Wood River Jewish Community
THE SHOFAR
Spring 2021

Happy Passover
About a year ago, Noa Ries and I were negotiating with the Limelight Hotel to hold our Passover Seder there. It had been many years that we had a seder at the Sun Valley Lodge, and we just thought that a catered seder would be a nice change of pace for us. We had the venue and the menu all planned and we were really excited that our members would love this change. Then, only a few weeks into March, the lockdown was put into effect—and we still were loath to cancel our plans until we finally understood that a public gathering was going to out of the question.

Thus began a year of many new “firsts” and creative innovations. Whoever heard of Zoom before last March? And now we credit it as the means for bringing us together when social gatherings have been restricted. Zoom brought us High Holiday services. Many of our members who were out of state were able to participate. Rabbi Robbi led us from the office here; our cantor Scott participated from his home in Texas. While not ideal by any means, it worked for us to gather and pray together at this most important spiritual time. From there we have had many Zoom Shabbat services which have been very well attended. And just recently we had our Purim Spiel where we enjoyed a rousing, costumed performance of the megillah! We even had Noa’s mother and her Australian grandkids joining us for this occasion.

On the social side, we had a well-attended Zoom ladies lunch with Bunker Frank’s daughter Alli as one of our featured speakers. Candice Stark and Leslie Kaplan launched our on-line cooking series which proved to be a major hit. The featured chefs are our own very talented members.

Not to be outdone, Adult Education presented guest speaker Leslie Barry, author of Newark Minute-men, a book about the Jewish boxers’ involvement in dismantling the American Nazi movement that took place before WWII. They have also recommended interesting topics and speakers that were available to us on line.

All told, we had a very active year, with much to be grateful for as we continue to reach out to our membership and find the many ways to connect with one another.

But the greatest accomplishment and miraculous achievement of this pandemic year was the purchase of a new and permanent home for the WRJC! Led by Marty Lyon and Jeff Rose, the building committee has raised the necessary funds to purchase our new Elkhorn home and fund its adaptive reuse. Thanks of course to the overwhelming generosity of our members and others in the larger Wood River community. Now we are on target to finish the design phase and begin construction in July. I am beyond excited as we get deeper into the planning stage. The finished building will serve us well into the future and will be a magnet for future growth.

So many people have stepped up this year to insure our path forward. I am hesitant to list them lest I leave someone out. Of course, I want to acknowledge that Josh Kleinman as co-prez has added an extra dimension that has definitely upped our game. Rabbi Robbi has also gone the proverbial extra mile to make sure that our Zoom services are consistent and pleasurable. Claudie has worked her heart out to bring value to our members while we have not been able to see each other in person. We are all looking forward to the summer when we can hopefully meet in person again.

Until then, stay safe and Chag Sameach!
Dear Members and Friends,

I am writing in my capacity as a member of the Development Committee, dedicated to assisting Claudie Goldstein in raising necessary funds for the continuation of services and programming for the WRJC. To fund our operating budget, we traditionally ask for contributions from our members over and above their dues, as dues alone cover only a portion of our expenses.

Our goal for funding spiritual life and leadership for this fiscal year is $65,000. This allows us to supplement funding for such things as Shabbat services, Torah study, children’s education and Bar/Bat Mitzvah training.

As a member of the WRJC, I have had the opportunity to study with Rabbi Sherwin, have participated in Bet Din conversions, and enjoyed zoom Shabbat services. With the number of b’nai mitzvah as well as students in our religious school increasing, the construction of our new building, and the continuing programs such as cooking classes, Jewish Film Festival and adult education, I feel tremendous optimism for our Wood River Jewish Community. I believe that Rabbi Sherwin’s heart and soul is with the Wood River Jewish Community (as well as the interfaith community).

I urge you to make a contribution to our appeal that will underwrite the many programs that our Rabbi leads and that will insure her presence here.

Wishing you a wonderful Spring,

Sincerely,

For the Development Committee, Joanne Mercer, member

Claudie Goldstein, Executive Director/Director of Development
Development Committee members: Margaret Gold, Phil Goldstein, Joanne Mercer, Eileen Prager, Bob Safron, Gail Stern, Rhea Schwartz

To make a donation see donation form: page 8 or go to our website wrjc.org /donate - Thank you in advance for your support.
“Mann Tracht, Un Gott Lacht” is an old Yiddish adage, “Man Plans, and God Laughs.” This time last year, we certainly expected that we would be together again – in person - to celebrate Passover as a community. We assume the best-laid plans may be unhinged by unexpected changes, which can be either disappointing or exhilarating – that is a normal part of living life. Every day used to include two plans: the plan that we design for ourselves, and the plan that God designs for us. It looks like God will be laughing again this year, and we will join in.

So, what does it mean to celebrate Passover today – again on Zoom – again without the physical proximity of our loved ones? Passover is the most celebrated of all holidays – even those who consider themselves Jew“ish” find their way to a seder every year. But what does coming out of Egypt – the narrow place – Mitzrayim – mean to Jews today?

In every generation, the Jewish community has had to find ways of celebrating Passover in times of scarcity and uncertainty. This is not new, even if it is new for us individually. Every year we read the Torah and experience the holidays through the lens of our own lives and whatever we are going through. For a second year, these themes take on new meaning in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Celebrating Passover in difficult times and circumstances has always been an act of resilience and hope for the Jewish people. Now, more than ever, it’s imperative that we have or find a seder, and rededicate ourselves and not allow it to be another casualty of this modern plague.

We still have a responsibility to give our children and grandchildren the comfort and strength of ritual and tradition — and the optimism that this crisis will also pass. And the laughter? We will join together in joy, in awe, in faith and, yes, in laughter, for Pesach 5781. Our sages gave us a great coping mechanism: Joy. Reb Nachman of Bratzlav (1772-1810) advised us: “Get into the habit of singing a tune. It will give you new life and fill you with joy. Get into the habit of dancing. It will displace depression and dispel hardship."

So, this year, “Dayeinu” your heart out, dance on the shores of the Sea of Reeds like nobody is watching and hold out a bit longer – we will get to the Promised Land and join in singing and dancing and laughing together again.

Rabbi Robbi
WRJC Virtual Passover Seder

Celebrating a year on Zoom - our own “Mitzrayim” or “narrow place”

We will do the entire seder together and then everyone will eat individually.

Sunday, March 28, 2021
5:00 PM MST

Link: https://zoom.us/j/6248305123
Ms. Newhouse’s article underscores a key point, both about Jews as well as about the Passover holiday; that we’ve always managed to adapt. The flexibility and adaptability, for instance, of the Haggadah and of the Passover Seder, is clear as it seems that every family adds its own special recipes, modifications to the prayers, or additions that reflect our daily concerns and current times. But always, we include the historical.

As a people, we’ve dealt with constraints imposed upon us by the times, by governments, our environments, and have managed incalculable hardships to observe the Passover holiday and to celebrate—at times our very hard-won freedoms, with the Passover Seder.

Taking into account the state of the world as we continue to deal with Covid 19 — our modern day plague, we’re moved to ask ourselves what impact will it have upon our Passover Seder this year. Regardless of how or whether we plan to celebrate with others, one thing is certain; all of us long for a return to our seders of the past. And what about them have we enjoyed so much? Spending time with family, friends and the occasional non-Jewish guest, a co-worker, a colleague, a neighbor and even a mere acquaintance.

As I look back upon Passover 2020 which fell on April 8-16, the pandemic already was well upon us. Most of us were cancelling the seders we’d been planning and assuming all would return to normal in a very short while. But this was not the case. Passover 2021 will be our second Passover, second seder during which all of us will adapt. We’ll acknowledge the holiday, have feast of sorts, but most of all, we ought celebrate our freedom as well as the ability to celebrate.

We all look forward to a winding-down of the pandemic’s power followed by a winding-up of our return to some state of normalcy. My guess is that our very first seder following our long period of quarantines, one that will be held not via ZOOM or FaceTime but in real-life will be one of our more memorable ones.

In reading Alana Newhouse’s essay entitled, The Power of Passover During a Plague, we’re reminded that while we may all be facing constraints and cancellations in the ways we’ve always celebrated Passover, one thing particularly important to keep in mind; that most Jews throughout history have not been free and as such, have not been free to observe and celebrate Jewish holidays, especially the opportunity to gather for a Passover Seder.
The entire holiday is rooted in glorifying a moment when life unfolded in very unexpected ways — and human beings found meaning, even liberation, in it.

The Bible includes various relevant mentions of Passover: One, in Exodus, of the Feast of the Passover, and several others (in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy) of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. Historians believe these were originally maintained by two distinct segments of Israelite society, for whom spring meant slightly different things. For the seminomadic part of the community, it was a signal that it was time to start moving again; but before doing so they would sacrifice a lamb to ward off evil spirits that might block their path. For the settled folks, it was an agricultural holiday, a joyful welcoming of the incoming spring harvest.

Most scholars believe the two holidays were eventually combined in 622 B.C.E. — when, on the orders of Josiah, the king of Judah, a national celebration emerged, which had at its heart a pilgrimage to the Temple and the killing of a Paschal lamb. Intended or not, the process looks poetic in hindsight: Elements were taken from each of the previous commemorations — the sacrifice from the former, the joy from the latter — and a Jewish future was made.

It didn’t last. Or rather, the Temple didn’t, but Passover certainly did. After Jerusalem was sacked in 586 B.C.E., the Jews were forced out of Judea into what became known as the Babylonian Exile, taking with them this powerful reminder that a people who had been brought out of exile to freedom might once again retrace that journey.

More than 2,500 years later, the Passover Seder has not simply survived. It is now, by a long shot, the most popular Jewish religious observance.

And what it is, essentially, is an agglomeration of a long and global inheritance.

The basic order of the evening stretches back to the third or fourth century; we end the night with a set of group songs from the 15th century; some of us whip one another with scallions during the song “Dayenu,” a tradition designed by Persian Jews; and we all make different kinds of charoset, the sweet paste meant to signify the mortar used by the Jewish slaves. Italian Jews use eggs. Gibraltar Jews make theirs with the dust of ground bricks. And African-American Jews incorporate sugar cane, and cocoa powder, the crops of American slavery.

Rabbis, scholars and communal leaders differ on exactly why Passover maintains this enduring power. Some argue that it is simply central to the religion — one of the three times a year when the ancient Israelites would make that pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem. Others point to the accessibility of the seder ritual itself, which allows people of varying levels of knowledge and experience, including non-Jews, to participate.

Part of the credit, I believe, goes to the Haggadah, the text at the heart of the ritual. Less a prayer book than a step-by-step guide, the Haggadah sets out the order of how one is to fulfill the commandment of telling one’s children about the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt — through a set of now-iconic blessings, parables, symbolic foods and songs, and with the specific encouragement for participants to question and challenge the script. Ten Plagues! Four Sons! Bitter herbs! Why Is This Night Different From All Others? There is in this one evening the roots of so much of what reads as Jewish, to us and others: the drama, the humor, the contrariness, the chosenness, the enough-already-ness.

Unlike the Torah or Talmud, which are considered inviolate, the Haggadah developed as a kind of semi-codified artifact, customized by individual Jewish communities throughout history.
Recently, some of my colleagues and I set out to create an American Haggadah — one that included the entirety of the traditional text along with elements that speak to the particular history and experience of Jews in this time and place, like entries not just on the Four Sons but also the Four Daughters; essays on food waste; cocktails based on the Ten Plagues; and more. While putting it together, I was struck by something I hadn’t ever fully explored — that of all the things included in the universe of Haggadahs, one thing is conspicuously missing from them all: the story of the exodus itself.

“The Haggadah is like the theater sets and costumes and reviews of a play, without the actual play,” Rabbi Noa Kushner of San Francisco told me recently, about a month before the coronavirus began derailing everyone’s Passover plans. All of a sudden the quixotic words of my high school rabbi came back to me: “Reading the exodus is for the already free.”

Most Jews throughout history have not been free, whether from murderous regimes or famines or pandemics. What we have been is devoted to the idea that we deserve to be. “The Haggadah’s purpose is not, in fact, to present a narrative,” Rabbi Mendel Herson, associate dean of the Rabbinical College of America, explained to me. “It’s a how-to guide to finding our own personal liberation.”

The text of the Haggadah is not a retelling of the liberation story itself but a record of agreements and disagreements among its interpreters, because it is not the God-driven part of the story that we should be focused on but the human-driven one. God will come to help when God comes to help; the question is what we do between now and then. This is why Jews observed Passover in the basement “cantinas” of righteous friends during the Inquisition; they kept it during the Crusades, even as evil people around them used it to manufacture the deadly, and enduring, libel about matzo baked with the blood of Christian children; and they kept it throughout the Holocaust — in ghettos and concentration camps and forests.

As I write this, I am looking at a heart-stopping picture of five people baking matzo in 1943, in a secret oven they built beneath the Lodz ghetto. These were Jews made slaves again in modern times, insisting on celebrating their God-given right to freedom even as they were being denied their earthly equivalent. But what really can’t get over is the smile on the face of one of the women. There it is, again, still: the joy and the sacrifice. It is the smile of someone who knows she is doing something miraculous by making Passover her own.

Our circumstances are much less dire than hers, but our task this year is the same. Last week, a group of major Orthodox rabbis in Israel announced that they would permit people to use Zoom videoconferencing for their Seder — a previously unimaginable accommodation to stringent Jewish law. But that’s the point. We may be away from loved ones, or shut out of communal spaces. We may not be preparing with the same vigor, or shopping with the same zeal. But we will do what millions of Jews have done before us: manifest our hope for liberation. That is our obligation, and our privilege. All the more so in moments when the taste of freedom — from oppression, from want, from disease — is not yet ours.

Citations & References:

ANNUAL RABBI SUPPORT CAMPAIGN

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT
Two Special Cooking Classes for Passover!
Join Us for Our Free Zoom Cooking Classes

Our WRJC cooking classes are turning out to be hot tickets for our members. We’re averaging around 30 participants per class, joining in for a fun and entertaining hour of Jewish cooking. So far, we’ve cooked chicken za’atar with Judy Meyer, shakshuka with Josh Kleinman, and latkes with Marlene Samuels.

We are offering two special classes for Passover featuring matzah brei, chopped liver and cheesecake.

Bob Kaplan - Chopped liver and Matzah brie
Thursday, March 18 at 3 pm

Rabbi Robbi Sherwin -
Award Winning Pesadichy Black Bottom Macaroon Cheesecake for Passover
Thursday, March 25 at 3 pm

Please note you need to register for each class separately.
To sign up or for more information, e-mail Candice Stark at cstark@thestarks.org or Leslie Kaplan at leslie@wrjc.org
THE LEWIS FAMILY

Scott Lewis and Laura Rose-Lewis started coming to Sun Valley with their families in the 1960’s. While raising their kids Zachary (now 26), Elliot (23) and Chloe (20), they lived in Portland, OR, and had a townhome in Elkhorn, where they spent summers, and holidays in Winter and Spring. Scott, Laura and Chloe moved to Sun Valley full time in 2018 for Chloe to complete her senior year at Community School (Zach was at NYU and Elliot at UC Berkeley by then; Chloe is now a sophomore at USC).

Laura presently serves as Executive Director of the “I Have A Dream” Foundation of Idaho, a nonprofit founded by Scott’s father, Ken Lewis, in 2012. Ken is also a member of the WRJC with his wife, Joyce Hart. Laura’s father was the 15th generation of Rabbis in her family! Scott is a sustainability professional, currently serving on the board of the Sun Valley Institute for Resilience, the Ketchum Sustainability Advisory Committee, the Climate Action Coalition and the Community School Sustainability Committee. Laura serves on the board of The Advocates. Scott and Laura love to ski, hike, mountain bike, backpack, and be outside in the beautiful mountains of Idaho.

THE WILL FAMILY

Happy Spring from the Will Family (Court, Michelle, Ella - age 13 and Hannah - age 11).

We are so happy to have recently joined the WRJC. Sun Valley is an area that has always been very special to our family but in the last year, has really felt like another home. Court, a native Washingtonian, grew up visiting the Sun Valley area with his parents and brother. Court’s parents, Jamie and Sally Will now split their time between their homes in WA and in Sun Valley. Michelle, a born and bred New Yorker, first visited the Sun Valley area approximately 17 years ago, and was immediately in love. As a result, Ella and Hannah have been lucky to grow up getting to enjoy all that the area has to offer. In past years, we have visited as a family on average two times per year, for a week or so each time. Since December 2019, and in these unusual times, we have spent approximately 10 weeks in Sun Valley and are proud to say we have just purchased land near Court’s parents’ home and look forward to building our own home in the not too distant future.

This year brought challenges for everyone. While we are grateful for our health and happiness, Ella’s bat mitzvah had to be postponed twice. We decided rather than have a zoom bat mitzvah, we really wanted to celebrate all that Ella has accomplished. We thought, why not pivot and do it in Sun Valley? So, we are. Rabbi Robbi has been delightful to get to know and it has been absolutely wonderful for Ella to become a part of the virtual Bar and Bat Mitzvah Prep (BBMP) program. It might not be a big party at the Four Seasons in Seattle, but we have been planning and are looking forward to a smaller, but very special bat mitzvah this July at the Roundhouse. And most of all, we look forward to celebrating our fabulous Ella with the WRJC.

We look forward to the day when we can all meet and congregate at the new home of the WRJC.

Court, Michelle, Ella and Hannah
**THE ABORN/MONIRANOLI FAMILY**

Lyn Aborn and Scott Molinaroli recently moved to Hailey from Burlingame, CA along with their children Sabrina (10.5) and Leo (9) and their dog, Sabaka. They have been frequent visitors to the valley for 20+ years, as two of Scott’s best friends from college have lived here with their families. There had been a decades-long campaign to get them to make the big move, and finally the time was right.

Lyn and Scott are both originally from New Jersey, but met in Washington, DC and both eventually found their way to the Bay area for graduate school. Lyn works as an emergency medicine physician, and Scott is a portfolio manager at an investment fund. There are few silver linings to a global pandemic - but the possibility of remote work is one of them, and the chance to live close to friends who are like family is another. And so the Idaho move was put in motion.

Sabrina and Leo have started at Hailey Elementary and are loving getting to know new friends and exploring their new hometown. The entire family loves to ski, and everyone is excited for even more outdoor adventures as the weather warms up. Our dog is getting used to encountering elk on her walks and the weasel who likes to taunt her from the back yard.

We hope that everyone is staying safe, and we look forward to the time when we can meet you all in person!

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**THE COOPER FAMILY**

Kit, Misha, Levi (15), Gemma (13) and Gus (10) love the Wood River valley and spend as much time here as they can. Kit, along with his three siblings, grew up spending summers and weeks in the winter here. Kit’s parents, Linda and Jay Cooper built a place in Ketchum in the 1970s. Over 20 years ago, when Kit brought Misha here to meet his family for the first time, she fell in love with the town — and his family, too! Now they make the drive from Santa Barbara, where they live, to the Ketchum/SV areas most summers and winters. They love biking, hiking, and flyfishing in the summer and skiing (Gemma and Gus), snowboarding (Kit and Levi), snowshoeing (Misha) and sledding (all of us) in the winter.

Levi is a sophomore and a member of his high school’s varsity wrestling team. He loves surfing, football, the stock market and enjoyed working at Wise Guys Pizza last summer; Gemma is in seventh grade and plays the violin, loves to bake, write stories, make smoothies and dreams of speaking many languages; Gus is in fifth grade and he wrestles, builds lego creations, plays the violin and loves to garden. Kit loves to surf, cook, boat, read and plan vacations off the beaten path. Misha loves to run, especially on trails, hike, read and anything design related. Freddy and Wolf, two Aussies, complete our family. All of us love to travel!

We are honored to be a part of the Wood River Jewish Community and are looking forward to celebrating Gemma’s Bat Mitzvah in Sun Valley this fall.
THE UPSIDE OF THE DOWNSIDE
How I spent my time during the Pandemic
by Josh Kleinman

It’s hard to believe that it’s a year since Rowena and I left Sun Valley in early March because of the talk about a pandemic, not realizing that we both had caught the virus and that it would be well over a year before we could return. Like us, many of you have reflected on a period unlike any other in our collective memory. The sameness of the days with repetitive established routines, fears, and hopes have made for a long challenging year. Like many of you, as I recovered, I tried to fill my time with new endeavours. I honed my cooking skills making Shakshuka - a dish I have always savoured, and then I embarked on a whole new art form.

In November 2019, Rowena and I visited Israel and found our way one afternoon to the Yaacov Agam museum in Rishon LeZion, his birthplace. As many of you know Yaacov Agam is an Israeli artist best known for his pioneering of kinetic art. The museum is surrounded by a sculpture garden with twenty multicolored pillars at the entrance. The exhibitions run the gamut from two-dimensional drawings to stained glass to interactive digital displays. Many of Agam’s signature optical creations often have moving parts and invite the viewer to change how they look by interacting with them or by seeing the image from different angles.

His “Agamographs” make illusionary images appear depending on the audience’s viewpoint. Agam wrote, “my intention was to create a work of art which would transcend the visible, which cannot be perceived except in stages, with the understanding that it is a partial revelation and not the perpetuation of the existing”. Agam studied in Jerusalem, Zurich and Paris. His works are included in collections at museums in Paris, the Guggenheim, Museum of Modern Art in New York, and The Hirshhorn in DC, among others.

One day last spring, as Vancouver was settling into our new reality of lockdowns, for some reason, I woke up to the idea of creating 3D “Agamographs” with the recollections from our extraordinary visit to his museum. Paper Agamograph tutorials are available all over YouTube, but I wanted to create 3D Agamographs in wood with the same visual effects we saw in his museum.

The first part of my process was to try and figure out how to create the 3D Agamograph effect. I chose to work with plywood ( 4’x8’), cut into ¾” triangles, which would provide two flat sides to paint on with the third side serving as the base. Next, I created a template to lay the triangles on, so each of the two sides could be painted as a flat surface. The attached photos show the triangles in the template and the flat painted surfaces.

I have now completed six Agamographs that measure about 24” x 34”. Many of the pieces have a Judaic theme and one reflects my love for Sun Valley, with Baldy and a “rainbow trout” featured. To get the full effect of a 3D Agamograph one has to either see it in person or view a video of the work. To see the 3D video versions of my Agamographs, visit me on Instagram: @joshkartwork.

I look forward to connecting with many of you and hearing what new hobbies or interests you too have discovered during this unique time!
The ancient Israelites never had to prepare for a bar or bat mitzvah by Zoom.

But Dana Berntson and her young charges became very familiar with doing just that during the Year of the COVID Pandemic.

With Rabbi Robbi Sherwin unable to travel freely from her home in Austin, Texas, to the Wood River Valley because of COVID concerns, Dana stepped in and got the job done. She officiated her first bat mitzvah for Riley Siegel on February 13, 2021. Dana had to learn as much as Riley in order to lead the entire service.

This isn’t the first time Dana has done this. She got the call 13 years ago when the Wood River Jewish Community had a couple of young people who needed to be trained and there was no rabbi to do it.

“I knew Hebrew so I got the phone call,” she recounts.

Her favorite part of working with the youngsters is getting to know them and getting to know their families. Sometimes after the lesson, she gets invited to stay for dinner.

This year things were different. It depended on the families’ comfort level whether she met with the youth in person or over Zoom.

“One young girl—she and I became best friends because we couldn’t associate with other people. We met in person at the park and that became an outlet for both of us to be with somebody in person,” Dana recounts.

Dana says it’s astounding to watch the kids mature between the time she starts working with them and nearly a year later when they participate in their coming-of-age ritual.

“They start out a bit timid and unsure, but after a year of working together they are confident, and ready for their big day. It is a true rite of passage. They go from cute kids to teenagers—just like that!”

Dana and the kids started out learning the alphabet, and then the prayers. Their final task: learning to read and chant from the Torah.

“The hardest thing is the chanting because they are intimidated and being 12 and 13 years old, their voices change. Summoning the confidence and ability is hard for them and for me, too. I’m not a natural singer and so we work together and do our best,” she says. “I do have one student right now who can truly sing. It’s been fun because she is teaching me!”

Each youth does a mitzvah project, or community service, as part of learning to be a good person and Jewish adult.

“Although they can’t vote or drink beer, they are seen in the eyes of the community as an adult who is capable of making their own good healthy moral judgments,” says Dana.

With COVID, it was challenging to do many of the projects the youth might have envisioned doing. But they got creative. One wrote letters to a refugee. Another read for seniors online. Others raised money for The Advocates and The Hunger Coalition.

Of the seven students, one youth had a small bat mitzvah in front of 30 people in the Sawtooth Botanical Garden. Another had hers before 30 people at The Lime-light Hotel. With the weather getting warmer and restrictions easing up, the other five students will have their bar/bat mitzvah’s this summer and fall with the Rabbi and Dana by their side.

Dana says her own bat mitzvah was one of the most meaningful events in her life.

“I recognize three best days of my life, one of them being my bat mitzvah,” she says. “It was very special to me and a beautiful family day, a beautiful day for myself.”

“It is so meaningful to stand up in front of friends and family and the congregation and chant from the Torah. If you can do that at 13, you can do almost anything the rest of your life,” she says.

Because it was such a special day for me, I want it to be special day for them. It never gets old. It’s a big day and I just love being part of it, to celebrate with them and their family and rejoice.”
Rob and Ellen Raede’s love affair with Sun Valley literally started with the birth of their oldest son.

“Ellen’s ob/gyn, while delivering, was telling us that as soon as he was finished delivering our son, he was headed to Sun Valley,” Rob recounts. “We’d never heard of Sun Valley, but it sounded great. And, six weeks after our son’s birth, we were going stir crazy and decided we needed to get out of Los Angeles. So, we hopped on a plane and got our first glimpse of Sun Valley in mid-September. And it was amazing.”

The couple have made Sun Valley part of their itinerary every year since, even buying part interest in a house in Warm Springs 17 years ago. And last summer they became members of the Wood River Jewish Community.

The couple have made Sun Valley part of their itinerary every year since, even buying part interest in a house in Warm Springs 17 years ago. And last summer they became members of the Wood River Jewish Community.

They packed their infant son in a day pack and took him to Pioneer Cabin during their first trip to Sun Valley when he was just six weeks old. And, as he and his younger brother grew, they began heading to Redfish Lake after the summer crowds had gone home.

“We love the trees turning, the way the fall air feels. There’s just something magical about it,” says Rob.

When the kids were 10 and 12, the family took a month off to drive through all the big ski towns in the Western United States. They cruised through Steamboat, Jackson, Telluride and other towns, ending up in Sun Valley on a week-long mountain bike camping trip.

“They said, ‘Is that the best time? We’re never going to live,’” says Rob. “I said, ‘What time is better than right now?’”

Rob started his career delivering mail in the Wall Street mailroom of a firm that no longer exists. He worked his way up to a position as a stockbroker on the West Coast, working out of San Francisco, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, which is where he and Ellen now live when they’re not in Sun Valley.

As one firm after another got bought out, he quit and started his own firm with Ellen, who served as its accountant. The couple ran their firm in a cool funky Spanish-style dwelling with wood beam ceilings. After five years they closed it, allowing Rob to pursue his great passion in life: Music.

“In fourth grade I got a trombone, and I still have it,” he says. “Dad said I should get a clarinet because it was small, but they were out of clarinets so I got a trombone.”

Rob played for a jazz ensemble. Then, when it occurred to him that he couldn’t take a trombone to the beach with a girl, he learned to play bass guitar.

His early band California Highway played Beach Boys and Beatles covers. But his music took a new twist after he quit dealing in stocks.

The day after he quit his job, he signed up for every music class he could take, including songwriting and vocal lessons. Then, while in Memphs for a wedding, he got the urge to seek out “some really good gospel music.”

“We went to a huge church, kind of like the Staples Center with 5,000 people,” he says. “The music was phenomenal. The roof was rocking. I walked out of there and said, ‘No one says, ‘Wow!’ when they walk out of a synagogue. I wonder if I could start a group that would do thematically Jewish music but with different musical styles like soul and gospel instead of the 19th century German drinking songs or early ‘70s folk rock you hear with so much Jewish music.”

Rob did just that, founding Soul Aviv, a four-piece vocal harmony group in 2007. The group presented Jewish messages through an infectious blend of folk, Motown, gospel, Memphis soul and world-music grooves in Hebrew, English and Yiddish.

Their songs included “A Glezele Yash,” “Go Down Moses,” “Lean on Me,” “Rivers of Babylon” and “Put a Little Love in Your Heart.”

Named one of the top 12 Jewish music groups in the world, the group proved particularly popular with crowds in the Upper Midwest, Canada and Europe.

“We met a lot of great people,” Rob says. “It seemed to resonate that we could take Jewish prayers and set them to music and make them go, ‘Wow!’ ”
But after seven years, Rob and his co-singers became weary of traveling.

“It’s fun but it wears you down,” he says. “We’d go out twice a month for five days each time. We’d fly to Detroit on a Thursday, do a Shabbat service on Friday, a Saturday night concert, a Sunday morning brunch, then fly home Sunday night or Monday.”

After a rest, Rob started a new four-piece vocal group dubbed the Red Sea Rhythm Rockers at his synagogue in Santa Barbara. The group, which performs Rob’s original songs, recently recorded its first album titled “You Have Answered” after its title song.

The high-energy song was inspired by Psalm 2:

“I’ve been burning with this question for so long I can’t remember. It’s threatened to consume me but I never did surrender I have asked it of all the holy men and the women at their altars … where do I find you?”

Other songs on the album include “Heaven Could Roll My Way”, and Daughter of Babylon (A Song for Queen Esther).

“It’s a little edgier than the first group, a little more rocking, still full of the gospel style,” he says.

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Our New Permanent Home Update

2021 has kicked off with a strong start - it is projected to be the year that the first Jewish Community Center and Synagogue will open doors to its permanent home in Sun Valley, Idaho. With more than a dozen religious organizations having their own permanent home, the WRJC’s new building at 95 Badeyana will provide a warm, inviting home for the entire community in Sun Valley. The WRJC has raised more than $1.75M during COVID, amplifying the significance of this project and demonstrating the Jewish people’s resilience during challenging times.

We encourage you and thank you in advance for considering a donation or continuing to donate to this campaign at any amount that you are comfortable with giving. As we reach and surpass our original $1.75M goal, we will continue to fundraise for construction costs and to grow the WRJC sustainability fund.

Our building and design work, led by co-chairs Marty Lyon and WRJC Vice President Jeff Rose, is moving forward. Joining Marty and Jeff to lead the Design Committee is WRJC Treasurer Judith Teller-Kaye. Today, our architect Daniel Hollis and his firm HR Architects are working on designing our place of meeting, worship, and community into an amazing new home. Joining Daniel and his team is world-class Judaica designer Jay Brown of the Maryland-based firm Levin/Brown & Associates. Jay and his firm have designed more than 250 synagogues and will be bringing a new level of spiritual and Judaica to our community. He’ll be working with us to design our new home, creating a sense of Judaica and flexibility for meetings, celebrations, events, and worship space.

As many of us can see driving through town or watching the ski lines weave across Baldy, it is clear that hundreds of new residents are here in the Wood River Valley, and we encourage you to reach out to your friends and new neighbors who are Jewish and encourage them to join the WRJC.

Jeff Rose, WRJC Vice President, Co-Chair and Building Committee Co-Chair
Marty Lyon, WRJC Building Campaign Building Co-Chair
Judith Teller Kaye, WRJC Treasurer and Design Campaign Co-Chair
I 1877, the first year for which numbers are available, Jews made up approximately 0.26% of Idaho’s population. In 2017, the most recent year for which numbers were available, Jews made up an even smaller share of the state’s population: 0.12%. But those small numbers tell an interesting story.

The closest that we have to “official” numbers come from the American Jewish Year Book, published annually since 1899 by the Jewish Publication Society and later the American Jewish Committee. The Year Book shows a population of 2,000 Jewish Idahoans in 1899 and 1900 and then a precipitous drop to 300 Jewish Idahoans in 1901. The number fluctuates between 135 and 1,160 over the next century, with the exception of a single-year spike in 1972 (likely a typo), before rising above 2,000 once again in 2015.

When I first saw these numbers, I wondered if the high Jewish population at the end of the 19th century was a reflection of Idaho’s mining boom. In her book History of the Jews in Utah and Idaho, historian Juanita Brooks points out that, although few Jewish men became miners, many were involved in commercial activity connected to mining. Jewish immigrants became leading merchants and businessmen in mining towns across the American West. Brooks also points out that there was an active Jewish community in Salt Lake City by the 1880s, some of whose members moved north to participate in the mining boom.

We know that the Jews of Idaho experienced several important milestones around the turn of the 20th century. The state’s first synagogue was founded in Boise in 1895 and Moses Alexander was elected Idaho’s first Jewish governor in 1914. In the Wood River Valley, S.M. Friedman served on the first Board of Trustees of the City of Hailey in the 1880s; local Jews gathered for the first Yom Kippur services in 1884; and in 1910, the residents of Hailey elected a Jewish Postmaster (Joseph Fuld) and a Jewish representative to the Idaho State Assembly (Samuel Friend).

But measuring Jews has always been challenging. The Pew Research Center devoted two full pages to explaining its methodology for “Who is a Jew?” in its landmark 2013 study of Jewish Americans. The U.S. census has rarely collected information about religious affiliation. For most of its 122-year history, the American Jewish Year Book has relied upon population estimates provided by local Jewish congregations around the country.

When I explored the statistics further, it became clear that Idaho’s early Jewish population numbers were not even provided by a local congregation. The Board of Delegates of American Israelites had estimated in 1877—before there were any Jewish congregations in
Idaho—that the state’s Jewish population was 85 people. In 1897, a communal leader in Philadelphia named David Sulzberger used math to estimate that Idaho’s Jewish community had grown from 85 to 2,000 people over the previous two decades. His calculations relied upon assumptions that now seem specious, including that the waves of Jewish immigrants arriving from eastern Europe in the 1880s and 90s had reached all corners of the country. But once Sulzberger’s estimates were printed in the American Jewish Year Book, they were entered into our historical record.

The historical record became more accurate over time, as communication methods improved and new congregations were organized in Pocatello and the Wood River Valley. In 2001, the WRJC became large enough that the Year Book began printing specific population numbers for Ketchum, Pocatello, and Boise as part of the state’s total. According to the record, there are now 2,125 Jews in Idaho, of whom 350 are in Ketchum. That number may generously include part-time residents.

Even if Sulzberger’s early estimates had been correct, Idaho would still have had one of the smallest percentages of Jewish residents of any state at the turn of the 19th century. It has remained at the bottom of the list since then. Today, Idaho’s Jewish population is, at 0.12% of the state, the second smallest in the country—just above South Dakota and below Mississippi.

One of the effects of this tiny size is a lack of attention from American Jewish historians and institutions. The only book ever published about Jews in Idaho is Juanita Brooks’ History of the Jews in Utah and Idaho. But Brooks was a scholar of Mormonism rather than Judaism, and her book focuses almost entirely on Utah, with just a handful of pages exploring Idaho’s history. There are few historic newspaper clippings about Jews in Idaho and even fewer academic journal articles.

Although a lack of attention from the outside makes it more challenging to know and teach our history, it also provides an opportunity for us to tell our own story—a story shaped in part by our community’s small size, but also by the qualities of the place we all call home (for part or all of the year). Jews in Idaho have been particularly connected to the wilderness and the values of the American West. Jews in Idaho have been resilient and tenacious, building communities where there were none. Jews in Idaho have formed the type of deep bonds with Christian neighbors that are necessary to flourish here, while Jews in New York and Los Angeles have the option to remain more insular.

Because Sun Valley draws Jewish transplants from around the country, it has also become a unique melting pot of Jewish experiences and traditions. In that way, I believe the Jews of the Wood River Valley today share something in common with our predecessors in the 1880s, who came to this place from around the world in search of silver and copper. Brought here by a shared goal, they established the earliest infrastructure of our community from a patchwork of languages and customs.

It’s clear, from both the numbers in the American Jewish Year Book and the lived experience of everyone here, that our community has grown significantly over the last forty years. It’s also clear that there are more Jews in the Wood River Valley today than there have ever been before. Opening the doors of our synagogue this year will be a beautiful way to mark that reality in the historical record.
From Linda Cooper
Chair Sun Valley Jewish Film Festival

Here are 5 suggested Jewish/Israeli movies to see from Netflix to keep you busy until our 2021 Sun Valley Jewish Film Festival this summer. Some are based on true stories, and they are all terrific, but my favorite is “The Spy, Eli Cohen.” starring Sacha Baron Cohen. Enjoy.

The Great Sun Valley Jewish Film Committee: Jay Cooper, Penny Coe, Buzz Coe, Stan Joseph, Harriet Joseph, Fran Michael, Lois Rosen, Ellen Fastow, Joe Fastow, Ken Molkner, Ravona Molkner, Karen Saks, Robert Safron

The Red Sea Diving Resort
Based on a true story, this is a 2019 spy thriller film written and directed by Gideon Raff. Israeli Mossad agents run a covert operation in Sudan that helps Ethiopian Jewish refugees escape to safe haven in Israel.

The Spy
Eli Cohen
In the 1960s, the true story of Israeli clerk-turned-secret agent Eli Cohen (played by Sacha Baron Cohen) goes deep undercover inside Syria on a perilous, years-long mission to spy for Mossad.

Maktub
A drama/comedy rated 5 stars by Rotten Tomatoes
Two criminals are the sole survivors of a terrorist attack at a restaurant in Jerusalem. They believe God has given them a chance to change their ways. They decide to secretly follow people at the Wailing Wall, taking their paper requests in the wall so they can help them fulfill their dreams.

A French Village
7 Seasons
This acclaimed drama is about the German occupation of France during World War II, and its effects on the inhabitants of a small village.

The Meyerowitz Stories boasts a stellar star cast comprised of Dustin Hoffman, Ben Stiller, Emma Thompson, Adam Sandler, and Elizabeth Marvel.

The story revolves around a Jewish family that tries to reconcile with each other over a course of time after being distant for a long time. Hoffman plays the role of the father, Harold Meyerowitz, who has been a successful sculptor and is now retired and living comfortably with his third wife, Maureen (Thompson). We see how the children reconnect with their father and how the love that they’ve always carried for each other slowly helps pave the way for them to reconcile. All of them are successful personally, but a sense of loss gets closure when the family goes through a series of events that they face together.
Albert Memmi was a Tunisian Jewish intellectual whose writings were infused with the dichotomy of his identity. Here was a Tunisian born Jew who fled to France, a left wing Zionist who supported a Palestinian state. He was a contemporary of and overshadowed by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, both of whom wrote introductions to his books. Memmi has been compared to “a Tunisian Balzac graced with Hemingway’s radical simplicity and sadness”.

I read and highly recommend his semi-autobiographical novel, The Pillar of Salt, first published in 1953. Memmi’s protagonist is Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, whose very name proclaims the question of identity. Alexandre, is a noble and glorious name that expressed his parents’ idea of the West. Mordekhai is a name that signified his Jewishness and his connection to his heritage. Benillouche in the Berber-Arabic dialect means son of the lamb. Throughout Alexandre’s formative years (and throughout all of Memmi’s life) were the questions “Who am I?” and “Do I belong anywhere?”

Living in his ‘blind alley’, sandwiched between the middle-class Jews and the Muslim population, Alexandre grew up near poverty in a home dominated by religion and superstition. Nearing his Bar Mitzvah, Alexandre realized that his ideas and aspirations differed greatly from the modest hopes and dreams of his parents.

Living at the dizzying crossroads of French, Jewish, colonial, African and Muslim culture, Alexandre (and Memmi) is unable to assimilate all of these influences into his life. Thus he rejects his background and is left with a void which throughout his life he can never fill. This places him squarely in the angst-ridden existential camp of Sartre and Camus, even as he becomes the well-reputed Professor Albert Memmi.

However, there is another aspect of this book that is delightful and charming....bringing to life a lost world. A Tunis that is no more, childhood memories and lush descriptions of the sights, sounds, smells tastes and colors of a place lost to history. This colorful mosaic of Tunis between the wars brings to life a world of which I knew very little.

Memmi writes of his protagonist Alexandre and of himself “…I will always be forced to return to Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, a native in a colonial world, a Jew in an anti-semitic universe and an African in a world dominated by Europe.

This is a book that definitely deserves to be lifted out of obscurity and placed along the finer novels of the 20th century.
We did it! An intrepid group of WRJC knitters and friends came together (virtually!) to knit 8 hats and 19 scarves for our community. These beautiful items were gifted to the Dream Scholars at the I Have A Dream Foundation. With a very quick turnaround goal a lot was accomplished.

Coni Foster, the chair of the WRJC Knitters Group, enthusiastically recruited 10 members and friends to contribute their time and effort to knit some lovely pieces. Coni is not a knitter, but she is long on infectious energy and organization. Carlyn Ring, Claudie Goldstein and Leslie Kaplan assisted with patterns and instructions. Hats off to these wonderful, caring women: Claudie Goldstein, Sammy Mailman, Kelly Curtis, Karen Saks, Ellen Campion (not pictured), Phyllis Schlessinger, Fran Michael, Flora Mason, Coni’s friend Deb Landrum. (See their photos below, left to right.) Thank you for participating in this “knitzvah mitzvah”!

Laura Rose-Lewis, Executive Director of I Have A Dream Foundation, was very grateful to accept the gifts of hats and scarves on behalf of their Dream Scholars. They were all appreciative.

Our new goal is to build on this successful event and meet this summer to get an early start knitting lab robes as well as hats and scarves. This is an invitation to all knitters and wannabe knitters to join us this summer. Stay tuned for more information and please let us know if you are interested!

Thanks again to all these amazing women who have made a difference!

“i have a dream”
Foundation®

Our Dream Scholars are grateful and happy to have received as a gift these hats and scarves that are truly works of art hand-knitted by the Wood River Jewish Community Knitting circle. Ihdfidaho. Appreciate. Gratitude. Peace

Laura Rose-Lewis
Executive Director
WE ARE THANKFUL FOR YOUR GENEROSITY.
None of the work we do would be possible without the generous support of our donors.

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We apologize for misspelled or missing names. Please email us at claudie@wrjc.org with any corrections.

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Have a nice Spring!