



Volume 21 | Number 1 | 2026

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On The Cover

*In the Garden of Freiden
by Shoshana Cenko*



Contributors



Sarah Siskin Alpert, a native Memphian and Tigers fan, became involved in the Memphis Jewish community through BBYO, where she formed many lifelong friendships. She is passionate about building meaningful connections, strengthening the Jewish community and creating welcoming spaces for families, and thrilled to begin this next chapter with the Bornblum family.

Sarah and husband Alex Alpert, a proud Bornblum alum, are now growing their family with their eight-month-old son and two beloved dogs.



Jeannie Ashford is a professional journalist who has written for *The New York Times*, *Institutional Investor* and *Business & Health*, among other publications. She was editor of *Venture*, *The Magazine for Entrepreneurs* and publisher of *The Practical Accountant* Group of publications. Jeannie also worked in public relations as senior vice president of Harrison Edwards PR & Marketing. She holds a BA in English Honors from Queens College and an MS in Journalism from Columbia University.



R. Dr. Gavriel Brown is the head of School of Margolin Hebrew Academy, Cooper Yeshiva of the South.



Shoshana Y. Cenker is a word & grammar nerd with nearly 25 years of experience in creative services. She's the editorial director at E Source, a utility consulting and research firm; the founder of Wonderful Word Nerd, her freelance communications consultancy; and the co-founder of Two Chicks in a Coop, a creative services agency. She brings brands to life through strategic storytelling and compelling content. She lives in her hometown of Memphis with her three teenage kiddos — twin boys Aiden & Kivi, daughter Lyla — and their pup, Jasper, and cat, Felix. ShoshanaAY@gmail.com



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.



Daniel R. Weiss, Ed.D is Head of School at Bornblum Jewish Community School. He has over 30 years of Jewish Day School experience as a student, teacher, principal, Head of School, and parent. He is the father of three and husband to Jessica.



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Letter From the Editor

Dear JSM Readers,

Cooler temps, hooray! I can't say I'm a winter person, but these summers have become unbearable. Hopefully your Sukkot evenings were comfortable and enjoyable.

After months of collecting the data and sending proofs, and now that the whirlwind of Jewish holidays is behind us, our annual 2026 Guide to Jewish Memphis is finally in print. We hope it will serve newcomers and others unfamiliar with our amazing Memphis organizations and programs.

Last year, longtime Hebrew Watchman advertiser, more recent Jewish Scene Magazine advertiser and well-known real estate guru Sheldon Rosengarten, received a call from an out-of-town reader who saw Jewish Scene online. She was looking for a local agent to find her the perfect home and saw his ad. Who knew? We did!

Our next issue features Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah programs and projects. Have you been involved with something you'd like to share? We'd love to hear about it!

We are always eager to hear suggestions for features about simchas – bar, bat mitzvahs, weddings, anniversaries

or special birthdays. We are also on the lookout for our next Inspiring Person, A Life (or Lives) Well Lived highlight or to hear about your favorite pet.

As always, please support and thank our advertisers. If you have not subscribed to The Hebrew Watchman or Jewish Scene, please look on page 5 and scan the QR code, visit us at JewishSceneMagazine.com or HebrewWatchman.com, or mail your check to Jewish Living of the South, PO Box 770846, Memphis, TN 38177.

Shalom,

Susan C. Nieman

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Editorial Assistants

Toni Nieman

Rebecca Schudel

Photography Contributor

Shoshana Cenker

Advertising Sales Director

Larry Nieman

Chief Financial Officer

Donald Heitner

Administrative Assistant/Subscriptions

Toni Nieman

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Susan Nieman

901.827.7244

susan@jewishscenemagazine.com

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Students pull apart old electronics to build their own Chanukkiot.

Seeds, Roots and Trees: How Beth Sholom Religious School Grows Jewish Identity

By Jeannie Ashford

The goal of Beth Sholom Synagogue's Religious School is to instill Jewish values and pride in its students by strengthening their Jewish identities, teaching the skills to participate in any Jewish setting, and making learning joyful and successful. With this philosophy, students grow from *Garinim*, seeds, for K-4th grade, to *Shorashim*, roots, for 5th to 7th grades, and ending with *Illanot*, fully grown trees, for post b'nai mitzvah adolescents.

A Q&A with Rachael Rovner, Director of Education, Beth Sholom Religious School

Rachael Rovner, M.A.Ed., has been a classroom educator for more than 20 years, including several years serving as a first-grade teacher and social-emotional coordinator at Bornblum Jewish Community School. In addition to graduating with an associate's degree in Judaic studies and a B.A. in education from Stern College for Women, she earned a master's degree in special education from Notre Dame College while raising her four children. Since she joined Beth Sholom in 2025, the synagogue's school enrollment has increased more than six-fold.

What is the goal of the Religious School? What do you want students to learn?

The goal of our religious school isn't primarily what we want our children to learn; it's how we want our students to feel. Of course, our students will learn to read Hebrew, but they will do it through creativity and games. They will practice *Savlanut* (patience) and *Hatmadah* (perseverance). They will learn Torah

(bible) through hands-on problem solving. For example, I put a swimming pool filled with water in the middle of the room and the children got the following prompt: Build a *tayva* (ark) using duct tape and wire. How many animals can fit? Can you fit two of each kind like Noah? What about seven of each kosher animal?

Students are encouraged to work together, brainstorm, negotiate, persuade, encourage, and yes, fail. They will learn to have *Rachamim* (compassion) – not only for others, but also for themselves!

In an effort to create peaceful, safe, character-building environments, I have focused most of my later teaching career on social-emotional learning. Transferring that concept to a Jewish classroom, teaching through *middot* (character traits) and Jewish values, opens up a world of self-discovery for our students.

We respect children and trust in their wonder and curiosity. Can we make pre-made Menorahs? Of course they can. But to watch

their excitement and joy when they are trusted and taught how to safely use tools and eye protection to take apart old electronics and turn them into Chanukkiot... well, there is a unique layer of pride in that accomplishment.

How should a Religious School strengthen a student's Jewish identity?

We believe Religious School is the stitching in the tapestry of our students' Jewish identity. Their family, traditions, holidays, school and Shabbat are all separate parts of the quilt. Religious School should unite all pieces and make a Jewish life, something that comes together to cover them in a whole picture. We will give them the language and reading to be successful in any synagogue. We will teach them the customs to participate at any table. We will establish the confidence to speak up in any environment. Religious School is woven through it all.

One of your successful teaching methods is "learning through play." Explain why that is so effective.

As a data-driven educator who regularly researches how children learn most effectively, it is repeatedly proven that learning through play requires just 10 to 20 repetitions, while traditional drills can require up to 400 repetitions, according to the National Institutes of Health.

But from an anecdotal perspective, students mirror the emotional regulation of the teacher. If a teacher creates a joyful environment, their students will feel safe to learn. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs proposes that teachers will only get the best possible potential from children who feel safe and loved.

"It's not your job to learn; it's my job to teach" is my education mantra. I will teach in whichever format a child best learns, and if it's not working, I will try a different strategy. Children want to learn. They also want to play. Here they get to do both!

Tell me about games you'd play with Garinim students (K-4th grades) vs. Shorashim students (5th-7th grades).

One of the best parts about our religious school is that our games are differentiated by child and ability, and they play the same games.

For example, one table will be set up to play Guess Who. On that table will be colored folders. The children are separated into groups with a tutor, and they are told which color they are that day. A student in our Garinim class who is just starting out on their Hebrew literacy journey (age or grade is not relevant) will get a Guess Who board that has two letters and the vowels. A student in Shorashim or Garinim who is strengthening their fluency may have full Hebrew words on their board. Then the children work in pairs and ask each other questions to eliminate parts of the board and guess the other's "secret sound."

Our Shorashim curriculum is a past, present, future exploration of their identity. An example of a game the Shorashim will play is Sequence the Timeline. They will be given magnetic images with blurbs of Jewish inventions, and they will sequence the timeline of when they were created. They will also play Match It, and they will need to match a Jewish custom to something secular that began at the same time. The goal in these games is to illustrate how deep our traditions go and how impactful Jews have been. Again, focusing on creating an intense Jewish pride.

You've created a Judaic-focused Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math (STEAM) program. Does that mean you are actually teaching these subjects? Please give me a few examples.

The quick answer is yes. We are teaching the information a student would need to meet the goal. Most of our curriculum falls

"I will teach in whichever format a child best learns, and if it's not working, I will try a different strategy," says Director of Education Rachael Rovner.



into the science, art and engineering category of STEAM. I'm a big believer in creating opportunities for problem-solving and discovery. One example of combining those three elements would be: the children will be taught about various kinds of instruments, vibrations and how to make sound. They will explore and use different *Shofrot*. Where does the vibration come from? We will do art that illustrates what vibrations look like (like painting with water balloons!). Then the children will be asked to use any of the materials in our maker space and make a noisemaker that would work similarly to a *shofar*, in that it will be loud enough to remind everyone to do teshuvah (repent).

An example of a math activity: making dreidels out of clay. The children learn the names for the geometric shapes, cube, cylinder and cone, and make each shape. We then put the shapes together and add the letters we learned.

We've been told you are not a fan of AI or heavy screen time because it reduces a person's critical thinking abilities. Why and what do you do to build your students' critical thinking abilities? Again, I'm following the data. Study after study finds negative effects on the brain with regular use of AI and screentime, especially developing minds. We are not raising robots. I don't want children who can compute; I want children who can communicate, problem-solve, feel success, promote themselves, persuade their peers, feel connected, seen and appreciated, and experience playfulness and joy. None of that happens behind a screen. I am also a fitness instructor and a line dancer, so I know muscles atrophy when we don't use them. Our brain is the same way, too. If we stop practicing creative thinking, socializing and problem solving, we will lose it.

Tell me about your staff. How many teachers and assistants do you have? We have two lead teachers on staff. Both are Jewish, extremely experienced, classroom teachers. Pam Buchwalter worked parallel with me at Bornblum and is an extremely passionate, creative educator. She currently teaches at Margolin Hebrew Academy

and runs their STEAM classes. She is joyful and playful and leads a classroom that supports all learning styles while also maintaining boundaries and expectations. Alicia Galloway will be teaching both age groups and brings with her decades of special education teaching experience. She is the definition of a person with a growth mindset. She is always learning and seeking new ideas. She enjoys being around both younger and older students, and we are so excited to have her on our team. Additionally, we have five older teenagers to tutor our Garinim class. Our students will be separated into groups of three or four, and they will build a relationship with the same tutor all year. Those tutors will guide them through the Hebrew language games each week. They will also be learning how to do weekly assessments through play, so the children's learning will be continuously accelerated.

Do you have any programs for pre-K children? Tell me about it.
I teach Parashah Playtime on Saturday mornings 10-11:30 for ages 2-9. We expand upon and support their Religious School learning as well as include instrument-free music, parachute games and toys, all modified to be appropriate for Shabbat.

What are the requirements to attend Beth Sholom Religious School?
The only requirement is to register! All students K-8 can enroll. You do not have to be a member to enroll. We offer one free class to any prospective student.

Q&A with Rabbi Sammy Rosenbaum
Rabbi Rosenbaum is the spiritual leader of Beth Sholom and oversees its Religious School. He leads the *Illanot* (trees) class, which offers teenagers an identity-shaping journey through Jewish history, Israel and the realities of modern antisemitism.

Tell me about the Ilanot class. What is it all about?
Illanot means trees in Hebrew. Our youngest group of students is called *Garinim*, seeds, followed by *Shorashim*, roots, and ending with fully grown trees. These are our post b'nai mitzvah students

"We respect children and trust in their wonder and curiosity. Can we make pre-made Menorahs? Of course we can. But to watch students' excitement and joy when they are trusted and taught how to safely use tools and eye protection to take apart old electronics and turn them into Chanukkiot... well, there is a unique layer of pride in that accomplishment."

grades 8-10. Its focus is to prepare our teenagers for the world ahead of them. Running with the tree analogy, allowing their branches to grow stronger and bear fruits that will sweeten and nourish their Jewish lives.

What topics will you discuss?
In the first section of the class, we will discuss the long arc of Jewish history through the lens of diaspora, beginning with the destruction of the 1st Temple and exile to Babylonia. This will lead us through the ages until we get to the story of American Jewry and how we got here.

In the second section of the class, we will study the history of the land of Israel and the circumstance that led to the modern state of Israel. We will learn about Zionism, its founders and its meaning.



In the third section of the class, we will learn the history of antisemitism. We will discuss blood libel, scapegoats, dhimmi status, pogroms, the Holocaust and why the world seems to be so heavily focused on Jews and Israel in the current moment. With this knowledge and understanding of history, our students will be prepared to respond to false claims, accusations and bigotry when confronted. We will prepare our teens for the inevitable confrontations they will have with anti-Zionism and antisemitism on social media and in school.

Describe how you engage with students and how they respond to it.
We will engage through the Unpacked Education curriculum and have discussion-based classes with ground rules of respect, listening, kindness and genuine curiosity. Classes will take place in the rabbi's office.

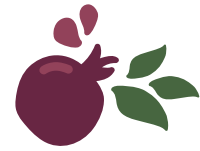
Can you give examples of one or two particularly interesting discussions?
We will explore the diversity of the Jewish world and learn about the Yemenite Jewish community and the Ethiopian Jewish community. These are two ancient branches of the Jewish family that have fascinating history, culture, customs and language. The students will learn about their different Jewish customs like the Ethiopian celebration of Sigd and the Yemenite pronunciation of Hebrew.

Describe how the class will help cement your students' Jewish identities.
My hope is that the class will broaden and enrich the students' connection to their own Judaism and to fellow Jews around the world. They will walk away from the class full of pride and the knowledge of how they fit into the vast tapestry of the Jewish tribe, ready to wear their Judaism like a badge of honor.

Let me ask you about the Religious School in general. What do you see happening in the classroom?
FUN! The students have fun, laugh, and through a warm and encouraging environment, learn abundantly.

The religious school's success can be attributed to our Director of Education Rachael Rovner, who has built a program that allows students at all learning stages to flourish, while having fun and building meaningful connections with their peers and teachers. With her focus on *middot* (Jewish character traits), she has crafted an engaging and powerful curriculum that our students can bring with them into their daily lives.

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2026-2027 5787



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The mission of Memphis Jewish Federation is to develop a vibrant and sustained Jewish community in Memphis, Israel and throughout the world. Federation helps nourish Jewish life through community grants, programs for the Memphis Jewish community and by supporting Jews in Israel and throughout the world. To learn more, visit jcpmemphis.org/federation.



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901.683.7485
baronhirsch.org

Beth Sholom's Men's Club

6675 Humphreys, 38120
mensclub@bsholom.org

Temple Israel Brotherhood

1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
brotherhood@timemphis.org
timemphis.org/brotherhood

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Baron Hirsch Sisterhood

400 S. Yates Road, 38120
901.683.7485
baronhirsch.org

Beth Sholom Sisterhood

Beth Sholom Mah Jong
6675 Humphreys Blvd, 38120
901.683.3591
erica@bsholom.org
bsholom.org

Chabad Women's Circle and Rosh Chodesh Society

2570 Kirby Parkway, 38119
901.219.7004
Mrs. Rivky Klein
Rivky@JewishMemphis.com
jewishmemphis.com

Temple Israel Sisterhood

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901.761.3130
sisterhood@timemphis.org
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901.937.2785
Head of School Blair Trotz
blairt@timemphis.org
timemphis.org/early-learning

Baron Hirsch Shabbat Programs
400 S. Yates Road, 38120
901.683.7485
Torah Tots 3 years old
Jr. Congregation: 1st-5th grade
Teen Minyan 6th-12th grade
Chidon Hatanach Teens
baronhirsch.org

Beth Sholom
6675 Humphreys Blvd., 38120
901.683.3591
Illanot (trees) Grades 8 – 10
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Parashah Playtime Ages 2–9
rachael@bsholom.org

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901.747.2665
Head of School Daniel R. Weiss
info@bornblum.org
bornblum.org

Margolin Hebrew Academy/Cooper Yeshiva of the South (Pre-K–12)
390 S. White Station Road, 38117
901.682.2400
Head of School Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Brown
info@mhacyos.org
mhacyos.org

Memphis Jewish Community Center Early Childhood Center
6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.259.9207
Director Lindsey Chase
lchase@jccmemphis.org
jccmemphis.org/ecc

Temple Israel High School Program
1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org

The Wendy & Avron Fogelman Religious School at Temple Israel
Grades Jr. K– 7th grade
1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.937.2777
Director of Youth Education & Family Engagement Sophie Weiss-Williams
sophiew@timemphis.org
timemphis.org/religious-school



6560 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, TN 38138
(901) 761-0810 | jccmemphis.org



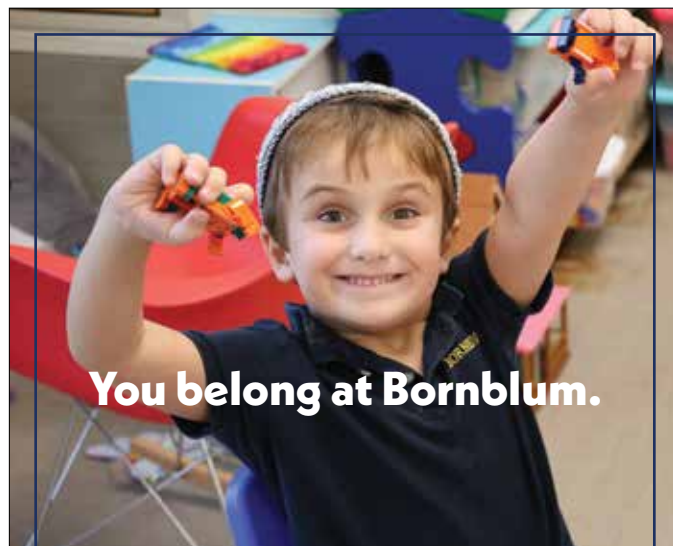
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The Memphis Jewish Community Center (MJCC) is an inclusive and compassionate community built on Jewish values, heritage, and culture, where people of all ages, lifestyles, ethnicities, and levels of observance come together to pursue personal fitness, team sports, the arts, youth programming, early childhood education, and more. We pride ourselves on being an inclusive, open and inviting place where everyone is welcome and anyone can be a member.



jcpmemphis.org/pjlibrary

Funded in part by Annual Community Campaign gifts to Memphis Jewish Federation, PJ Library is a national program that sends Jewish children a free, age-appropriate, Jewish-themed book or music each month to children up to 8 years old. Memphis is part of more than 250 participating communities. Thanks to this program, younger children gain the opportunity to turn learning about their religion into something that is both interesting and exciting. PJ Library also has programs throughout the year for young Jewish families.



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Another component to the B'nai Tzedek program is the Co-Op Fund. Endowed by a generous donor, this fund provides \$10,000 each year for the teens to distribute to local Jewish organizations. The teens work together to create the grant application, review the proposals, and then rank the programs to decide how much money to distribute to each organization.



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Youth Programs ~ grades 1-12
baronhirsch.org

BBYO

6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.761.0810
Director Zoe Goldberg
zgoldberg@bbyo.org
bbyo.org

Beth Sholom

6675 Humphreys Blvd.
901.683.3591
Parashah Playtime on Shabbat
bsholom.org

B'nai Tzedek Teen Philanthropy of Jewish Foundation of Memphis

6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.7100
cschrier@jcpmemphis.org
jcpmemphis.org/teen-philanthropy

CTEEN at Chabad

For all Memphis Jewish High Schoolers
2570 Kirby Parkway, 38119
901.754.0404
Cteen@JewishMemphis.org

JYG: Junior Youth Group at Temple Israel

1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
Karleigh Ring
KarleighR@timemphis.org
timemphis.org

NCSY

Jr. NCSYers (6th-8th) and Sr. NCSYers
(9th-12th)
ncsy.org

PJ Library

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901.767.7100
jcpmemphis.org/lemsky-endowment-fund

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1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org

TIMPO: Temple Israel Music & Programming Outreach

Cantorial Soloist & Music Director Eleanor
Tallie Steinberg
eleanors@timemphis.org
timemphis.org

Tot Shabbat and Family Shabbat at Temple Israel

1376 East Massey Road 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org

YOUNG ADULTS

Hillels of Memphis

Serving University of Memphis and Rhodes College
3581 Midland Avenue, 38111
901.452.2453
Director Phoenix Goldberg
pgoldberg@jcpmemphis.org
hillelsofmemphis.org

Jewish901 ~ Chabad Young Adults

Chabad@JewishMemphis.org
Jewish901.com

The CollecTive

20s and 30s social & spiritual group at Temple Israel
901.761.3130
Karleigh Ring
karleighr@timemphis.org
timemphis.org/collective

Young Adult Division Memphis Jewish Federation

6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.8522
jcpmemphis.org/fedled

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100newfamilies.com

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901.767.7100

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Director of Membership & Engagement Faith Evans
faithr@timemphis.org
timemphis.org/tribes

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Baron Hirsch Congregation

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baronhirsch.org

Beth Sholom Synagogue Lifelong Jewish Learning Center

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Thursday Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Sammy
6675 Humphreys Blvd., 38120
901.683.3591
erica@bsholom.org

Bornblum Judaic Studies University of Memphis

301 Mitchell Hall, The University of Memphis, 38152
901.678.2919
Director Dr. Shaul Bar
sbar@memphis.edu
memphis.edu/jdst

The Jewish Learning Institute Chabad Center for Jewish Life

2570 Kirby Parkway
Memphis, 38119
901.754.0404
Rabbi Levi Klein
JLI@JewishMemphis.com
JewishMemphis.com/JLI

Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & the Mid-South

6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
President David Bearman
mjhsresident@gmail.com
jhsmem.org

Or Chadash

Tuesday night classes at 7 p.m. with Rabbi Cantor David Julian
rabbidcj@gmail.com

Professional Advisory Group of Jewish Foundation of Memphis

6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.7100
Larry Schaffer
lschaffer@jcpmemphis.org
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Faith Evans.
faithr@timemphis.org
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1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org/ti-university

TIMPO: Temple Israel Music & Programming Outreach

TI Band, TI Memphis Jewish Choir, TIMPO Jam, multiple instrument instruction
Cantorial Soloist & Music Director Eleanor Tallie Steinberg
eleanors@timemphis.org
timemphis.org

SOCIAL SERVICES

Beth Sholom Synagogue

901.683.3591
Tikkun Olam Committee, Chesed Committee, Room in the Inn
erica@bsholom.org
bsholom.org

Sam Schloss Lodge #35 of B'nai B'rith

bnaibrith.org

Temple Israel

Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Temple Cares, Tikkun Olam Tribes, MICAH, Room in the Inn, Team Read, Team Glean
901.761.3130
timemphis.org

Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service at the MJCC

901.767.8511
Director Rashki Osina
jccmemphis.org/FogelmanJFS

- Classes and Support Groups
- Counseling
- Education and Outreach
- Emergency Assistance
- Finestone Family Home Delivered Meals
- Inclusion and Diverse Abilities Programming
- Judy and Larry Moss Senior Services – Compassionate Case Management and Care for Seniors
- Kay & Allen Iskiwicz Shalom Shuttle
- Peggy E. & L.R. Jalenak, Jr. Food and Baby Pantry
- Resource Center
- Volunteer Services

SENIOR SERVICES

SENIOR GROUPS

Baron Hirsch So-Shuls

400 S. Yates Road, 38120
901.683.7485
baronhirsch.org

MJCC Ben and Larisa Baer Senior Adult Center

Memphis Jewish Community Center
6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
Adult Service Coordinator Steve Kaplan
901.259.9220
stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org

The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Center offers a wide variety of educational, physical, social and cultural activities to meet the diverse needs and interests of our senior adult population. From fitness to adult education, from theater to Israeli programs.

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- Daily Senior Lunches
- Monday and Wednesday Programs and Activities

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1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org

SENIOR LIVING FACILITIES

Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab

36 Bazeberry Road, Cordova, 38018-7756
901.758.0036
Executive Director Bobby Meadows
bmeadows@memphisjewishhome.org
memphisjewishhome.org
Events: Annual Golf Tournament in September
Annual Meeting in April

Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab (MJHR) is a not-for-profit nursing home, Jewish in character and environment, dedicated to providing the highest level of care possible with dignity, compassion, and professionalism. We provide quality care for seniors seeking rehabilitation services and long-term care. With more than 99 years of experience serving seniors in the Memphis community, MJHR's professionally trained staff provides patient-centered care to people of all faiths.

Plough Towers Senior Housing

6580 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.1910
Executive Director Leigh Hendry (retiring 2026)
lhendry@ploughtowers.org
Incoming Executive Director Paige Peebles
ppeeble@ploughtowers.org
ploughtowers.org
Facebook: search PloughTowersMemphis

Plough Towers is a 150-unit apartment community located in the heart of East Memphis, which provides safe, HUD subsidized, independent living housing and services for seniors. Plough Towers is convenient to shopping, grocery stores, the Jewish Community Center and doctor's offices. A hot kosher lunch is served daily, and Plough Towers has amenities such as its own convenience store, beauty shop, transportation, computer center and fitness room.

SENIOR SERVICES

Alzheimer's Day Services of Memphis

Yad l'Yad Caregiver Support Group
Meets once a month at Memphis JCC
6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.372.4585
info@adsmemphis.org

Finestone Family Home Delivered Meals

For seniors in need.
Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service at MJCC
6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.8511
jccmemphis.org/FogelmanJFS

Friendly Visitors

Volunteers visit homebound seniors for companionship and socialization.
Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service at MJCC
6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.8511
jccmemphis.org/FogelmanJFS

Handy Helpers

Volunteers assist homebound seniors with errands and light house chores.
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6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.8511
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6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.8511
jccmemphis.org/FogelmanJFS

MIFA Scheidt-Hohenberg Hot Meals Program of Memphis Jewish Federation

Daily lunches at the MJCC
6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.767.8511
jccmemphis.org/adults/scheidt-hohenberg-kosher-hot-meals-program

Ronna K. Newburger Adult Day Center

36 Bazeberry Road, Cordova, 38018-7756
901.758.0036
Executive Director Bobby Meadows
bmeadows@memphisjewishhome.org
memphisjewishhome.org

Sam Schloss Lodge #35 of B'nai B'rith

bnaibrith.org

Senior Services Collaborative

Memphis Jewish Federation
Bluma Zuckerbrot-Finkelstein
901.767.7100
jcpmemphis.org
bzuckerbrot-finkelstein@jcpmemphis.org

Temple Cares at Temple Israel

1376 East Massey Road
901.761.3130
timemphis.org/caring-communities



Serving University of Memphis and Rhodes College
Director Phoenix Goldberg • pgoldberg@jcpmemphis.org

As a pluralistic Jewish student organization operated by Memphis Jewish Federation, Hillels of Memphis strives to shape a world where every student is inspired to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning, and Israel a reality at University of Memphis, Rhodes College, and campuses around the Mid-South. A student's involvement with Hillel is one of the strongest predictors of future Jewish leadership and as the leading authority on Jewish campus life, Hillels of Memphis reaches, engages, and equips tomorrow's leaders today.



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The Foundation's Professional Advisory Group (PAG) is made up of professionals in various legal and financial fields who support the mission of the Foundation. It is often the advisor who links a client's estate planning objectives to a charitable gift. These financial advisors, estate planning attorneys, CPAs and insurance agents help clients make informed decisions about charitable giving and advise them of the benefits associated with estate, tax and financial planning. The Jewish Foundation hosts many programs throughout the year for this group, including networking events and continuing education. If you are an advisor in the mid-South and would like to get involved, contact Larry Schaffer, lschaffer@jcpmemphis.org

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901.377.2639
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901.552.4505
231 New Byhalia Road, 38017
901.853.4100

Nosh-A-Rye Deli

36 Bazeberry Road, Cordova,
38018
901.756.3229
Executive Director Bobbie
Yarbrough
[byarbrough@](mailto:byarbrough@memphisjewishhome.org)
memphisjewishhome.org
thenoshmemphis.com

Nothing Bundt Cakes

681 S White Station Road,
Suite 101, 38117
901.208.8984

Ricki's Cookie Corner

5068 Park Avenue, 38117
901.866.CHIP(2447)
rickiscookies.com

Sam's Corner

6560 Poplar Avenue, 38138
901.236.9326
samscorneratj@gmail.com

CEMETERIES

Anshei Sphard Cemetery

901.682.1611

Baron Hirsch Cemetery

901.683.7485

Beth Sholom Memorial Gardens

901.683.3591
executive.director@bsholom.org

Jewish Cemetery at Elmwood

901.435.6353

Temple Israel Cemetery

901.761.3130
Jennifer Kollath
jenk@timemphis.org
timemphis.org/cemetery

Zalowitz Beth El Emeth Cemetery

901.682.1611

JUDAIC MUSEUMS

Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art

119 S. Main Street, 38103
Concourse Level
901.523.2787
belzmuseum.org

Temple Israel Museum

1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org/museum

JUDAICA

T Clifton Gallery & Framing

2571 Broad Avenue, 38112
901.323.2787
tcliftonart.com

Temple Israel Judaica Shop

1376 East Massey Road, 38120
901.761.3130
timemphis.org/judaica-shop-sisterhood



Baron Hirsch Congregation
400 S. Yates Rd., Memphis, 38117
901.683.7485
Senior Rabbi Ian Lichter
Cantor Ricky Kampf
Rabbinic Scholar Rabbi Joel Finkelstein
Executive Director Stuey Einhorn
Youth Director Stuey & Bracha Einhorn
general@baronhirsch.org
baronhirsch.org

Baron Hirsch is a vibrant, Modern Orthodox Zionist congregation that seeks to engage the community in all aspects of Jewish life – with a strong commitment to our Torah, our people and the State of Israel. Our daily, Shabbat and holiday services are warm and spirited, and everyone feels welcome. Each week, we provide enriching educational opportunities for people of all ages and Jewish backgrounds in a comfortable setting. Our youth department caters to everyone from toddlers to college students, with creative programs that allow our youngest members to forge deep connections to their Judaism. And our world-class clergy provide support and guidance to members experiencing all aspects of the Jewish lifecycle.

At Baron Hirsch, we seek to develop community on every level through a combination of major events and small clubs for those with similar interests. We host a variety of religious, educational,



social and community service events throughout the year to bring our diverse membership together. These include holiday kumsitzes, scholar-in-residence programs, our annual 100 man minyan, a festive Purim seudah, assembling food packages for the needy, engaging youth programs (such as Parsha and Pizza with the Rabbi for lower-schoolers and Israel advocacy training for teens) and more. For our most senior members, we hold monthly So-Shuls luncheons featuring guest entertainers. There is truly something for everyone here at Baron Hirsch!



bzuckerbrot-finkelstein@jcpmemphis.org

Senior Services Collaborative

An initiative of Memphis Jewish Federation, the Senior Services Collaborative proudly supports our community partners providing services to our seniors including vital needs, companionship, transportation, activities, and wellness. To serve seniors and their caregivers, Federation produces a monthly Memphis Jewish Seniors email newsletter, updates a Senior Services brochure at regular intervals, and runs the Memphis Jewish Seniors Facebook group, which anyone is invited to join. These efforts ensure that every Memphis Jewish senior is getting the care and support that they deserve. Learn more at memphisjewishseniors.org.



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A photograph of a man and a woman, Earle and Patricia Schwarz, sitting on a dark blue couch. They are both smiling and holding glasses of beer. Behind them is a large, colorful mural depicting a traditional Vietnamese village scene with thatched-roof houses, a river, and people in boats. The man is wearing a grey button-down shirt and glasses, and the woman is wearing a dark patterned top and red-rimmed glasses.

Earle and Trish share a toast at Bao Toan Kitchen and Bar in Crosstown Concourse.

Earle and Patricia Schwarz A Shidduch, Shared Life & Legacy of Service

By Shoshana Cenker

For Memphians Earle and Patricia Schwarz, a life well lived isn't measured by titles or accomplishments. It's measured by people and service.

Whether helping adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities find a place to call home, teaching generations of art students, caring for patients as a paramedic, or raising a family rooted in Jewish values, the couple has spent decades finding meaningful ways to serve others.

Earle, a third-generation Memphian, grew up in a blended family with two brothers and two sisters. His father was killed in a car accident when Earle was young.

Earle went on to earn a degree in religious studies from Brown University before finding rabbinical and law school applications sitting side by side. "I made a really informed choice that I wanted only a three-year post-degree track," he said with a grin, "not a five-year post-degree track." Law school won. Earle earned his J.D. from Vanderbilt University in 1980 and returned to Memphis to practice law.

Patricia's path was far less conventional. Raised in Greenfield, Tennessee, she was adopted at 6 weeks old and grew up in one of only two Jewish families in the small town of about 1,700 people.

With no Jewish religious education there, Patricia charted her own religious course. For her senior essay, in fact, she chose Judaism as her subject. Her father also took her to High Holiday services at Temple Israel in Memphis. Later, at Sophie Newcomb College of Tulane University, she pledged a Jewish sorority.

Patricia earned a BFA in clay with a minor in printmaking, followed by an MFA in clay and photography from East Carolina University. She moved to Memphis in 1979 to teach at St. Agnes Academy and later earned a master's degree in art history from then-Memphis State University.

Then came the shidduch that changed both their lives.

The director of Henry S. Jacobs Camp, where Earle had served as the first executive director from 1975 to 1977, was in Memphis recruiting for the summer in

1983 and introduced them.

Earle and "Trisha" married that December. Because Patricia was in her 30s, she thought starting a family might take some time.

It didn't. Anna was born the following October.

"God works that way sometimes," Earle quipped.

Susan arrived 22 months later and is now an Apple executive in Austin. The Schwarzes also raised Patricia's older daughter, Lindsey, now a chief mate in the Merchant Marine and a master diver. Their family now includes two delightful grandchildren.

Patricia's career eventually took her from art classrooms to a different calling.

She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001 and spent the next year undergoing chemotherapy and radiation.

"I realized that everybody on the face of the Earth needed some walking-around medical knowledge," she said. "I couldn't



Surrounded by parents and in the presence of loved ones, Earle and Trish were married at Temple Israel in Memphis, TN.



Trish and Earle accept Intunity's 2025 SPARK Award, presented by cityCURRENT and WKNO.



Earle and Trish take in a Memphis Redbirds game with their adorable grandkids.

see myself going back to teaching. I needed something new."

After years as an artist and educator, she went back to school, became a paramedic, and spent 15 years working at Baptist East before retiring.

Earle's legal career also evolved, leading him to one of the most meaningful chapters of his life. He became involved in litigation over conditions at the Arlington Developmental Center, which ultimately resulted in an agreement to move people with intellectual and developmental disabilities from institutional settings into community-based housing.

The Housing Foundation of West Tennessee was created out of that litigation, and Earle became its first board chair. He later served as executive director of the organization, doing business as Intunity, which now owns nearly 40 houses in Memphis and Jackson. That purposeful work has grown to include building new modular homes designed to be accessible, durable and energy efficient.

The 70-something Schwarzes have

remained deeply connected to Jewish life throughout the years.

"I was raised and confirmed at Temple Israel," Earle noted. "My rabbi for most of my life was Harry Danziger."

Earle and Patricia were married at Temple, as was their daughter Anna, whose career centers on the Jewish communal service values her parents instilled. After working at the Memphis JCC and Temple Emanu El in Houston, she's now VP of development at the Houston JCC.

The blissful couple is enjoying a different kind of adventure these days, having moved to Crosstown Concourse six years ago.

"We made a lifestyle choice," Earle said. "We sold our house, repurposed the equity, and decided we'd let somebody else worry about all the problems."

"And," Patricia added, "it's worked out great!"

They also travel extensively, most recently to Japan, and enjoy restaurants together. When they're home, their lives

largely revolve around Crosstown. "There are a surprisingly large number of folks like us, our demographic, who have sold their houses and are renters by choice," he added. "It creates a whole social life within the building."

After more than four decades together, the Schwarzes' paths have spanned law, art, healthcare, nonprofit work, parenthood and Jewish communal life. But the people they've encountered along the way have mattered the most.

"I always want to be thinking in ways that can help people," Patricia said.

Earle hopes his professional legacy is one of making a difference in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, helping give them opportunities to live quality lives.

Personally, "I want to be known as the best father and grandfather ever," he said. "That's always been my priority."

"Dad and grandad," added Patricia, "he has that in spades."



WHY YOU BELONG AT A JEWISH DAY SCHOOL

By Dr. Daniel R. Weiss and Sarah Alpert

What does it mean to belong at a school? Every school will tell you that your child will be accepted. Almost none of them will tell you the difference between becoming accepted as you adjust and being accepted as you are. It's a distinction most families don't think about until they've already watched their child start to change, often not for the better.

It's easy to confuse belonging with fitting in. The two words sound like cousins; they are, in fact, opposites. Fitting in is the quiet work of editing yourself to be accepted, sanding down the parts of you that might not match the room. Belonging is being received exactly as you are and discovering that a seat has been waiting for you the whole time.

That distinction matters most when you think about the size of the room. Public school is, by design and by mission, a big pond. There can be real value in that size, from breadth of programming to exposure to the diversity of the world. But a big pond asks something of the fish inside it. When a school serves thousands of students, it doesn't have the luxury of truly knowing every child: strengths may go unnoticed and struggles unaddressed. Fitting in becomes standardized almost out of necessity. The mold gets built first, and the child must find their way into it.

A Jewish day school like Bornblum Jewish Community School can do something different, not because we're better, but because we're smaller, and because belonging is baked into our mission rather than sprinkled on top. Here, it works the other way around: the child comes first, and our shared identity, our values, and our expectations are all built around them. We're not raising kids to perform a version of themselves that tests well in a bigger room later. We're trying to make sure they know, bone-deep, who they already are, so that when they do enter that wider world, and they will, they walk into it with confidence.

Fitting in asks a child to guess what's wanted and then become that. Belonging asks the room to make space instead. The difference is not sentimental; it's the whole point.

Picture the third grader who raises her hand every time, until a wrong answer draws a laugh, and by sixth grade she has learned to stay quiet instead. That same editing is happening right now to Jewish kids in public spaces across the country, including here in Memphis. As antisemitism and anti Israel sentiment have risen, some students have learned to tuck their Jewish star out of sight, skip discussing their Jewish life, or go quiet when talk turns to Israel, not because they stopped being proud of it, but because visibility has started to feel risky.

Developmental psychologists have a name for that kind of self editing: masking. The costs are real. Kids who spend years managing an acceptable version of themselves can carry that strain into anxiety and a shakier hold on who they actually are underneath it. Childhood and adolescence are supposed to be when a person builds a stable, secure sense of self. A child who edits themselves for years does not just end up with an edited version of who they are; they learn that editing is simply what is required, a lesson that can follow them for decades, leaving them always searching for belonging and never fully comfortable in their own skin.

None of this means belonging is the absence of standards. A family that asks nothing of you is not really a family. We hold our students and ourselves to real expectations; we simply try to make sure those expectations land as invitations rather than auditions.

At some point, most kids will need to swim in the big pond, but we believe there is something a child needs first: to spend their formative years somewhere they don't have to guess who to be, and to know their own values before the world hands them various choices. That knowledge and identity doesn't disappear once they leave us. If anything, that's what travels best. A school cannot hand belonging to a child on the first day, and a child cannot edit their way into it either. The room makes space for a child from the moment they arrive, and keeps making space every ordinary day after, so a child knows they are home from the start and never has reason to doubt it.

Street Dog Rescuers Caroline Schwartz and Alaina Bierdz

By Melinda Lejman

Caroline and Alaina have two Mexican street dogs rescued by Amazing Strays Rescue in San Diego, and one foster dog who they saved from the streets of Memphis.

The two had originally applied for a different dog with the rescue in San Diego, but she already had a meet and greet scheduled. The rescue recommended they meet Leo and the rest was history! Buck and Leo look like they could be related, so after meeting Buck we really had no choice but to give Leo a little brother! And then there's Lenny. She found us, but we hope to find her a forever family who picks her because of a deep bond they feel to her.

Naming them was easy. "Leo, our eldest daughter, came to us as Leona, and we just wanted a nickname, so we went with Leo," they said. "Buck came with his name, and Lenny (Lennox) was named after the area of Memphis she was found in. But her nickname, Flicka, is because she was found on Flicker Street."

Lenny is fostered through Team Memphis Rescue and Support. "They are an amazing group here in Memphis doing all they can to save dogs at risk! I am forever grateful for their support of all the strays we save," they said.

Buck and Leo went on a cross-country road trip when the two moved from San Diego to Memphis. Lenny has stayed a little closer to home boarding at Dogtopia. "She loves it there!" they agreed.

They also agree on using positive reinforcement training and recommend Ann Marie Easton of Pawsitive Companionship.

When it comes to treats, "Our dogs are the most spoiled! No trip to Hollywood Feed is complete without a new toy or treat," they said.

Caroline works from home, which means the dogs get to come to work with her every day! "It's the best!" she said. "Buck loves to say hi to my colleagues during meetings."

Love Most

That is so hard to put into a few sentences but here are just a FEW of the things we love about them. Leo is so sassy – sometimes her expressions make me think there is a human in there. Buck can always make us smile, even on the worst days. Lenny is the most loyal dog I have ever met. She is our little shadow around the house!

Pet Peeves

Lenny is a very vocal girl who loves to tell you how she feels. She can hit some high pitches! Buck loves to go number 2 on our driveway instead of the grass... we really don't know why! And Leo is a sock stealer, but we also kind of love that about her.

Favorite Veterinarian

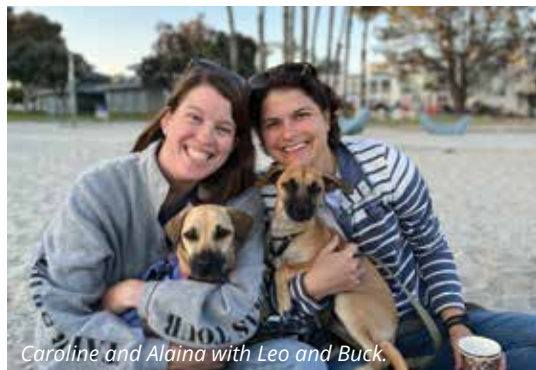
Buck and Leo go to Walnut Grove Animal Clinic. Lenny goes to Cloverleaf Animal Clinic through Team Memphis Rescue and Support.

Interesting Stories To Share

We are eager to just share the story of Lenny (Flicka) and hope she catches the eye of a Jewish Scene reader! We have been looking for her forever family since January, and we know they are out there. She was in rough shape when we found her, but is now healthy, happy, and ready for her life to begin. She is about 1 year old, 42 pounds, house and crate trained and continues to work on her skills through positive reinforcement training. She gets along with dogs after careful introductions and would do best in a home with active and patient humans. A fenced in yard would be ideal as she continues to work on her leash skills. She loves to play tug of war and fetch and is also a total cuddle bug on the couch!



Caroline with Lenny.



Caroline and Alaina with Leo and Buck.





Rachel with her husband, Steve.



Rachel and Congressman and civil rights icon, John Lewis, when he came to Memphis to speak for a Facing History and Ourselves event.

RACHEL SHANKMAN'S UNDENIABLE IMPACT: Educating Generations, Inspiring Positive Change

— By Shoshana Cenker

Rachel Shankman has spent a lifetime transforming history into purpose. Rachel was born in a WWII displaced persons camp in 1946 to Holocaust survivor parents from Poland, Cesia and Abram Fromer. She arrived in the U.S. at 3 years old. A “wonderful” Nashville family sponsored their journey, where they began rebuilding their lives.

“Nashville was an extraordinarily wonderful place to grow up,” she remembered. “I will admit this: Nothing really prepared communities for how to deal with survivors.”

Conversations at home, even in a segregated Nashville, often centered on justice, empathy and the danger of any group believing itself superior to another.

“There’s no question that growing up with survivors as parents put me on a trajectory through my whole life about what was important,” Rachel explained. “Our conversations about how wrong it was that the Black community was being treated as second-class citizens propelled me into what I did the rest of my life and really understanding the danger of any group thinking they were superior to any group.”

Like many second-generation survivors, Rachel describes her upbringing as “a puzzle you’re always trying to put together.” Her father died when she

was a high school senior and her mother not long after. Much of their stories remained hushed, shaped by a quiet mutual instinct to protect one another from pain.

“I had an unspoken contract with my dad,” she said. “I didn’t ask him questions, and he didn’t tell me much.”

What her mother shared, though, focused more on humanity than horror. Those stories, and the core values beneath them, would unfold across decades of Rachel’s trailblazing leadership.

It began in high school, where B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) was a “lifeline,” and Rachel started sharing her parent’s Shoah experiences with adult groups. For college, her mother encouraged her to broaden her horizons. “My little 4-foot-10 dynamo mother knew to give me wings,” she said.

At then-Memphis State University, she dated and married Stephen Shankman, who was in law school. His work with American Airlines took them to Kentucky where their first son, Brett,



Shankman family

was born, then to LA, where Brian was born, before they settled in Memphis.

Combining her B.S. in sociology and social work with a Foundations of Education college program, Rachel built a career on education, advocacy and connection. From her early work in social and family services to leadership roles with BBYO, Beth Sholom Congregation, and the Jewish Student Union (now Hillel), she gravitated toward helping young people connect history to their own lives.

That calling found its fullest expression when Rachel attended a Facing History and Ourselves (FHO) workshop. “I came



Rachel with her son, Brian, in Israel for its 50th Anniversary.

out thinking, "This is everything I want to do professionally," she remembered. "I didn't want it just to memorialize that experience. I wanted it to be about prevention. ... It's much easier to face history sometimes – but applying it to today was and is so challenging."

After oral history training from Holocaust scholar Yaffa Eliach in New York, Rachel met Facing History and Ourselves cofounder Margot Stern Strom in Boston, which crystallized her calling. In 1992, Rachel founded FHO's Memphis office, which she led for more than two decades.

Through that work, she helped generations of students see how history applies to their own lives. In a memorable experience at a Memphis school, a student approached her. "She said, 'I can't believe white people did that to other white people,'" Rachel recalled. "And I realized what a gift I had given her, because it took that tunnel vision of what oppression meant [and expanded it]. She understood that it was human history."

Rachel's undeniable impact stretched beyond Facing History. She was the first woman president of Beth Sholom Synagogue, and earlier, had the tremendous honor of receiving the first female aliyah when the synagogue became egalitarian. "To feel the weight of my ancestors and of women, how awe-inspiring. It was a privilege," she said. "Now, I see so many young women read Torah, so beautifully, and it's so normal. One of the best things that ever happened is the sense of normalcy about women's participation in services."

Rachel has long championed the idea that meaningful change happens through education, shared responsibility and a willingness to engage. "I really believe Memphis is the kind of place where, if you want to roll up your sleeves," she said, "there are so many opportunities to get involved."

Rachel has certainly lived by that philosophy. Her community involvement has also included bringing the "Anne Frank in



Rachel with former Mayor Don Sundquist lighting candles during Yom HaShoah program.

Congressman Don Sundquist (Rep. Tn.) and Rachel Shankman, a second generation Holocaust survivor and chairman of the Memphis Jewish Community Relations Council's Holocaust Committee, par-

the World" exhibit to Memphis, chairing Memphis Jewish Federation's Yom HaShoah Committee, and currently serving on the KAVOD board. Over the years, she's been recognized with numerous honors including the Women of Achievement Award, the Daniel Pearl Legacy Award, the Women's Foundation of Greater Memphis' Legends Award, the Presidents Humanitarian Award from the Memphis Theological Seminary, and many more.

Now 79, with nearly 60 blissful years of marriage and four grandchildren, Rachel notes that her greatest accomplishment isn't on her résumé. "I have lived such a blessed life," she said. "When people ask me what I'm most proud of, it's raising two wonderful human beings."

In addition to family time, she travels, loves cruising, reads voraciously, listens to podcasts, is a "passionate Zionist," and, perhaps most joyfully, dances; a passion she and Stephen discovered later in life and embraced together.

In the wake of Oct. 7 and rising antisemitism, her work and voice remain deeply relevant. Yet, the core of her message has not changed.

"Because of my parent's experiences, I was always aware what a miracle it was that I'm alive – the fact that I grew up in this truly loving family, who always made me feel like I could do anything," Rachel shared. "I was an overachiever because I wanted to make up for what they lost. As a teenager, I'd suddenly think, 'Oh my G-d, at my age, my mother was going into a concentration camp.' So I felt this very strong need to be happy, to achieve, and to make them proud. And I think I did."

By honoring her parents' legacy, Rachel created one of her own. The values they instilled in her continue to ripple outward through the generations she has taught, mentored and inspired, carrying forward their legacy, and now hers, for years to come.

Where the Freiden Garden Grows, Community Blooms

By Shoshana Cenko

As you walk upon the Freiden garden in Memphis, transported to what feels like a faraway fairytale, the first thing you notice is that there is no single thing to look at.

Under a canopy of towering trees, flowers spill from colorful pots. Fountains bubble, wind chimes hang from branches, and butterflies and dragonflies decorate massive tree trunks. There are rabbits and angels, benches and swings, quirky signs, bright metal flowers and little surprises tucked everywhere.

At the center is a large pond edged in stone, where orange fish dart beneath floating greenery surrounding a fountain. And the man responsible for all of it insists on one thing: "I'm not a gardener," Hugh Freiden said decisively. "I just do things."

Those "things" began around 2019 and took off during the early days of the COVID pandemic, when time at home gave him an opportunity to start transforming the backyard of the Memphis home he shares with his wife, Debbie.

Debbie eventually encouraged Hugh to bring the evolving garden to their front yard, "where everybody can enjoy it," she said.

The timing gave the project another purpose.

"During COVID, people needed to feel productive, useful. What can I do with my time here?" Debbie recalled of the garden that offered a way to combat the isolation. "People felt so lonely at times and all alone."



Hugh and Debbie Freiden

There was no grand landscape plan. Hugh dug a hole here, planted something there, potted plants and planted trees, and kept going. A fountain spotted at an estate sale sparked another idea, followed by more plants, rocks, ornaments, water features and garage sale goodies he could refurbish or repurpose.

And the neighbors noticed.

"It really has become much more neighborly," Hugh said. "My neighbors always stop by and talk to us."

People walking past stop to look, talk, play and meditate. Debbie recalled one woman who walks to shul telling her, "I always use your garden to relax." Sometimes, the Freidens even put out drinks for visitors.

"It's good for your mental and emotional health," Debbie said, "all the things."

Much of what fills the garden has been rescued or repurposed. Garage sales are favorite hunting grounds, and Hugh buys discounted and dying plants and gives them another chance. Despite the many decorations within easy reach of the street, no one has vandalized the garden or stolen anything.

Some pieces carry much deeper meaning.

The first rose tree was planted when Debbie finished cancer treatment, marking the milestone after she rang the bell.

Another tree has especially deep family roots. When the Freidens'



grandson Benny was 3, he helped plant a Bradford pear. Benny is now 18, and the once-small tree now towers overhead (just like he does).

The Freidens' five grandchildren swing beneath the trees, explore the fountains, and peer into the pond. Wildlife has discovered the oasis, too. Birds stop at the fountains to drink and bathe. Frogs and tadpoles congregate around the water, along with the occasional raccoon or turtle.

"At nighttime, we have a frog party out there," Hugh beamed with his infectious smile.

"It's been really well received in lots of ways," Debbie added. "Animals and humans."

The garden's personality is everywhere. One tree promises a "Stress Free Zone," while another sign warns visitors they've entered a Bigfoot breeding area. Statues and painted finds peek from among plants and rocks, and fountains and wind chimes provide a soundtrack beneath the trees.

Maintaining it all is decidedly hands-on work. There are rocks to move, holes to dig, plants to tend, and an ever-changing collection of projects. "I'm not retired," Hugh joked.

"We're always grateful when it rains," Debbie said.

"We do rain dances," Hugh added.

But he does stop long enough to enjoy what he's created.



The Freiden grandchildren enjoy every section of the garden.



"I spend a lot of time out there just staring at fish," Hugh said. "It's soothing."

The garden doesn't feel finished. It isn't supposed to be. One discovery leads to another rescued plant, fountain, project or unexpected addition.

"We're very thankful, very grateful," Debbie said, "it's a blessing to be able to do this."

What started as something to do with Hugh's time has become something much bigger: a whimsical retreat for the Freidens, their family, neighbors, wildlife and any passersby – exactly where Debbie thought it belonged, out front for everyone to enjoy.

Melinda and husband Mike celebrate Jillian's bat mitzvah at Beth Sholom with their sons Dylan and baby Henry in 2018.



Choosing to Belong: A Memphian's Journey to Judaism

By Shoshana Cenker

Writer's note: Enjoy 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, including acceptance of mitzvot, immersion in a mikveh, and, for men, circumcision, they are as fully Jewish as someone born Jewish.

....
For some people, Judaism is inherited. For others, it's chosen.

For native Memphian Melinda Lejman, the path to becoming Jewish unfolded gradually through family, study, community and a growing sense that Judaism felt right.

Aside from a brief period attending a Methodist church when she was young, religion was not part of her upbringing.

"I didn't convert from anything," Melinda explained. "I didn't grow up in a religious family."

Her connection to Judaism began later, when she married her first husband, Eric, who was Jewish. Even then, conversion wasn't something she initially considered for herself. When their first child, Jillian, was born, the conversation began to shift.

Her mother-in-law, an active member of Beth Sholom Synagogue, gently raised the idea of bringing the baby into the Jewish community. When Jillian converted at just 9 months old with Rabbi Aaron Rubenstein at Beth Sholom, Eric joined their daughter in the mikvah. The moment was especially meaningful because Jillian's great-grandmother, who had escaped Poland and immigrated to the United States, was there to witness it.

At the time, she was finishing her undergraduate degree at the University of Memphis. Wanting to better understand the faith her daughter was growing up with, Melinda enrolled in



Melinda at around 3 years old with her parents and brother.

college courses about Judaism. One class, in particular, changed everything.

"My intense Holocaust studies class," she said, "had a huge impact on my decision to convert and become part of the Jewish community."

That deeper understanding of Jewish history led Melinda to seriously consider conversion. In 2009, she approached Rabbi Rubenstein to begin the process.

For about a year, she studied and met regularly with the rabbi. Her mother-in-law played an important role as well, helping guide her through synagogue life and the rhythms of Jewish practice.

"When I started going to Beth Sholom services, I sat with her. We were looking at the siddur together, and she was explaining to me, 'This is what you do here, and this is why.' She was such a big help," Melinda shared. "Nothing gave me pause. I appreciate that being a Conservative Jew means I could



Grandma Sylvia (OBM), Lauren Spiegel and Jillian.

participate in services. I felt like I could be included in a way that was important for me. I found everybody to be very warm and welcoming, especially after services. I was like, why don't people who go to church do this? Everybody goes to lunch after church, but they go to different places. Here, everyone stays together for kiddush."

Eventually, her studies culminated. To finalize her conversion, Melinda appeared before a *beit din*, a panel of rabbis who asked her questions about why she wanted to become Jewish and what Jewish life would look like for her and her family.

"It was very intimidating," she admitted. "I was afraid I was going to say the wrong thing."

But after she passed the final questions and immersed in the mikvah, her conversion process was finally complete. "It kind of felt surreal," she said. "I was very happy."

That same day, her young son, Dylan, converted alongside her, marking the beginning of fully Jewish lives.

Celebrating holidays quickly became one of Melinda's favorite parts of the journey: preparing for Passover, learning what belongs on the Seder plate, and navigating Jewish traditions for the first time as a participant rather than an observer.

Life brought changes. A divorce. A new marriage in 2015 to Michael, under a *chuppah* he and Dylan built. Their son Henry was born. The family became active at Temple Israel, while maintaining friendships from Beth Sholom.

Through every transition, Melinda's Jewish identity remained constant. "I lived a little vicariously through our kids' bar and bat mitzvot," she noted. "Going through that really makes you feel like you're Jewish."

These days, she offers encouragement to anyone considering the same path: "Go for it."

Melinda acknowledges that at first, some converts may feel what she calls "imposter syndrome," the sense that they are somehow not fully part of the Jewish world. But that feeling fades with time.

"You studied, you did the work, you're living Jewishly, own it," she said. "Getting involved in the community helps. Meet people and make connections. Find what inspires you and what you're passionate about. Find others who do those things too. Before you know it, you'll have a strong community of people and will feel part of it. Don't assume people will treat you differently if you convert, no one has done that to me."

For many, choosing Judaism is not about where you started, but about where you decide to belong.

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The Child in Front of Us Has Not Happened Yet

By R. Dr. Gavriel Brown, Head of School, MHA-CYOS

Rosh Hashanah is usually described as the birthday of the world. The phrase is familiar enough that we can miss how strange it is, because according to one of the central rabbinic calculations, the world is not what gets born that day. *Human beings are.*

Vayikra Rabbah 29:1 belongs to Midrash, the rabbinic tradition of interpreting and expanding on the Torah, and it collects interpretation on the biblical book of Leviticus. It walks through Adam's first day hour by hour. The world begins on the twenty-fifth of Elul, which places Adam's creation on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem forms him, gives him a nefesh, a soul, and brings him into Gan Eden. By the ninth hour Adam receives his commandment. In the tenth, he violates it. In the eleventh, he is judged. And in the twelfth:

"He emerged pardoned."

Hashem then tells Adam:

"This is a sign for your children. Just as you stood before Me in judgment on this day and emerged pardoned, so your children will one day stand before Me in judgment on this day and emerge pardoned" (Vayikra Rabbah 29:1).

Quite a first day of school for humanity! Adam starts with nothing but potential, and within hours he has also accumulated a record.

Anyone who teaches children knows that problem. Records pile up fast. Teachers learn who forgets homework, who reads ahead, who talks too much, who rarely speaks. Parents develop their own shorthand: "*She's my anxious one.*" "*He's not really a math kid.*" "*She's the responsible one.*" The shorthand usually starts out descriptive, and then at some point it starts predicting.

Prediction has power. The psychologist Albert Bandura spent decades studying what he called self-efficacy, a person's belief that he or she can successfully undertake a task. That belief affects whether we attempt something, how long we persist and what we do after failure. A student who concludes "I cannot do this" is carrying more than the difficulty of the assignment. He is carrying a theory about himself. Carol Dweck's research on mindset comes at the same territory from another direction:

children respond differently when ability is presented as capable of development rather than as fixed. Her idea has sometimes been flattened into the cheery claim that effort solves everything, when the more useful point is that a current level of performance tells you where a child is today, which is not the same thing as telling you who he is.

Rosh Hashanah makes a similar claim.

One of the Torah readings chosen for the holiday tells the story of Hagar and Yishmael in the wilderness. Their water is gone, Yishmael is dying, and Hagar walks away because she cannot bear to watch. Then Hashem hears the boy.

"For G-d heard the voice of the boy where he was" (Bereishit 21:17, Genesis).

Those final words, "where he was," attract the attention of Chazal, the ancient rabbis whose teachings form the foundation of classical rabbinic Judaism. Bereishit Rabbah 53:14, a classical Midrash on Genesis, imagines the angels objecting to Yishmael's rescue. They know what history will eventually contain. His descendants will cause terrible suffering to the Jewish people. Why save him?

Hashem asks: "Right now, what is he, righteous or wicked?"

The angels concede that at that moment he is innocent.

Hashem responds:

"I judge a person only according to his present moment" (Bereishit Rabbah 53:14).

The Gemara, the rabbinic discussion that forms a central part of the Talmud, turns this into a broader principle:

"A person is judged only according to his deeds at that moment" (Rosh Hashanah 16b).

Rashi, the great eleventh-century commentator, sharpens it further:

"He is judged according to the deeds he is doing now, and not according to what he will eventually do" (Rashi, Bereishit 21:17).

For anyone who spends the day with children, that is a hard sentence to read without flinching. The angels see the trajectory. Hashem sees the person standing in front of Him.

There is an inversion in this for teachers and parents. We do not have the angels' knowledge, and we have no idea where the story goes, yet we often speak about children with considerably more confidence than the angels did. "He's never going to..." "She just isn't..." "He's the kind of kid who..."

Psychologists have studied what are sometimes called expectancy effects, the ways an adult's expectations can subtly shape another person's performance. Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson's "Pygmalion" research from the 1960s has been debated and refined since, but the classroom mechanism is still recognizable. Expectations affect which questions we ask, how long we wait for an answer, whom we challenge, whom we rescue and what evidence of growth we notice. Children read adults well, and they usually know when we have stopped being curious about them.

What Rosh Hashanah asks is harder than giving people another chance. Judaism has no interest in amnesia. Rosh Hashanah is the great day of "remembrances," one of the central themes of the Mussaf prayer service. We say:

"For You remember all that has been forgotten."

There is a record. The claim is that the record does not close off what is still possible.

Good teachers remember too. They know which child failed the test, disrupted the class or hurt another student. Responsibility depends on memory. The work is to remember yesterday without letting yesterday own tomorrow.

The shofar, the ram's horn blown on Rosh Hashanah, says something similar. The Rambam, Maimonides, the twelfth-century philosopher and legal authority, writes in Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4:

"Wake up, sleepers, from your sleep, and those who slumber, awaken from your slumber."

That is an interruption rather than an argument. We have been telling ourselves a story about who we are, and the shofar breaks into it.

Children can get trapped early inside descriptions of themselves. "I'm bad at Hebrew." "I can't sit still." "I'm the kid who gets sent out." Once "this happened" turns into "this is who I am," a temporary struggle starts hardening into identity.

Even the sounds of the shofar suggest another possibility. Tekiah is whole, shevarim is broken, teruah fractures the sound further, and then comes another tekiah. Whole, then broken, then whole again, which is not a bad description of growing up.

The Mishnah, the foundational collection of rabbinic teachings compiled around the third century, gives us one more image:

"On Rosh Hashanah, all who inhabit the world pass before Him like sheep (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:2).

The Gemara explains one possibility as soldiers passing one by one in review, another as people crossing a narrow mountain pass (Rosh Hashanah 18a). Either way the image is individual. One by one, which may also be a philosophy of teaching. Schools need standards, schedules, benchmarks and categories, and the actual work still comes back to one child standing in front of us. Where he is, and from there, where he might yet go.

Maybe this is why the Rosh Hashanah liturgy can say: "Today the world is conceived."

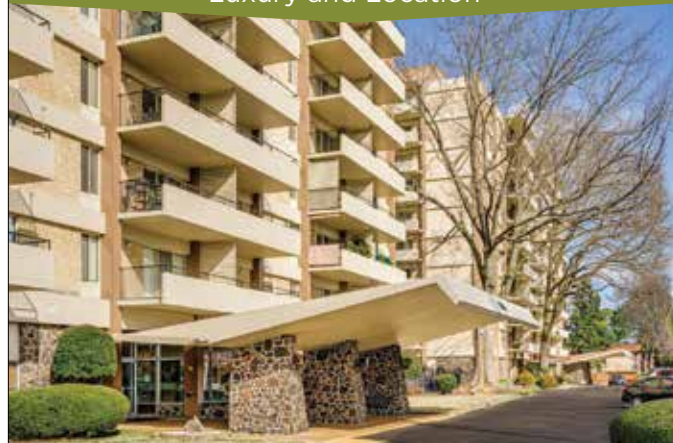
Today. The world has been around a while and has accumulated an impressive disciplinary file, and Judaism still talks about it as though something is waiting to be born.

Consequences matter, and so do standards and memory. So does the habit of holding a child's current version loosely.

Adam can fail in the tenth hour and still have a thirteenth. Yishmael can have a history ahead of him and still be judged "where he is." The shofar can find someone asleep and assume he can wake up. Maybe the most sacred thing a parent or teacher does is look at a child whose weaknesses have become familiar and keep enough humility to remember that we have not read the ending. The child in front of us has not happened yet.

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michael.stein@wellsfargoadvisors.com
<https://home.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael.stein>

Erika Brewer
Personal Client Associate
erika.brewer@wellsfargoadvisors.com
(901) 761-6357

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