anniversary is the 100 Stories for 100 Years weekly column in The Hebrew Watchman. The profiles share words from various people who have been involved with the Home across the 100-year history. Additionally, staff and residents have formed a committee to ensure the campus feels lively all year long. There will be dress-up days, special events and more hosted by the staff to celebrate the occasion.



Below is a snapshot of the major community events taking place in 2026-27 to mark the centennial.

#### **Save the Dates!**

The following events are open to the community to celebrate MJHR turning 100! All are free of charge, except the Centennial Celebration. Ticket information coming soon.

#### **Community Day: Sunday, August 16, 2026**

In honor of National Senior Citizen's Day, we will host the community on the MJHR campus for a day of fun for our residents. With activities occurring from 9 a.m.-3 p.m., it's a great way for individuals and groups to volunteer and interact with seniors in our community.

#### **Centennial Celebration: Thursday, March 18, 2027**

In March, we will host the community for a ticket-event with a celebrity guest. It will be held at the Scheidt Family Performing Arts Center, and all proceeds will fund our free Certified Nurse Aide Training Program.

#### **MJHR's Birthday Party: Sunday, May 23, 2027**

Get your party hats on and blow horns out for a mega-birthday extravaganza at MJHR! A carnival-esque day will be great for families and loved ones to enjoy what makes our senior care stand out: joy!

#### **MJHR Archival Opening and Remembrance Service: Sunday, October 10, 2027**

To better understand the legacy of 100 years of Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab, the organization will host an archival exhibit showcasing photos, videos, newspaper articles and memorabilia from the century. It will be a day to honor the memory of all those who entrusted the Home with their care and all of the leaders who ensured its success.

For information on any of the events or ways to get involved, contact Baylee Less, director of development, at [bless@memphisjewishhome.org](mailto:bless@memphisjewishhome.org) or 901-756-3273.

*Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab is a nonprofit nursing home, Jewish in character and environment, dedicated to providing the highest level of care possible with dignity, compassion and professionalism. Only through the help of generous donors is the organization able to care for those in need. Find more information at [www.memphisjewishhome.org/giving](http://www.memphisjewishhome.org/giving).*

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## Upcoming Issues

Don't be left out of the  
2026 Guide to Jewish Memphis  
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For details contact Susan Nieman  
[susan@jewishscenemagazine.com](mailto:susan@jewishscenemagazine.com)



*Residents ready to board Shalom Shuttle to services at Temple Israel.*

# PLOUGH TOWERS ANNOUNCES OUR NEW SHABBAT SHUTTLE!

— By Leigh Hendry

At Plough Towers, we believe that aging in place is about more than providing a safe and affordable home – it is about creating opportunities for residents to remain connected, engaged and active within their community. With the support of a generous grant from Memphis Jewish Federation, we are excited to introduce a new transportation program designed to enhance the quality of life for our residents by providing a dedicated shuttle service to synagogue on selected Fridays.

For many of our residents, maintaining meaningful traditions, relationships and faith-based connections is an important part of their overall well-being. As mobility and transportation options can become more challenging with age, access to these opportunities may become limited. This new Shabbat Shuttle program helps remove those barriers by providing a safe, reliable and convenient way for residents to attend synagogue services and participate in an important part of their spiritual life.

We are excited to add Herb Kahn as our Shabbat Shuttle driver. Many people may recognize him as the Shalom Shuttle driver for Wendy & Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service at the MJCC. We are fortunate that he shares his Friday evening with us, allowing our residents to continue practicing their faith, strengthening friendships and staying connected with their community. Transportation is more than simply getting from one location to another – it represents independence, inclusion and the ability to continue participating in activities that bring purpose and joy.

This program reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting our residents' independence while recognizing the importance of social, emotional and spiritual wellness. Living in an independent living community means residents value their ability to make choices, maintain routines and remain active participants in the larger community. Providing transportation options helps make those choices possible.

We are grateful for the financial support that made this program possible and for the opportunity to expand services that directly benefit our residents. The Shabbat Shuttle program is an example of how partnerships and community support can create meaningful improvements in the daily lives of older adults.

We are especially excited about the positive impact this program will have – not only by providing transportation, but by creating opportunities for connection, fellowship and continued independence. A simple ride can open the door to friendship, tradition and a stronger sense of belonging.

As we continue to look for ways to enhance resident services, programs like this remind us that small investments can make a significant difference. Our goal remains the same: to provide a supportive environment where residents can live with dignity, maintain independence and enjoy a fulfilling quality of life.

Look at this house 🏠


# YOUR SPOUSE HAS SENT YOU THIS LISTING.

**IF YOU'VE RECEIVED:**

- 🏠 "Just looking..."
- 🏠 "Wouldn't this be nice?"
- 🏠 "Look at this kitchen."
- 🏠 "LOOK AT THIS KITCHEN."

**THEN CONGRATULATIONS. YOU'RE ALREADY HOUSE HUNTING.**

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**If your spouse is sending these, the only thing left is to find out what your new address is.**

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