

Don't Just Do It, Do It Justice RABBI MARCELO R. BRONSTEIN

“Panim el Panim—in Hebrew, face to face—has brought hundreds of our community members together to have serious conversations about what moves us personally to pursue justice.”



At the 2009 rally with Atria Assisted Living residents about resident housing costs and working conditions. From left: Rabbi Marcelo R. Bronstein, BJ member Hilda Greenberg, and Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal.

Ten years ago, we were invited and challenged by a group of BJ members to rethink the old model of rabbinic leaders as the sole drivers and messengers of the synagogue’s core social-justice vision. Maybe it was passé for us, as the rabbinic leadership, to go it alone. We had a rich history of engagement, and Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer’s legacy as a human-rights activist remained in the hearts of our congregants. After all, our homeless shelter and lunch program were a demonstration of our community commitment to tikkun olam (repair of the world).

The way we operated had been successful for a time, but striving for systemic change required thinking outside of the box. A group of revolutionaries in our community was headed by Kathleen Peratis, Rabbi Rachel Cowan, and our newly appointed Director of Social Action Amanda Silver. They traveled to Temple Israel in Boston with the goal of learning about another congregation’s experience with Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO): an alternative way of thinking about social-justice issues, community organizing, and advocacy.

Our revolutionaries returned with renewed energy and convinced that this was the right direction for the congregation. When they first presented the principles of the model, it seemed almost oxymoronic. The emphasis on sharing stories and “listening campaigns” seemed to go against all we had been teaching. Our central modus operandi had been to identify a problem and to just go for it: “Just do it.”

To think that we had to embark on a long process of engaging in conversations felt, at the beginning, like a waste of time; we thought, “Are we just going to be talking instead of doing?” That would be a desecration of our obligation to make change. Our fear was that we would not have an impact. Thus, with a little hope and vision, we embarked on a journey together that would have an impact beyond our expectations.

We were asked by these amazing and visionary community organizers to make a leap of faith and to trust the process. They did incredible research and showed us the complexities, depth, and benefits of a model of community advocacy built on broad participation and relationship. The congregation that we were used to leading was asking us to trust that this process would open a new world for us.

There was also a sense of awe in us; we felt a sense of empowerment with the possibility that a prophetic, redemptive vision could arise from our community and our members’ many voices. To embark in true dialogue between partners about what the future might hold felt very exhilarating.

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SOCIAL ACTION/SOCIAL JUSTICE

We Were Transformed and Strengthened, and So Was The World: Celebrating 10 Years of Panim el Panim

By Rochelle Friedlich (Co-Chair, Aging in NY Hevra), Lisa Safier and Amy Lavine (former Co-Chairs, Marriage Equality Hevra), and Channa Camins (Director of Social Action/Social Justice)

if you asked a New York City Council member, New York State senator or Assembly member, or even a U.S. senator from New York about B'nai Jeshurun, what might they say? One thing they might say if they have engaged with us (or heard of us) is that BJ can have an impact. We can help move an issue. We have thoughtful members who are active and committed (even persistent) in their pursuit of justice. We show up and we are organized! How did we get this way? How did we earn this well-deserved reputation?

My world exploded and blossomed with connections, dinners, and meetings with so many different people. I didn't realize how much I was learning and what a privilege it was to have these challenging and often overwhelming opportunities.

— Elizabeth Weiss, former Co-Chair, Environmental Action Hevra

Ten years ago, B'nai Jeshurun was thriving after more than a decade of growth and innovation. BJ had become a spiritual home for many Jews on the Upper West Side and throughout New York City. BJ became a place that tested boundaries, that was not afraid to try new things, that through its inspiring leadership and willingness to act compelled hundreds and then thousands to live a Jewish life. BJ had begun to help us realize a Judaism that is relevant in our daily lives.

Then, in 2003 a group of 20 BJ members, led by Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Kathleen Peratis, set out to reach new heights and deepen our congregation's capacity and power to contribute to positive change in New York City. Together they founded a new initiative for community organizing and advocacy that they called Panim el Panim (face to face). They recognized that our commitments as a community, at the time,

lay mainly in direct service and decided they wanted to develop the capacity to change the systems and structures that necessitated our service. Serving people, meeting their immediate needs, alleviating suffering today is a responsibility. Nevertheless, they asked themselves, "What about advocacy?" Could we serve the homeless and at the same time



Panim el Panim cultivated the leadership skills, Jewish identity, self-confidence, and political empowerment of so many BJ members. It did those things for me, too! What a privilege and a pleasure to have been part of this movement. May it live to be 120!

— Guy Austrian, former Director of Social Action/Social Justice

PHOTOS: LEFT, CHANNA CAMINS. BELOW, GUY AUSTRIAN





PANIM ASPIRATIONS THAT STILL GUIDE US TODAY

Face-to-Face Conversation and Stories

We set out to engage in meaningful conversation and hear stories and concerns from our community that would be the basis for our collective action. We know that we want this initiative to be organic to BJ members, emerging from the actual, real, pressing concerns of our own congregants. We will listen to discover the shared issues, values, and social concerns that motivate and inspire us as congregants.

Relationships, Accountability, and Power

We set out to magnify our power by building lasting relationships among BJ members and between our community and our elected officials. We want to enable BJ members to gain access to, and a voice in, our civil society.

Actionable Goals

We set out to develop specific, actionable, and measurable goals for our advocacy campaigns in order to have an incremental impact on a problem. We want to organize our efforts based on the reality of “what is” and on the thoughtful, concrete proposals for coming one step closer to “what ought to be,” a just and decent society.

Partnership

We set out to collaborate with organizations in New York City with whom we share common values or goals, across difference.

Thoughtful Leadership and Openness to Learning

We set out to grow individually and collectively, by committing ourselves to learning new skills and providing opportunities for new people to do the same. We want to become thoughtful and effective lay leaders. We want to be able to reflect on our work, to hear feedback, and to continually strive to do better.

Participatory Decision-Making

We want to engage in participatory decision-making that empowers people.

Action Grounded in Spiritual Engagement and Reflection

We wanted to ground our actions in Jewish text and teachings. We set out to explore our Judaism through the interplay between study, action, and reflection.

Impact and Passion

We set out to participate in the life of New York City as a Jewish community with a passion for justice and a willingness to act.

attempt to influence the laws, public policies, and resource allocation in the city and state institutions and structures that affect people’s lives and cause homelessness? This group of lay leaders was convinced it was possible for our community to contribute.

This type of advocacy depends on people, and therefore it depends on community organizing. So, the first thing that Panim el Panim did in 2003 was to launch a listening campaign, in the model of Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO). Our small band of early Panim leaders trained in how to have intentional one-to-one meetings to hear people’s stories and initiate public relationships. Over the course of three months, they proceeded to have 613 conversations with BJ members. They engaged people one on one, in house meetings, and in a large listening event with over 200 people. The excitement and energy were palpable as the community tried something new and meaningful.

We listened and we shared our own stories. Stories emerged about mothers who brought their children or grandchildren to march on Washington in 1963. Stories about parents who grew up poor and learned how to advocate for themselves. Stories about fighting back against unfair tenant laws. Stories about a homeless person we spoke to on the street for years and what that person taught us. Stories about why we were pro-choice and how someone we knew had suffered before *Roe v. Wade*. Stories about how segregation and inequality in our neighborhoods and schools affected us. Stories about the actions of our parents who survived the Holocaust. Stories about the Vietnam War and antiwar movements.

Stories about a b’nai mitzvah and what it meant to us. Our collective memory led the way forward.

This was the first of four listening campaigns that Panim el Panim has conducted over the past 10 years. Each listening campaign allowed us to discover which social-justice issues to pursue. After each listening campaign, we reported back to the entire community. Then we formed or maintained a “*hevra*” that could pursue a specific campaign goal after a period of research and identifying good external partners. Hundreds of BJ members have

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Page 2, top left: Renie Rutchick and Judith Trachtenberg in Washington, D.C. for Industrial Areas Foundation action against usury and high interest rates, 10% is Enough Campaign, 2010. Top right: Siblings Adam Goldman and Melissa Goldman at the Equality and Justice Lobby Day 2011 with Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) in Albany. Bottom: Channa Camins, Cecile Rodau, Elizabeth Weiss, unknown, and Rabbi Felicia Sol at the rally for the passage of the Electronics Recycling Law, Intro 104 on the steps of New York City Hall, 2008. Page 3: Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Amanda Silver, former Director of Social Action/Social Justice, at the 2005 Panim el Panim Task Force Retreat.

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participated in community conversations over these 10 years. Each step of the Panim process required our volunteers to learn new skills: one-to-one conversations, facilitating meetings, researching an issue as well as who are the various players working on that issue, determining what form of advocacy is warranted for the issue (for example, meeting with elected officials, planning events to educate our community, working with diverse constituencies within BJ, etc.), and working in coalitions to consolidate our power.

If Panim had started and ended with the 20 lay leaders who helped us to get started, we would not have accomplished much more. But in fact it did not end. Panim developed a rhythm and momentum of its own. We have been able to learn, grow, and change over 10 years. We developed clear processes. We developed a structure for our committees. We met and engaged new people. We had support from BJ's rabbinic leadership and Board of Trustees. We developed clear criteria for what made a good campaign for BJ. We managed leadership transitions with grace.

Our volunteers took turns offering divrei Torah or facilitating at every meeting. We learned to laugh together and came to care about one another. We each found ways to contribute. We found community.

Panim has had its share of frustrations (often due to the slow pace of social change) and successes. We have experienced a great deal of sadness and fatigue when our campaign goals are thwarted or stalled. At times, our campaigns have failed as the political landscape shifts or the status quo prevails. But we have learned to pick ourselves up, dust off our advocacy energy, and start anew, returning to BJ members for insight and thoughts on the path forward. The immense gratification that comes from our successes is matched by our deep sense that we, BJ members, had made a real difference. We have not completed the task, but by embracing the challenge to work together, face to face, we have made, and continue to make, a real impact on the world around us. Panim el Panim became an incubator for new stories and memories that we want to share.

For me the highlights are seeing that an idea can become a transformative reality, that people can become deeply involved through conversations and a sound organizational structure. And through that process I made very close and lasting friendships across generations—feeling more at home when I walk into shul. I think my biggest organizational thrill was the first time we presented to the whole community the results of our 613 campaign, with the stories, the festivity, the deep sense of community. And of course the first event we held for the NYC community [on the Health Care Security Act] that was so well produced, so well attended, and so impactful. It made me so proud to be a member of the BJ community.

— Rabbi Rachel Cowan,
former Co-Chair, Panim el Panim
Task Force and BJ Board Member

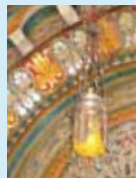
We hope you will join us this year in celebrating 10 years of community organizing! Panim el Panim is excited to face new challenges and will continue to thrive with the participation of many BJ members. ■

The authors are all members of the Panim el Panim Task Force.

A SMALL SAMPLE OF OUR MILESTONES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Four listening campaigns in 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2011 involving hundreds, if not thousands, of BJ members
- In 2005, New York City Council passes the Health Care Security Act, Introduction 758-A four months after 700 people pack the sanctuary of B'nai Jeshurun to ask for support from City Council Speaker Gifford Miller
- 500 people and 22 clergy of various denominations attend Civil Rights and Sacred Rites: an Interfaith Gathering for Marriage Equality: Sharing Our Faith in Prayer and Action at B'nai Jeshurun
- During 2005, BJ's Environmental Action Hevra participates in a campaign that culminates in a unanimous vote in NYC Council to approve Resolution 0762-A recognizing and supporting the efforts

of organizations that work to increase consumer awareness of and commitment to poor farming communities around the world through Fair Trade



(Eternal Light) by converting it to renewable solar power through a solar panel on the roof

- In 2007, we enroll 100 households in the "Greening BJ" campaign to encourage sustainable practices at the synagogue's facilities and in members' households, and BJ rededicates its Ner Tamid
- BJ becomes an official member institution of Manhattan Together in 2008, a new interfaith coalition for congregation-based community organizing. We host a Manhattan Together Assembly in 2008, bringing more than 700 people from

the entire coalition (including 200 BJ members) to our sanctuary to hold mayoral candidate Comptroller William Thompson, accountable on affordable housing and immigrant rights

- BJ members go to Albany for Equality & Justice Lobby Day to facilitate and hold meetings with elected officials in 2008, 2009, and 2010
- In 2010, 100 people participate in a Social Justice Shabbaton organized entirely by the Panim el Panim Task Force
- Over 350 people attend a Town Hall Gathering with U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand – NY in the Spring of 2010
- In the fall of 2010, over 100 BJ members participate in a "wedding march" over the Brooklyn Bridge for Marriage Equality



Through the Marriage Equality Hevra, I became acquainted with my City Council Representative, my State Senator, and my State Legislator. We now know each other by name. Isn't it amazing that I live in the largest city in the United States, but have real relationships with the people who represent me?

— Joe Antenson, current member Panim el Panim Task Force, former member Marriage Equality Hevra



A truly memorable milestone for me centered around the excellent work accomplished in the early months of 2006 to establish criteria for upcoming campaign selection and evaluation. I believe that [this] initiative [was] transformative and a reflection of the huge momentum that Panim el Panim had achieved since its inception. (Feel free to quote me on that!)

— Susan Kippur, former BJ President, Board of Trustees

I really appreciated that Panim el Panim focused on tangible goals. It energized the work we were doing, and it gave us a sense of hope. In a number of cases, we achieved our goals, and of course, that felt great! The passage of the Same Sex Marriage Act in Albany was especially thrilling.

— Ruth Jarmul, former member Women's Rights and Marriage Equality Hevras

PHOTOS: EMHOFF & GOTTESFELD, COMMUNITY CAFÉ—CHANNA CAMINS, 88TH ST. MINI-PARK, ARIEL SCHNEIDER.

- BJ's Domestic Workers Rights Hevra and Employers for Justice Group contribute to the passage of the New York State Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in the summer of 2010
- In 2011, New York State finally passes Marriage Equality and over 200 people come to celebrate at B'nai Jeshurun, and we are recognized by elected officials and our partners at Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) and Marriage Equality New York (MENY) for our contribution and leadership in the statewide campaign
- In 2012, the new Aging in New York Hevra launches an education series called Aging Wisely: Practical and Spiritual Tools for the 21st Century. Over 120 people attend our first event with Rabbi Rachel Cowan and

Rabbi Marcelo R. Bronstein to explore our hopes and fears for aging.

- In the fall of 2012, the Economic Justice Hevra participates in the final push for the Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act, Introduction 251-A, to provide living wages for workers in businesses where private developers receive city subsidies from tax payer dollars. The bill passes the city council with a wide margin, in spite of mayoral veto.
- Aging in New York Hevra launches an elder-care dialogue and workforce development campaign to improve the quality of care and training for both workers and consumers with partners from Adhikaar, Damayan, Domestic Workers United (DWU), Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), and Manhattan Together.

Clockwise from top:

- Rabbinic Fellow Adam Roffman, Joe Antenson, Judith Trachtenberg, and Amy Lavine at the Panim el Panim Task Force Retreat, August 2012.
- Jamie Emhoff and Matt Gottesfeld at the "Wedding March" with Marriage Equality New York (MENY) across the Brooklyn Bridge in which 150 BJ members participated.
- The early days of Panim el Panim, with leaders Rabbi Rachel Cowan, Joan Westreich, Sandi Berger, Susan Olderman, and Laura Horwitz.
- Donna Weinstein, Barbara Leiterman, and Len Wasserman at the "mini-park" created by BJ members in front of our synagogue on 88th Street. Dubbed an "Oasis in the Asphalt Desert," it was one of 50 such spots in New York City created for Park(ing) Day, an international event sponsored locally by Transportation Alternatives.
- Jenny Eisenberg and Lori Zimmerman at the Community Café, February 2011.

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Being part of Panim el Panim was fun! It also changed my life. For the first time since my Bar Mitzvah I did Jewish. I studied Torah, interpreted, and gave a drash. I studied the brokenness in our community. I shared my story and listened to others. I wrestled with Torah and wrestled with how to make our world a better place. I celebrated Shabbat and the holidays as if for the first time. Messages of rest, restoration, reflection, gratitude, accountability, and responsibility for a more just, fair, and compassionate world spoke to me about who I wanted to be and the world I wanted to build. We met, we noshed, we drank seltzer, we learned, we wrestled, we engaged civically and spiritually. We partnered with other faith communities, unions, businesses, and nonprofits. We acted together to bring health care to New Yorkers, to fight for same-sex marriage, to make our community and city greener. We were transformed and strengthened, and so was the world, in big and small ways. And it was good.

— Benjamin Ross, Former Co-Chair of Panim el Panim Task Force and BJ Board Member

Clockwise from top:

- Economic Justice Hevra and Panim el Panim Task Force member Marion Katz holding BJ Living Wage "People's Override" Petition to deliver to Mayor Bloomberg, Living Wage Coalition NYC Rally—Council Override of Mayor's Veto, June 2012.
- Panim el Panim Task Force Retreat, 2005.
- Dale Bernstein, Rebekah Bennett, and Marlene Halpern at Equality and Justice Day in Albany, Spring 2009.
- Guy Austrian, former Director of Social Action/Social Justice, and Rochelle Friedlich at the Panim el Panim Task Force Retreat, July 2007.
- Ben Ross and Robert Buxbaum at the 2007 Panim el Panim Task Force Retreat.
- Domestic Workers United member, Rochelle Friedlich, Sandy Soffin, and Allison Julien (Domestic Workers United member) at the First Elder Care Dialogue Planning Meeting, October 2012—Aging in NY Hevra.

PHOTOS: CHANNA CAMINS EXCEPT FOR 2005 TASK FORCE RETREAT (UNKNOWN).



Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon and Council Member Christine Quinn backed by coalition at the Health Care Security Act Rally on the steps of New York City Hall, 2005.

I have been a member of BJ since 1986, and until I joined Panim I didn't connect or know my fellow congregants. My husband and I attended services and longed for a way to get to know fellow members. Panim has given me a life and family within BJ. I am proud to be the current chair of the Economic Justice Hevra, a Task Force member, and part of a community of people dedicated to the same values as mine.

— Sandy Cheiten, Chair, Economic Justice Hevra

One of my fond memories is of going with Rachel Cowan to St. Cecilia's on 106th St. and listening to a nun describe how their community advocacy efforts had made a difference to local residents.

— Ted Becker, former BJ President, Board of Trustees

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Hence, with some fear and a lot of love, excitement, and trust we jumped in to community organizing and advocacy, Panim el Panim (face to face).

Panim el Panim has become one of the most important and fundamental of B'nai Jeshurun's initiatives. It has shaped the way we think about social justice and also how we think about ourselves. It has brought to the surface the stories that we carry behind our actions; it has made us tighter as a community.

In the introduction to the Panim el Panim manual that documents the early years, Roly, Felicia, and I wrote:

Panim el Panim—in Hebrew, face to face—has brought hundreds of our community members together to have serious conversations about what moves us personally to pursue justice. Through these conversations, we tell each other our stories. Memories are awakened and passions are expressed. We are moved by each other to become more involved and to take ownership of our responsibility. We become accountable to each other to not just sit on the sidelines, but to become actively engaged. We build trust that enables us to act together, and with each and every person who engages in communal action, we grow our capacity to make change, and we become a movement of power. By giving voice to



our deepest values and hopes for justice in our world, for ourselves and for others, we become able to act together to move toward that prophetic, redemptive vision. We walk farther along our spiritual path of becoming a kehilla kedoshah, a holy community.

For thousands of years, we as a Jewish people have been telling the story of our liberation from Mitzrayim/Egypt. The tradition teaches, "behold, it is praiseworthy" to expound on that story at the seder, the ritual meal of Passover. Why is it praiseworthy to retell and expand the story of this liberation from bondage? We believe that the story awakens us, so that we grasp the blessing of freedom and recognize that so many in the world are yet to be free. We will tell and retell our stories over and over again, with the hope

that they will awaken our passion not just to speak, but to act, as a community in partnership with each other and God to create a more just world.

In their book *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society*, Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers write: "We believe that there is a greater need than ever for leaders to meet and genuinely 'think together'—the real meaning of dialogue. Only through creating such opportunities can there be any hope of building the shared understanding and coordinated innovative action that the world desperately needs."

Ten years is a time to be grateful, for the original leaders of this initiative, the hundreds who participated in our community conversations, in the hevra meetings, in the actions that followed the meetings. We are grateful for the leaders of today: Director of Social Action and Social Justice Channa Camins; Larissa Wohl; the Panim el Panim Task Force, skillfully headed by Judith Trachtenberg and Jamie Emhoff; and all of the members for their love and commitment to the community. We are a better community because of Panim. We have been creating new memories as we talk, as we meet, and as we do. ■

Above: Rabbi Marcelo R. Bronstein at the Equality and Justice Lobby Day for Marriage Equality with Empire State Pride Agenda, Albany, Spring 2009.

YOUTH & FAMILY EDUCATION

Mapping Our Mitzvahs

By Madelaine Strauss

When our daughter Cornelia joined the B'nai Jeshurun Hebrew School in 2008 in Kitah Aleph, her bat mitzvah seemed like such a distant event. Sure, we picked her date last year in Gimmel and put it in the calendar for 2015. But, when 4th-grade families were invited to our first major b'nai mitzvah event in March of 2012—the “B'nai Mitzvah Journey Opening Ritual” where the Torah is unrolled so each student can find their parasha—the imminent reality sank in that Cornelia’s journey to be called to the Torah was just around the bend.

While the “Opening Ritual” is a thrilling event unto itself, this year we were doubly excited as we were told about a pioneering new component of the b'nai mitzvah process designed to engage students with mitzvot. Called the “Mitzvah Map,” the concept was some years in the making, and we were all curious to learn more. Like many BJ families, we chose this community for the values and principles that we share, including having a deep connection with the community beyond BJ and engaging in mitzvot even at the most granular level. Institutionally, the concept of mitzvot is embedded in the B'nai Jeshurun Hebrew School model through cooking at the homeless shelter, visiting the elderly, and



collecting tzedakah, among many other things. The challenge has always been to “walk the walk” together as families with our hectic schedules. Many of us have been content to leave this aspect of our Jewish lives to the Hebrew School, so the idea of a Mitzvah Map was intriguing as a way for us to participate as families, fully engaged in the process.

With much anticipation, the Mitzvah Map was officially rolled out to 5th-grade families on Erev Sukkot at a filled-to-capacity event culminating in a lively dinner in the sukkah at the Hebrew School’s new 89th Street “home.” You could feel the energy and enthusiasm as groups of families met

Above: 5th Graders do mitzvah of Ba'al Tash'hit, not being wasteful. Below: Students participate in Tefillah (prayer) and Hebrew learning together.



PHOTOS, TOP: HILARY SCHUMER. BOTTOM: KRISTEN KERSEY.

“We keep the coach informed about what mitzvot we’ve participated in and map out our goals, both long-term and short-term.”

with their “mitzvah coaches” to begin the discussion. There were lots of questions: What types of mitzvot can we do together as families? Are there things that we do daily, like recycling and conserving, that are also mitzvot? How can we reach out to the greater community to perform meaningful mitzvot? How can we enhance our rituals to lead more fulfilling Jewish lives? How will the Mitzvah Map engage us as a community and deepen our commitment to each other?

Like in the case of any groundbreaking initiative, the answers will come as we move forward. Each family has been assigned a mitzvah coach who is their point of contact in the program. We keep the coach informed about what mitzvot we’ve participated in and map out our goals, both long-term and short-term. There will be opportunities for us to come together as a community to work on projects, and we can create opportunities with smaller groups. The concept immediately crystallized when we visited the sukkah for dinner and the children started comparing notes on how many mitzvot they had just performed. Let’s see, there was Kiddush, shaking the lulav and etrog, and visiting the sukkah—they had hit the trifecta of the Mitzvah Map!

Our family is so honored to be part of this inspirational pilot program. The Mitzvah Map has raised our awareness of our daily actions and made us more conscientious members of the community. For Cornelia, it’s also sparked a dialogue to help crystallize and start planning her personal mitzvah journey—to visit and support a school in Guatemala where she was born. If the Mitzvah Map will guide families in performing mitzvot resulting in tikkun olam, what greater gift can our b'nai mitzvah offer the community through the help of this program? ■

Madelaine, Marc, and Cornelia Strauss live on the Upper West Side and have been BJ members since 2001. Madelaine is a marketing and communications consultant specializing in law firms and is a former practicing attorney.

The Jewish Journey Project: Jewish New York is the Classroom

By Bryan Wexler

i distinctly remember Ivy Schreiber, Director of Education for Youth and Family, saying to me last May, "This year a new and exciting alternative Jewish educational model is being piloted in NYC, the Jewish Journey Project (JJP). BJ is offering this model for our 4th- and 5-graders, and we hope that 10-15 families opt into it for the year. I would love if you would be our JJP adviser."

Six months later, after much planning and advising 4th- and 5th-grade families, BJ is proud to be one of only a few pioneer synagogues in the JJP. Though rather than having 10-15 families participating in JJP ... we have 41!

The interest in and enthusiasm for JJP among BJ families has been more than we possibly could have imagined. With 41 children participating in the program, BJ has made an important statement: We are eager to be bold, innovative, and to try new models to ensure that ALL of our children engage in deep, lasting, and impactful Jewish learning.

What exactly is the Jewish Journey Project? It is a Manhattan-wide, Jewish education initiative for children in grades



Bryan Wexler

PHOTO: DENISE WAWMAN

JEWISH journey PROJECT



Each JJP participant, with his/her family and guidance of the JJP Adviser, plans and builds a personalized journey, choosing courses that match his or her passions and curiosities as well as preferred mode of learning."

3-7. Envisioned and founded by Joy Levitt, the executive director of the JCC, JJP is a "collaborative, innovative, and flexible model that engages participants in experiential learning based on their individual interests, schedule, and learning style." JJP experiences include the individual, the family, the synagogue, and the larger New York Jewish community. It is a "a network of museums, community centers, synagogues, theaters, art galleries, parks, gardens, and your family's home," in other words a "living classroom." As explained on the JJP website its goal is for students "to come to understand that Jewish learning takes place in many settings, not just the traditional classroom."

Each JJP participant, with his/her family and guidance of the JJP Adviser, plans and builds a personalized journey, choosing courses that match his or her passions and curiosities as well as preferred mode of learning. JJP offers courses (currently about 30 all over Manhattan) along five distinct pathways: Torah, God & Spirituality, Jewish

Peoplehood, Hebrew, and Tikkun Olam every Monday through Thursday during school vacations, and opportunities to do independent projects, designed by the student, the family, and the JJP Adviser. In addition to the electives that our JJP participants take with students from other participating synagogues, the learners come together for MeetUp on Mondays at BJ, a home-base class that allows BJ students to stay connected to the BJ community and

their friends. It also ensures that they continue learning Hebrew, prayers, and other Jewish values and practice that are at the core of the BJ community.

BJ's participation in JJP is off to a great start! Our students come to BJ on Mondays excited to share all that they are learning and doing in JJP courses on subjects like intergenerational cooking, Hebrew Ulpan, Jewish wilderness, Bible Raps, and Israeli army boot camp.

I am honored and proud to be part of the BJ-JJP pilot year, and I look forward to getting to know many more BJ families over the coming days, weeks, and months! ■

Bryan Wexler is the new Rabbinic Intern for the Youth and Family Education (YFE) team. Bryan is a Wexner Fellow and a second-year rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary with a passion for Jewish learning and working with people. Bryan graduated from Brandeis University in 2009 with a B.A. in Jewish Studies, Hebrew, and Philosophy. He then worked for two years as the Youth Director and Community Educator at Temple Aliyah, a Conservative synagogue in Needham, MA. Bryan and his wife, Rebecca, moved to New York in the summer of 2011. Bryan can be reached at bwexler@bj.org or at x244.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Why Are You Wearing That Camel Around Your Neck?

By Joanne Palmer

So, wearing the tie that’s an overall matzah print on Pesah makes perfect sense.

The tie with the big whale for the afternoon of Yom Kippur, when the haftarah is the story of Jonah, yeah, that’s pretty obvious too, once you think about it. (Rosh Hashanah morning and Kol Nidrei, on the other hand, call for a simple white tie to match the kittel.)

Putting the tie together with the parashah is a puzzle, far more art than science; the more you know about the parashah’s details, the more nuanced the connection between the tie and the reading can be.

These ties are a very basic introduction to the very many ties of Frederic S. Goldstein, gabbai and third-generation face of BJ.

The one with hearts on it? That’s for Parashat Va-era, when Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. (Va-era often is read in February, but no, it’s not for Valentine’s Day.)

The game quickly gets harder. What about the tie with the Cat in the Hat? There are no cats mentioned in the Torah, and certainly there is nothing about top hats. It’s because the Cat in the Hat is a creation of Dr. Seuss, and in Parashat Beshallah, when the people sing the Song of the Sea, we are told that they are celebrating God’s having hurled horse and driver into the sea. Horse and driver? Sues vrachvo. Oh! Got it!

Freddy, who is an Excel guru in civilian life, started teaching about computers at Baruch College in 1970, back when computers and he both were young, and he teaches there still. He is the grandson of the Reverend Jacob Schwartz, who was BJ’s cantor from 1914 to 1953. He traces his interest in parashah neckwear to his grandfather.

“My mom”—Bobbye S. Goldstein—“would dress me in a suit when I was a little boy when we’d go to shul,” he said. “It was a time when everyone was dressed more

formally. I would sit up in the balcony. My grandfather would sit on the bimah and look up at me and he’d rub his tie, and I would rub my tie. I would be sitting in the middle of 1,000 people, but it was as if I could hear him saying ‘Hello, Freddy,’ and I was yelling back to him ‘Hello, Grandpa Jack.’ I like to believe that’s how my tie thing started.”

Freddy has always worn a tie, even when he was an undergraduate in the 1960s, when they were not at all in vogue.

“I can’t remember when I first started with the parashah themes, but among the first idiosyncratic ties I had was one with watermelons,” he recalled. It’s from Parashat Beha’lotekha, where the Israelites, who for a change are complaining, say that they used to have melons back in Egypt. The word for melons in biblical Hebrew, avatichem, is the word modern Israelis use for watermelons. Et voila!

Some of Freddy’s ties are literal—animals for Parashat Pinchas, which describes sacrifices in what might be too much detail. At least one day of Sukkot calls for a tie with a citron on it, and Shemini Atzeret—the eighth and last day of the festival—demands a tie with pool balls, one of them sporting a great big number 8. He has a rainbow tie for Parashat Noach and one with stars for Lekh Lekha, where God promises Abram that he will have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky.

Sometimes Freddy gets ties as gifts—like the one showing Moshe coming down Mount Sinai with the tablets in his hand, which clearly appeals to a very niche market. Others he buys himself. He went to the M&M store in Times Square for its iconic M&M tie. He wears it when two parshiyot, Mattot and Mas’ei, are read in the same week. The habit might get expensive, but there are ways to



Freddy Goldstein

PHOTO: DENISE WAXMAN

cope. “You can buy a regular tie starting at \$30 and going way up, and you can get tourist ties for a few dollars,” he said. The tourist ties, needless to say, tend toward the garish.

Occasionally his ties have a more personal meaning. His father, Gabriel F. Goldstein, was a chemist, a pioneer in plastics, and Freddy honors him at his yartzheit by wearing a tie with some of the signs of his discipline, chemical symbols or a balance scale.

Freddy points out that as much fun as his hobby is, and as creative as it allows him to be, at its core it is serious. His life has connected him to the rhythms and assumptions of the Jewish world in profound ways. Not only was his grandfather a cantor, for many decades his grandmother,

(continued on page 11)

Tze'irim and the Senior Lunch Program

By Jodi Smith

That person you see every day on your commute, the waiters at your favorite restaurant, the person who serves you lunch at the deli around the block. As New Yorkers, we know about connections, we know we come into contact with a myriad of people each day. Many of these connections, though, are brief—a quick wave, an acknowledged head nod, a glance, a smile.



Jodi Smith

What starts in those ways sometimes continues in a spirited environment with long conversation and sitting down face-to-face over a hot meal. These elements serve as some key ingredients that make more than

passing connections—they make sincere relationships. And that is the true pleasure of the work that I do as social action co-chair of Tze'irim, B'nai Jeshurun's 20's and 30's group, especially at one of our regular service projects, facilitating the Sunday Senior Lunch Program run through the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty. At the senior lunch program, I have gotten to know each senior personally. Over brewing cups of tea, I spoke with one woman about her grandchildren and how she cherishes their visits, while one couple described their family still in China even though they have built a life for themselves here. I enjoyed an

I think I can speak for the almost 100 Tze'irim Senior Lunch volunteers who have similar experiences to mine in saying that we feel that we are helping in a special way by sharing our stories and listening to the seniors' stories."

hourlong conversation with another senior in his apartment, where he proudly showed off the redecoration efforts of himself and his wife as well as chatted about his war experience. One of my favorite seniors is a woman who seems a little bit reserved, but in sitting down with her, I've discovered that it may be loneliness that makes her appear that way and that, underneath, she is happy to live where she does. She has a fondness for New York City, street fairs, discovering new neighborhoods, and eating new foods. I think I can speak for the almost 100 Tze'irim Senior Lunch volunteers who have similar experiences to mine in saying that we feel that we are helping in a special way by sharing our stories and listening to the seniors' stories.

For me, and I suspect for many of the young people whom I have the privilege to work with through B'nai Jeshurun and Tze'irim, sustained connection and making a true difference in the lives of others is why we engage in social action/social justice work and, often, why we choose B'nai Jeshurun in the first place. Meeting others for whom the meaning of tikkun olam, repairing the world,



PHOTO: JODI SMITH

Tze'irim members cooking for elderly in need.

can come alive in a bustling, busy area like New York City, is a real gem. In fact, volunteering at the Metropolitan Council of Jewish Poverty Senior Lunch programs is only one of our volunteer initiatives through Tze'irim. Look for us in the community, especially in our work at the B'nai Jeshurun shelter. Our Tze'irim board is made up of about seven board members, and we're thrilled to have exciting programming for 20's and 30's for Shabbat, for the holidays, just for fun in the city. It's been a wonderful group to be involved with. We'd love to meet you and to have you join us! ■

Jodi Smith is excited to be on the Tze'irim committee for a second year as Social Action/Social Justice Co-Chair. She works as a Jewish educator, enjoys outdoor activities and loves connecting with others, whether family, friends or new people that she meets.

Why Are You Wearing That Camel? continued from page 10

Lottie G. Schwartz, was the president of the sisterhood. Freddy's other grandfather, Herbert S. Goldstein, was the rabbi of the West Side Institutional Synagogue, and his other grandmother, Rebecca Fischel Goldstein, was the president of that congregation's sisterhood. "I've been in shuls all my life," Freddy said. So, the game is a logical one for him. To do it properly it is necessary to study the parashah thoroughly. The idea of such study, week after week, comes naturally. Putting the tie together

with the parashah is a puzzle, far more art than science; the more you know about the parashah's details, the more nuanced the connection between the tie and the reading can be.

It's educational for everyone else at BJ as well. People look at his tie and try to figure the connection out. "In most shuls, people ask what the rabbi said," Freddy said. "At BJ, they ask what the rabbi said, and then they ask what tie the gabbai wore."

Freddy still has one tie on his wish list. He would like one with a big red letter C—that's Beshallah again, for the crossing. Camels, olives, pieces of silver, Mickey Mouse—an entire world of Torah hangs around one man's neck. ■

Joanne Palmer is the editor of the Jewish Standard in Teaneck. As always, in loving memory of Shira Palmer-Sherman. This story first appeared in CJ: Voices of Conservative/Masorti Judaism.

Bringing Jewish Tradition to Appalachia

By Sian Gibby

as Jews, we are lucky to have a long and robust tradition of assisting people who are less fortunate than ourselves. I say lucky because, having this work built into our history and religious tradition means we don't have to look very hard for ways to help others. Would you be surprised to learn that one of our fellow congregants decided recently to search beyond the volunteer opportunities in New York City and reach out to a population that, sadly, in our enormous land is almost invisible?

This past spring, after hearing news of the horrendous damage done by tornadoes to the homes and lives of impoverished people in Appalachia, Myriam Abramowicz decided to find a way to volunteer there. Appalachia is a cultural region stretching from southern New York State down into Alabama and Mississippi, covering territory in 13 states (and it's pronounced "appel-AY-cha"). Some of the nation's poorest counties are located in this area, and it is a poverty of a third-world degree of severity. Myriam was moved by learning of the extreme amount of devastation wrought on communities of people, some of whom maybe lived in

chicken coops or tool sheds. People who had very little and were left with nothing.

Myriam Googled and quickly found the Christian Appalachian Project, an organization that works for small children, elderly folks, and the disabled in that region that can so often ill afford to take proper care of these most vulnerable segments of its communities. Over the phone the CAP coordinator, Kathy Kluesner, didn't flinch when Myriam mentioned her Jewishness; she asked Myriam would she be willing to use her arts experience for the whole month of June to teach arts and crafts to groups of children at a summer camp, many from impoverished families, and Myriam accepted with alacrity. "For some of these kids, even the cabins with camp beds and rustic plumbing was like staying at a 5-star hotel," Myriam told me.

So, for four weeks she taught art at Camp Shawnee, in Eastern Kentucky, to groups of kids ranging from 6 to teenagers. For some of the younger ones, Myriam set them to building wooden boxes. "Every little child likes to put things in a box," she said, "pebbles, pictures or small

“This past spring, after hearing news of the horrendous damage done by tornadoes to the homes and lives of impoverished people in Appalachia, Myriam Abramowicz decided to find a way to volunteer there.”

objects and it was also something they could take back home with them and hold in their hands.” She also taught painting with watercolors and other paints, using some of the art supplies sent to the area by generous donations from BJ members Myriam had contacted prior to going to Kentucky. So, the kids had all kinds of supplies, paints, pencils, paper, crayons as well as getting books and clothes. And, at the end of their week's stay each received a bag from Myriam filled with the goodies from the donations to take home.



www.christianapp.org

I was interested to hear what the folks she worked with made of her Jewishness. But Myriam said that, apart from the administrators of CAP and the camp counselors, the children themselves didn't know she is a Jew. "I didn't want to create any possible disturbance about it," she explained. Perhaps good work speaks for itself, no matter who is doing it. But the adults who coordinated her volunteer experience now know a little bit more about our tradition of giving, particularly in the context of gemilut hasadim, "the giving of loving-kindness" a fundamental social value in the everyday lives of Jews. Judging from the CAP website, the work they set out to accomplish has everything to do with helping people's quality of life (including the barest necessities of food, help with bill-



‘For some of these kids, even the cabins with camp beds and rustic plumbing was like staying at a 5-star hotel,’ Myriam told me.”

paying, and home construction) and little to do with the particulars of religion.

However, Myriam adds: “I decided to bring the DVD of my film *As If It Were Yesterday* with me but only plan to show it if it seemed appropriate or if the subject of the Holocaust came up. Since the documentary is about non-Jews hiding Jewish children (mostly the age of the ones who came to Camp Shawnee) I thought it would have resonance and garner interest just by the subject alone. ... We had a Q&A, and their questions revealed how moved they were by the actions of the Belgian Christians but also how much this page of history remains hidden from a segment of our society.”

In a response book about the film one counselor wrote: “I thought it was amazing to hear the stories of people who lived through something as difficult as they did. It makes me wonder what the world would be like if more people were like these people ...”

Myriam noted that Roly thought it might be worth considering Appalachia as a potential destination for BJ Teens trips in the future who presently go to New Orleans, and she agrees that they need more help of this kind. Young people who go there might be

shocked by the abjectness of the poverty of people living a mere three hours or so from New York City. In the ‘60s when the late NYS Senator Robert F. Kennedy visited Appalachia it had been reported that some families were reduced to eating starch like that used in laundry for carbohydrates.

A small group of people from BJ has gotten together, via Myriam, to “adopt a family” and gather some Christmas gifts for that Appalachian family, Terry and Candy and their five kids, so that they would have a tree and gifts to go under it. Seven hundred families have applied to the CAP *Christmas Baskets* program.

“I like that we can start and be a Jewish presence there,” Myriam says quietly. Among the humble gifts requested by this family on their holiday list is a spark lighter for the family’s wood-burning stove. Myriam says, “Maybe BJ’s participation in helping this family can be a little like that spark lighter, a spark that lights up the way... a beginning... to further involvement and awareness in this desperately poor section of the United States just mere hours away.” ■

Sian Gibby has been a Jew, and a member of BJ, for eight years. She is the copy editor for Tablet magazine and works at the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute.



Scenes from Myriam Abramowicz’s *Christian Appalachian Project* volunteer trip, Camp Shawnee, Eastern Kentucky.

PHOTOS: MYRIAM ABRAMOWICZ

COMMUNITY

Be the Key to Open the Door: Penny Dannenberg and Kabbalat Panim

By Sian Gibby

t B'nai Jeshurun has become a "must see" stop for Jews visiting New York, and this includes confirmation classes from around the country and the world as well as youth and adult groups of other kinds. When the Education and Communications Team of the Membership Steering Committee (MSC) took a look at ways these (mostly) young visitors could be encouraged to have a fuller Kabbalat Shabbat experience, Joe Antenson had the idea of getting volunteers to give groups an introduction to the service.

Enter Penny Dannenberg. An L.A. native, Penny's been a member of our community for more than 20 years. She moved to New York in '79 to take what she thought was a two-year job doing lighting design and production stage managing for the Pilobolus Dance Theater, but instead she met and married her husband Steve and started putting down Big Apple roots. Ted Berger, whom she worked with and befriended a couple of years later, and Rabbi Rachel Cowan, who married her and Steve, both suggested she try davening at BJ, because of her deep love of communal singing. Attending services left her rapt, and the rest is history.

A member of the MSC, she was quickly drawn to this welcoming-visitors idea and decided to jump in with both feet. Having retired a couple years ago and then training and working as a docent at the Whitney Museum of Art, she embraced the chance to, as she puts it, "use something I learned in that experience and bring it into the community I love."

And so the program was born and developed. BJ volunteers worked with a



PHOTO: DENISE WAXMAN

Penny Dannenberg

carefully crafted sample "script" of suggested topics to introduce visiting groups to BJ in an effort to make them feel comfortable enough to really participate in the service, which is the program's bottom line. The volunteer greeters personalize their own introductions, but everyone tries to give a bit of background history about the congregation, the spiritual legacy of Heschel, Marshall Meyer, and "the Argentinian Connection," as well as underlining the importance of "getting into" services, rather than passively receiving them.

As for the name, Penny proudly admits that, with the help of Roly, they found the perfect one: Kabbalat Panim, "receiving faces." We may have forgotten if BJ seemed big and overpowering at first, but these friendly and informed "faces" give of their time and knowledge and love of the community to mitigate that for guests and make them feel included. As anyone who has listened in on a Kabbalat Panim volunteer talking to a group (as I have been lucky enough to do, with Penny herself) will tell you, even middle-school kids sit up and listen attentively when a welcoming BJ member talks to them about our shul in a caring and intelligent way.

Over 100 groups have been welcomed through this initiative since it began last year. As the second year of Kabbalat Panim begins, it is already a resounding success. A dedicated group of about 10 volunteers

work at this initiative, but Penny says, "We'd love at least 20!" They've done so well so far that they are evaluating and honing their process, polling both past visiting groups and the volunteers themselves about what works and what needs tweaking. One man from a visiting adult group wrote in his blog after experiencing Kabbalat Panim:

[W]e were greeted outside by a smiling happy woman who wanted to introduce us to what she experienced in her faith and her interactions with her house of worship. ... It was when my friend ... asked our host what B'nai Jeshurun had meant to her in her own life that I saw the real power of such a community. She was literally staggered by the question. Tears came to her eyes. "I've never been asked that," she said, searching for words.

Human warmth and community are precisely the fundamental Jewish values that Kabbalat Panim seeks to communicate to guests: These values forge connections among people and encourage involvement. When we act as good hosts, visitors feel as though they, too, can take part in an experience of genuine davening.

Penny couldn't be more delighted with the program, as it allows her the chance to show people how beautiful and meaningful a community can be—as B'nai Jeshurun certainly has been for her. She puts it best when she says, "Kabbalat Panim can be the key to opening the door for visitors to come in and participate with us." ■

Sian Gibby is copy editor for the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute and Tablet Magazine. She has been a BJ member for eight years.

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Designer: Harriet R. Goren

Mazal Tov

To the following members and their families on their B'nai Mitzvah (November and December):

Maxwell Singer	Sophia Daniels
Samuel Antar	Jane Frankel
Harris Whiteson	Alexander Cohen
Jediah Katz	Mia Sternoff
Ezequiel (Zeke) Bronfman	Sarah Rosenthal
Evan Rubin	Julia Mervis

To the following members and their families (through November 9):

- Robin, Martin and Alexandra Wanner, Marlene and Murray Altman on the naming of their daughter, sister, and granddaughter, Riley.
- Renee Cherow-O'Leary and John O'Leary on the wedding of their son, David Eli, to Ashley Bank.
- Oriyan, Jonathan, and Maya Schwartz on the birth of their daughter and sister, Rena Lev.
- Elissa, Daniel, and Hazel Kestin on the birth of their daughter and sister, Hayley Fiona.
- Eli, Amy, Jay, Sam and Mia Schiff and Daniel and Leslie Merims on Eli becoming a Bar Mitzvah.
- Peter Geffen and Susie Kessler, Jonah, Julia, and Bina Mannes Geffen and Nessa Geffen on the marriage of their son and brother, Daniel Geffen, to LuAnne Tyzzer.
- Steven, Lynette, and Caroline Koppel on the engagement of their daughter and sister, Sarah, to Josh Smith.
- Jordana Horn Gordon, Jon Gordon, Zev Marinoff, Rami Marinoff, and Gabriella Gordon on the birth of their daughter and sister, Orli Rachel Gordon.
- Julia Kirsh, her parents Rona Kirsh Davis and Phillip Kirsh and Fred Davis, and her siblings Jonathan and Talia Kirsh and Austin and Charlie Davis on Julia becoming a Bat Mitzvah.



Condolences (through November 9)

The community of B'nai Jeshurun mourns the death of our members:

- Linda Frankel, and we extend our sincere condolences to her entire family.
- Martin Igel, and we extend our sincere condolences to his wife Halina Igel and their entire family.
- Harold Fleisher, and we extend our sincere condolences to his entire family.
- Sam Schatsky and we extend our sincere condolences to David Schatsky, Susan Bodnar, Ronen Schatsky, Binah Schatsky, Gary Schatsky, Amy Cohen, Max Schatsky and Maya Schatsky and their entire family.

The community of B'nai Jeshurun extends sincere condolences to the following members and their families:

- Scott, Susan, Zoe, and Max Grodnick on the death of Scott's father, Armil Grodnick.
- Gail Goodman on the death of her mother, Mim Goodman.
- Larry Zuckerman and Alice Gottesman and their children, Zachary, Eleanor, and Jessica, on the death of Larry's father, James Zuckerman.
- Eva Fogelman, Jerome Chanes, and their son Adam on the death of Eva's mother, Lilli Fogelman.
- Naomi Goodhart on the death of her mother, Zelda Goodhart.
- Steve Brand and Nancy Ramsey on the death of Steve's father, Curtis Brand.
- Evelyn, Sam, Joshua, and Hannah Rittenberg on the death of Evelyn's mother, Rose Garcia.
- Eileen Lowenstein on the death of her mother, Florence Feirman.
- Steven Cohen, Kirk Iwanowski and Lily Cohen on the death of Steven's father, Richard Cohen.
- Arlene, Alan, and David Baily on the death of Arlene's mother, Jean Friedman Michaelson.
- Lisa, Larry, Benjamin, Hannah, and Michael Davidoff on the death of Lisa's father, Bernard Bergman.
- Ellyn Rabinowitz and Richard Sussman on the death of Ellen's cousin, Milton Ross-Fein.
- Rae, Richard, Adam, and Dan Janvey and Emily Cooper on the death of Rae's father, Dennis Goldman.
- Paula and Maya Rackoff on the death of their mother and grandmother, Florence Lessch Rackoff.
- Carol Silberfeld on the death of her father, Albert Silberfeld.
- Peter Goldman and Peter Eckert on the death of Peter's mother, Marjorie Goldman.
- Andrew Clateman and Josine Shapiro and their daughter Leora on the death of Andrew's father Saul Clateman.

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