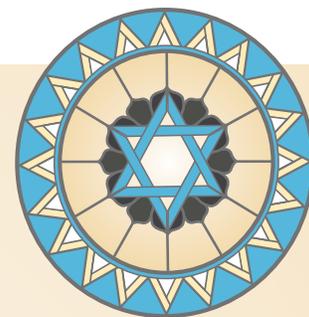


# JHSM BULLETIN



Volume 7 • December 2021



*JHSM's tenth J-Cycle bike tour of historic Jewish Detroit on October 10, 2021, included a stop at Beth Olem Cemetery, which lies within GM's assembly plant, Factory ZERO. GM provided tremendous support to enable JHSM's visit, including stopping a \$2.2 billion construction project for the tour and building a half-mile "bike lane" from the plant entrance to the cemetery. (Courtesy of Arnold Collens.)*

## GM'S GUARDIANSHIP OF BETH OLEM CEMETERY STRENGTHENS TIES WITH JEWISH COMMUNITY

*Catherine Cangany, PhD, JHSM Executive Director*

You probably know that jarring, iconic image of Beth Olem Cemetery: the old-world graves in the foreground, cut against the modern factory looming in the background. Google "Beth Olem" and a dozen versions will pop up. The stories that accompany the photos generally emphasize that grating contrast, mourning "progress" by leveraging Beth Olem's long and unusual history.

Beth Olem is Congregation Shaarey Zedek's first burial ground, established in 1862. Michigan's first all-Jewish cemetery, it was sited well beyond Detroit's population center in the Milwaukee Junction neighborhood (named for the two railroad lines that

intersected nearby). But Detroit's burgeoning industry soon encroached on Beth Olem. In 1910 the Dodge Main Plant sprang up not far away, drawn to the proximity of the tracks.

Unable to expand the 2.2-acre cemetery (packed with 1,100 burials by the last interment in 1948) and attuned to the Jewish community's suburban migration, Shaarey Zedek looked northwestward. In 1918 it opened its second and current burial ground, Clover Hill Park Cemetery, 23 miles away in Birmingham.

Although no longer an active burial ground after 1948, Beth Olem and the Dodge plant lived cheek by jowl—until in 1966

*Continued on page 12*

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT • RISHA B. RING

The 2020 *JHSM Bulletin* was recently awarded the Historical Society of Michigan's 2021 Outstanding Printed Periodical prize. Little did I think, as I penned my *Bulletin* message last fall, that we would still be in our "COVID pivot" a year later.

Yet JHSM has managed to survive and thrive. We reinvented how we share and preserve history while serving our membership and the larger community. Our membership has grown. Our programming has been plentiful. Our fundraising and friendraising efforts have given us a head start on the organization's future.

Through virtual technology we have provided programs across a range of disciplines: education, recreation, the arts, science, medicine, and more. Zoom has allowed us to bring scholars from around the country into our participants' homes to share their knowledge, enthusiasm, and spirit.

In the past year, our Zoom programming gave us an opportunity to hear Craig Wilson, chief curator at Mackinac State Historic Parks, speak about the first Jew in Michigan—Ezekiel Solomons. Two special series, "Innovators & Entrepreneurs" and "Shattering the Ceiling," introduced us to people making positive, significant differences. We watched lectures from scholars like Dr. Catherine Cangany who presented to virtual audiences of JHSM members and guests as well as to several local organizations. Additionally, we connected with author Judy Batalion (see related article on page 18) and author, psychologist, and Michigan native Leonard Felder, PhD (see related article on page 22) for fascinating programs.

This sounds much like 2020. But in the last year, we all learned to deal with COVID-19 and navigate new ways to a more normal life. Using appropriate protocols, we returned to in-person programming. We have provided several in-person private tours for families and groups in recent months. We also pulled off a successful and safe J-Cycle 10 bicycle tour (and, for the first time, bus tour) of historic Jewish Detroit on October 10.

We will continue to expand our in-person programming as conditions become increasingly safer.

Despite the constraints of the pandemic, JHSM was still able to collaborate and develop new partnerships with important organizations in the community, including Bookstock, the Center for Jewish Studies at EMU, the Coalition for Black and Jewish Unity, Detroit Urban League, Ford Piquette Avenue Plant, General Motors, the Greater Michigan Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, The Henry Ford, Historical Society of Michigan, the Holocaust Memorial Center, JCC Chicago, JCRC/AJC, Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network, Liberty Temple Baptist Church, Livonia Historical Society, Mackinac State Historic Parks, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, National Endowment for the Arts, Nu?Detroit, the University of Detroit Mercy, and The Well.

JHSM's most significant initiative and massive undertaking is the launch of a feasibility study to determine if we should embark upon the creation of Michigan's first Jewish historical museum. Following extensive research by our Museum Exploration Committee, the JHSM Board of Directors approved the creation of a Museum Task Force, charged with moving forward with a feasibility study. After consideration of several consultants, we selected Gallagher & Associates, noted for many outstanding museums, including developing the plans for the newly opened ANU Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv. Gallagher & Associates' findings will give JHSM a clear picture of our future. More news on this initiative will follow in the months to come.

Our STAR continues to rise. . . .



Jewish Historical Society of Michigan's *Bulletin* offers a colorful and engaging retrospective of the last year's programs, presentations, and achievements. It is one of the many perks of a JHSM membership.

### **JHSM Bulletin**

Risha B. Ring, PhD, *President*

Catherine Cangany, PhD, *Executive Director*

Tracy Weissman, JD, *Editor*

*Designed and Printed by:* Grigg Graphic Services

*Published by:* Jewish Historical Society of Michigan



*This publication is supported in part by an award from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts.*

## A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR • CATHERINE CANGANY, PHD



(Courtesy of Elayne Gross Photography.)

After struggling to repay its short-term construction loans, the National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH) recently emerged from bankruptcy with startling news. A number of the museum's bondholders collectively forgave \$14 million of the \$30 million debt. Former long-time trustee Mitchell Morgan and his family bought the museum building for \$10 million, leasing it back for a mere \$1,000 per month until the institution is in a position to repurchase it.

In the press release announcing the remarkable arrangement, Morgan outlined the benefactors' motivations: "We're living in a time that requires us to reflect on our values, and a time when our country needs institutions like [NMAJH] that represent freedom and inclusivity."

## WELCOME JHSM'S NEW DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR • MICHAEL FELDMAN

I come to JHSM after many years as a lay leader in the Detroit and national Jewish communities. I have been involved in fundraising campaigns in many different organizations, both locally and nationally, and have come to learn that fundraising is about a lot more than just asking for money. We need to raise money at JHSM, but in order to do so, we must raise awareness in the community about the vital role we play. In the future I hope to showcase our value by sending out newsletters that highlight our activities and developing events that appeal to a wide audience.

I was born and raised in Detroit and am a longtime member of JHSM. History has always been a passion of mine, which is one of the reasons I am so excited about my new role. I love learning about our old buildings and artifacts, but sometimes even more important are the voices from the past. They help tell the smaller stories that tend to get lost in the larger narrative. These stories are about our collective past because each of us is a part of Michigan history. This is what makes JHSM so important to me.

As 2020 began, no one could have predicted that it would be necessary to switch to Zoom programming, but the team at JHSM has done a great job of not only converting to online programming but also offering even more programs than in the past. Many of you have logged in for events such as Professor Emeritus (Bowling Green State University and Wayne State University) David Weinberg's lecture on the integration of Polish and Russian Jewish immigrants into American life (May 3, 2021), and an interview with renowned pediatric endocrinologist and Oakland

We are taking up Morgan's twofold charge. We are thinking intensely about the importance of Jewish tradition and experience in American history. We are working to transmit that importance deeply and widely, within the community and beyond.

We also take to heart Morgan's third charge: to "encourage more people to play a role . . . by providing different perspectives on how immigrants and religious minorities have positively impacted our great nation for centuries." That is work we are distinctively positioned to undertake—together.

As we contemplate pursuing our own museum, we proceed with NMAJH's many lessons, whether financial, structural, or philosophical, firmly in mind. We plan a member informational session in the near future with Gallagher & Associates, the firm we have retained to conduct our feasibility study. Stay tuned! Thank you for joining us on the adventure.

University President Ora Pescovitz about shattering the glass ceiling (July 27, 2021). A number of others are featured in the pages of this *Bulletin*.



Hopefully, as our lives return to normal, we will be able to host more in-person events, such as our successful tenth J-Cycle bike ride on October 10, while continuing to have virtual programs. You can read more about J-Cycle on page 14 of this issue.

I am also excited about the prospect of opening a Museum of Jewish Michigan. Such a museum will be an opportunity to capture the life, culture, and history of Jewish Michigan and share it with the whole state, as well as tourists. We have begun our feasibility study to see if it is a workable idea and look forward to reporting the results.

Our mission is to preserve and celebrate Michigan's rich Jewish history. We want to share this legacy with our entire community because it is your legacy that we celebrate. JHSM is not just a communal organization: It is your organization. We value your ideas, input, and of course, financial support. All of our exciting plans for the future will require funding, and we appreciate what our ever-growing membership has done and continues to do, to allow us to keep providing you with great programs and publications.

## EVENT COORDINATOR'S UPDATE • KARA SCHUCHMAN



JHSM saw another successful year of Zoom programming—as well as the return of J-Cycle in 2021. Our programming continues to reach viewers from across Michigan, the country, and the world, with many appreciative that most programs are recorded: They can register and view them at their leisure. Here are just a few highlights of our 24 offerings from 2021.

We began the year with a look into our past as nearly 200 viewers watched our Executive Director, Catherine Cangany, PhD, present “Reams of Hate” on January 19. Her riveting hour-long lecture detailed the history of Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* newspaper and how this publication still influences many hate groups to this day. Our audience has continued to appreciate that JHSM programming works to tie our state’s Jewish history to today’s current events.

A joint program with Eastern Michigan University’s Center for Jewish Studies focused on the Linguistics Department’s Jewish Life and Language in Southeast Michigan Project on February 15. It provided participants with an overview of the department’s research on language and how it has changed in the greater-Detroit Jewish community. We teamed with Rabbi Joseph Krakoff of the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network on March 23 to gain a better understanding of continuity and change in end-of-life care in the time of COVID-19 (see related article on page 24). And in our new Innovators & Entrepreneurs series (March 10, May 12, and August 10), JHSM partnered with Jared Rothberger of JAN-PRO Detroit

and Gabe Schuchman of Alrig USA to hear the stories of local entrepreneurs and how their experiences growing up and residing in Michigan’s Jewish community have influenced their lives and careers.

JHSM also was fortunate to screen two movies exclusively for our members and friends this past year. *Summer in the Country*, a film by Jody Belsher, chronicles six generations of the families who spent their summers in the Mt. Pleasant subdivision in western Michigan (February 10). *Ten Questions for Henry Ford*, a film by Andy Kirshner, examines the troubling legacy of Henry Ford and was followed by a panel discussion featuring Kirshner along with Michigan ADL Director Carolyn Normandin, JCRC/AJC Executive Director Rabbi Asher Lopatin, and JHSM Executive Director Catherine Cangany, PhD (August 26).

Fall brought the return of in-person programming with J-Cycle on October 10, after taking off 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This oversold event brought out nearly 140 participants to learn more about Jewish influences on the automotive industry. Featuring eighteen miles and five stops (including the Ford Piquette Avenue Plant, Beth Olem Cemetery, the Meyer and Anna Prentis Building on Wayne State’s campus, Henry Ford’s home in the historic Boston Edison neighborhood, and Eastern Market), JHSM raised nearly \$30,000, and participants enjoyed a wonderful ride on either bicycles or, for the first time, a coach bus once storms cleared (see related articles on pages 1 and 14).

As we look ahead to 2022, we are excited to continue bringing high-quality, knowledge-packed programs to our audience. We look forward to in-person programming as the year progresses, as well as the continued use of Zoom to make sure that all of our friends from across Michigan, the country, and the world can continue to join our programs.

## JHSM’S INNOVATORS & ENTREPRENEURS ZOOM PROGRAMMING SERIES

In 2021 JHSM presented “Innovators & Entrepreneurs,” a series of Zoom interviews with Jewish Michiganders who have built and thrived in Michigan-based businesses. Sponsored by Jared Rothberger of JAN-PRO/Jan-Supply Detroit and Gabriel Schuchman of Alrig USA, the Innovators & Entrepreneurs series featured interviews with Dennis Bernard of Bernard Financial Group (March 10) and Geoff Kretchmer of Star Trax Events and Detroit Axe (May 12). These history-makers shared their unique Michigan stories, highlighting how the community has impacted their journeys.

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION • TRACY WEISSMAN, JD



(Courtesy of Paul Stoloff Photography.)

There have been many surprises at JHSM since COVID-19 changed all of our lives eighteen months ago. Some disappointing, like no longer getting to work in person with my wonderful colleagues or our amazing volunteers. Others fantastic, like our 2020 journal, *Michigan Jewish History (MJH)*, and our 2020 *JHSM Bulletin* both winning Outstanding Printed Periodical Awards from the

Historical Society of Michigan! As is evident in the pages of this *Bulletin*, JHSM has not only achieved, but flourished.

Although the pandemic prevented us from presenting awards in person for a second year, we honor in this issue's "JHSM Happenings" Feiga Weiss, who received the 2020 Leonard N. Simons History-Maker Award during a virtual ceremony on March 7, 2021 (page 6), and Samuel Kole, who won our 2021-inaugural Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum Award for outstanding original scholarship in the field of Michigan's Jewish history (page 8). We also highlight the achievements of professional dance teacher, performer, and choreographer Harriet Berg, one of the many remarkable individuals in our Michigan Women Who Made a Difference online gallery (page 10). And we provide a glimpse into our private bus tours that allow families to share their personal histories with the next generation (page 11).

This issue's "Programming Spotlight" section features our long-awaited return to in-person events, with photos and personal reflections on JHSM's sponsorship of a booth at the 2021 Hazon Michigan Jewish Food Festival on August 15 (page 13) and our tenth J-Cycle bike tour of historic Jewish Detroit on October 10 (page 14; see also related story on page 1). Despite a rainy start, cyclists and, for the first time, bus riders enjoyed five stops along an eighteen-mile course, all related to automotive history.

In 2021 we also offered 24 Zoom programs, reaching well over 1,000 participants in 26 states, Washington, DC, Israel, and Canada! We are pleased to include in the "Programming Spotlight" articles and essays from speakers on such wide-ranging topics as World War II's Jewish women resistance fighters (page 18), modern-day refugees (page 21), influences of growing up Jewish in Detroit (page 22), changes in Jewish end-of-life care during COVID-19 (page 24), and the incredible paintings of Israeli photorealistic artist Yigal Ozeri (page 26).

This issue introduces a new "Community Spotlight" section, highlighting notable collections that contribute to Michigan's rich Jewish history. Featured are the efforts underway in Grand Rapids to collect and preserve stories of Holocaust survivors (page 28), the *Jewish Journeys* oral history archive housed on the website of Troy's Congregation Shir Tikvah (page 29), the burial records of Detroit's B'nai David Cemetery—the result of lengthy efforts to identify illegible names on the cemetery's headstones (page 32), and more than 600 *yahrzeit* plaques from Congregation B'nai David, recovered from a storage locker with the hope of reuniting them with family members (page 32).

Turning to JHSM's own collection, our super sleuths cracked the case of last year's "unknown" picture (page 28). And we are hoping readers will help us identify the woman in our new "mystery" photo (page 48). The issue concludes with our annual thank-yous to new members (page 38), donors (page 39), and in-kind donors (page 42), as well as to those who made tributes (page 43) and memorial contributions (page 46). We also recognize JHSM's 2021-2022 leadership (page 48), without whose commitment we could not achieve all that we do.

COVID-19 certainly has not slowed down JHSM's accomplishments. Indeed, the list is growing!

# 372

ANNUAL DONORS GAVE A TOTAL OF

# \$285,676

(EXCLUDES TRIBUTE AND MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF \$18 OR LESS)

## 2020 LEONARD N. SIMONS HISTORY-MAKER AWARD

### FEIGA WEISS



*Feiga Weiss (top) received JHSM's 2020 Leonard N. Simons History-Maker Award following opening remarks by JHSM Vice President Jeannie Weiner (bottom) during a virtual ceremony on March 7, 2021. (Courtesy of Elayne Gross Photography.)*

On Sunday, March 7, nearly a year late, JHSM honored 2020 Leonard N. Simons History-Maker Award winner, Feiga Weiss. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the ceremony and presentation were not in person, as originally planned. Despite the less-than-ideal arrangements, it was a meaningful opportunity to honor a pillar of the community.

The Simons Award, established in 1991, honors those who have made outstanding contributions to the enrichment, conservation, knowledge, and dissemination of Michigan Jewish history. Recipients include Philip Slomovitz, Emma Lazaroff Schaver, Sidney Bolkosky, Mandell Berman, and A. Alfred Taubman, all of blessed memory. It is named for Leonard N. Simons and “continues his passion for Jewish and communal history. Leonard Simons established the Jewish community archives at the Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit. He supported the publication of our annual scholarly journal, *Michigan Jewish History*. And he promoted and fostered the pride he felt in this Jewish community,” Vice President Jeannie Weiner noted in her opening remarks.

When it convened in early 2020, the Simons Award committee unanimously selected Feiga Weiss for the honor, as she embodies both of the award's highest criteria:

- exceptional involvement in the retrieval, preservation, and/or distribution of Michigan Jewish history
- extraordinary direction of a program of major significance or far-reaching impact to the Michigan Jewish community

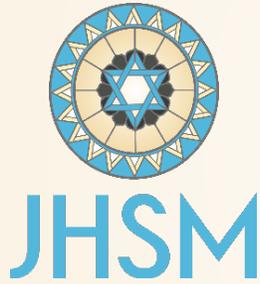
Since the Holocaust Memorial Center's opening in 1984, Feiga Weiss has developed and maintained its library archive collections. These include the oral history department, which has amassed more than 700 audio and video interviews of Holocaust survivors, liberators, veterans, witnesses, and rescuers. These testimonies provide invaluable historical information that will be used by generations of historians, psychologists, and social scientists. Under Weiss's leadership, the HMC's library archive has grown to be a major source of Holocaust documentation that is recognized nationally and internationally.

Feiga Weiss's colleagues have called her “dedicated,” “hard working,” “knowledgeable,” and “serious about her work.” Jeannie Weiner praised Weiss's “proficiency in several languages, as well as her familiarity with Holocaust scholarship and artifacts, [which] have served the community well.”

After accepting the Simons Award, Weiss presented several “exceptional objects” with ties to Michigan that represent the scope and power of the HMC's collections. These included an album given to soprano Emma Lazaroff Schaver to commemorate her visits to displaced persons' camps following World War II, a colorful horsehair and found-material hat made in the Buchenwald concentration camp, a delicate shoe worn by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus performer Lya Schwartz Graf, a tiny 1735 German *seder ma'ariv* (evening prayer) book, children's toys recovered from unknown concentration camps by Paul Rabinek, Prof. Arnold Joseph's censor stamps on letters addressed to Hermann Göring and other Nazis convicted of war crimes, Albert Einstein and Walter Seligson's denaturalization certificates, and trial notes and photographs kept by Major Warren Lambert, who presided over the Dachau war-crimes trials.

According to Weiss, “The Holocaust Memorial Center's goal is to include as many Michigan oral-history testimonies, artifacts, and archival records as we have available,” noting their “profound impact” on visitors. She urged, “Now is the time to bring awareness to the public that the World War II items that have been sitting in drawers, attics, and basements might have educational, historical value with the potential to better lives and the society in which we live.”

**JHSM OFFERED 24 ZOOM PROGRAMS IN 2021,  
DRAWING WELL OVER 1,000 PARTICIPANTS.**



## LEONARD N. SIMONS HISTORY-MAKER AWARD

Established in 1991, the Leonard N. Simons History-Maker Award honors those who have made outstanding contributions to the enrichment, conservation, knowledge, and dissemination of Michigan Jewish history. Presented by Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, it supports our mission to preserve and share Michigan's remarkable Jewish history, to inspire history enthusiasts of all ages. The award's presentation is the highlight of our annual meeting.

**NOMINATION DEADLINE FOR THE 2022 CYCLE IS JANUARY 31, 2022**

### CRITERIA

Nominees should embody at least one of these four attributes:

- exceptional involvement in the retrieval, preservation, and/or distribution of Michigan Jewish history
- instrumental leadership in fostering bridge-building or groundbreaking connections between the Jewish and larger communities that have or will have historical significance
- extraordinary direction of a program of major significance or far-reaching impact to the Michigan Jewish community
- passionate embodiment of an agenda reflecting the totality, depth, or breadth of the Michigan Jewish community

### APPLICATION MATERIALS

Please provide the following information:

1. The nominee's name and all contact information (*address, phone, email*)
2. The nominator's name and all contact information (*address, phone, email*)
3. A short essay (up to 1,000 words) demonstrating how and why the nominee fits the award's criteria. Supporting documentation (biography, newspaper clippings, publications, photos, letters of support, etc.) is welcome and encouraged.

### SUBMISSIONS

To submit a nomination, please send, via mail or email, to:

Catherine Cangany, PhD  
Executive Director  
JHSM  
33228 West 12 Mile Rd., #349  
Farmington Hills, MI 48334

248-915-1848  
ccangany@jhsmichigan.org

*Nominations must be received by JHSM by close of business on Monday, January 31, 2022, to qualify for the 2022 award cycle.*

## LEONARD N. SIMONS HISTORY-MAKER AWARD PAST HONOREES

1991 Philip Slomovitz*	1998 Judith Levin Cantor	2006 Gerald S. Cook	2014 A. Alfred Taubman*
1992 Hon. Avern L. Cohn	1999 Michael W. Maddin	2007 Sharon L. Alterman	2015 Carl Levin*
1993 George M. Stutz*	2000 Alan D. Kandel*	2008 George M. Zeltzer*	2016 Jan Durecki
1994 Irwin Shaw*	2001 Sidney M. Bolkosky*	2009 Mandell L. Berman*	2017 Aimee Ergas
1995 Emma Lazaroff Schaver*	2002 Adele W. Staller*	2010 James D. Grey	2018 Arnold Collens
1996 Leslie S. Hough, Philip P. Mason*	2003 Matilda Brandwine*	2011 Charlotte M. Dubin	2019 Ben Falik
1997 Mary Lou Simons Zieve	2004 Susie Citrin	2012 Michael O. Smith	
	2005 Edith L. Resnick	2013 Irwin J. Cohen	<i>*of Blessed Memory</i>

## 2021-INAUGURAL RABBI EMANUEL APPLEBAUM AWARD

### SAMUEL KOLE



Samuel Kole won JHSM's 2021-inaugural Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum Award for his article, "Healing the Soul of a City: Carl Levin's Early Career in Detroit." The article appeared in the 2021 issue of our scholarly journal, *Michigan Jewish History (MJH)*, and was supported by the Cohn/Prentis Family Foundation Michigan Jewish Writers' Fund. Named for *MJH*'s first editor (1960-1963) and a founding

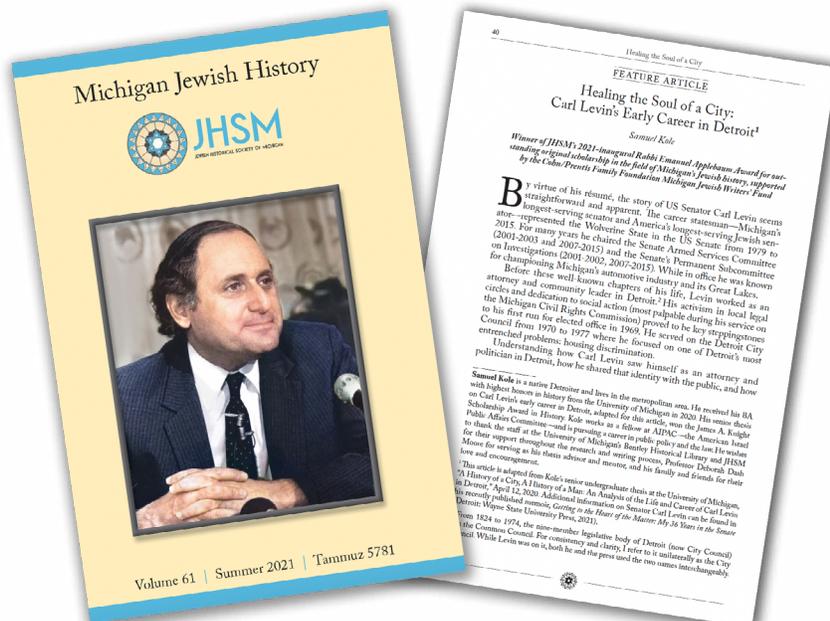
JHSM member, the award honors outstanding original scholarship in the field of Michigan's Jewish history. Although the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from honoring Kole in person in 2021, we are pleased to recognize his accomplishment and to profile him here.

Samuel Kole is a native Detroiter and lives in the metropolitan area. His family has deep roots in the local Jewish community, staunchly supporting Jewish life and education in Detroit. The grandson of a Holocaust survivor, Kole was imbued from a young age with a passion to study and learn the lessons of the past to shape the future. He attended Hillel Day School and Frankel Jewish Academy and received his bachelor's degree with highest honors in history from the University of Michigan in 2020. His academic interests lie primarily in contemporary American political history and American Jewish history.

While deciding on a topic for his senior thesis project, he learned that Senator Carl Levin would be donating his papers to U-M's Bentley Historical Library. Levin's early work in Detroit was of particular interest to Kole, and one visit to the library's Levin archive was all it took to inspire Kole to keep digging. He was especially interested in the opportunity and challenge to be one of the first researchers to utilize the Levin archive and is honored to have been the first to publish an academic article based on the archive's materials.

Kole's senior thesis on Carl Levin's early career in Detroit, adapted for his article in *MJH*, won U-M's James A. Knight Scholarship Award in History. Following graduation, Kole worked as a fellow at AIPAC—the American Israel Public Affairs Committee—and is pursuing a career in public policy and the law.

Because the pandemic prevented Kole from accepting his award in person, he did not have an opportunity to thank publicly the people and organizations who assisted him with his thesis and the publication of his article in *MJH*. In particular, he wishes to thank the staff members of the Bentley Historical Library for their support throughout the research and writing process; Professor Deborah Dash Moore for serving as his thesis advisor and mentor; his family and friends for their love and encouragement; *MJH* Managing Editor Tracy Weissman, JD, and Editor Catherine Cangany, PhD, for their insightful comments and meticulous edits that brought out the best in his work; and, finally, JHSM, with support from the Cohn-Prentis Family Foundation Michigan Jewish Writers' Fund, for the Applebaum prize and for helping Kole realize his dream of sharing his findings on Senator Carl Levin with a greater audience.



## SPECIAL THANKS TO 2020 JHSM BULLETIN CONTRIBUTORS

JHSM is thrilled to announce that the 2020 *JHSM Bulletin* has followed in the footsteps of our journal, *Michigan Jewish History*, and won the Historical Society of Michigan's prestigious **Outstanding Printed Periodical Award for 2021!**

The Historical Society of Michigan, the state's official historical society and oldest cultural organization, presented the award during a virtual awards ceremony on September 24, 2021. *JHSM Bulletin* Editor Tracy Weissman, JD, and Executive Director Catherine Cangany, PhD, wish to recognize and thank the many individuals and organizations who made this fantastic honor possible:

Fred Cislo, Jr.

Barbara Madgy Cohn

Gerald Cook

Professor Marc Dollinger

Ruthe Goldstein

Grigg Graphic Services

Elayne Gross

Meryl Hankey

Natalie Ruth Joynton

Michael J. Kasky

Gloria Levine

Little Traverse  
Historical Museum

Jane Nordberg

Risha B. Ring, PhD

Amy Rothberger

Roberta Russ

Kara Schuchman

Sidney Simon

Levi Smith

Michael G. Smith

Sally Shearer Smith

Judy Sofferin

Rebecca E. Starr

# JHSM BULLETIN



Volume 6 • December 2020




Figures 1 and 2: Zilla Goldstein (left), pre-1920, and Minnie Rosenthal (right), circa 1907. (Courtesy of Gloria Levine.)

### JEWISH MICHIGANDERS AND THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

*"Then when the final count is made, wisdom will have its reward. The suffragist lamps will be filled, trimmed and burning."*

— Zilla Goldstein

The year 2020 marks the centennial of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, prohibiting the states and the federal government from denying voting rights on the basis of sex. Among the untold numbers of activists who worked to secure women's suffrage was a pair of sisters from Potoskey, Michigan: Wilhelmina "Minnie" (von Wunderlich) Rosenthal (1868-1943) and Zilla (von Wunderlich) Goldstein (1874-1946).

Minnie and Zilla von Wunderlich were born into a Jewish-German family that moved permanently to the United States between their births. In Chicago, where Zilla von Wunderlich was born, they met their respective spouses: Alick Rosenthal (who married Minnie von Wunderlich in 1887) and Cassius Goldstein (who married Zilla von Wunderlich in 1896). In 1894 Minnie and Alick Rosenthal relocated to Potoskey to work in the family department store, S. Rosenthal & Sons. Along with her daughter Gertrude, Zilla Goldstein joined them in 1911, serving for seventeen years as the store's vice president and establishing and operating its knitting shop department. After Alick Rosenthal's death in 1939, Minnie Rosenthal would serve as store president until her own death four years later.

Continued on page 13

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Natalie Ruth Joynton is the author of *Welcome to Republic Dodge*, a finalist to the *Memoris* category of the *Next Great Indie Book Awards*, and a *Foreword Reviews Book of the Day*. She lives with her husband, son, and daughter in Mason County, Michigan. She can be reached at natalieruthjoynton@gmail.com.

### TRIVIA QUESTIONS

**J.** In whose home was the first minyan in Detroit held?

**K.** Where was Michigan's first Jewish cemetery established?

**L.** In the mid-1950s, what protégé of Diego Rivera painted the 1,000-square-foot mural in Grand Rapids' Temple Emanuel?

**M.** As of 2018, how many Jews live in Michigan (rounded to the nearest thousand)?

**N.** What is the name of the only free-standing synagogue currently within Detroit city limits?

## PROGRAMMING SPOTLIGHT

### HASTINGS STREET HERO: SONNY ELIOT WEATHERS HIS TIME AS A POW

*Jane Nordberg*

Sonny Eliot was a beloved radio and television weathercaster in Metro Detroit for nearly 60 years, becoming a household name and a Detroit institution. Delivering his forecasts with a quick wit, corny puns, and a penchant for the small towns of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, he was a fan favorite and regularly rated at the top of numerous Detroit-personality popularity polls. Prior to his longstanding career in media, however, Eliot was a pilot in World War II, shot down, and held in a prison camp in Germany for over a year—an experience that shaped the rest of his life.

Born Marvin Eliot Schlossberg in Detroit on December 5, 1920 (or possibly 1919, as he was cagey about his real age), Eliot received his moniker from his eldest sister, Anne, who oversaw the Schlossberg household while parents Jacob and Jeanette, Latvian immigrants, ran the family's hardware store on Hastings Street, Detroit's predominantly Jewish, immigrant neighborhood. Despite this location, according to Eliot's greatness, the Schlossberg family was not overtly religious and often worked on Jewish holidays and during Shabbat, as the family's hardware store was open six days per week.




*Figure 1: Weathercaster Sonny Eliot became a household name in Metro Detroit and beyond, delivering light-hearted, witty forecasts from 1956 until his retirement in 2010. (Courtesy of Hilder P. Romber Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.)*

*Figure 2: Sonny Eliot, Joe Marvin Schlossberg (center), gained experience in comedy as captain of the all-male cheerleading team at Detroit's Central High School in the late 1930s. Such experience helped him deliver amusing-tying forecasts on television and radio years later. (JHSM collections.)*

Eliot graduated from nearby Central High School in 1939, where he earned his chops in physical comedy by captaining the all-male cheerleading team of three, and where, as a member of Central's radio unit, he got his first taste of playwriting and broadcasting. Following high school, Eliot attended Wayne University (now Wayne State University) to study acting and broadcasting, and began taking flying lessons at Wayne County Airport (now Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport). He received his private pilot's license in 1941, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**War Interrupts Acting Plans**  
 "When the war broke out in '41, we were all stricken with great patriotism," Eliot later recalled in his typical light-hearted manner. "We immediately went down to enlist because we

On January 7, 2020, over 50 people gathered to learn about the life of legendary weathercaster Sonny Eliot. At what turned out to be one of JHSM's only in-person programs in 2020, guests heard a wide-ranging lecture by freelance writer and former JHSM Program Director Jane Nordberg. In her presentation, "Sonny Eliot: From POW to Parastar," Nordberg explored Eliot's time as a POW during World War II and subsequent rise to fame. By the mid-1960s, Eliot had become Detroit's top television personality, delivering light-hearted weather forecasts, enjoyed by millions until his retirement from broadcasting in 2010. The accompanying article provides further insight into the impact of Eliot's time as a POW on his life and career.

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## PROJECT FOCUS: MICHIGAN WOMEN WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

### Harriet Berg: Professional Dance Teacher, Performer, and Choreographer

*Aimee Ergas, Walter P. Reuther Library Archivist  
and Former JHSM Director*

*Jeannie Weiner, JHSM Vice President*



*Harriet Berg has dedicated her life to performing, teaching, choreographing, and sharing her love of dance. Berg is pictured, circa 1950s, as one of her characters, “The Teeny Tiny Lady.” (Courtesy of Michigan Dance Archives: Harriet Berg Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.)*

Harriet Berg has spent her lifetime performing, teaching, choreographing, and inspiring an appreciation for dance in Detroit, throughout Michigan, and beyond. While a dance teacher at Wayne State University in Detroit in the 1950s, and for decades after, Berg made it her mission to put Detroit on the map for the modern dance, folk dance, and historical dance movements. She was the founder and artistic director of a number of dance groups: Renaissance Dance Company, Madame Cadillac Dance Theater, Belles and Bachelors of Fort Detroit, and the Isadora Duncan Dance Ensemble, as well as groups based at the Jewish Community Center of Detroit (including the Festival Dancers, which performed for over 35 years).

It was Berg’s sister who aspired to be a dancer, but a heart murmur kept her from her desired career. So Berg, at age eighteen, majoring in English and poetry at Wayne State University, got involved with her first dance production “because they needed a body.”

Harriet Jean (Jeanie) Waratt Berg was born on December 6, 1924, in Detroit. Her mother, Helen Link, was born in Austria in the 1890s. Her father, Jacob J. Waratt (originally Baretnick), died at the age of 101 in 1991. He worked with bakery supplies and frozen foods in Detroit after emigrating from Ukraine.

Harriet and Irving Berg, son of Edith and Morris Berg, were married for 63 years. They shared a passion for the arts. He was a sculptor who taught for many years at Cass Tech High School in Detroit. They had two children: Martin, born in 1946, and Leslie, born in 1951. They lived in Northwest Detroit on Snowden Street before moving to Midtown in 1983. They have two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Irving died in 2009.

Harriet Berg is known as a “brash and bold” force of nature, dedicated to dance in all of its aspects from learning, teaching, choreographing, and performing her craft, to promoting the study of the history of dance, to using dance to teach American history and Jewish culture. She has inspired many others with her love of the arts, mentoring more than one generation of dancers in Detroit and throughout Michigan who have themselves become professionals, amateurs, and lovers of dance and the arts. Berg believes anyone can dance and everyone should. She has taught dance to the youngest campers at Tamarack Camps in rural Michigan and to the oldest hoofers at the JCC’s programs for seniors.

During her career, Berg states she was inspired by the most renowned American dancers, who were her mentors and friends, including Isadora Duncan, Merce Cunningham, Twyla Tharp, Martha Graham, and Louis Falco. She has traveled across the United States, to Canada, and to Europe to participate in and teach workshops as well as to perform with her dance companies. Even in her early 90s, Berg continued to travel to the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College, where she had been present at its founding in 1948.

Berg has choreographed performances inspired by many topics, including folk tales and songs, Biblical stories, American and Jewish themes, Israeli folk themes, and French and Detroit history. She has incorporated dance styles from Renaissance and Baroque-European to Sephardic and Middle Eastern. Expressing history, religious inspiration, and cultural tradition through dance is one of Berg’s unique and lasting contributions to the arts. Some of her choreography was based on stories from the Bible and ancient religious rituals, and her dances have been performed in a variety of religious and secular venues.

Harriet and Irving Berg endowed the Michigan Dance Archives at the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Berg’s papers, covering more than 50 years of choreography and dance education, form the nucleus of the archive.

Berg stated in *Hour Detroit Magazine* to writer Monica Mercer in 2012, “Dancing is that fleeting moment when you feel alive.” Harriet Jean Waratt Berg is a Detroit dance icon.

## TOUR FOCUS: JHSM'S PRIVATE BUS TOURS ALLOW FAMILIES TO "SHOW AND TELL" THEIR STORIES

### Morry Opperer Celebrates His 80th Birthday in Style with a Return to His Childhood

*Michael Feldman,  
JHSM Director of Development*



*Morry Opperer (front right) celebrated his 80th birthday with his wife, Margi (front left), and their children and grandchildren on a JHSM private bus tour that visited Detroit locations from Morry's youth. JHSM President Risha B. Ring (back left) and Vice President Jeannie Weiner (back center) served as docents on the custom trip. (Courtesy of Opperer family.)*

Did you know JHSM offers private, customizable bus tours?

Morry Opperer's 80th birthday was approaching. He and his wife, Margi, wanted to celebrate with their children and grandchildren in a special way that would appeal to different generations.

A native Detroiter, Morry loves to talk about life in the "old neighborhood." What better way to celebrate his birthday than a personalized bus tour focused on his youth? Morry and Margi are longtime JHSM members, so they knew whom to contact for assistance planning the celebration. We were happy to help them come up with an itinerary, arrange a bus for their group of twenty, and provide two docents to narrate the trip.

At the suggestion of docents Jeannie Weiner and Risha B. Ring, the July 21, 2021 tour started at the Birwood Wall to provide context for what was happening in Detroit during Morry's childhood. The six-foot-high Birwood Wall, also known as

Detroit's Segregation Wall, was constructed in 1941. Now on the National Historic Register, it runs for about a half-mile in the Eight Mile/Wyoming neighborhood. It separated an existing poor, Black, redlined neighborhood from a new development intended strictly for whites: Blackstone Park No. 6. The barrier allowed the new homeowners to be deemed "creditworthy" and qualify for home loans from the Federal Housing Authority, a mortgage insurer sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. A number of Jewish families moved to Blackstone Park. Many were unaware of the wall's existence.

The day ended with a visit to "Gateway to Freedom," the US half of the International Memorial to the Underground Railroad in Philip A. Hart Plaza. The internationally known statue depicts a conductor helping six fugitive slaves escape to freedom across the Detroit River. Below the statue is a plaque listing Michigan's abolitionists, including Jewish Detroiters Fanny and Emil Heineman, who outfitted escaped slaves from their wholesale clothing business.

In between these two stops, the tour focused on locations important to Morry. In the 1940s the Detroit Jewish community was centered on the 12th Street/Linwood/Dexter area. The group visited Morry's schools (Thirkell Elementary, Winterhalter Elementary, and Mumford High), plus the former location of Yeshiva Beth Yehudah.

Morry loved that he could show his grandchildren all the places he always talks about. Palmer Park, where Morry spent time as a child, now became real. So too did Congregation Beth Abraham, where Morry's parents belonged.

According to Morry, the participants (who ranged from 11 to 83 years old) were engaged throughout the day. His grandchildren peppered him with questions so they could learn even more.

Each of us has a story. With our help, Morry was able to "show and tell" his story with his family. We would love to help you show and tell yours.

### 2021 MEMBERSHIP IS UP

**7%**  
OVER 2020

**&**

**23%**  
OVER 2019

(AS OF OCTOBER 31, 2021)

*Continued from page 1*

the assembly flattened and consumed two adjacent blocks for a carpark. Beth Olem was suddenly and completely engulfed, “a green island in a vast sea of a concrete parking lot.”<sup>1</sup> Fifteen years later, when the Dodge plant closed, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young’s administration invoked a now-unconstitutional use of eminent domain, giving the plant land and surrounding Poletown community to General Motors to build a new assembly. Which explains why, today, Beth Olem lies within GM’s Factory ZERO, concealed entirely from view.



*Beth Olem Cemetery, established in 1862, was Michigan’s first all-Jewish cemetery. Today it is completely surrounded by GM’s Factory ZERO. (Courtesy of Arnold Collens.)*

That jarring, iconic shot of Beth Olem works because it sets the plant against the cemetery. Dramatic. Misleading. The truth lies in this humbler image: Two padlocks secure the green gates of Beth Olem. Unlocking them requires two separate keys from two separate institutions: Clover Hill (which maintains the cemetery) and GM (which provides access to it). Thanks to the coordinated efforts of these two guardians, Beth Olem is open generally twice per year, on the Sundays preceding Rosh Hashanah and Pesach.

Sometimes, there are exceptions to the calendar. October 10 marked JHSM’s tenth J-Cycle bike ride, a five-stop, eighteen-mile tour of historic Jewish Detroit that typically draws more than 200 participants (see related story on page \_\_\_). This year’s theme highlighted Jewish connections to the automotive industry. The perfect opportunity, we reasoned, to showcase Beth Olem.

Clover Hill gave us the go-ahead immediately, offering to cut the grass and putting us in touch with its Factory ZERO contacts. GM was enthusiastic, but uncertain: The plant is in the throes of an intense, round-the-clock, \$2.2 billion construction and retooling project to become an all-electric-vehicle assembly. Ten days before J-Cycle, our visit looked unlikely. Anthony Stevens, the plant’s senior production engineering manager, invited us for a site visit, so we could understand the construction’s impact on reaching Beth Olem.

Beth Olem lies in the northwest corner of Factory ZERO, about a half-mile from the plant’s truck entrance off East Grand Boulevard.

Except that there is no signage, no indication of what lies within the plant’s walls; the site visit seemed unwarranted. But just past the entrance’s guard box, the pristine concrete road gave way to mud, potholes, and hordes of fast-moving heavy equipment, all the way to the cemetery gates. It was a completely improbable route for cyclists.

Remarkably, Stevens was not deterred. He understood Beth Olem’s importance to the community. He promised to stop construction in the area for the tour. The road would still be rough and muddy. But we would have safe, unhindered access in and out of the cemetery. J-Cycle could go on.



*Just ten days before J-Cycle, GM added signage (left) and built a “bike lane” (right) to enable cyclists safely to reach Beth Olem Cemetery in the northwest corner of its Factory ZERO, a half-mile from the plant’s entrance. (Courtesy of Elayne Gross Photography.)*

And it did. Six groups of cyclists, plus a charter bus, visited Beth Olem on October 10. From the ride’s starting point, we briefed each group on how to navigate the plant: Keep to the road’s shoulders. Go carefully. Prepare to get dirty. Call if you need the mobile mechanic. Nobody hesitated. It was the access that mattered, not the conditions.

But we were astonished to find that in the ten days between our site visit and J-Cycle, Anthony Stevens and his team had built us a road. Five inches of perfectly smooth, compacted earth ran the full length of the deteriorated pavement, from the guard box to the cemetery. And stretched along this new “bike lane” were volunteers who greeted, cheered, and directed us, including Stevens, his wife, GM industrial engineer John Paulina, and Clover Hill’s executive director, Kim Raznik. An outpouring of support that was as moving as it was unexpected.

Unwittingly, J-Cycle’s preparations have continued to strengthen ties between the Jewish community and GM. Our deeply knowledgeable site docents, Jim Grey and Arnie Collens, have facilitated conversations with and among Factory ZERO employees about GM’s remarkable guardianship and the extraordinary charge in their care.

Two padlocks. Two guardians. One purpose. One spectacular experience. It all adds up to ZERO.

<sup>1</sup> Milton Marwil, “The True Story of the Cemetery in the General Motors Parking Lot,” *Michigan Jewish History* 33 (Winter 1992): 31.

## JHSM'S RETURN TO IN-PERSON PROGRAMMING

### Hazon Michigan Jewish Food Festival 2021

*Margery Jablin,  
JHSM Secretary*

On Sunday, August 15, 2021, JHSM participated in its first in-person event in nearly eighteen months! Partnering with Hazon, JHSM sponsored a booth at the 2021 Hazon Michigan Jewish Food Festival. During the drive-through event, JHSM President Risha B. Ring, Secretary Margery Jablin, Past President Stan Meretsky, Advisory Board members Elayne Gross and Margi Opperer, and member Morry Opperer distributed peaches, courtesy of Verellen Orchards, and provided information about JHSM to nearly 280 cars full of visitors. Margery Jablin reflects below on the wonderful day.

Driving into the entrance of Marygrove Conservancy, I was greeted with a wonderful sight: approximately 35 tents set up for organizations from all over the Detroit metropolitan area. As I wound through the grounds looking for JHSM's tent, I passed clowns and festive signs. I had arrived at the Hazon Michigan Jewish Food Festival 2021. In the middle of a pandemic, there couldn't be a huge festival at Eastern Market with thousands of people walking around, so Hazon shifted to a COVID-safe, drive-through event. This was a genius idea to keep everyone safe and let all the participating organizations inform people about their continued work in our community. Everyone safely in masks and filling up their cars with delicious food and interesting reading material.

I took time to walk through the area to see who was there and what I could eat! I found plenty—Topor's pickles, honey for the



*JHSM President Risha B. Ring (right) greets longtime JHSM members Peggy Frank (left) and Dennis Frank (center) at the festival. Nearly 280 carloads of visitors stopped by JHSM's booth.*

upcoming Rosh Hashanah holiday, nuts, granola, many fruits and vegetables, including, of course, the peaches JHSM was handing out, and much, much more. There were people displaying their produce from urban gardens, synagogues talking about their place of worship, and community organizations letting people know they are here to help. And the cars full of people from all over the Metropolitan Detroit area. Everyone having fun and learning about our community.

At JHSM's location, a peddler's cart was set up, full of delicious looking peaches. We traveled back to the days of Jewish peddlers in Detroit in the early twentieth century and greeted nearly 280 cars. Visitors enjoyed the peaches and learned a little about our organization and our plans to create a Museum of Jewish Michigan. We heard a lot of interest and met many people who didn't know what JHSM was. Word is spreading that we are here and growing. What a wonderful day it was!



*JHSM Advisory Board member Elayne Gross (left) and President Risha B. Ring (right) talked to visitors about JHSM during the 2021 Hazon Food Festival drive-through event on August 15, 2021. (All photos courtesy of Elayne Gross Photography.)*



*JHSM Secretary Margery Jablin (front) and Past President Stan Meretsky (back) distributed peaches, courtesy of Verellen Orchards, from JHSM's peddler's cart, along with information about the organization.*

## JHSM'S RETURN TO IN-PERSON PROGRAMMING

### J-Cycle 10

2021 marked our tenth J-Cycle bike tour of historic Jewish Detroit. By the calendar, it should have been our eleventh, but COVID-19 made the 2020 ride impossible. Held Sunday, October 10, J-Cycle 10 ran two months later than usual to avoid the summer viral surge. Featuring six, smaller, socially distanced ride groups (plus one charter bus, new this year), J-Cycle was nearly canceled due to morning thunderstorms. Despite the soggy day, the 132 registrants enjoyed five stops along an eighteen-mile course, all related to automotive history.

Beginning at William G. Milliken State Park on the riverfront, participants headed north to the Meyer & Anna Prentis Building on Wayne State University's campus. Here, they were met by Dale Frenkel, who told personal stories about his grandfather, revered GM treasurer Meyer Prentis, described in his eulogy as "the financial genius who held the purse strings of General Motors during its crucial years."

Cyclists and bus riders then journeyed north to the Henry Ford home in the historic Boston Edison neighborhood. Docents Susan Friedman and Barbara Cook discussed the numerous automotive executives who resided on the leafy streets including Prentis, several of the seven Fisher brothers, Walter "Spike" Briggs, James Couzens, and Ford, who lived at 140 Edison from 1908 to 1915. The docents highlighted several Ford initiatives, including the socially restrictive \$5-a-day wage and the antisemitic Dearborn Independent, and their corrosive effects on the Jewish community.

Leaving Ford's home, participants traveled to Ford's business: the Piquette Avenue Plant. Trustee Mike Skinner and Executive Director David Flatt treated attendees to rapid tours of the former factory (used by Ford from 1904 to 1910 and Studebaker from 1911 to 1933) and its significant collections. The birthplace of the Model T, the plant is now on the National Historic Register.

From Piquette, participants headed east to GM's Factory ZERO in Hamtramck. The "Poletown Plant" completely surrounds Beth Olem, Detroit's first all-Jewish cemetery. Established by Shaarey Zedek in 1862, the time-capsule cemetery holds some 1,100 graves. Docents Arnie Collens and Jim Grey recounted Beth Olem's unusual circumstances: In the 1980s Detroit Mayor Coleman Young seized the land surrounding the cemetery through a now-illegal invocation of eminent domain and gave it to GM to build a Cadillac assembly. GM and Clover Hill Park Cemetery serve as Beth Olem's twin guardians, overseeing the cemetery's maintenance and providing public access twice a year, on the Sundays before Rosh Hashanah and Pesach (see related story on page 1).

En route back to Milliken State Park, participants made a final stop at Eastern Market, the largest public market in the United States. Docents Harriet Saperstein and Mike Kasky regaled the cyclists and bus riders with the complex's history, including the trucking industry that supplied the market's produce, and its mixed-usage today (including breweries, lofts, and Detroit Flyhouse Circus School). Many Jewish businesses got their start at Eastern Market. One legendary person was the late Julian Berkovitz, who opened Busy Bee Hardware in 1918. In the basement of the store are tunnels the Purple Gang purportedly used to hide liquor during Prohibition.

A number of participants shared their memories of the day. From teenagers to grandparents, from those excited to be back in person to those relieved that the rain stopped, from cyclists who enjoyed riding to the Piquette Avenue Ford Plant to learn its history to bus riders who felt privileged to be able to enter Beth Olem Cemetery, each participant left J-Cycle with new memories and new knowledge about Detroit's Jewish history. We have reprinted some of their reflections below.

The weather on October 10 started out looking a little questionable! We have participated in J-Cycle in years past, but never in the rain! Because we were leading a group, we grabbed our bikes, attached them to our car, and drove down to Milliken State Park, the starting point for the ride. We waited for the thunder and lightning to pass and then headed out on our tour. And, what a great, informative tour it was! . . .

*—Gail & Steve Elkus, J-Cycle 10 Group Leaders*

On Sunday, October 10, I had the opportunity to participate in a bike ride around downtown Detroit with JHSM, in which I was able to learn about the Jewish history of many different historical sites. It was a wonderful chance for my brother, Gideon (age 14), and me (age 16), to hang out with our 84-year-old Zayde. Specifically, we saw an old Ford factory [the Piquette Avenue Ford Plant] that was designed by a Jew, Albert Kahn, and had been restored. In addition, we went to Wayne State University where we learned about the Jews who funded and built the school.

The best part of the ride was that I had the incredible honor to ride with my grandfather and brother. Even if we did not visit any sites and just rode for 18 miles, I would have had an amazing day spending time with my grandfather. For many a mile we sang *Lecha Dodi* to the tune of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*, and a couple of other riders joined in with us!



*Figure 1 (left): A rainy start to J-Cycle 10 did not prevent cyclists from enjoying the ride. (Except where noted, all photos in this article are courtesy of Elayne Gross Photography.)*



*Figure 2 (above) and Figure 3 (left): J-Cycle 10 participants visited the Boston Edison neighborhood where they saw Henry Ford's home (Figure 2 and Figure 3 back left) and learned about other automotive executives who resided there. Pictured in Figure 2 are J-Cycle 10 group leader Larry Gunsberg (who also was responsible for the tour's routing) and Historic Boston Edison Association Membership Engagement Chair Fatoumata Cissoko-Willis. (Figures 2 and 3 courtesy of Fatoumata Cissoko-Willis.)*



*Figure 4 (above left), Figure 5 (left), and Figure 6 (above): Pictured in Figure 4 in front of the restored Piquette Avenue Ford Plant, designed by famed Jewish Architect Albert Kahn, are volunteers: (left to right) Paul Neuburger, JHSM Vice President Barbara Cohn, Sam Kole, and Dale Frenkel (grandson of Meyer Prentis and J-Cycle 10 docent at Wayne State University's Meyer & Anna Prentis Building). J-Cycle 10 bus riders and cyclists toured the former factory and saw some of its vintage cars (Figure 5). At Beth Olem Cemetery, surrounded by GM's Factory ZERO, J-Cycle 10 docent Arnie Collens (Figure 6, second from right) described Beth Olem's unique history.*

Besides the information, I took away two main lessons from the bike ride: First, it is important to note that perhaps the most important figure in Detroit’s automotive history and development was Henry Ford, who was quite antisemitic. It is striking, therefore, that Jews were still able to participate in the building of Detroit—even designing Ford factories! Second, it is easy to dismiss the Jewish people, and to think that because we are so few in number, we haven’t done much to help the place in which we live. However, the J-Cycle event has taught me that despite our small numbers, the Jewish people have had a hand in building up Detroit and Michigan. It was immensely cool to hear that the place where I live was built in part by my ancestors, and it certainly connected me strongly to the area.

--- Judah Lopatin, J-Cycle 10 Cyclist

Having done the J-Cycle bike tour for at least six years, it truly is always such a treat! There is so much history in Detroit that I am still constantly learning new information, even after all these years. On this tour it struck me that Detroit was the Silicon Valley of its day with regard to the auto industry.

Probably my favorite stop this year was the Poletown cemetery [Beth Olem]. It’s only open twice a year. A cemetery in the middle of a GM plant—who would have thought something like this exists?

One of my all-time favorite experiences from previous J-Cycle rides was going to Central High School. My mother (may she rest in peace) had graduated from there. When I went into the auditorium and knew that she had been in that same place, chills went up my back.

--- Ron Elkus, J-Cycle 10 Group Leader



Figure 8: (left to right) Judah Lopatin, his grandfather Warren Tessler, and Judah’s brother, Gideon Lopatin, enjoyed riding together in J-Cycle 10.

My husband and I had participated in J-Cycle one time many years ago, but had never been inspired to try it again—at least my husband was not—until this year. When we saw the ride was going to be related to Detroit’s automotive history, my husband said, “Sign me up!” He had always wanted to go to the Piquette Avenue Ford Plant, and he wasn’t disappointed. We loved the tour and seeing the old cars. Another highlight was Beth Olem Cemetery. The history—past and present—was really interesting. It looked like it was going to be rainy, but the sky cleared up, and it was a great day!

--- Linda Minns, J-Cycle 10 Cyclist

Ten-Ten-Ten. The tenth J-Cycle historical bike tour on the tenth month and tenth day of 2021 was the first time that a bus followed the route of the bikes. As the bus docent, along with JHSM board member Trudy Weiss, I can attest that although we had fewer passengers than usual, and we sat masked and distanced from each other on the bus, the group was very enthusiastic about the stops. Several expressed to me that they felt privileged to be able to enter Beth Olem Cemetery, our unique Jewish cemetery completely surrounded by a GM plant. This historic site, containing 80 years of burials, with the final one in 1948, is generally open to the public only two times a year.

This was the first bus tour since the pandemic began. Early that morning, in the parking lot of Congregation Beth Ahm, as the bus pulled in, I nearly jumped for joy. There in the driver’s seat was Charlie Armstrong, the familiar and expert bus driver who has been navigating for us since 2012. In fact, he was such an important person on our tours that JHSM honored



Figure 7: Pictured are four of J-Cycle 10’s many volunteers: (left to right) support riders Steve Elkus, Gail Elkus, Diane Kaplan, and Ron Elkus.



Figure 9: JHSM Vice President Jeannie Weiner (center standing) and Board member Trudy Weiss (not pictured) served as co-docents on J-Cycle's first bus tour on October 10.

him as a Volunteer of the Year in 2016. On this tour, after docent Harriet Saperstein spoke at our Eastern Market stop, Charlie said, "Wasn't that the lady who used to dress up in historic costumes and pretend to be a woman from the past?" Yes, indeed, she was!

It feels great when everyone on the bus, from the driver to the guest in the last row, feels the day was fun and impactful. At the end of the tour, the sun was shining, and we all knew a lot more about the automotive history and Jews in Detroit.

– Jeannie Weiner, JHSM Vice President and J-Cycle 10 Bus Tour Docent

## THANK YOU TO OUR J-CYCLE 10 DOCENTS, VOLUNTEERS, SUPPORT RIDERS, AND STAFF:

DEEDE AUSTER  
 KEN BERNARD  
 NORMAN BRANT  
 CATHERINE CANGANY  
 BARBARA COHN  
 RICK COLEMAN  
 ARNIE COLLENS  
 BARBARA COOK  
 GAIL ELKUS  
 RON ELKUS  
 STEVE ELKUS  
 MICHAEL FELDMAN  
 DAVID FLATT  
 MARY FREEMAN  
 DALE FRENKEL  
 SUSAN FRIEDMAN  
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 ANTHONY STEVENS  
 ALON TOLWIN  
 DAVID TUSHMAN  
 JOEL UNGAR  
 DIANE VOIGHT  
 JEANNIE WEINER  
 TRUDY WEISS  
 ROB WEST

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

## JEWISH WOMEN RESISTANCE FIGHTERS IN POLAND DURING WORLD WAR II

### JHSM Executive Director Catherine Cangany, PhD's Conversation with Author Judy Batalion, PhD

On July 8, JHSM donors and Executive Director Catherine Cangany, PhD gathered for a Zoom conversation with author Judy Batalion to discuss her new book, *The Light of Days: The Untold Story of Women Resistance Fighters in Hitler's Ghettos* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021), which has been optioned by Steven Spielberg. Born in Montreal, Batalion grew up speaking English, French, Hebrew, and Yiddish. She received her bachelor's degree in the history of science from Harvard. She earned her PhD in art history from the University of London. She has worked as a museum curator and university lecturer. She is also the author of *White Walls: A Memoir about Motherhood, Daughterhood, and the Mess in Between* (New York: Berkley, 2016). The conversation is edited for length and clarity.



Catherine Cangany, PhD (left) and Judy Batalion, PhD (right). (JHSM collections.)

#### Catherine Cangany:

*The Light of Days* opens with this wonderful, visual scene-setting: You're in the British Library, in the reading room. You're surrounded by the stacks of dusty books you've called up. You're ready to embark on this research project. And all of a sudden, these remarkable stories begin to throw themselves at you. How did this research project and this book come to be?

#### Judy Batalion:

I was at the British Library researching something else. This book really happened by accident, a *bashert* kind of connection. This began fourteen years ago. I was living in London. It was 2007, and it was a time in my life where I was thinking a lot about my Jewish identity. I am the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, but I was thinking about what I call the "emotional legacy" of the Holocaust, the way that trauma passes over generations. I am a very, very anxious person. And it was a time in my life when everything felt very dangerous to me. I began to question how much of this was due to my Holocaust heritage, how much had my family story shaped how I perceived and reacted to every-day dangers.

I decided I wanted to write a piece about Jewish women who confronted danger. And I wanted to have a historical kind of spine to it, a real person. And the first one I thought of, a Jewish woman

who confronted danger, was Hannah Senesh. She was someone I had studied in fifth grade. She was a Hungarian Jew who made Aliyah and moved to what was then Palestine in the 1930s. She was a poet. She was a lyricist. But during World War II, she decided she wanted to fight back. She joined the Allied forces. She became a paratrooper, and she volunteered to return to Nazi-occupied Europe. She was caught very early on in her mission. But legend had it she looked her executioner in the eye when he shot her. I always grew up with Hannah Senesh as an image of Jewish courage, a symbol, a hero figure.

Then, back in 2007, when I started writing about this, I wanted to know more about Hannah Senesh. I didn't just want to know about the hero. I wanted to know the person: Who does that? What poet chooses to jump out of airplanes and fight the Nazis? What motivates that kind of audacity? So I wanted to find a nuanced biography on Hannah Senesh, not just the heroic narrative about her. And that's what led me to the British Library. I ordered whatever books they had. And one of the books that came back was this old dusty book with yellowing pages and a blue fabric cover with gold embossed writing on the front. It was also in Yiddish. It was called *Women in the Ghettos*. But, I always say, even more unusual than the book is the fact that I speak Yiddish. So, I decided to look through the book for Hannah Senesh, and she's only in the last five, ten pages. The rest of the book is 170 pages in small script. It contains stories by and about dozens and dozens of young Jewish women who fought the Nazis, primarily from the ghettos in Poland. There was an ode to guns, and this just stopped me cold in the library. I'd never read anything like this. It was the last thing I expected in a musty old Yiddish book about women in the ghettos. And that's how this began.

#### Catherine Cangany:

In the discipline of history, we talk a lot about silences. Especially in the archive, certain kinds of sources are not collected. Certain kinds of historical actors are privileged. Certain kinds of narratives are recorded or not recorded. It is often harder to find women and people of color and other marginalized peoples even represented in the archive. And yet in this project, there were dozens of sources there. In some cases, they were published. And yet they've been forgotten.

#### Judy Batalion:

When I went out to really begin researching this book, I found these testimonies in archives in Israel, Poland, the US, and Canada. Many were published with small presses. But these stories just hadn't reached a general public or even a Jewish public, despite being dramatic and so compelling. So this became a huge question for me: On the one hand, what is the story of Jewish women in the

underground in Poland? And on the other hand, what happened to this story? Why did I not know about this? It didn't make sense.

There are different reasons why we didn't know this story. I think some of them are political, and they have to do with how the history of the story, the narrative of the Holocaust, has been politicized. Sometimes we see it now, even in Poland, where there are laws about what is allowed to be told and not to be told. We've been interested in different elements of the Holocaust over the decades. At some point the interest was in concentration camps and then in spiritual resistance, and more recently in women's experiences. But I think a lot of it in this story has to do with a personal silencing. Many of these women stopped telling their stories or never told them in the first place. Some of that has to do with the fact that they weren't believed. Some of it has to do with them being accused. They felt there was this kind of myth that the "pure souls" had perished in the Holocaust, but those who survived did something to survive, something conniving; perhaps they were collaborators. They had slept their way to safety. Many women felt they were accused of having abandoned their parents to fight, to be part of an underground. They suffered from terrible survivors' guilt. And then some of it is that these women were so young during the war. They were twenty years old. They had no family, they had no home. They were refugees in countries and often didn't know the language. And it was very important for many of them to start fresh. They felt a compulsion to have children to recreate the Jewish people. And they wanted to raise their children in a happy, normal environment. And so again, they didn't tell their stories for a long time as a way to cope and to continue surviving.

**Catherine Cangany:**

One of the questions that Holocaust scholars wrestle with is what constitutes active resistance. Some favor a broad umbrella that includes the sheer act of staying alive. Others feel that definition is too general and diminishes acts of heroism because it equates resistance with resilience. So, given all that baggage, how do you define acts of resistance, and how did you come to that definition?

**Judy Batalion:**

I was very aware of these scholarly debates about what counts as resistance: Does an active resistance have to be preplanned? Does it have to be organized? Does it even have to be conscious? Is it part of a group? Is it an active attempt to define a regime? Is it shooting someone in the head? Or can resistance be simply staying alive? Telling a joke to relieve fear can be an act of resistance. But at the end of the day, I tried to present as broad a sample of resistance activity as I could: Jewish women who ran soup kitchens and underground schools and underground printing presses—they would smuggle bulletins by braiding them in their hair; women who ran underground summer camps; who helped orphans; who helped clothe children and feed the poor. And then also the activity on the other end of the spectrum: young Jewish women who blew up Nazi supply trains; who shot Gestapo men in

the head; who were guerrilla fighters in ghetto uprisings, lighting Molotov cocktails and throwing them at tanks. I wanted to show the broad array of activity that women engaged in.

Many had a particular role of courier girls. In Hebrew, they were called *kasbarit*: connectors. These were young Jewish women who pretended to be Christian and slipped in and out of ghettos. They did their work on the outside, performing this fake identity. And they connected the ghettos. The ghettos weren't allowed to have radios or newspapers. It was often young Jewish women bringing the news, the news of the death camps, the news of the genocide. Young Jewish women brought false papers, false passports, fake IDs, medication, money. They often armed the ghetto underground. It was these young Jewish women who snuck out and met with weapons dealers and people from the Polish resistance. They hid the weapons in fashionable handbags and in their pockets and taped them to their torsos and then brought them back into the ghettos to help arm uprisings. They also did rescue work. They helped take Jews out of ghettos and labor camps and find them hiding spots, sometimes in the cities, sometimes in the countryside. And they would then support their charges in hiding. They would pay off the hidiers. They would come with money, medical help, even just a book or a piece of paper and a pencil to give them some something to do, some spiritual nourishment. Young women did all these things.

**Catherine Cangany:**

Talk about the 1930s when these young Jewish women were coming of age. So much of the story you tell is rooted in their experiences in the years before they became radicalized resisters. What is it about Poland in the 1930s that allowed them to take on these roles?

**Judy Batalion:**

I've become obsessed with Poland in the 1930s. That period is, I think, so under-discussed, so eclipsed by what happened after. It was an amazing time for Jewish culture. There were 180 Jewish newspapers in Warsaw. It was a cultural golden era. There was growing antisemitism, but also film and theater and cabaret and political parties. Poland was—I don't want to say it was feminist. They wouldn't have used that term. But it was so much more progressive than I would ever have imagined. Women had the vote in 1918, before most Western countries. School was mandatory for boys and girls through eighth grade. Jewish women were more bourgeois, generally, and slightly wealthier. Women worked in the 1930s. Forty-five percent of the Jewish labor force was women. Women actually married later, in their late twenties or early thirties. They had fewer children. They worked more. They had a public life. Universities were open to women. The majority of women in Polish universities were Jewish. Even fashion changed for women in Poland. In the thirties, they wore their hair short, stuck back in barrettes. Fitted blazers, shorter heels, skirts were raised. Clothes they could work in, walk in, run in.

Amid all this there is another context going on: Jewish youth was organized into youth movements. One hundred thousand young Jews were members of these youth movements, which were often affiliated with political parties or political ideologies. They were value-driven. They were social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual breeding grounds for young Jews. I like to joke that your last name was the name of your youth movement. It was your whole world for these young Jews. And the movements that I write about were socialist, secular youth movements, and value-driven. They really believed in Jewish pride, pride in our history, pride in our heritage. They talked about collaboration and group work, and women were leaders in them. They worked the land. They were trained to be aware and to plot and to act. And many of these young Jews left their family homes. Often the parents were very upset about this. The youth would move in for periods of time with their comrades in these communes. The members trusted each other. They knew each other very well. They had strong leadership and collaborative structures. And these were the groups that later on became the underground cells in the ghetto, the fighting units. They were primed to become these guerilla cells.

**Catherine Cangany:**

One of the most important figures in your book is a woman named Renia. The book opens and closes with her. How did you choose her as your central figure? What struck you about her and her story in particular?

**Judy Batalion:**

Going back to the Yiddish book I found in the British library, it was a collection of different bits: some obituaries, some excerpts, memoirs, essays, journalistic bits. The longest bit, in the middle, was by this woman, Renia. There was no last name. Her story immediately struck me. She wrote with a very matter-of-fact tone, her story was dramatic and detailed, and she told it as a narrative. Many of the other writers were socialists and wrote from that political slant. She didn't. She was not particularly political before the war. She wrote in a way that struck me as being extremely modern, very contemporary. And she felt very relatable because she wasn't a bleeding-heart socialist. That drew me into her story.

Renia was young when the war started: She was about fourteen years old, just turning fifteen. When Hitler invaded, she was defiant. She would sneak out of the ghetto and trade family heirlooms for food to help feed her family. She knew she was going to be killed. And in the summer of 1942, her whole family decided to escape the ghetto. They were all going to go in different directions. She went by herself and fled through fields. She passed as a Catholic Pole

and got a job working as a housemaid for a German family. But she really wanted to connect with her sister. Her sister smuggled her over to this town in southwest Poland, where her sister was in the underground. When Renia arrived, she was eighteen years old. They needed someone to work as a courier, to go back to Warsaw and gather supplies, information, weapons. All their other couriers had been killed. And because she could pass, they asked if she would go. For about a six-month period in 1943, she went back and forth, buying weapons, smuggling weapons, papers, money, organizing rescue plans, and helping smuggle people.

**Catherine Cangany:**

Tell us about the title. How did you settle on *The Light of Days*?

**Judy Batalion:**

This was a hard book to find a title for. For many, many years in my computer, it was called *Ghetto Girls*. But then, "girls" was overused, and I couldn't use that. Every title I threw out was rejected. I didn't know what to do. My editor and I had a conversation and we decided: Let's look at poetry. Let's look at songs. And then I remembered that in that original Yiddish book, there were some poems. So I went back to the book, and there was this poem written by a young Jewish woman in the Warsaw ghetto as part of a song-writing competition. One of the stanzas was saying, "Warsaw right now is decimated, but we know one day it will again see the light of day." And that felt bittersweet. There was an inspirational element to it, and the fact it was written by a young woman and sort of fit.

But there was another reason! Many of the women I wrote about were in the underground, and many of them for long periods of time were underground. They craved the light of day. They craved sunlight, the ability to go outside and be under the sun. And I found that very moving. Matching those two reasons up felt right.

**Catherine Cangany:**

A question from our viewers: Did you ever answer your original question, about trauma?

**Judy Batalion:**

Well, I never really got answers. Maybe more questions! But I think what I learned is that when I went into this project, I was thinking about trauma and the troubles that caused; how the trauma and pain passed over generations. But what I've come out of this project thinking about is how also the strength passed through generations: the passion and the fight and the fury and the compassion and the courage. My bubbe, yes, she passed on trauma. She was also the strongest person I know. And I'm trying to hold those both together. All of that, I think passes to us and through us.

905

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP  
AS OF OCTOBER 31, 2021

112

NEW MEMBERS SINCE THE 2020  
BULLETIN WAS PUBLISHED

## ONCE I WAS SOMEBODY

Rachel S. Yoskowitz, MPH

*Just the word “refugee” conjures up strong feelings. Everyone has an opinion on the topic, but not everyone has knowledge about the topic. Are today’s refugees the population Emma Lazarus described as “tired, poor . . . huddled masses?” How did they become refugees? Where can they go? On October 20, 2021, nearly 30 attendees joined expert Rachel Yoskowitz, MPH, for a Zoom discussion of today’s refugees and the scope of the community’s responsibility under current law to receive and resettle those admitted to the United States. In the accompanying essay, Yoskowitz describes the profound and enduring impact of a single conversation with a refugee client at Jewish Family Service of Metro Detroit in 1996.*

In my work at multiple resettlement agencies across the United States, I learned that country of origin is not a determining factor in defining an individual’s expressed desire to emigrate for a life free from persecution. Whether from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Albania, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, or Afghanistan, upon reaching safety, all refugees express their desire for freedom and release from torment and tyranny.

The refugee’s initial euphoria at reaching safe harbor is almost palpable. Over the years, I have noticed that each newly resettled person conveys an expectation that he or she is safe and can now move on with life. There is the feeling of “free at last, safe at last, and now my life is renewed.” Only later when the actual process of resettlement and cultural integration are progressing does the refugee begin to realize the difficulties that lie ahead. It is painful to observe this epiphany, the realization that neither I nor other resettlement professionals could convey. Only in experiencing it can one believe it.

Escaping persecution and the journey to physical safety eclipsed all thoughts of the journey to absorption. The challenges of acquiring linguistic proficiency, adapting to the social milieu, and gaining employment had not been anticipated. Then too, the reality of the huge task of cultural adaptation may have been theoretically known, but not understood until it became a glaring reality confronting each newly arrived refugee. It was our task as resettlement professionals to ease the way. Each day I felt the obligation to fulfill the dictum of Torah: “The stranger who resides with you shall be as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. . . .” (Leviticus 19:34).

Welcoming the stranger is core to every refugee program. The task of refugee resettlement and absorption/integration are contracted by the US government to professional resettlement agencies, which have established networks of services to facilitate

the integration of each individual and family unit. The hurdles to achieving a modicum of adaptation, including language skills and cultural sensitivity, are well known to resettlement professionals. Yet, even for me, with the knowledge and experience that came with working in this field, the reality and accompanying pain of the refugee was brought home most clearly to me by one of my clients at JFS, a woman who articulated to me the true challenge. Her words made the theory a reality.

She had just met with her case manager to complete applications for food stamps and subsidized housing. Then, she asked to speak to “The Director.” Hesitantly, this dignified woman entered my office clutching a large purse. Her mood matched the dreary winter day. Her dignity overrode her circumstances. She sat erect, hands folded in her lap, feet flat on the floor. Her dull brown hair was pulled into a knot at the nape of her neck, her bare skin pale and smooth. Under her open coat she wore a faded sweater. She looked older than her age, worn-out and defeated. I saw that she was a woman in her prime. Her accented English reflected her Eastern-European roots. She spoke in simple sentences, fearing embarrassment by using the wrong word. She spoke of the difficulty of being a stranger in a new place with strange customs. She lamented the inadequate public transportation that limited her ability to go places; but then, there were so few places to go. She was from the land of Pushkin, and we Americans were uncultured, unsophisticated compared to residents of her native Leningrad, with its great museums and music. She spoke of the humiliation of being a refugee dependent on others, clothed in cast-offs from strangers, living in a sub-optimal apartment.

She was an educated person, a scientist, a researcher who had much to contribute. But now, she was unemployed, idle, and linguistically limited. What would her future hold? She emigrated to raise her son in a democracy and give him a better life without the stigma and persecution of being a Jew. For her, the price was very high. She had no special requests of me, just that I know what it was like to be a refugee, unwelcome at home in the land of her fathers and out of place in her new setting. She rose from her chair, and as she reached the door, she looked at me and poignantly said words I have never forgotten: “Once I was somebody.”

That was 1996. Her words remain with me as though it were yesterday. Just four simple words that touched my heart and continue to impact me. Those four words have informed my approach to refugees, to clients at JFS’s Project Chesed (of which I was founding director), and to all of the vulnerable

*Continued on page 37*

## WHAT I LEARNED NOT FAR FROM SEVEN MILE ROAD

Len Felder, PhD

*On September 23, 2021, Len Felder, PhD, spoke to nearly 50 Zoom viewers about the influences of growing up Jewish in Detroit with his father's small family of Holocaust survivors and his mother's large family of Polish Jews. Among the discoveries he made was the importance of embracing the diversity of Jewish beliefs and opinions about spirituality, religion, politics, Israel, and social change. The accompanying essay provides readers the opportunity to learn more about the impact of Felder's early experiences on his careers as a bestselling author and psychotherapist.*

I didn't realize there was something unique and special about being Jewish from Michigan until my family went to the Catskills when I was nine, and I heard from a pushy ten year old from Long Island that "there are no Jews in the United States except in New York and New Jersey." Apparently there is a belief in America that the boilerplate version of the "American Jewish Experience" is coming to Ellis Island, living in one of New York City's five boroughs, and moving to a nearby suburb to assimilate. That's why it's so important you and I explore our unique and special stories of what it was like growing up Jewish in Michigan and how our adult values and priorities were impacted by those early experiences in the "Water Winter Wonderland."

What I discovered about my own upbringing—born in Sinai Hospital in Detroit; kindergarten at the city's Vernor Elementary, where they did serve Vernor's Ginger Ale in the cafeteria; then attending Detroit's Bow Elementary and Coffey Junior High; and finally, Southfield High School—were several themes that influenced my life and my work. These include:

**The Rich Diversity of Jewish Affiliations and Beliefs.** I grew up in two different congregations along Seven Mile Road. One was the Conservative Congregation Beth Abraham (today known as Congregation Beth Ahm following a series of mergers, and located in West Bloomfield), where I sat next to my beloved grandfather on many Saturday mornings and tried to keep up with the elders racing through the words. I sometimes would pray, "Please may *Adon Olam* come soon" (because I was hungry for lunch and *Adon Olam* was the closing prayer). My immediate family also went often to Temple Israel, then in Palmer Woods (today located in West Bloomfield). There I learned about repairing the world (at age fifteen I was a volunteer Head Start teacher at Chaney and Burton Elementary Schools in Detroit with my temple youth group) and making Jewish prayers and rituals relevant and creative (we did multimedia *Havdalah* services to the music

of Jefferson Airplane and Bobby Zimmerman/Bob Dylan). I also met Jews from all over Michigan at weekend youth group gatherings where we developed crushes, and, before heading back to our hometowns at the end of the weekend, we would sing John Denver's "Leaving on a Jet Plane" ("tell me that you'll wait for me, hold me like you'll never let me go . . .") and shed tears at the campfire sing-alongs.

In addition, I had friends who invited me to their services that were Orthodox, Conservative, Humanistic, Ethical Cultural, Reconstructionist, Sephardic, or Reform. I also experienced Reform temples that were more politically conservative and religiously traditional than my very progressive temple in Detroit when our statewide Michigan branch of the National Federation of Temple Youth held weekend retreats in Flint, Lansing, Jackson, Battle Creek, Benton Harbor, Muskegon, and Grand Rapids. By the time I was seventeen, I had learned that there were many ways to be Jewish and that we are a connected family of many different flavors and beliefs. This understanding helped me in my adult life because as a couples counselor I realized that every marriage is somewhat like a "mixed marriage": every two Jews (even if both are Conservative or both are Reform) have very different beliefs and practices on how to do a wedding, a baby naming, a bris, a bat or bar mitzvah, or a Friday night dinner. Because of the diversity I experienced as a teen in the Jewish communities of Michigan, I was able to help many couples and families work through their differences and develop hybrid solutions that made all the various family members feel welcomed and included.

**The Enormously Different Lifestyles and Personalities of the Two Sides of My Own Family.** Since my father was a Holocaust survivor from Plauen, Germany, and had lost most of his relatives in the Shoah, I learned a lot about German Jewish viewpoints from him. I saw him cringe whenever any of his cousins from Cleveland, New Jersey, or Delaware would speak German. He would walk out of the room saying, "I will never speak that language again." I saw him lose sleep for several days with horrific flashback dreams and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder before and after each annual visit to the German embassy to seek reparations for a tiny amount of what was taken from his family. I saw him speak slowly and very precisely when he was upset or angry, with the kind of carefully controlled rage that sounded a lot like Henry Kissinger or Arnold the bodybuilder.

When my father and one of his few surviving relatives would get into a disagreement (whether about the Vietnam War, civil rights, or Roosevelt's adequate or inadequate efforts to pressure the Allies to stop Hitler), the slow, carefully articulated rage

would sound intellectual and rational, but you could feel my father’s pain and sadness underneath the fancy words.

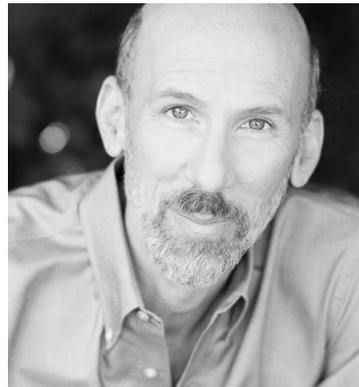
My father’s cautious, carefully phrased Germanic anger was quite different from the fiery responses of the numerous relatives on my mother’s first- and second-generation Polish Jewish side (her side had a cousins club with over 100 members, monthly meetings, and annual picnics in Kiplinger’s Park near Eight Mile Road). My mom’s aunts, uncles, cousins, and others were much-less-cautious Polish Jews, mostly from a town named Sandomerz, who had arrived in Michigan in the 1920s and 1930s—many with quick tempers and jobs in grocery stores, gas stations, or liquor stores. What I learned from my mother’s side is how much people who never went to college had brilliant things to say and how strongly they believed in helping one another despite engaging in heated arguments at Shabbos meals and family picnics.

One of the beautiful traditions of my mom’s family at their monthly Rothenberg cousins club meetings is something called “Good and Welfare.” At each meeting someone would bring out a bowl, and a recent immigrant cousin with a booming voice and a sharp temper would shout, “Good and Welfare!” That started a fifteen-minute flurry of relatives donating 25 or 50 cents for a family member’s *nachas* (joyous accomplishment), a dollar for someone’s birthday (everyone then would sing “Happy Birthday”), and additional small amounts for other news, trips, or joyous celebrations. This abundant bowl of money (from people who did not have much money but had a lot of life force) would go to help struggling family members, near and far. I learned from this ritual that no matter how painful life is or how little we have, there is always the possibility of people coming together to lift up one another’s spirits and boost the prospect for improvement.

**The Diversity of Jews Outside My Own Family To Whom I Felt Connected.** Growing up in Michigan I felt like I had an extended family that included all sorts of Jews who were not my blood relatives. I remember one night when Soupy Sales was standing next to me in line for the Good Humor ice cream truck on Freeland and Pembroke in Detroit (in front of my grandparents’ home). I sensed at that moment that Milton Supman (Sales’s real name), Sonny Eliot, Robin Seymour, Mitzi Gaynor, and many other Jews in the media were part of one big family of Michigan Jews.

I grew up revering Detroit Tigers player Hank Greenberg and his decision not to play baseball on Yom Kippur. As a student at Kenyon College in Ohio in the 1970s, I took a yoga class from Hank Greenberg’s daughter Alva Greenberg (who was one year ahead of me at Kenyon) and felt like I was in the presence of Jewish royalty because of her exalted lineage.

During my childhood I went to occasional fundraising dinners with my father (who worked for Hughes & Hatcher’s clothing stores and was part of the decision to bring monkeys into the Northland Mall store). One evening I realized that even though the speaker, Max Fisher, came from a different economic class and belonged to a different political party, we stood together, as one united people, wanting to help local Jews, Israel, and Soviet Jews. This perspective of feeling connected despite our differences has helped me as an adult, especially lately when there is so much polarization and name-calling. I learned in Jewish Michigan, not only in Detroit but also on my visits to more conservative towns like Benton Harbor, Jackson, Battle Creek, and Muskegon, that we do not have to agree on politics to agree to help one another through tough times.



**Len Felder, PhD**, is a psychologist and author whose fifteen books have sold over one million copies. He has been interviewed on *Oprah*, *The Today Show*, CNN, National Public Radio, *Kelly & Company*, *Sonya Live* (hosted by Sonya Friedman), and the *J.P. McCarthy Show*. His most recent books are *We See It So Differently: Creative Ways for Jews to Make Peace When Family Members or Colleagues Disagree About Religion, Politics, and Other Issues* (North

Charleston, SC: Palmetto Publishing, 2019) and *Keeping Your Heart Open: How to Overcome the Things That Make Us Numb, Cynical, or Burned Out* (North Charleston, SC: Palmetto Publishing, 2021). Thank you to Risha B. Ring, Kara Schuchman, and Tracy Weissman for suggesting that I write about growing up in the Jewish communities of Michigan and how it impacted my book writing and psychotherapy practice.

## ENGAGEMENT ACROSS MICHIGAN AND BEYOND HAS CONTINUED TO GROW.

IN 2021 OUR ZOOM PROGRAMS HAVE REACHED PARTICIPANTS IN ISRAEL, CANADA, WASHINGTON, DC, AND THE FOLLOWING 26 STATES!

ARIZONA  
CALIFORNIA  
COLORADO  
FLORIDA  
GEORGIA  
ILLINOIS  
INDIANA

MAINE  
MARYLAND  
MASSACHUSETTS  
MICHIGAN  
MINNESOTA  
MISSOURI  
NEVADA

NEW JERSEY  
NEW MEXICO  
NEW YORK  
NORTH CAROLINA  
OHIO  
OREGON  
PENNSYLVANIA

TEXAS  
VERMONT  
VIRGINIA  
WASHINGTON  
WISCONSIN

(UP FROM 19 STATES, WASHINGTON, DC, ISRAEL, AND CANADA IN 2020)

## PIVOTING JEWISH END-OF-LIFE CARE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

*Rabbi Joseph H. Krakoff*

*On March 23, 2021, 45 Zoom viewers joined Rabbi Joseph Krakoff, Senior Director of the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network, for a fascinating discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on hospice care and the bereavement process. The accompanying essay provides readers the opportunity to learn more about changes in Jewish end-of-life care as a result of the pandemic.*

The Torah is clear that life is exceedingly precious. It is a gift given to every human being by G-d, and as such, we are charged with the sacred responsibility to cherish and guard our bodies and to do our best to keep them healthy and well. While there are several deaths noted throughout the Book of Genesis, it actually is not until Genesis 48:1 that illness is first introduced into the world.

As Jacob nears the end of his life at the age of 147, Joseph is informed that his father is ill, and he immediately comes to be by Jacob's side. According to the Midrash, in Bereshit Rabbah Toldot 65, Jacob appreciates that he will be able to utilize his illness to put his affairs in order and to bless his children and grandchildren.

We learn from this Biblical scene two very important lessons. First, it is a mitzvah that when we hear of someone who is sick, we are obligated to visit them and tend to their needs. The Rabbis understood that each time we visit someone who is ill, we bring along with us a measure of healing (not necessarily physical, but certainly emotional/psychological/spiritual uplift). Second, when we are faced with a terminal diagnosis, we can use the journey to put our affairs in order and connect deeply with loved ones, using whatever time we have left to repair broken relationships and to express and receive forgiveness, gratitude, and love.

As a rabbi serving palliative care and hospice patients and their families, I am blessed to experience the beauty inherent in being with people at a time that can be very lonely and extremely isolating. But I realize now that I truly did not understand the depth of loneliness and isolation that can occur until February 2020, when everything changed seemingly overnight.

At the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network (JHCN) office in West Bloomfield, we had been carefully monitoring the rampant spread of coronavirus throughout China and Italy. Seeing what was happening overseas, it was not hard to anticipate that COVID-19 would soon be wreaking havoc in the United States. As a staff we had daily conversations focused on identifying strategic pathways that would allow us to continue to best serve our 180 patients once the pandemic hit Michigan.

Admittedly, we had absolutely no concept of what to expect, but we were wholly focused on brainstorming approaches that would help us pivot patient care amid the coronavirus.

In the midst of our planning, community transmission was detected throughout Washington State, New York, and here in Michigan as cases began spreading quickly and indiscriminately. I will never forget that on the day after Purim, a celebration of great joy on the Jewish calendar, public schools were closed, malls were shuttered, grocery store shelves were laid bare, hospitals were overflowing with patients who were deathly ill, and a state-wide "stay at home order" was implemented.

While JHCN has been addressing the daily crises in our patients' lives since our inception in 1999, the sudden crisis of COVID-19 was something nobody could have ever imagined. It was our hospice medical partners—nurses and aides—who were true heroes as they put themselves at risk each day by bringing essential care to our patients' bedsides.

As an agency, we were unable to bring social work and spiritual care services to our patients in person. Yet, our team of JHCN caregivers was determined that nothing would keep us from fulfilling our mission: "No Jew Is Ever Alone." In a time of growing anxiety, uncertainty, isolation, and panic, we began making regular phone calls and implemented ongoing FaceTime and Zoom virtual visits. We kept in constant touch with our patients and their family members wherever they lived, providing compassion, guidance, comfort, and spiritual connection. We well understood that they needed to feel our presence and support now more than ever!

While tending to the patients already on our census, our new patient admissions expanded exponentially with people who had contracted the coronavirus. So too, we were flooded with many additional patients enrolling in our hospice program much earlier in their disease progression specifically to stay out of the hospital where they feared contracting COVID-19.

Perhaps, though, the most devastating aspect of the pandemic itself was not the countless deaths, but the fact that people were truly dying alone, whether in the hospital or at home. We were getting multiple calls each day from distraught family members—both in and out of town—devastated that they could not hold the hands of their loved ones a final time or kiss them goodbye. There are no adequate words to describe the sheer heartbreak that people felt at not being physically present like the Biblical Joseph was for his father Jacob. We, as clergy, were reciting end-of-life prayers for people over the phone or outside at first floor windows, and involving their loved ones virtually where possible.

In the same way, meetings with families to prepare for funerals could only take place virtually. Shivah services following the burial also were held remotely, at least until the weather got warmer and people could carefully gather and socially distance in mourners' backyards.

And for funeral services themselves, most people were not permitted to attend in person during the initial days of the pandemic. Trying to balance Jewish legal considerations with the Michigan stay-at-home order, the Michigan Board of Rabbis unanimously passed a policy to permit outdoor, graveside funerals exclusively. Early on, many outdoor funerals were attended only by the rabbi and funeral director when the family had been exposed to COVID-19 and were required to quarantine. They, along with family members who lived out of town, would gather around their home computers, tablets, and phones to watch a live feed of the graveside service. Each Jewish cemetery locally made its own gathering rules about who could attend in person. Some cemeteries limited the number of guests to ten and closed the cemetery gates when that number was reached. Others required a list of attendees that were checked off by a guard as they arrived. In some cases, people stayed inside their cars and only partially rolled down their driver-side windows to hear the service.

To make matters worse, there was no hugging or handshaking to comfort the bereaved. Many people wore gloves, and everyone was required to wear a face mask. In many cemeteries, people were instructed in advance to bring their own shovels to perform the ritual of *chesed shel emet*, the mitzvah of burial. When it came to the preparation of bodies for burial, because it was hotly debated exactly how COVID-19 was spread, each body was handled carefully and sanitized before *tachrichin* (burial shrouds) were laid gently on top.

It was only with the distribution of vaccines, beginning in January 2021, that the situation began to revert to the way it used to be. By May 2021, people began to take off their masks

at outside services, and some of the funeral chapels opened once again. But a short time later, with the widespread Delta variant of coronavirus, many people returned to mask wearing and taking precautions to protect their health.

While it will undoubtedly take us a long time to recover emotionally and psychologically from the tragedy forged by COVID-19, I must conclude on a more positive and hopeful note. Amid the endless death and devastation, there were some beautiful silver linings. Again and again, I watched families and friends reconnect after some type of rift and extend themselves sincerely and lovingly toward one another, setting aside their grudges and ill will to support each other, as the Bible teaches. Connecting virtually became the standard for checking in with one another and staying in touch with our spiritual selves in everything from Shabbat and High Holy Day services to Passover seders. And finally, and most importantly, I saw more compassion, empathy, kindness, honesty, and love expressed among individuals toward one another than I had ever seen prior to the pandemic. I pray that we thoughtfully take these gifts forward into the world, and, in so doing, may we continue to recognize not only that life is precious, but also that we truly need one another.



**Rabbi Joseph H. Krakoff** is the Senior Director of the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network. He was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1998 and is the author of *Never Long Enough: Finding Comfort and Hope Amidst Grief and Loss* (Canton, MI: Skywardjems, 2017). He also wrote the chapter on "What Is Hospice Care?" in *Now What? A Guide to the Gifts and Challenges of Aging* (Canton, MI: Front Edge Publishing, 2021).

## SHATTERING THE CEILING: INTERVIEWS WITH REMARKABLE MICHIGAN WOMEN

In 2021 JHSM held a two-part Zoom series, *Shattering the Ceiling*. Sponsored by Advisory Board Member Ann J. Conrad, the program featured Jewish women in Michigan who are pioneers in their fields.

Part one (April 20) highlighted Molly Reeser, founder and executive director of Camp Casey, which "delivers happiness on horseback to children with cancer and rare blood disorders." Founded during Reeser's college days, Camp Casey continues to grow each year and now includes programs that come to children's homes, especially helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the interview Reeser provided an in-depth look at how she has made history as a young Jewish woman building a unique and inspirational organization in our state.

Part two (July 27) featured Ora Pescovitz, MD, president of Oakland University. Zoom viewers were treated to a wide-ranging interview covering Pescovitz's distinguished career in medicine, education, and business before she began her tenure at OU in 2017; her unique perspective on succeeding in a male-dominated field; and her experiences navigating COVID-19 as an educator.

## AN EVENING AT THE FLINT INSTITUTE OF ARTS WITH ISRAELI ARTIST YIGAL OZERI

Barbara Madgy Cohn

Barbara Madgy Cohn previews JHSM's upcoming Zoom program on January 20, 2022, when she will be interviewing Israeli artist Yigal Ozeri and his daughter and business manager, Shear Ozeri.

The weather could not have been worse! Driving in a rain and wind storm to the Flint Institute of Arts on Thursday, September 23, 2021, I was sure all the guests heading to the event I had organized were screaming at me from inside their cars. One person even experienced a flat tire, but luckily, made it just in time. Forty-five people enjoyed dinner and drinks with Israeli artist Yigal Ozeri and a private tour of his new exhibition, *Brush with Reality*. The exhibition highlights the last fourteen years of Ozeri's career and will travel around the US, following its opening at the FIA (through January 2, 2022). Tracee Glab, FIA Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, did incredible work putting together the exhibition of 50 paintings from private collections. It was well worth the drive, even in the rain!

Among those accompanying Ozeri to the special event were longtime prominent art dealer Louis K. Meisel, who represents the artist, and friends and collectors Wayne Yakes and Eileen Kaminsky, who loaned several pieces for the exhibition. Ozeri's daughter, Shear Ozeri, who handles her father's business operations, public relations, and show logistics as director of Yigal Ozeri LLC, also attended.



The Flint Institute of Arts hosted a private reception with Israeli artist Yigal Ozeri on September 23, 2021, to celebrate the museum's opening of his new exhibition, *Brush with Reality*. Pictured at the reception are: (left to right) Susan Marsch; the author, who helped organize the private event; Ozeri; and Ozeri's daughter and business manager, Shear Ozeri. (Courtesy of author.)

Ozeri was born in 1958 in Tel Aviv, Israel. After serving in the IDF, he attended the Institute of Plastic Arts in Bat Yam. He helped establish the Israeli contemporary art scene; yet something was beckoning him to the United States. He first arrived in New York City in the 1980s and relocated there in 1991. His studio currently is situated in MANA Contemporary, an arts center in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Ozeri is a photorealistic artist. Coined by Meisel in 1969, the term "photorealism" refers to the unique form of painting from photographs, attempting to reproduce them as faithfully as possible. In recent years, artists of this genre have used digital photography as a tool to enhance their paintings' lifelike details.

Meisel discovered Ozeri at a Miami art fair many years ago. According to Meisel, "Ozeri is now one of the leading artists of the third generation of photorealists." Ozeri is best known for painting large-scale images of beautiful women (usually models), often in natural landscapes. It is hard to believe his works are not actual photographs! Although he insists his photorealistic paintings are reality because they are based on photographs and videos, the works are a combination of fantasy, imagination, and reality. Ozeri paints his figures in dreamlike states and merges them with their surroundings.

Ozeri is a charming man who talks to everyone and looks the part of an artist. He has a wispy mane of greyish black hair and dressed in black with platform shoes. He escorted us through the exhibition, stopping at many paintings to talk about his work. Our first stop was a large striking painting of a beautiful woman with wind-blown hair, *Untitled; Olya* (2014), at which Ozeri discussed his style and painting process. He pointed out individual strands of hair, so lifelike that attendees quickly reached for their phones to snap photos.



Photorealistic paintings like Yigal Ozeri's *Untitled; Olya* (2014) contain such lifelike details as the individual strands of wind-blown hair visible on *Olya* that it is hard to believe they are not photographs. (Courtesy of Yigal Ozeri LLC.)

In 2010 Ozeri created a series of paintings of Elizabeth “Lizzy” Jagger, daughter of Mick Jagger, in Central Park, New York. The work included in the FIA exhibition, *Untitled; Lizzie [sic]* (2014), captures her smoking a cigarette during wintertime. Ozeri explained he used this setting to capture the smoke as it floats through the air. The crowd had a moment of “Wow!”



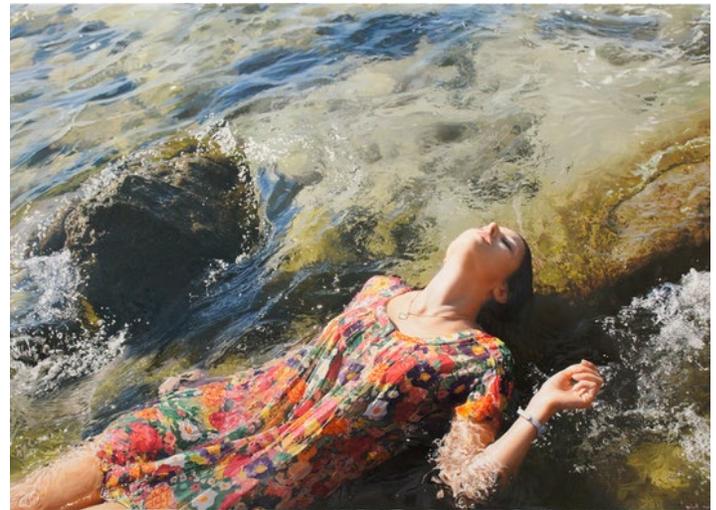
*Ozeri describes one of his paintings of Lizzy Jagger, Untitled; Lizzie [sic] (2014), during a private tour of his exhibition at the FIA on September 23. (Courtesy of Yigal Ozeri LLC.)*

One of the evening’s highlights involved a story about another series, *Territory*, which he created of Shely Ben-Joseph, an Israeli soldier. Ozeri photographed her in Tel Aviv, where she was in charge of a department of 30 male soldiers in a special division dedicated to cyber defense. Ozeri’s series was meant to be a dialogue, juxtaposing beauty and strength, adolescence and responsibility, and being female and a high-ranking soldier. It was the first series Ozeri painted that touched on a political topic.

Ozeri’s latest series, *New York Story*, also on display at the FIA, captures candid images of people on the streets of New York City. This new body of work represents an evolution in Ozeri’s painting, credited to his daughter, Shear, who told her father, “You have to connect to where you live.”

Ozeri is one of the most successful painters today in the world of photorealism. This unique form of painting seeks to capture a rare technical mastery. It is easy to understand how people viewing his paintings are mesmerized by his extraordinary level of execution.

The FIA is a treasure for our entire state. Working with the museum to organize this amazing event was a pleasure. Attendee Risa Brickman shared, “It was such a treat to meet this cool, talented artist. Listening to his enthusiastic explanations of his work was so inspiring. His art is both thought-provoking and beautiful.” Debby Tukel noted that Ozeri’s “passion



*Ozeri’s series, Untitled: Territory (2012) (pictured above and below), addresses the tensions between beauty and strength faced by Shely Ben-Joseph as a high-ranking female soldier in the Israeli army. (Courtesy of Yigal Ozeri LLC.)*



and skill as a grand storyteller were most evident in each painting on display. Dialogue with the artist also offered great insight into his life and career. Ozeri’s work will continue to gain attention, as his pieces are incredible, relatable, and memorable!” And Linda Golden appreciated “the Flint art museum’s commitment to showing Ozeri’s work in the best way possible: It allowed the viewer into his world. Having the artist present to discuss his work made for a wonderful, personable opening.”

**Barbara Madgy Cohn** is the co-author of *The Detroit Public Library: An American Classic* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017). She received her master’s degree in museum studies at John Hopkins University in December 2021. She serves as vice president of JHSM and on the boards of the Albert Kahn Legacy Foundation and the Detroit Institute of Arts Friends of Modern and Contemporary Art. Since 2007 she has been an active docent at the DIA.

## WESTERN MICHIGAN HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE WEBSITE PLANS TO GO LIVE

*Nicole Katzman,  
Executive Director, Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids*

*Margaret (Peg) Tracy-Finkelstein,  
Director, Peg & Mort Finkelstein Archives, Temple Emanuel;  
Director, Gen & Jack Finkelstein Archives, Congregation Ahavas  
Israel; and JHSM Advisory Board Member*

Readers of the 2021 issue of *Michigan Jewish History* may recall Robert Franciosi, PhD's "Grand Rapids Remembers the Holocaust: A New Website," which introduced the Holocaust remembrance project underway in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The project's creators have been hard at work and plan for the website to go live in the spring or summer of 2022. Made possible by a generous gift by Mort, Raleigh, and Edward (z"l) Finkelstein to the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids (JFGR), the website will preserve the stories, interviews, photos, and interactive maps of Holocaust survivors who settled in Grand Rapids and beyond. It also will feature a Holocaust curriculum that complies with current Michigan education mandates. Survivors profiled will include Joseph Stevens, Henry Pestka, Margit Sarne, Clara Zaidenworm, David Mandel, Konrad Veit, and Susette Tauber.

Margaret (Peg) Tracy-Finkelstein, who directs the archives at Temple Emanuel, Congregation Ahavas Israel, and JFGR, is a driving force behind the website. She hopes its value will be widespread: "As we complete [the survivors' profiles], we are going to share them with the local community and our partners. It is our hope that the project will be a template that other Jewish communities can use."

In addition to creating the collection, Tracy-Finkelstein designed the webpage's logo: "The outer chain represents no beginning

and no end: *l'dor v'dor*, generation to generation. The circle of dots represents infinity. Broken pieces of glass represent how fragile our life can be. Our Star of David continues to shine for us all and gives us hope."



*Peg Tracy-Finkelstein designed this logo for a new website that will share the stories of Holocaust survivors who settled in western Michigan.*

Under Executive Director Nicole Katzman's leadership, JFGR also received a major gift from the Pestka family this summer. In 2022 the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park will become home to a Holocaust memorial sculpture, given in honor of survivor Henry Pestka (1919-2013). Created by prominent Israeli artist Ariel Schlesinger, "Ways to Say Good-bye" is a striking twenty-foot-tall aluminum cast of a fig tree, whose branches hold up immense shards of glass. It memorializes the millions murdered in the Holocaust, provides a meaningful gathering place, and increases awareness of western Michigan's Jewish history.

## MYSTERY SOLVED!

The mystery of this photo from last year's *JHSM Bulletin* has been solved! Our super sleuths have determined that it is likely the interior of Congregation B'nai David, located at 545 Winder St. in Detroit. The man seated front row center is Rabbi Ezekiel Aishiskin. His son-in-law, Samuel Drasnin, is on the left side, three rows up, arms folded, with a Magen David above his head.



## NOTABLE COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS

***Jewish Journeys* Oral History Archive: What's Your Story?**

Dena Scher, PhD

The *Jewish Journeys* oral history archive, which I curate, explores Jewish identity through interviews of members of the archive's host institution, Congregation Shir Tikvah (CST), as well as others in the Detroit metropolitan area. Begun in 2015, *Jewish Journeys* has grown to include 34 interviews. The collection, housed on CST's website, is driven by the philosophy that everyone has a story, and every story adds to a collective understanding of Jewish identity—a better appreciation for the challenges and choices that Jews make in their lives.

*Jewish Journeys* was born out of the same spirit which saw its host institution, CST (Song of Hope), spring to life in 1982. CST was formed as a lay-led congregation by two mothers desiring conveniently located Jewish education for their children. The original 48 members pooled their skills, knowledge, and love of Judaism to form a congregation that was made in their image—a place that was welcoming and ready to “reinvent the wheel.”

CST's first service, held in a Unitarian meeting hall, set the tone for how the congregation would articulate its future growth. In welcoming its newest member, a baby girl, the congregation held its own naming service for her, setting the tone for action—both for the creation of, and participation in, services and events. Along the way CST sought out rabbinical leadership and found a perfect fit in Rabbi Arnie Sleutelberg's wisdom, caring, and enthusiastic support of congregants and social justice initiatives, including supporting Muslim and Hindu neighbors, helping the homeless, protecting the environment, and ensuring equal religious participation for female congregants.

In this atmosphere, I found fertile ground to set the seeds for the *Jewish Journeys* oral history archive. As a clinical psychologist and college professor, I had been teaching my students about oral history data collection. Students' interviews of family members became the basis for *Detroit Journeys*, an oral history collection of African American migrations to Detroit. Interviews from this collection illuminated issues such as the role of Bennett College women in the North Carolina sit-in demonstrations, the impact of poverty on northern migration, and life in Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood. Upon retirement I continued my passion for hearing the stories of the common person and weaving their stories together, with the creation of *Jewish Journeys*.

With support from CST's leadership and community, including Rabbi Sleutelberg, Lorelei Berg (Executive Director), Sarah Chisholm (Director of Lifelong Learning), and Herschel Poger (former CST High School teacher), I designed sessions to train both high school and adult congregants in how to conduct oral history interviews. These sessions addressed the ethics of interviewing, modeled techniques for conducting interviews, and provided recorders with which students could practice.

Behind the scenes, I worked with many others to ensure *Jewish Journeys* would launch and be run in accordance with guidelines from the Oral History Association, including: securing a host institution, developing interviewee consent forms containing copyright information, training interviewers, acquiring recording equipment, and obtaining information technology support to manage the integration of the collection onto the host institution's website.

The first *Jewish Journeys* interview was conducted in 2015. By 2017 there were six trained interviewers and nine interviews in the collection. That same year CST launched the archive on a dedicated web page created by Berg on the congregation's website. The stories of grandparents and elders of the congregation became the essential foundation for *Jewish Journeys*.

Among the interviewees was Wolf Gruca (z"l), age 98, who reflected on his experiences after immigrating to the United States:

Q. What were your impressions when you first came to the United States?

A. Before the war, there was a place you could eat/sleep, a homeless shelter. They brought me to Detroit because I was a toolmaker. *Joint* (American Joint Distribution Committee)—Jewish, refugee organization—offer to go to US or Israel, made papers to *Joint*, after a few months, could come to Detroit, the Jewish center, Claremont & 12th Street, near Taylor, they rented out little flats—a sign, for poor people in Hebrew, when I saw the sign—I lost 99% of my life, I was embarrassed, I didn't want a handout. Stay for 4 weeks, then they sent us to flat on Blaine, found a job as toolmaker. I pushed through, had a family, worked 30 years for Chrysler. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wolf Gruca (z"l), interview by Lawrence Booker, August 20, 2018, audio and transcript, *Jewish Journeys* Oral History Collection, Congregation Shir Tikvah website, <https://www.shirtikvah.org/content/wolf-gruca>.



On October 8, 2017, the Jewish Journeys web page (below) was unveiled to the congregation (above) with a celebration and presentation: “Advantages/Disadvantages of Oral History/Overview of JJ project.” (Except where noted, all photos in this article are courtesy of the author, with permission from Congregation Shir Tikvah.)



By 2019, *Jewish Journeys* had grown to 30 interviews, and there was a backlog of recordings waiting to be transcribed. The community stepped up with donations for professional transcriptions, allowing the curators to focus on accurately preserving Jewish words and phrases—such as *Mensch* or *Chutzpah*—in the final documents.

A landmark moment for *Jewish Journeys* came when CST member Cary Levy, one of the collection’s most prolific interviewers, coordinated with Rabbi Aura Ahuvia to integrate audio snippets of interviews into a Friday Shabbat service. One of the featured interviewees was Pennie Michelin:

I was raised strictly kosher home, with separate meat and milk dishes as well as Passover dishes and towels. I went to Conservative shul. My brother was Bar Mitzvah’d, my sister was first female Bat Mitzvah’d. All cousins had b’nai mitzvahs. I was Bat Mitzvah’d,

but because I was a girl I could not get close to the Torah. I had a Haftarah portion to recite, from Book of Kings. I led service on a Friday night. I went to Hebrew school for 5 years, Bat Mitzvah training for just less than 1 year, and Hebrew High School for 4 years (United Hebrew Schools, affiliated with Conservative Judaism). I was reading Hebrew at 7 ½. Learned a lot from Hebrew school: read and write Hebrew, rituals, holidays, Torah, and history. I went to Hebrew school 2 afternoons a week and Sunday morning. It did take up a lot of my time, it was very much a part of my identity. We did not go to public school on the High Holidays, kept Pesach for all 8 days. This was all normal to me. Not eating meat outside of the home was normal to me. This was what it was like growing up Jewish in Metro Detroit for me. . . .

There were a lot of kosher butchers then. My grandparents didn’t believe in taking time off/vacation except for the Jewish holidays. My father enjoyed going to the shvitz downtown, and providing the steaks. . . .

Q. What about Reform Judaism made you move to that movement?

A. It had much more meaning to me. While more was in English, it was more meaningful to me. Singing in a different way. I love the singing, music, and services. When I go to Conservative services, I have trouble following the Cantor and knowing where we are. Although I do prefer some of the Conservative melodies for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that I remember singing with my parents. It’s ingrained in me, like the Pesach seder and melodies. . . .

I’ve read twelve times from the Torah here. Very proud of myself for having done it and helped my son with it. We have come very far as women with Torah. It used to be we weren’t allowed near the Torah. Women weren’t allowed to lead services; women weren’t allowed to vote in the congregation. Now there are women presidents, women are Rabbis. . . . Even thanking our foremothers in the Amidah. . . .<sup>2</sup>

As *Jewish Journeys* expanded, we indexed the electronic collection using eight themes:

**Anti-Semitism:** to center experiences of hostility or prejudice against Jews

**Conversion:** to chart people’s experiences becoming Jews

<sup>2</sup> Pennie Michelin, interview by Stacy Ziegenfelder, November 18, 2017, audio and transcript, *Jewish Journeys* Oral History Collection, Congregation Shir Tikvah website, <https://www.shirtikvah.org/content/pennie-michelin-0>.

**Doctrine:** to investigate religious practices, such as how individuals hold the Sabbath

**Holocaust:** to examine the severe impacts on European Jews during this horrific time in history

**Immigration:** to detail Jews' myriad paths to the United States

**Jewish/Gentile Relations:** to focus on the way Jews and non-Jews feel and behave towards each other

**Observance:** to highlight interplay between Judaism and cultural actions or practices

**Upbringing:** to investigate the instructions, beliefs, and customs interviewees learned as children

## Oral History Themes

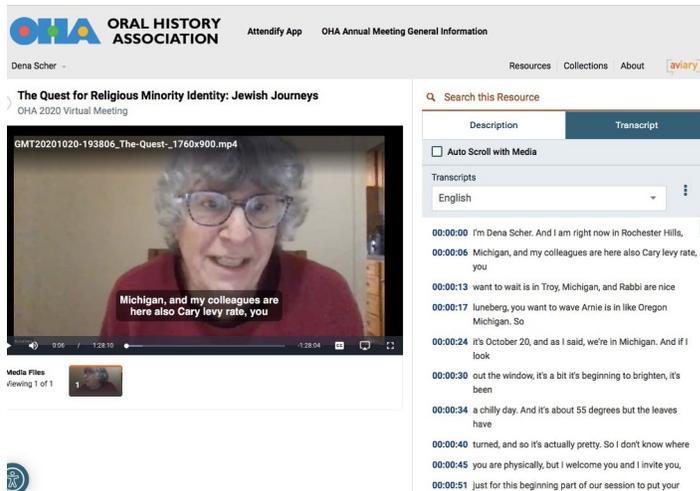
[About History Themes](#) [Complete Interviews](#)

1. **Anti-Semitism**--Gruca, Hoffman, Sleutelberg, Thams, Paul Wenig, Yamron,
2. **Conversion**--E. Chezick, Comai, Crowe, Hoffman, Thams, Walker, Zachman,
3. **Doctrine**- Ahuvia, Matthew Bruer, Caytak, Greenwald, Gruca, Hoffman, Nira Lev, Levy, Michelin, Silverman, Aaron Starr, Rebecca Starr, Sleutelberg, Walker, Paul Wenig, Phylis Wenig, P.Spitzer
4. **Holocaust**-- Ahuvia, Caytak, E. Chezick, E. Bernstein, Fraymovich, Gruca, Kovacs, Rubin, Judy Schreiber, Sleutelberg, Yamron,
5. **Immigration** --S. Boocker, Bose, Gruca, Kovacs, Rubin, Sleutelberg, Yamron,
6. **Jewish Gentile Relations**--Ahuvia, S. Boocker, Bose, E. Chezick, Gruca, Hoffman, Isenberg, Levy, Sleutelberg, P. Spitzer, Rebecca Starr, Scher, Tauber, Thams,
7. **Observance** - Ahuvia, Matthew Bruer, Caytak, Greenwald, Gruca, Kovacs, Levy, Michelin, Rubin, Silverman, Sleutelberg, P. Spitzer, Aaron Starr, Rebecca Starr, Walker, Phylis Wenig, Yamron
8. **Upbringing** -Ahuvia, E. Bernstein, S. Boocker, Bose, Leon Bruer, Matthew Bruer, Caytak, E. Chezick, Crowe, Greenwald, Hoffman, Isenberg, Kovacs, Levy, Rubin, Silverman, Sleutelberg, Aaron Starr, Rebecca Starr, Phylis Wenig, Tauber, Thams, Yamron, Zachman

*Interviews in the Jewish Journeys collection on CST's website are indexed by theme.*

Thanks to the work of all involved, *Jewish Journeys* also has found its place in the larger oral history community. CST panelists presented "The Quest for Religious Minority Identity: *Jewish Journeys*" at the Oral History Association (OHA) national conference in October 2020. Among the three papers panelists presented during the program was "The Big Tallit: Jewish Identity," which was driven by content from *Jewish Journeys* interviewees about how they self-identify as Jews and the challenges that develop as they sustain a Jewish identity.

When COVID-19 hit, the CST "can do" attitude revealed itself, and *Jewish Journeys* pivoted from doing face-to-face interviews in subjects' homes to conducting interviews outdoors, by phone,



*The author (pictured above), along with CST Rabbi Arnie Sleutelberg and congregant and Jewish Journeys interviewer Cary Levy, presented a program on the Jewish Journeys oral history archive and Jewish identity at the Oral History Association virtual national conference in October 2020.*

and via Zoom. Looking back on the evolution of *Jewish Journeys*, I used to worry about oral history tapes gathering dust in my office, then came the ability to use small recorders, followed by websites, and now Zoom interviews! As work on the archive continues, I am committed to the following guiding principles: Everyone has a story—every story is interesting. An oral history interview is not a conversation. And the interesting time begins when you have several interviews, and you look for themes and associations.

The *Jewish Journeys* oral history archive is continuously looking for more oral histories to add to the collection and is excited about its future. To find out more about the archive or to support its work go to: <https://www.shirtikvah.org/cstorallhistoryarchive>.



**Dena Scher, PhD**, is professor emerita at Marygrove College, where she taught from 1981-2015. She founded and established the John Novak Oral History Archive, which included *Detroit Journeys* (migration and immigration experiences to Detroit), migrant workers' experiences in Florida, and civil rights sit-in experiences at Bennett College. Scher was a founding member of the Institute for Detroit Studies (IDS). She has recently established the *Jewish Journeys* oral history archive which explores religious identity.

## NOTABLE COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS

### Plots and Plaques

*David Goldman*

B'nai David Cemetery on Detroit's east side, in the middle of a post-apocalyptic neighborhood, speaks to me. While I'm not a native Detroiter and have only a distant relative buried in the place, it has called to me for help. So began my volunteer vocation as a cemetery caretaker, something I never imagined would be part of my life plan.

In 1897 the founding fathers of B'nai David (formerly Beth David, also known as the Russhische Shul for the Russian immigrants who established it) purchased 1.6 acres from a farmer on land contract for \$1,800 (approximately \$60K in 2021 dollars when adjusted for inflation). The Jewish community lived about four miles west and a short street-car ride away. The local farmers were largely tolerant of the Jewish cemetery, save a 1905 lawsuit claiming burials were contaminating area water wells. Nobody would have expected that 123 years later, after the synagogue took its last breaths, some of this same land would return to its agrarian roots.

Congregation B'nai David fell apart without a plan to care for its cemetery. For more than eight years, a small group of folks has scraped together the funds needed to provide a very minimal level of maintenance. When I became involved, I was given a key to the gate, \$14.00 from the depleted perpetual-care fund, and a difficult-to-follow burial list. The rows were crooked and unnumbered, grave markers were buried beneath years of shifting earth, and others were illegible as words carved in soft stone had faded away. I asked around to see if anybody had better records of grave locations and other burial records, but ultimately found nothing.

Fortunately, my exceedingly organized and logical family jumped into action and formulated a plan to bring order to the place. Each headstone was photographed, sequential markers were placed at the beginning of each row, and the headstones were lettered A-Z. All of this information was entered into a spreadsheet which made it easy to find names and locations. In addition, headstone photos were hyperlinked to names of the interred, allowing anyone a virtual visit to the cemetery. We also began the difficult task of identifying names on headstones that were illegible and applying name plaques at the base of the headstones.

Because former B'nai David members and their descendants are scattered all over the world, I felt it was important to provide unfettered access to this information. Two websites



*The author has led efforts to identify illegible names on headstones in B'nai David Cemetery and apply name plaques, such as the one above, to ensure those buried in the cemetery will not be forgotten. (Courtesy of author.)*

allowed this to happen. Photos were posted on *Find a Grave* (<https://www.findagrave.com/>) and *Billion Graves* (<https://billiongraves.com/>), allowing anyone in the world to find or see a family member's headstone. The images on these websites have reacquainted folks from around the world with their Detroit roots. (A list of all headstones in B'nai David Cemetery also is available on the "Friends of B'nai David Cemetery" Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/bnaidavidcemetery>.)

Along the way, a friend of mine who owns a self-storage company mentioned that B'nai David had rented a locker at one of his facilities that had long gone unpaid. He was too kind to empty the unit himself. Since I was on the hunt for records relating to the cemetery, I offered to clear out the unit. Unfortunately, I didn't find any records. I did find outdated *sidurim* (Jewish prayer books) for which a genizah at the cemetery was created. I also called Robbie Terman, director of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit's Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives, to see if she could save anything. Ultimately, I was left with boxes and boxes of *yahrzeit* plaques (over 600) that once hung in the synagogue. I couldn't bear to discard the plaques, so I brought them home and attempted to reunite them one by one. Along the way, I asked various synagogues to take them,

but was unsuccessful. The majority of plaques remained, cold and disconnected from their families.

In early September 2021, the cemetery was open for visitors, and I displayed the plaques in a last-ditch effort for reunification. Only a few were claimed. However, two wonderful visitors offered to help. Ann Zaron spent countless hours photographing the plaques and entering the names on a spreadsheet, which she then uploaded to JewishGen's yahrzeit plaque database, <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Memorial/>. Carolyn Rands put the names and pictures on the "Detroit Jewish History" Facebook page administered by JHSM President Risha B.

Ring. These efforts led to the repatriation of nearly 60 plaques over the past two months. I am hopeful more will follow.

The process of mapping the cemetery and returning yahrzeit plaques has been rewarding. Improving the level of care and providing access to anyone wanting to visit remain the central goals. The formulation of a long-term plan to care for B'nai David Cemetery is essential as we cannot sustain this work on a shoestring budget. B'nai David, along with all our cemeteries, deserves to be protected and maintained. As important as it is to improve the lives of the living, we must not forget to respect and honor our past.



© Elayne Gross for B'nai David Cemetery

*Some of the more than 600 yahrzeit plaques from Congregation B'nai David that the author is working to reunite with family members.*



**David Goldman** and his wife Amy (Sabin) live in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. They have raised three daughters among a large extended family who all live within a few-mile radius of them. When Goldman worked for a living, he was a partner at a training and marketing firm that served the pharmaceutical industry. In addition to caring for B'nai David Cemetery, Goldman

currently is building an urban garden on nine formerly vacant lots located on the street adjacent to the cemetery; is very involved in a program called Free Bikes 4 Kidz; and loves to ride bikes and unicycles, travel, and enjoy his family and friends.

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## NOTABLE JEWISH MICHIGANDERS IN HISTORY

### Edward Levy, Sr.: A Successful Entrepreneur and Lifelong Supporter of Israel

*Levi Smith, JD's Interview with Edward Levy, Jr.*



*Edward Levy, Jr. (left) and his father, Edward Levy, Sr. (right), circa 1956. (Courtesy of Levy family.)*

*On May 21, 2021, JHSM Journal Advisory Committee member Levi Smith, JD, interviewed Edward Levy, Jr., about the experiences of his father, Edward Levy, Sr., growing up on a farm near Detroit; starting his own company at age 18, which is still a thriving business more than 100 years later; and avidly supporting Israel. The interview is edited for length and clarity.*

**Levi Smith:**

Where was your father, Edward Levy, Sr., born?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

My father was born near the village of Big Beaver, Michigan, in 1900. That village has long since been absorbed into the city of Troy.

**Levi Smith:**

Where was your grandfather from? Why did he leave the old country?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

My grandfather came from Latvia in about 1893, but my grandmother and their four children did not come until the late 1890s. He left Latvia because of anti-Semitism—Jews had to serve in the Tsar's army for twenty or more years, which was longer than Gentiles had to serve.

**Levi Smith:**

Was your family name Levy in Latvia?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

When he came to Ellis Island, he was given the name Sam Levy because he could not understand the question, "What is your name?" and the immigration official determined that he was a member of the Levite Tribe. I never knew my grandfather's actual surname before he came here.

**Levi Smith:**

How did your grandfather come to Michigan?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

He had been sent a train ticket from New York to Traverse City, Michigan, by a relative who lived there. So he went to Traverse City where his family outfitted him as a "pack peddler." He would go from farm to farm selling goods to homemakers. After about two years, he had saved enough money to make a down payment on a small farm in Oakland County, doing what he did in Latvia.

Having established a farm, he sent for his wife and four children to bring them from Latvia. Subsequently, my grandmother blessed him with two more children, the last of whom was my father, Edward Charles Levy, born on November 5, 1900.

**Levi Smith:**

Did you ever visit the farm?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

I remember as a child going to the old farm neighborhood in Big Beaver. This must have been about 1940-1941. We visited the neighbors, and they were happy to see my father. My grandfather had a tough time making a living at farming, with a wife and six children, so he became the neighborhood blacksmith. He also became the person who took the neighbors' crops to market in Royal Oak or Detroit. My father would often ride the wagon with him.

**Levi Smith:**

Did any strange visitors ever come to the farm?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

When my father was still a little boy, a man came to the farm on a wagon without a horse. The wagon was powered by a noisy machine with smoke coming out of it. That man, Henry Ford, was traveling among the farms trying to sell stock in the automobile company he was starting. Of course, my grandfather and other farmers were too sensible to get involved in such a scheme.

**Levi Smith:**

Was your father's family religious?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

They kept a kosher home in a neighborhood where there were hardly any Jews. Every Friday my father was sent, on the inter-urban railroad, to Detroit with a couple of dollars to buy two kosher chickens for Shabbos dinner.

When he was twelve years old, my father was sent to Detroit to live with a young rabbi and prepare for his bar mitzvah. He didn't like the rabbi or the way the rabbi treated him, so he left Detroit and returned to the farm. The inevitable punishment that resulted was the end of his religious training!

**Levi Smith:**

When did your father move from the farm?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

My father left during his middle teens to begin a new life in Detroit. For a couple of years, he collected alley rubbish in downtown Detroit for the city. During those early years he lived with his sister Kate who was married to Charles Harris. He shared a bedroom with his nephew Mort Harris. Early in the Second World War, Mort joined the US Army Air Corp and became a B17 bomber pilot flying bombing missions over Europe, including Berlin. He completed 33 missions with the US 8th Airforce and was highly decorated for his heroic achievements.

My dad saved his money to make a down payment on a dump truck with which he hauled waste foundry sand and disposed of it as a contractor to one of the many iron foundries that were then operating in Detroit.

**Levi Smith:**

When did your father get involved with Henry Ford?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

In 1922 my father became aware of the iron and steelmaking operation that Henry Ford was starting in the Rouge River Plant in Dearborn. He went to the Rouge complex, found Ford, reminded him where they met when Ford came to the Levy farm soliciting investors, and suggested that Ford could use Levy to remove slag from the blast furnace that just started operating. He told Ford that he should be hired to perform this work because "I always do what I say I'm going to do, and I treat my customers' money even more carefully than my own." Somehow that statement rang true with Henry Ford, and he sent one of his people to put my father and a couple of his trucks to work hauling lime waste. The company my father started in 1918 is still removing slag from the furnaces at that steel mill, even though it is on its fourth owner. When the soil in the Rouge plant was completely stabilized with blast furnace slag, my father took responsibility for removing it from the steel mill and making it into useful products.

**Levi Smith:**

Was your father ever summoned to Henry Ford's office?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

In the late 1920s, during prohibition and the period when Henry Ford's financing of anti-Semitism was very much in the public eye, my father was summoned to Ford's office on very short notice. On his way, he wondered, "What is this about? Has he found out that I am Jewish and going to Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann's meetings to hear about his quest for a Jewish state? Maybe this will be my last day at Ford Motor Company. If so, Henry Ford will hear about his anti-Semitism from me!"

Upon arrival at Ford's office, Ford asked him, "Has Ford Motor Company been fair with you?"

He answered, "Yes, Mr. Ford, and I have been more than fair with the Ford Motor Company."

"Have you made money working for the Ford Motor Company?"

"I am happy to say that my work here has been profitable and that I have made many times more money for Ford Motor Company than I have earned for myself."

Henry Ford responded, "Edward, we have a big investment in you, and my Service Department [the band of thugs who maintained security at Ford] has informed me that after work you are seen in saloons drinking large quantities of alcoholic beverages and in the company of rowdy men and women of questionable reputations. Edward, you are on the road to hell and I'm going to see that you stop this right now. I want you to promise me as long as you live you will never let another drop of alcohol pass your lips."

According to my father, the 30 seconds or so that passed while he was thinking of a response seemed like 30 minutes. He finally said, "Mr. Ford, the reason you have called me here to have this talk is because the first day I came to the Rouge plant I told you that I always do what I say I will do. I can't promise that no alcohol will ever pass my lips again, however, I will promise you that your Service Department will never find me in one of those saloons again."

After giving him a very long look, Ford said, "You know, I have people waiting for me in the lobby, you are a busy fellow, so why don't you just get back to work?" In my father's mind, that experience was the closest he ever came to encountering Henry Ford's anti-Semitic activities.

**Levi Smith:**

Did your father have anything to do with construction of the Ford family homes?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

In about 1929, Edsel Ford, Henry Ford's son and president of Ford Motor Company, together with his wife Eleanor, were building an estate in Grosse Pointe Shores on Lake St. Clair. At Edsel Ford's request, my father worked closely with Eleanor Ford and the architect (Jewish Detroit Albert Kahn) to build the roads on the estate and the breakwater on the lakefront. Mr. and Mrs. Ford were very pleased with his work, and it led to a lifetime of friendship between my father and Mrs. Ford.

**Levi Smith:**

How did your father do during the Depression?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

It was very difficult. He didn't have cash to pay his workers because all his money was in the banks that had failed and closed. However, on Dix Avenue, there was a saloon and restaurant called Kelly's. My father was friendly with Jimmy Kelly, so he went to him and asked him to cash the Levy employees' paychecks until the banks opened again at which time he repaid Jimmy Kelly the value of those checks. Their friendship lasted for the rest of Kelly's life; in fact, they were such good friends that I was one of the pallbearers at his funeral in the 1950s.

The Levy company sold slag to the Work Projects Administration (WPA) during the 1930s, which was its first source of cashflow. In 1938 the company also acquired a contract to remove slag from the property of another steel company in Detroit that was both successful and quite profitable. These activities made it possible for my father to repay all of his debts and begin to build his business further.

**Levi Smith:**

What did your father do during World War II?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

During the Second World War, civilian construction was mostly set aside. As part of the war effort, Edw. C. Levy Co. supplied large quantities for slag aggregate to build the Willow Run Expressway, thereby helping the Ford-operated Willow Run plant that built B24 bombers to achieve the rate of one four-engine bomber per hour.

**Levi Smith:**

Was your father involved with the creation of the State of Israel?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

Yes, he was always a pro-Zionist because he knew what my grandfather went through in Latvia before escaping and coming to America. In 1949 a Detroit neighbor named Saul Sloan invited my father to a meeting at his home along with a number of other prominent Jewish businessmen who wanted to do more than just send money to assist in building this new little country. The discussion led to my father being asked to travel to Israel to assess its needs in terms of absorbing the flood

of Holocaust survivors arriving from Europe as well as residents of Arab countries forced to leave as a result of the creation of the Jewish state. His trip to Israel was a great revelation to Ed Levy. When he returned, he was asked what resources Israel had that would enable it to survive. His answer was: "Israel has two resources, rocks and Jews. The Jews will use the rocks as a building material together with their inventiveness and hard work to build the country."

The group agreed to form a company to design and build a modern stone mining, crushing, and screening plant in Israel. There were many small, less efficient stone quarries in Israel, but they were mostly owned by the Pension Fund of the Israel Labor Movement, which had a very inefficient, socialist approach to doing business. My father made a hand-shake agreement with David Ben-Gurion to borrow Israeli pounds [Israeli currency from June 9, 1952 through February 23, 1980, at which time it was replaced by the shekel], to fund local costs and to bring in American-made equipment, duty-free. The American-formed Rock Products Co., financed by the group of businessmen who had sent my father to Israel, would fund the design, acquisition, and delivery of the plant and equipment. My father spent at least half of the next five years bringing this project to reality, and for the rest of his life, he became an avid financial and emotional supporter of the State of Israel. In fact, he was one of the early supporters of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) when it was a brand-new organization in the mid-1950s.

**Levi Smith:**

Was your father politically active?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

My father got involved in the Republican party. He used to go hunting in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan with prominent Republicans whom he had met. It led to him purchasing an 80-acre lodge in Alger County near Munising. The lodge was called Camp Kennedy; it was named after a Roman Catholic priest who was a friend of the family. When the owner of the lodge, Governor Fred Green died, his wife called all of his friends to see if they would buy the lodge. Nobody was interested because of its remote location at the top of the Upper Peninsula. Finally, my father received a call from the widow asking him to buy the lodge.

My father asked, "How much do you want for it?"

"\$25,000."

He said, "Done."

There was only one stipulation. The widow said he always had to keep the name Camp Kennedy. So my father and I were amused several years later when he donated Camp Kennedy to the Jewish Fresh Air Society in Detroit, known today as

Tamarack Camps, to be used as a remote camp for hiking and canoeing near Lake Superior. Dad was recognized at a meeting one night for having named the camp after Democratic President John F. Kennedy! We had quite a laugh!

**Levi Smith:**

We had a delicious lunch in the company cafeteria today. How did that come about?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

That question brings to mind my father's thoughtfulness. The CFO of the Levy company, my cousin Jim Stone, and I decided to build a cafeteria for the employees. Our office location was not close to restaurants. We charged employees \$1.00 a day for lunch, which was prepared by a private chef and was very tasty. There were always leftovers, and my father would send them by messenger to retirees, friends, and suppliers. One day a letter arrived from a recipient who said she hadn't known what to make for dinner and here arrives this beautiful meal of roast beef, mashed potatoes, and green beans; she was so appreciative of what he had done. It was signed Eleanor (Mrs. Edsel) Ford. As you know she was very influential and put my father on several charitable boards, introducing him to many people whom he otherwise would not have met.

**Levi Smith:**

What sayings from your dad stick with you today?

**Edward Levy, Jr.:**

My father had a simple, straightforward attitude about

*Continued from page 21*

in our midst whom I have been privileged to serve in some capacity. It is her message that compels me to see each person as an individual, to listen to each story, and to recognize each person's worth as I strive to learn each biography.

These words ring true today. As I watch the global tragedies unfold in South Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and see the refugees these wars have created, I am reminded that people do not choose to flee, migrate, start anew. They are forced to do so by circumstances. No longer physically connected to their roots or homeland, their futures will be entirely different from the futures they had dreamed and anticipated. As a group, they are refugees, but each refugee is an individual with a unique story and history.

When I look at the faces of those seeking safe haven in a war-free country, I try to look beyond the terror and confusion on their faces to see their personhoods. I want to hear their stories. I want to ask, "Who are you?" Really, "Who are you?" Each print article, each digital image, each video, each individual reminds me of the profound message I first heard in 1996. I remember the poignant words of my dignified client. They ring true today. Everybody is somebody.

money: 1) Money is to be used to provide a roof over the heads of your family and food on the table. 2) Money is to practice the free enterprise system for both your own interests and those who helped you make it. 3) Any surplus of money should be used to support good causes. I remember, as a young boy, accompanying him to a picnic that raised money for the Capuchin Brothers' soup kitchen which was and is one of Detroit's oldest charities that serves the neediest people.

He built parking lots for churches at his cost because he realized that people needed education and encouragement to learn how to live a moral life. He helped educate many young men and women who were brought up in families where leadership was absent. Near the end of his life, my father said, "I have tried to give away everything I have to good causes, but I have failed because there is still so much left." After he passed away in 1981 at the age of 80, we established a charitable foundation to continue his efforts to do good for society.

**Interviewer's note:** As I was leaving the Levy company board room, I noticed that there was only one picture on the wall—Henry Ford, its longtime customer . . .

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**Edward Levy, Jr.** began working at Edw. C. Levy Co. when he was twelve years old as a mechanics assistant. He became majority owner and CEO in 1969. He is a graduate of MIT. He is past national president of AIPAC (1988-89) and remains an active director.

**Levi Smith** is an attorney, commercial real estate broker, and developer. He is vice president of the Albert Kahn Legacy Foundation.

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**Rachel S. Yoskowitz, MPH**, is the former director of Resettlement Services at Jewish Family Service of Metro Detroit. During her tenure, JFS successfully resettled Russian Jewish and Kosovar refugees. Yoskowitz also spoke nationally and was invited by US Senator Spencer Abraham (MI) in 1996 to testify before the US Senate Committee investigating the impact of proposed welfare reform on refugees.

Yoskowitz subsequently was the founding director of JFS's Project Chesed, a provider network that offered pro-bono health care to low-income, medically uninsured members of the Jewish community, including refugees. In this capacity, she worked with the Chaldean American Association of Health Professionals to model Project Chesed in the Chaldean community (Project Bismutha).

In 2011 Yoskowitz joined the founding faculty of Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine as an assistant professor and global health director, teaching courses on refugee health. On her retirement, in 2020, she received the Faculty Excellence in Service Award.

Yoskowitz received her nursing degree from the Sinai Hospital of Baltimore School of Nursing. She earned her BS from Johns Hopkins University and an MPH degree from the University of Texas School of Public Health.

She is married to Rabbi Herb Yoskowitz and considers her most important role to be that of mother to their three (plus three) children and grandmother to eight amazing grandchildren.



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**From October 30, 2020, through October 15, 2021**

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

DR. MILES AUSTER	<b>Mazel Tov on being named one of our community's volunteers of the year</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
DONNA & JACK BELEN	<b>Mazel Tov on your 50th wedding anniversary</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
JUDIE BLUMENO	<b>Thank you for being a wonderful docent on our private family bus tour</b> <i>from Stuart Rosen</i>
LINDA BRODSKY	<b>Mazel Tov on your "8 over 80" honor</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
RHONDA BROWN	<b>Wishing you a speedy recovery</b> <i>from Risha B. Ring</i>
RHONDA & DR. MORRIS BROWN	<b>Mazel Tov on the bar mitzvah of your grandson, Ethan,</b> <i>from Risha B. Ring</i>
RABBI MEGEN BRUDNEY & ZACH BERG	<b>Mazel Tov on the birth of your son</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
CATHERINE CANGANY, PHD	<b>Thank you for your editing work on Alan M. Hurvitz's* article for Michigan Jewish History</b> <i>from Ruth Hurvitz &amp; Family</i>
JUDITH & BERNARD CANTOR	<b>Mazel Tov on your 70th wedding anniversary</b> <i>from Harriet Siden</i>
SUSAN CITRIN	<b>Mazel Tov on your being an honoree at the Opening the Doors 25th Anniversary Celebration</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
BARBARA MADGY COHN	<b>In your honor</b> <i>from Marc Schwartz</i>
DOROTHY COLLENS	<b>Wishing you a speedy recovery from knee replacement surgery</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
BARBARA & JERRY COOK	<b>Mazel Tov on your grandson's bar mitzvah</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
JERRY COOK	<b>In honor of your having been part of the Detroit Public TV special, "Detroit Remembers . . .,"</b> <i>from Melvyn Friedman</i>
SUZANNE CURTIS	<b>Thank you for being a wonderful docent on our private family bus tour</b> <i>from Stuart Rosen</i>
CATHY DEUTCHMAN	<b>In honor of your special birthday</b> <i>from Risha B. Ring, JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
JACQUELINE & LAWRENCE ELKUS	<b>Mazel Tov on the birth of your granddaughter, Emma Jordyn,</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>



## JHSM TRIBUTES

AIMEE ERGAS	<b>In honor of your birthday</b> <i>from Julie &amp; Mark Teicher</i>
CATHERINE & NATHAN FORBES	<b>Mazel Tov on the bar mitzvah of your grandson, Tony Blake Forbes,</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
DENNIS FRANK	<b>In honor of your 80th birthday</b> <i>from Ellen Cole*, Beth &amp; Robert Sklar, JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
PEGGY FRANK	<b>Mazel Tov on your being an honoree at the Opening the Doors 25th Anniversary Celebration</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
LAURA GOTTLIEB	<b>Mazel Tov on your wedding</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
EMERY GROSINGER	<b>Mazel Tov on your “8 over 80” honor</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
LARRY GUNSBERG	<b>Thank you for your superb work on J-Cycle and for finding my lost phone, keys, and jacket during the event</b> <i>from Jerry Cook</i>
ANITA HAENICK	<b>In honor of your birthday</b> <i>from Annette Friedman</i>
DOREEN HERMELIN	<b>Mazel Tov on your granddaughter’s bat mitzvah</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i> <b>Thank you for being a wonderful docent on our private family bus tour</b> <i>from Stuart Rosen</i>
MARGERY JABLIN	<b>On your special birthday</b> <i>from Barbara &amp; Jerry Cook</i>
CONSTANCE & TONY JACOB	<b>Mazel Tov on the bar mitzvah of your grandson, Tony Blake Forbes,</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
SEYMOUR “SYE” LINOVITZ	<b>Mazel Tov on your “8 over 80” honor</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
HOWARD LUPOVITCH, PHD	<b>Thank you for your editing work on Alan M. Hurvitz’s* article for Michigan Jewish History</b> <i>from Ruth Hurvitz &amp; Family</i>
MARLENE & ED MALKIN	<b>Mazel Tov on your 55th wedding anniversary</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
FLORINE MARK	<b>Mazel Tov on the sale of your business</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
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JANET MOSES	<b>Mazel Tov on your “8 over 80” honor</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
ALLAN NACHMAN	<b>Thinking of you and sending good wishes</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
JOSH NORMANDIN	<b>Wishing you a speedy and complete recovery</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>



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DAVID OTIS	<b>Wishing you a speedy recovery from your fall</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
SUSIE & NORMAN PAPPAS	<b>In honor of your 50th wedding anniversary</b> <i>from Annette Friedman</i>
RISHA B. RING	<b>In your honor</b> <i>from Rhonda &amp; Dr. Morris Brown, Dr. Ernest &amp; Phyllis Ring</i> <b>Thank you for the apples and honey—L’Shana Tova</b> <i>from Barbara &amp; Jerry Cook</i> <b>Wishing you a happy and health New Year—L’Shana Tova</b> <i>from Rhonda &amp; Dr. Morris Brown</i>
DR. MARLA ROWE & NEIL GOROSH	<b>Mazel Tov on the birth of your granddaughter, Naomi Lev Gorosh,</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
SAUL SAULSON	<b>Mazel Tov on your “8 over 80” honor</b> <i>from Jeannie Weiner, JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
HARRIET SIDEN	<b>Wishing you a speedy and complete recovery</b> <i>from Dorothy &amp; Arnie Collens</i>
STACEY & MICHAEL SIMMONS	<b>Congratulations on the marriage of your daughter</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>
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FEIGA WEISS	<b>In honor of your receiving the 2020 Leonard N. Simons History-Maker Award</b> <i>from Holocaust Memorial Center Docents, Anne Klisman, Gail Kaplan</i>
TRACY WEISSMAN	<b>In honor of the 2020 JHSM Bulletin winning the Historical Society of Michigan’s Outstanding Printed Periodical Award for 2021</b> <i>from Donna &amp; Michael Maddin</i> <b>Thank you for your editing work on Alan M. Hurvitz’s* article for Michigan Jewish History</b> <i>from Ruth Hurvitz &amp; Family</i>
NEAL ZALENKO	<b>Mazel Tov on your receiving Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit’s 2021 William Davidson Lifetime Achievement Award</b> <i>from JHSM Board, Officers, &amp; Staff</i>

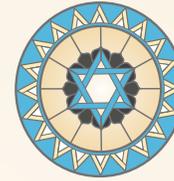
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