Our Bat Mitzvah Girl to be Page 17

L' Shanah Tovah!
2020-5781
How did Dickens know? “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”

Rowena and I left the valley in March with zero cases of Covid 19 diagnosed and then our world changed. The last six months have been difficult and our future is uncertain and challenging. During that time I was honored to be asked to co-chair the WRJC with Sue Green who has been an inspiration to many of us with her devotion and leadership to our community.

During this pandemic our community has come together in many ways and remarkably we will purchase our first home in Elkhorn. We elected new board members in July and our building committee, led by Jeff Rose and Marty Lyon, with Bob Safron, Ron Greenspan, Phil Goldstein, Judy Teller-Kaye, and Juli Roos accomplished what many thought was not possible. They raised the money needed to take the first step in making the Elkhorn building our new home.

Facing the challenge of these times, Rabbi Robbi spent three weeks here and we were able to hold Shabbat services outdoors during this time of social distancing. They were all well attended and it was lovely to see one another there. She is now turning her efforts towards organizing our High Holiday services. Like almost every other congregation in the country, they will be on Zoom. You will be receiving more information about this in the coming days.

Due to the hard work of our Children’s Education committee chaired by Noa Ries and Dana Berntson, we have seen an increase in young family membership and children attending our Hebrew school. With the enthusiasm of our board and membership I am certain that our future will reflect the best of times for all of us.

I too want to echo what Josh has written above. But I also wanted to add a few comments of my own as well. First, I am so delighted that Josh has joined me as co-president of the WRJC. His history in this valley is a lot longer than mine, as he has been spending time here for well over thirty years. He also has served as a leader in several Jewish organizations in Vancouver, so he is now sharing his expertise with us. Together we have worked on a leadership development plan for the WRJC so that the future of our community is assured.

As always, I want to thank every person who has volunteered his/her time and effort to the WRJC community this year. They make all of the above possible.

Of course, we extend a special thank you to Rabbi Robbi and to Claudie. Without you, none of this could happen.

We are all looking forward to the time when we can truly celebrate together and share in the “nachas” of the Jewish community.

Josh and I wish all of you a Shana Tova Umetukah. May you all have a happy and healthy New Year!

Josh Kleinman & Susan Green
Please Support Our High Holy Days Appeal

The New Year will bring the Wood River Jewish Community its first real home! This is an exciting time in our journey together and we have much to be proud of looking at what is ahead of us.

Experiencing the worst pandemic in a century, being prevented from carrying on our lives as in the past, we are continuing to move forward, have sustained our community and are embarking on a new adventure with the purchase of our own building.

This was not happenstance but is grounded in the 3,500-year-old history of the Jewish people, holding tight to their faith and culture, moving continually through the worst of times endured by any people.

It is our continued strength in holding on to who we are that keeps our traditions alive and well. Without these traditions we would not have survived as a people.

Our High Holy Day services have been the most significant bringing together of our people throughout our history. This year, in spite of the pandemic we are experiencing, the Wood River Jewish Community will welcome our members and friends to pray together during our High Holy Days. With modern technology at hand, we are presently formulating the most effective way to make this a most meaningful event.

As we work to make this happen, our costs remain a reality. Our ability to meet the expenses for a full and meaningful High Holy Day program remains in your hands. These expenses are not covered by membership dues.

Rabbi Robbi Sherwin has enriched our community spiritually and is working to make our services memorable for all. Rabbi Robbi has arranged once again for Jewish musician and Cantorial Soloist, Scott Leader, to join her throughout our services.

Please be generous and show your support by making a contribution now to cover our High Holiday expenses. You will enrich yourself, our community and our Jewish tradition by doing so. Next year may we celebrate together in our new home!

With our very best wishes for a happy, healthy and peaceful New Year,

Claudie Goldstein
Director of Development

Development committee members: Penny Coe, Steve Dorinson, Judy Teller Kaye, Phil Goldstein, Joanne Mercer, Eileen Prager, Bob Safron, Rhea Schwartz

See donation form following page
Important Note About the Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur Schedule

Below, you will find a draft schedule for the High Holy Days. Rabbi Robbi and WRJC are working hard to best adapt our meaningful services to the digital medium. We are planning and working with great attention and sincere intention to ensure that the coming Days of Awe are truly ‘awe’some and equally special, and we look forward to worshipping and being in virtual community with you. We can’t wait to see everyone’s shayna punims (beautiful faces) on Zoom!

Put these dates and times in your calendar for now, and we’ll make sure to send a final version, along with Zoom links, as we get closer to the High Holy Days.

Friday, September 18
7:00 PM: Erev Rosh Hashanah

Saturday, September 19
10:00 AM: Morning Rosh Hashanah Morning Service
4:00 PM : Shofar and Tashlich Service
at Draper Preserve, Hailey in person!
Bring bread/cracker crumbs to “cast away” your sins. We will be practicing social distancing.

Sunday, September 27
7:00 PM PM: Kol Nidre Service

Monday, September 28
10:00 AM: Yom Kippur Morning Service
3:00 PM: Afternoon Healing service
4:00 PM: Children’s Service
5:00 PM:Yizkor (Memorial Service)
5:30 PM: Neilah (Concluding Service)

Borrow Prayer Books

For those that need to borrow a machzor/prayer book, we will have two opportunities to come by to safely pick one up at the office. Please remember that these will be loaned on an honor system and are expected to be returned after the holiday.

Pick up Times:

Thursday, Sept 10, 10:30 -12:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept 14  10:30-12:30 p.m.
Please Support Our High Holy Days - Season of Giving

HIGH HOLY DAYS SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES
SPONSOR ON YOUR OWN, OR JOIN WITH ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY TO CO-SPONSOR!

Cantor ○ Eve RH ○ RH Morning ○ Kol Nidre ○ YK Morning ○ Yizkor ○

$5,000 ○ $2,500 ○ $1,500 ○ $1,000 ○ $500 ○ $250 ○ OTHER: ○

CHECK      CREDIT CARD      DONATE ON LINE: wrjc@wrjc.org      CALL THE OFFICE: 208-726-1183

CREDIT CARD #:________________________________ Exp. Date ________ CV________

NAME: _____________________________ BILLING ADDRESS: ___________________________

ZIP CODE:__________________ PHONE:_______________ EMAIL:___________________________

Please recognize this donation in honor/memory of: ____________________________________

Please keep this gift anonymous. ☐

THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR SUPPORT

L' Shanah Tovah!

For everyone's health and safety our High Holy Days services will be via Zoom this year. Congregants who have renewed their memberships for 2020-21 will receive a link in their emails in the first weeks of September. If you are not a member we would be delighted to have you join us.

Guests and Non-Members: Everyone is welcome to attend our services. We do not “sell tickets”. We do ask non-members for a $75 donation for an individual or $150 per family in order to share the costs of maintaining Jewish resources in this community. These donations are for the whole High Holy Day season including multiple services, events and teaching events we will be hosting via Zoom. These are suggested donation amounts and we ask that people only donate what they are able. Please do not let cost affect your decision to join us, donation amounts are at your discretion. If you would like to participate for the 5781 season please email Claudie at claudie@wrjc.org. Links will be emailed to you in the second week of September. We look forward to seeing you virtually.
Make Your Place a Sacred Space for the Yamim Nora’im (High Holidays)

With the Covid pandemic and restrictions on group gatherings, our kitchens have become our classrooms, our basements our yoga studios, and the dining room has become our office. Where then, is our synagogue? The rabbis asked this same question right after the destruction of the Temple. Without a localized place of worship, how could we pray together? We are the inheritors of their answer: Our home would become our “mikdash m’at,” a miniature sanctuary, a holy place. Our current challenge is to create a sacred space at home while we are in front of our computers, on Zoom or live-streaming services. What can help us create both that spiritual mindset and sacred refuge?

We will not able to gather in our beautiful shared space at St. Thomas for the for the High Holy Days. We will all certainly miss being together in person with the majesty of large crowds standing close, singing moving ancient and modern tunes in harmony. But we will be “together” safely in our own homes. This year, we have a unique opportunity to create a sacred space in our home, a mikdash m’at for the High Holidays and beyond. These ten suggestions collected by Rabbi Elyse Goldstein (Toronto CN) are meant to help you enhance the High Holy Day experience at home, while creating a communal atmosphere for us all:

1. Choose your prayer space carefully in advance by spending a few moments of individual contemplation/family discussion. Involve your family in creating this special space. Do not wait until the last minute!

2. Once you have chosen your space, say a blessing or kavannah (“holy intention”) over it to mark it as your mikdash m’at. Suggestions of verses and blessings are given below.

3. What chair will you sit on? Put a cushion or festive pillow on it, or drape it with a tallit, special piece of fabric, or scarf.

4. Change where you put your computer from a workspace to a contemplative space by covering the desk or table with a white tablecloth, white runner, or white placemat, and a vase of flowers.

5. Find meaningful objects to grace your space. On Rosh Hashana, include holiday objects like candlesticks and kiddush cup, apples and honey. On Yom Kippur, you can place cherished mementoes, family heirlooms, and photos of loved ones to surround you. If you own a shofar, put it where it is visible.

6. If possible, move the computer space back so that you are “watching” the screen more than “manipulating” it. Consider connecting your computer to a TV screen so it feels less like a work device.

7. Try to limit or disconnect auditory distractions. You can turn off your email and text message ping sounds, and/or close your email program and other apps so you can be fully present during the service.

8. Wear clothing that makes you feel as if you are entering a spiritual space. Kippah and tallit are welcome if they help you express a connection to this special worship. Why not dress up for the holidays if it helps you feel special/connected or holy?
9. Be sure you have your *machzor* (High Holidays prayerbook) with you, just like on past High Holidays when we gathered. As you feel its cover and edges and flip its pages, remember the times you’ve used one before, who you sat near, what moved you in the service, the first time you used it, etc. If you buy a new one, inscribe it with a meaningful phrase for this year. We will use the beautiful, poetic *machzor*, *Mishkan HaNefesh*, as we have for the past four years. The prayers will not be on the screen, so having a machzor means you can participate more fully. For those in town, we will be distributing them. If you are not with us here in the Valley, we will also help you order one, or you can contact a local Reform synagogue to borrow or purchase them – they come in two volumes: one each for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

10. Make it a habit to join the services we already offer now. Praying as any other activity becomes more comfortable and “natural” when we practice it. The more services you attend before the High Holy Days, the more you will be able to enjoy them and to find the right *kavannah*, mental and spiritual setting.

We all appreciate the time and effort it takes to make your *mikdash m’at* a reality. Think of it as a “work in progress!” May it add joy and meaning to your holiday - and may we all be together to greet each other in person soon! From our sacred space to yours, we wish you a very warm and safe New Year!

Shana tovah!
Rabbi Robbi Sherwin & Mark Jordan

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**Verses and Blessings to Help Create Your Sacred Space/mikdash m’at:**

**Numbers 24:5**

מַה־טוּ֥בוּ אוֹהָלָךְ יַעֲקֹֹ֑ב מִשְׁכְּנֹתְךָּ יִשְׁרָאֵ֖ל׃

Mah tovu ohalecha Ya’akov, mishkenotecha Yisrael!

*How good are your tents, O Jacob, Your sacred places, O Israel!*

**2. Birkat Habayit (Blessing for the Home):**

Let no sorrow come through this gate.
Let no trouble come in this dwelling.
Let no fright come through this door.
Let no conflict come to this section.
Let there be blessing and peace in this place.

**3. Exodus 20:21:**

בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַזְּכִֶֽיָּר אֶת־שֶם אֱלֹהֵינוּ אַל־יַוֵּשׁ בָּהֶם B’chol hamakom asher azkir et-shem Eloheynu al-yoash b’ham

*In every place where My name is mentioned, I will come to you and bless you.*

**4. Exodus 3:5**

כִֶ֣י הַמָּק֗וֹם אֲשֶׁ֤ר אַתָּֽה עוֹמֵ֧ד עָלִָ֔יו אַדְמַת־קֶֹ֖ד שֶׁ֜הוּא׃

Ki hamakom asher ata ohmeid alav admat kodesh hu

*Indeed, the place on which you stand is holy ground.*

**5. Psalms 121:8**

יְֵֽׁהוָ֗ה יִשְׁמָר־צ אתְׁךָֹ֥ו וּבוֹא ֹ֑ךָ מ ֵֵֽ֝עַתָ֗ה וְׁעַד־עוֹלֵָֽם׃

Adonai yishmar tzayt’cha u’voecha mayata v’ad olam

*Adonai will guard your going and coming, now and forever.*
There’s nothing sweeter than new beginnings, which is a central theme for Rosh Hashana, the first of the High Holy Days. Rosh Hashanah is the first among the High Holy Days because it is the start of a new year, literally translating to ‘head of the year’. It is a time for feasting, reflection, togetherness, renewal, forgiveness, and preparation.

The Symbolic Shofar
In the Torah, Rosh Hashanah is referred to as Yom Teruah, or ‘Day of Shofar Blowing’. Indeed, the shofar is central to this holiday, symbolizing a call to wake up, think about the past year, and prepare for the judgement in the Book of Life. The shofar also reflects Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac, and the ram that took his place, this is why the shofar is made from a hollowed ram’s horn.

The blowing of the shofar may call to mind a crying voice, and this is no coincidence. As one of the major themes of Rosh Hashanah is repentance, it reflects the regrets and sins which are considered. During the morning service, the shofar will be blown 100 times, in various types of calls, from short and sharp to long and lingering as stipulated in the Torah.

Traditions of Rosh Hashanah
The greeting most often used is Shana Tova, which means ‘have a good year’ or Shana Tova U’Mitukah, which means ‘have a good and sweet new year.’ After Rosh Hashanah, and before Yom Kippur, the customary greeting is G’mar Chatimah Tovah, which means ‘a good signing/sealing’, which refers to the Book of Life and a person’s fate, which was written during Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur.

On the first afternoon of Rosh Hashanah, it is a custom to perform tashlich, where sins are ceremonially ‘cast off’ into a body of water such as a river or lake. Quite often, bread or pebbles are used to illustrate the sins. In the evening, girls and women light candles and recite blessings. On the second night of Rosh Hashana, new candles should be lit with the old flames.

The Foods of Rosh Hashanah
Feasting is a time for connection and celebration. On Rosh Hashana, many symbolic foods represent the desire for a good year ahead. For instance, the first supper of Rosh Hashanah is traditionally started with apples dipped in honey—this represents the desire for the new year to be sweet with blessings.

The symbolism does not end there: round challah loaves symbolize the yearly cycle, and they are also sweetened to call to mind blessings and positive thoughts. Pomegranates, one of the Seven Species from ancient Israel, are a central symbol of this time: they represent a wish for the coming year to be filled with good deeds and fruitfulness.

Finally, many seasonal foods fit Rosh Hashanah perfectly. Tzimmes, a carrot stew, is often served, as well as leeks, dates, and pumpkin. Generally, it is a custom to eat sweet foods to represent the sweetness of the coming year—this is the reason why bitter foods are avoided.
The culmination of the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe) is the fast day of Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement), which takes place 10 days after Rosh Hashanah. This is the day at the conclusion of which, according to tradition, God seals the Books of Life and Death for the coming year. The day is devoted to communal repentance for sins committed over the course of the previous year. Because of the nature of Yom Kippur and its associated rituals, it is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar.

Yom Kippur History
A ritual for the expiation of sins was in existence already during biblical times. However, it was only during the Second Temple Period that Yom Kippur assumed central importance as a day of mourning and abstention. By the Rabbinic Period, it had become the most important day in the Jewish liturgical calendar, an importance that the day has retained until the modern period.

Yom Kippur in the Home
Yom Kippur is the day on which we are instructed to divorce ourselves as completely as humanly possible from the mundane world in which we live, in order to devote ourselves with all our hearts and minds to our relationship with the Divine. Fasting is the most widespread manifestation of this devotion. Other examples include: refraining from washing, sexual relations, and the wearing of leather (a sign of luxury in earlier times). It is traditional to dress in white on this day, symbolizing personal purity. Because of this and the desire to avoid leather, many Jews wear sneakers, or white athletic shoes, on Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur in the Community
The liturgy of Yom Kippur is completely centered in the synagogue. It is traditional to wear a tallit, or prayer shawl, at all times in the synagogue on Yom Kippur; this is the only time during the year when the tallit is worn in the evening. There are more and longer services on this day than any other in the Jewish calendar. Yom Kippur is ushered in while it is still light out with a powerful and ancient prayer called Kol Nidrei (All Vows), in which the congregation asks that all vows made under duress during the coming year may be considered null and void before God. In many congregation, in addition to the three daily services of Ma’ariv (evening service), Shacharit (morning services), and Mincha (afternoon service), the Yom Kippur liturgy adds a special Musaf (additional) service. On Yom Kippur, Yizkor, the memorial service, is recited, as is the Avodah, a symbolic reenactment of the ancient priestly ritual for Yom Kippur. Synagogues often have discussions or contemplative music, as well. During the course of the holiday, a major component of the liturgy is the repeated communal confession of sins, the Viddui. The day closes with a unique and emotionally powerful service called Neilah, during which the liturgy imagines the gates of heaven closing at the end of the High Holiday period. Neilah, during which it is traditional to stand since the ark is opened, ends with a long blast of the shofar or ram’s horn, understood by many as signifying God’s redemptive act in answer to true repentance.

Yom Kippur Theology and Themes
The overarching theme of Yom Kippur is repentance. During the holiday all thoughts are supposed to be centered on this theme. From Kol Nidrei to the repeated Viddui to Neilah, the day revolves around the theme of communal repentance for sins committed during the past year, in order that both the community and the individual be inscribed in the Book of Life for the coming year.

G’mar Chatimah Tovah – may you be written & sealed for a good year.
The Wood River Jewish Community Book honors the memories of loved ones throughout our community. This year, we will have virtual Yizkor Book that will be shared in advance of Yom Kippur.

For those unable or uncomfortable accessing the book via virtual means, we will make printed copies available at that time.

Below is a form for the Book of Remembrance to be returned it to the office by September 11, 2020. It is common to make a donation in memory of your loved one during this season. Please know we are grateful for any donation you are comfortable in sending. A suggested amount is $18 (chai) for each name you are remembering during the High Holy Days. We thank you for your generosity. If you have any questions you can contact Claudie Goldstein at the office (208-726-1183).

You may also wish to purchase a permanent plaque to be hung on the Memorial Wall in the office library. The cost of the plaque is $320. Please contact the office for more information.

YIZKOR BOOK FORM

Loved one(s) who have passed away in 5780, October 1st, 2019– present

________________________________

________________________________

Loved one(s) who have passed away in prior years

________________________________

________________________________

Yizkor Book Donation: $ ________

YIZKOR PLAQUE FORM

Name to be engraved on plaque: (name in Hebrew also, if known)______________________________

English date of death: ____________________________

Hebrew date of death: ____________________ or Secular date of birth: ____________________________

To be observed on which date (circle one): Hebrew Secular

Ordered by: _______________________________ Date: _______________________________

Yom Kippur Food Drive

Please bring a donation of food to place in the barrel put outside of the WRJC office during the High Holy Days. Please bring only non-perishables: canned goods, boxed pasta or rice dishes, cooking oil, nut butters, healthy snack items. This is our chance for the WRJC to make a meaningful contribution to the Hunger Coalition.
One of the most in-demand and highly regarded music producers in the Jewish world, Scott Leader is also a songwriter, performer and cantorial soloist.

An accomplished pianist, Scott began his career as a song leader for NFTY while growing up in New Jersey mastering his second instrument – the guitar. Scott holds a Master's Degree in Education from Arizona State University and degrees in Geology and Judaic Studies from the University of Arizona. While an undergraduate, he taught music at Temple Emanu-El in Tucson with friend and music partner, (Cantor) Billy Tiep. As energetic song leaders in the Reform movement, they played across the US as a duo and were soon joined by fellow Greene Family Camp song leader, and future Sababa partner, (Cantor) Robbi Sherwin.

Scott taught science and music at the Austin Jewish Academy in Austin, TX, was director of Camp Isaiah in Los Angeles, became cantorial soloist at Temple Sinai, Denver, CO, and now serves as the music director of Congregation Kehilah in Scottsdale, AZ. Scott's solo discography includes “Lift my Eyes” (2003) and “Gates” (2006) and 3 albums with his band, Sababa, Pray for the Peace, (2008,) It’s All Good, (2011,) and Shalosh, (2015.) Scott has produced and performed on over 100 albums of contemporary Jewish music and over 350 albums of secular music. Scott owns Brick Road Studio in Scottsdale, a high-end recording studio drawing clients of all genres from around the world, where he is producing, recording, and mixing.

High Holiday Services Online
Creating a sense of togetherness in this time of separation by Scott Leader

Shana Tova!

As we bring another year to an end and reflect on how we may have transgressed, and pledge to renew ourselves for the year ahead, we are challenged in doing so due to the current circumstances. Just like the other facets of our lives our services are also impacted in the same ways. As a participant in High Holiday services it will be challenging to feel the sense of awe we get being in our sacred spaces being near the Torah, and more importantly, being together in our spaces. However, as we have grown accustomed to having our business meetings, classes, and even our social events via Zoom online, we will also adapt and hopefully find the same meaning in our virtual gathering for the High Holy Days.

Participating in t’filah while being at home might feel strange but for many communities, the “new normal.” What is challenging for me as a leader (no pun intended): effectively leading music and t’filah from the bema and from my daily workspace. For me, there has always been a tough balance between “leading” music on the bema and “performing” music for a congregation. Its hard to articulate how this is done, but it is something I have worked on for decades. Standing on the bema, wearing a suit and tie (which is not a regular part of my daily life) and being in the presence of the Torah helps create that sense of awe. It also imparts some weight of responsibility for me to find that balance to lead the congregation and not simply perform a concert, like I do normally. The challenge for me, and Rabbi Sherwin, is to find that balance and convey this over our virtual space which is not easy! One of the best parts about leading music is the spontaneous moments of unplanned harmony, or a melody that is new but catches on quickly with the congregation. When these unplanned moments happen, I feel it, and I believe the congregation feels it too, which creates that sense of togetherness that I believe is the entire point of doing to synagogue. It will be difficult to have these moments naturally occur without being able to sing in harmony simultaneously or use eye contact to signal we’re going to sing something unplanned etc.

I am honored to be a part of your community again this year. It’s my hope that even though we will not be in the same room together, that I can convey the sense of sharing music with you and that “separately-together” we can create a virtual holy space during our services.
Believe it or not, this September will mark 136 years since the High Holidays were first celebrated in the Wood River Valley.

“All the business establishments of devout and believing Jews in Hailey were closed Sunday evening at 6 o’clock, and remained closed until about 7 o’clock last evening,” read an article from Tuesday, September 30, 1884 in the Idaho Weekly Keystone. “For the first time in the history of Wood River,” it continued, “the Jewish people came together and observed [Yom Kippur] by participating in the usual religious ceremonies, which were held in Masonic Hall.”

I’m not an expert on Idaho’s history, but I was intrigued by a sentence in the recent WRJC Building Campaign materials that referred to our community as the “continuation of a rich Jewish history in Idaho.” So I turned to an archive of Idaho’s historic newspapers, and was stunned to find pages of evidence about our collective Jewish past—a past that raises interesting questions, tensions, and lessons for today.

The Keystone article about Yom Kippur 1884 explains that the “usual” services were attended by 27 local Jews plus three visitors from Salt Lake City, and were followed by a break—the fast banquet, replete with “fresh oysters, speckled Eastern trout, stuffed spring chicken, stuffed teal duck, fresh oyster salad, [and] English plum pudding.” The banquet was, in turn, followed by a party at the Hailey Hotel at which “social converse and singing of operatic and other songs were kept up until a late hour.”

Although the Jewish community was small, so were the towns of Hailey and Ketchum, established amidst a mining boom just a few years earlier. A listing of Yom Kippur attendees reveals that many of the Wood River Valley’s early Jewish residents had German last names—Gottlieb, Hirsch, Marx, Schwartz, Schweitzer—so it seems likely that they were immigrants or children of immigrants, caught in the great wave of German Jewish immigration to the United States in the mid-19th century. Evidently, many did not observe the rules of kashrut.

I find it difficult to imagine what it must have felt like to be a German Jewish immigrant living in a mining town in Idaho in the 1880s. An ocean away, Jews in Europe were experiencing unprecedented social and political upheavals, including violent pogroms and the birth of Zionism. In the eastern United States, record numbers of Yiddish-speaking Jews were settling in major urban centers like New York, making their mark on this country and coming into conflict with some of the established communities already here. But those pioneering Jews who chose to join the mining boom and move west, like our Idahoan forebears, are challenging to place amidst the larger narratives that we usually tell about Jewish history.

The Wood River Valley’s most prominent early Jews seem to have been the Friedmans, including Simon J. (S.J.) Friedman, his cousin Simon M. (S.M.) Friedman, and their wives and children. The Illustrated History of the State of Idaho explains that S.J. was born in Germany in 1846, emigrated to Salt Lake City in 1869 or 1870, and then moved to Hailey in the spring of 1881 after “learning of the great silver and gold discoveries in the Wood River country.”

According to the Blaine County Historical Museum, his cousin S.M. arrived that same year and brought the first sheep to the Valley. Both S.J. and S.M. opened dry goods stores in Hailey, and S.M. went on to serve on the first Board of Trustees of the newly-incorporated city of Hailey. S.M.’s children, Leon and Lucile, donated the land for the present-day Friedman Memorial Airport to the city in 1930.

Both the land for Friedman Memorial Airport and the building for the Blaine County Historical Museum were donated to the city of Hailey by the Friedman family. In this late 19th century image from the museum’s collection, the Friedman family name can be seen emblazoned on the side of the building that would become the museum almost a century later.
A Rich Jewish History

One of the challenges of studying Jewish history is the temptation to assign a significance to Jewish identity that may not have been authentic to people’s personal experiences. As a contemporary observer, it feels noteworthy that the Friedmans were Jewish. But what if Judaism did not hold great meaning in their lives? This kind of qualitative assessment is impossible to make without evidence in the historical record.

What is clear from historic newspapers is that the Friedmans did not hide their Judaism. On at least two occasions, in 1886 and 1892, S.J. Friedman placed advertisements in the Wood River Times announcing the closure of his dry goods store for the High Holidays and asking patrons to place their orders before 6 PM on Erev Rosh Hashanah. That kind of openness indicates that S.J. Friedman’s Jewish faith, while exotic, was likely not a threat to business in the town. On another occasion, on June 29, 1891, the Times published an announcement of a brit milah in the Friedman family: “Dr. Theodore Meyer, of Salt Lake City, arrived last Saturday, to visit with his sister, Mrs. S.J. Friedman, and to perform a Jewish rite upon the young heir of the house, who has been named Maximilian.”

When I consider this history, it becomes apparent that the Wood River Valley is covered in unmarked Jewish historical sites. 116 S Main St in Hailey, now the Mint Bar, was the site of those first Yom Kippur services in 1884 (the Masonic Lodge moved locations after the original building was destroyed in a fire). The original houses of both S.J. and S.M. Friedman are still standing at 123 2nd Ave N and 215 E Silver St in Hailey, respectively. Multiple buildings in Hailey were once Jewish-owned businesses, including the building at 218 N Main St that now houses the Blaine County Historical Museum. And St. Thomas Episcopal Church and the office at 471 Leadville Ave have both become part of our Jewish story, too, serving as homes for our community for multiple decades.

The establishment of a synagogue in the Wood River Valley will be a significant historical feat and, I’ve now learned, truly a continuation of a rich Jewish history in the region. As we prepare for an exciting new era in our community’s history, we should remember our roots and the long road it took to get here.

This holiday card from S.J. Friedman, which includes visual themes related to Christmas, is an interesting reflection of the life of a Jewish merchant in a Christian town. Today, the card is in the collection of the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.
Having closed on the purchase of the Wood River Jewish Community’s first permanent home and place of worship, the High Holidays are a time to give and give thanks for the generosity of those who support our community.

The WRJC Building Campaign came about during an inauspicious time in our world. Just weeks after going under contract to purchase the property at 95 Bedayana in Sun Valley, COVID-19 hit, and a global economic crisis was upon us. Like most things for the Jewish people historically, nothing comes easy. It was through the efforts of a committed Building Campaign Committee and the leadership of our beloved Co-President Sue Green, the WRJC’s Board of Directors, and many dedicated members of our community that we were able to move forward with this ambitious endeavor.

A project that once seemed impossible, today, is a reality and can continue to be successful with your help.

So many WRJC members have stepped forward to give, as well as many Jewish non-WRJC members in our community (who will hopefully become members). These donations have created a level of financial support that the Wood River Jewish Community has never seen. With all this said, the Wood River Jewish Community now owns the property and building in an all-cash purchase.

We want to thank all you have donated and of course, with the High Holidays upon us, look forward to your continued support for the WRJC and its activities during this season.

Warmest,

The WRJC Building Campaign Committee: Co-Chairs, Jeff Rose & Marty Lyon
Committee Members: Bob Safron, Ron Greenspan, Phil Goldstein, Juli Roos, Judith Teller Kaye
THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

**Founding Benefactor : $200,000 and above**
(includes building, chapel or classroom naming rights)

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**Leader: $50,000 +**

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Bunker and Larry Frank
Juli & Michael Roos

Marc and Jane Schorr
Gail Stern
Stuart and Tracy Simon
Len & Phyllis Schlessinger

Continued ....
Our Committees

- **Finance Committee**: Chair: Judith Teller-Kaye
  
  Ron Greenspan

- **Adult Education Committee**: Co-Chairs: Lenny Cohen and Harriet Parker-Bass. Rabbi Robbi, Josh Kleinman

- **Ritual Committee**: Co-Chairs: Buzz Coe and Dana Bernston
  
  Jim Fabe, Joe Schultz, Coni Foster, Sue Green

- **High Holidays Subcommittee**: Harriet Parker-Bass, Brooke Diamond, Al Luray

- **Development Committee**: Chair: Claudie Goldstein, Penny Coe, Steve Dorinson, Judy Teller Kaye, Phil Goldstein, Joanne Mercer, Eileen Prager, Bob Safron, Rhea Schwartz

- **Membership Committee**: Chair: Claudie Goldstein

- **Outreach Young Families**: Noa Ries, Juli Roos, Jami Delgado

- **Children's Education Committee**: Co-Chairs: Noa Ries, Dana Bernston, Rabbi Robbi, Jami Delgado

- **Rabbi Liaison Committee**: Juli Roos, Joanne Mercer, Josh Kleinman

- **Building Committee**: Co-Chairs: Marty Lyon, Jeff Rose, Ron Greenspan, Bob Safron, Phil Goldstein, Judith Teller Kaye, Juli Roos

- **Architectural Building Committee**: Marty Kaplan, Sammy Mailman, Joyce Hart, Joe Fastow, Ken Lewis, Judith Teller Kaye, Claudie Goldstein, Rabbi Robbi

- **Caring Committee**: Chair: Coni Foster, Carol Glenn, Al and Brenda Hackel, Karen Saks, Dora Levin, Margery Friedlander, Juli Roos

- **Sun Valley Jewish Film Festival Committee**: Chair: Linda Cooper, Jay Cooper, Buzz Coe, Penny Coe, Stan and Harriet Joseph, Fran Michael, Karen Saks, Ken and Vonnie Molkner, Ellen and Joseph Fastow, Lois Rosen, Bob Safron.

- **Social Committee**:
  - Picnic. Volunteers needed
  - Chanukah. Volunteers needed
  - Passover. Volunteers needed
  - Summer ladies Lunch: Chair: Ellen Fastow
  - Winter Ladies Lunch: Chair: Sammy Mailman
We are so excited to reunite with the children of the Wood River Jewish Community. Despite the challenges this year has brought, our children have shown up with resilience and positive attitudes. We have much to be grateful for and the future of this community and strength of our Jewish values is one such thing.

Our Sunday School lessons will recommence in September. This year, we will have Morah Dana Berntson assisted by Morah Eden with the wonderful Rabbi Robbi in attendance whenever possible.

In order to recommence our children's education, we will be holding the classes outside at the Rotary Park. The younger kids will attend from 3:30-4:30. The BBMP pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah group will attend 4:30-5:30.

Since we will be holding the classes outside, we will plan just 6 weeks at a time so we can adjust for weather and also the state of COVID19 within our county.

In order to make these sessions as productive as possible, as well as insure the safety of our children, we need parent participation. A signup sheet and COVID release will be distributed separately.

Children’s Education Team:
Dana Bernston, Jami Delgado, Keri Desler, Margo Ramsay, Noa Ries & Rabbi Robbi

Our Bat Mitzvah Girl

Rowan Desler

Hello I am Rowan Desler and I have been working hard to prepare for my Bat Mitzvah on October 10, 2020.

Being Jewish is a big part of who I am, it has shaped my understanding of this world. I have learned so much working with Dana and the Rabbi.

I love how kindness and generosity are so important and that giving back to the community is a life-long commitment. For my Mitzvah project I am going to be working with The Hunger Coalition in some capacity when this paramedic is behind us. I have learned that many in our community are less fortunate and I want to help. That is why having my Bat Mitzvah is very important to me and my family. I hope when I am older I will be able to pass down all the knowledge I have of this beautiful religion to my children.

I want to thank all of you for supporting me and my family. I cannot thank you guys enough.
It is that time of year when we ask each of our WRJC members to renew their membership for the upcoming year (beginning July 1, 2020).

At the same time, we encourage our non-member Jewish friends, mostly part timers, to consider joining our community and become members.

The past 44 years has seen steady growth in our small but vibrant Jewish community in the Wood River Valley - a community which provides a religious, spiritual, educational and cultural home to our diverse membership.

Our common denominator has been that we as individuals want to join together as a community to acknowledge and experience our Jewishness and experience our Jewish identity in various ways. Membership in the Wood River Jewish Community now surpasses 180 family units.

Your support is essential to making all our events a success. Your dues cover only 36% of the cost of providing our education, religious and cultural programs. The balance is covered by the generosity of our members and friends. If you are able, please consider voluntarily making a contribution over and above your membership, knowing that you are helping to cover the services and programs which are at the heart of our WRJC’s mission.

Thank you in advance for renewing your membership and continuing as a part of our community. And to our nonmember friends who are new to our community and would like to join us, we welcome you with open heart and friendship.

Kindest regards,
Claudie Goldstein
Executive Director/Development Director

Development/Membership Committee: Steve Dorinson, Penny Coe, Phil Goldstein, Joanne Mercer, Eileen Prager, Bob Safron, Rhea Schwartz, Judy Teller Kaye.

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**Family: $800.00 + $100 Security:$900**

**Young Family initiative: $400**

**$Single: 500.00 + $50 Security:$550**

**$200.00 Be a Blessing**

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Your donation is tax-deductible. Questions? Please call 208-726-1183 or email us: claudie@wrjc.org
Laura and Scott Jordan

Laura and Scott Jordan recently rejoined the WRJC. The couple moved to Ketchum from Chicago in 2003, a few years after starting an online business which gave them the freedom to live anywhere they wanted. Laura is a native Chicagoan whose family began visiting Sun Valley in the 1940s. Originally from Philadelphia, Scott’s trek west started when his family moved to Cincinnati. After finishing school, Scott headed to Chicago and met Laura when they were both studying for the bar exam.

The proud parents of three standard poodles, Laura and Scott spend their free time hiking with Susie, Rhonda and Sabrina. When not on the trails, they are busy running SCOTTeVEST—their online clothing company with a new flagship store in Ketchum—and designing dog accessories and writing children’s books for their other venture, YAY Margaux! The couple lives above their store at the “Poodle Resort & Spa” where their girls run the show. Please feel free to drop by our SCOTTeVEST store, right behind Hotel Ketchum, anytime to say hi and meet us and the poodles.

Ellen and Rob Raede

Rob & Ellen have been coming to the valley for 32 years. They live (most of the time) in Santa Barbara, CA and love travel, outdoor stuff, and eating well. They have two great sons, one of whom is married, lives in Boston and has thoughtfully provided perfect twin grandchildren. The other son lives close to home near Santa Barbara, and they enjoy seeing him often.

Rob & Ellen very much look forward to getting to know the people of the Wood River Jewish community better, and Rob will be helping lead the High Holiday services this year.

Susan Passovoy

Susan first came to the the Valley to ski in the mid 60’s. She continued to come from her home in San Francisco as a visitor, then as a part time resident, and finally as full time resident.

She is married to Bob Kaplan, and enjoys her step children and grandchildren who live in Colorado and California. She loves to hike with their two dogs, ride one of her horses, ride her bike, and is learning to play bridge.

Susan congratulates the WRJC on securing a permanent home, and looks forward to our first gathering there.
Welcome our 5 new Board Members

Coni Foster

Like many people in the Wood River Valley I moved here to be closer to family. Every year when I came to visit from South Florida I’d stop in to the WRJC and chat with Claudie. Little did I know what a good idea that was. When I moved here 2 ½ years ago I already felt connected. There are a couple of characteristics that would accurately describe me. Friendly and caring are the most obvious. Through the years I have been most drawn to service and volunteer environments. In New Mexico I was involved with Altrusa International, a women’s service organization. Florida provided more varied opportunities for me. Working for the food division of Jewish Community Services of South Florida and the Greater Miami Region of Hadassah were fulfilling ways for me to reconnect with the Jewish community. The benefit of my involvement at Temple Bat Yam of East Fort Lauderdale was a way to be of service and afforded me a beautiful temple family. I served on the leadership track for both the board of directors of the sisterhood and the temple. A CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) internship with Vitas Hospice and the years as a volunteer facilitator with the Children’s Bereavement Center’s partnership with Vitas providing peer support for grieving children and their families was the most meaningful experience of my life.

Now in Idaho I have the pleasure of volunteering for Hospice of the Wood River Valley, the Senior Connection and being part of the WRJC. The bonus for me is growing a new “temple” family!! The easiest way to do that was to get involved. I have enjoyed being part of Souper Suppers, helping with the Ladies Luncheon and the Summer Picnic. You may have seen me handing out prayer books at various services held at St. Thomas Episcopal Church. Karen Saks has very graciously handed over to me the Caring Committee’s Chair.

Jeffrey Rose

Jeffrey Rose is a member of the WRJC Building Committee. Professionally, he has been involved in guiding marketing and public relations activities for some of the top businesses and consumer lifestyle brands in America. As a co-founder of The Rose Group, with his wife Elana, the agency has represented clients ranging from Moet & Chandon to Sony Entertainment to Bristol Farms to Brookfield Properties. Additionally, Jeffrey has worked on a range of high-profile reputation management and crisis communications issues such as the release of US journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee who were held captive in North Korea. He was a producer of the hit independent film WAITRESS, which spun-off the Tony-nominated Broadway play of the same name. Most recently, as one of the early employees of Amazon Studios, he shaped marketing and PR campaigns for a number of TV shows winning multiple Golden Globe and Emmy Awards, including THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL. Previously an executive at Miramax Films and an agent at William Morris Agency, Rose is a graduate of UCLA, with a BA in political science.

He lives in Los Angeles and in Sun Valley where his daughter Eden has been teaching WRJC Sunday School and Hebrew School while attending Community School - along with her brother Auggie.
Julie Roos

As many of you know, we moved here full time from San Francisco 25 years ago. We had been vacationing here since the 1980’s with my husband Michael’s family, who have been coming here since the 1940’s. Michael and I raised our two children here, Greg (29), who lives and works in Seattle and Nicole (26), who lives in Sausalito and works in San Francisco, though as I write this, they are both working remotely from their respective apartments. I am a graduate of UC Berkeley, where I studied communications and graphic design. I was in graphic design and communications for close to 30 years, but now work part time in retail. Shortly after moving here in 1995, we met Harriett Parker Bass and Jill Eshman and joined the WRJC.

Since then, I have either served on the board, was co-president of the WRJC or on any one of a dozen WRJC committees. I love our small, intimate community and look forward to serving again.

Ron Greenspan

Ron Greenspan, and his wife Susan, have owned a home in Sun Valley for 11 years and have been permanent residents for the past three years.

They also maintain a condo in Los Angeles and their son (Douglas), daughter-in-law (Lauren) and granddaughter (Marley) live in New York. Ron worked on the WRJC real estate committee previously when the existing office lease and alternative sites were being evaluated and is currently serving on the Building Committee in connection with the purchase and fundraising for the Elkhorn building.

Susan and he have been enthusiastic participants with Lew’s Wednesday morning Jewish Bike Brigade! For a while more, Ron still works. He is a senior executive with the largest financial and operational restructuring firm and co-leads its global real estate restructuring and finance group. He is a recovering lawyer, having previously practiced law after graduating from Harvard Law School. He is a Fellow of the American College of Bankruptcy, is a member of its Finance Committee, and is a trustee of the affiliated non-profit Foundation which is the largest nationwide provider of grants to pro bono bankruptcy and non-profit financial literacy organizations. He is a Certified Turnaround Professional (CTP) and Certified Insolvency and Restructuring Advisor (CIRA), skills we hope the WRJC never needs.

Phil Goldstein

Over the last 40 years I have founded and operated businesses in the fields of electronics, real estate and finance. I currently manage a large portfolio of secured real estate loans funded by my company, primarily in California. I also manage a personal real estate portfolio. I grew up in a Zionist family in New York that was very committed to our Ashkenazi heritage. Our family continues that tradition; my wife and I are very active in and support various Jewish organizations locally and in Israel.

We have three children: our eldest son Noah is an electrical engineer for a medical start-up in Boston, our son Ari works in the Office of the President & CEO of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York, and our daughter Hallie made aliyah in November and is currently studying in an ulpan program and living in Tel Aviv. My wife, Cathy, practiced law for almost 30 years, served as a trustee for several more years, and has served on numerous nonprofit boards over the last 40 years.
My father hid from the Nazis in a coffee pot. True story

When a parent tells a child stories about their lives, the stories live in the child’s imagination until reality intervenes. One of the most powerful stories in my dad’s Holocaust experience involved an incredible escape from death that I thought I comprehended until I met concrete, physical evidence at the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust last November in New York. There was a family wedding on the East Coast so it was an opportunity for me to see the award winning exhibit, “Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away.”

My father, of blessed memory, was in a total of 12 concentration camps, most notoriously Auschwitz-Birkenau. Some of the camps were railroad construction facilities that closed and relocated. He was then sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau and to the coalmine sub-camp, Jaworzno. Others were camps he passed through during evacuation from the Auschwitz network of camps and the Death March. It was during the retreat away from the advancing Soviet troops that this particular brush with death occurred.

Prisoners from Jaworzno were marched to Blechhammer where they were deposited. The prisoners previously held in that camp were evacuated and my dad’s group suddenly found themselves without guards. The starving men went in search of food, with my dad going into the camp kitchen. He found “beautiful potatoes” that were cooked but not distributed. In an effort to bring some food back to his brother in the barracks, he took a piece of wire and tightened the bottom of his pant legs and began storing potatoes around his legs.

He heard shooting and saw a prisoner shot dead in the doorway of the kitchen. The Nazis had returned and he knew he would be shot on sight, but where could he hide? As he told the story, he climbed into a large pot, the kind used to make “coffee” for thousands of prisoners, and “closed the door.” Closed the door? Did he mean he closed the lid? That always puzzled me and I didn’t know if maybe he didn’t know the right word in English? No, he was right and I was confused and it took the exhibit to set me straight.

While walking through the exhibit, listening to the museum-provided headphones, I heard the commentary explaining a prisoner’s uniform in a display case. There was the familiar striped uniform and a pair of wooden shoes. It was explained that the shoes were often problematic because prisoners got blisters and infections from wearing them. I paused and said to my companion that those wooden shoes saved my dad’s life. I was going to explain in detail later.

As I turned into the next section of the exhibit, I stopped in my tracks. There was a large cauldron. This was a “large pot, the kind used to make ‘coffee’ for thousands of prisoners.” This was the kind of pot my father hid in. Now I understood why he said he closed the “door.” The lid was hinged, not separate from the pot.

For years I had looked for photos of “the pot” my dad might have hidden in but never found it. This was a surprise and, sadly, it was after he passed away so I could not share this with him.

But wait, I have not finished the story of his brush with death. There were other prisoners in the kitchen when the shooting started. My dad and another man were resourceful enough to make use of the available pots but the other man had regular shoes and the bottom of the cauldron was still hot, so he had to get out. Nazi guards came in and shot everyone they saw in the kitchen but they didn’t see my dad because he was in the pot and had “closed the door.” If he hadn’t had wooden shoes, which provided insulation from the heat, he would not have been able to remain hidden and would not have survived. When the shooting stopped, he was the only prisoner to walk out of that kitchen alive.

He reunited with his brother and told him what happened. Shortly thereafter the Nazi guards collected the prisoners in Blechhammer and resumed their Death March. My dad and his brother got separated but both survived. After months of harrowing experiences, my dad escaped the Nazis in May, 1945.

And after years of knowing this story in the abstract, I saw concrete proof.
Jewish Agency: Israel to have 250,000 olim over next five years

The Jewish Agency estimates that Israel will see an influx of a quarter of a million immigrants over the next five years, based on the dramatic increase in interest in aliyah witnessed in the months since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This estimate was presented to President Reuven Rivlin during a visit to Ulpan Etzion, a Hebrew-language school in Jerusalem run by the Jewish Agency, on Sunday.

Since the global health crisis began, the Jewish Agency and other organizations involved in aliyah have witnessed a massive spike in the number of people making contact to inquire about aliyah and in the number of people opening aliyah files.

The new assessment takes into account these new trends, as well as information received from Jewish Agency officials on the ground around the Jewish world, and bearing in mind that in 2019, a relatively normal year for aliyah, there were around 35,000 new immigrants.

Bearing that in mind, the Jewish Agency believes that 50,000 new immigrants over the next five years is a realistic figure.

Although the actual numbers of new immigrants has declined significantly in 2020 compared to previous years due to the wholesale cancellation of commercial flights, it is thought that the coronavirus crisis has generated new circumstances for many Jews living in the Diaspora who now see new opportunities to move to Israel which may not have existed before hand.

The Jewish Agency says that it received some 90,000 calls in the first half of 2020 requesting information on aliyah, including a 31% increase in inquiries from western countries.

In addition, some 25,000 aliyah files were opened in that time, with a rise of 91% in western countries and of 400% in North America.

Speaking to students at the ulpan, Rivlin noted that they had chosen to make aliyah at a difficult time, but added that they would be able to overcome these difficulties.

Jewish Agency chairman Isaac Herzog noted that even during the greatest crises faced by the Jewish state aliyah never stopped, and expressed hope that talented Jews from around the world would continue to make aliyah even during the current pandemic.

“The waves of immigration to Israel over our history made significant contributions to the economy, culture and society of Israel,” said Herzog.

“The State of Israel must take the opportunity with both hands, to sit with the Jewish Agency and other organizations who deal with immigration and prepare a national plan for this welcome immigration and prevent a missed opportunity of historic proportions.”

Some 10,330 new immigrants came to Israel from January to July this year, compared to 19,943 in the same period in 2019.

Aliyah and Absorption Minister Pnina Tamano-Shata recently formulated a five-year plan for immigration, but its implementation depends on funding to be allocated under the pending state budget.

During Rivlin’s visit to Ulpan Etzion on Sunday, the president took the opportunity to meet some of those immigrants currently studying at the institution.

Each year, some 500 immigrants from different countries and with different professions pass through the program, so that they can be equipped with the language skills that will give them greater independence and help them to find work in Israel.
Rivlin was escorted on the visit by Herzog as well as Sam Grunwerg, world chairman of Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal.

The president met with immigrants from several countries. Among them were Noa Tumin, 26, from Moscow; Ari Sherovskey, a 32-year-old doctor from Argentina who is currently a resident at Ichilov Hospital; Roni Cohen, a 22-year-old artist from California who is part of Garin Tzabar, the IDF program for Lone Soldiers; and Eli Spektor, 21, from South Africa, who plans to enlist in the IDF in September.

Using the universal greeting of Shalom – Peace, Rivlin told the immigrant students: “Even if you don’t all speak Hebrew yet, everyone knows that beautiful Hebrew word – Shalom! Moving from one country to another is not easy,” he acknowledged. “In many cases, it carries with it feelings of alienation and loneliness. And now, the virus brings the added challenge of isolation.”

Lauding the immigrants for opting to come to Israel at this time, Rivlin said: “You chose to make aliyah to Israel at this challenging time: the time of coronavirus. The challenges you are facing will become the stories you tell your children and grandchildren. Israel is not just another country to immigrate to. We ‘go up’ to Israel. Israel is the home of the Jewish people. You are not alone: You are home.”

Reprinted from The Jerusalem Post.
August 16, 2020 - Jeremy Sharon, Greer Fay Cashman

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WRJC STANDS WITH ISRAEL

The Shofar is Published by Claudie Goldstein and produced entirely in the WRJC office.
Thinking this Holiday About Borders of Israel

According to the Bible, Abram, our forefather, was told to “go forth from your land and your birthplace to a land I will show you...” Genesis 12:1-2. The land is not described. Abram is not told about its location or its appeal, whether good or bad. Going became a matter of trust. Avram blindly left his past and his way of life and went to a land he knew nothing about. But after Abram got to the area, he was told “raise your eyes and look out from the place where you are to the North and the South and the East and the West, for all the land you see, to you I give it and to your seed forever.” Genesis 13:14-16.

The borders of his new land were limited by Avram’s eyesight. And again: “Rise, walk about the land through its length and its breadth, for to you I give it.” Genesis 13:17.

But what length and breadth? In Genesis 15:18 we read for the first time: “To your seed I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.” Genesis 15:13. For those who literally believe this promise, the promise covers an area including today’s Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria! But for most of us this language really implies the idea of “within” that gift: like within The Kingdoms of Judea and Israel.

In my forthcoming book On Zion I deal further with God’s promises to Abram. In the first part of the book I discuss the historical philosophy of Zionism while Rabbi Aubrey Glazer writes about the poetics of Post Zionism in his section of the book. Since article space in this Rosh Hashanah book is limited, I drafted this note with warm greetings for the coming Shana Tovah. For I think that Genesis 15:18 is relevant to our thinking in the present day context.

But simultaneously it also describes borders actually chosen by three tribes to settle, borders within the promised area but much tighter than the promise ‘from Egypt to Mesopotamia’. Our kingdoms also chose areas within that promise, but much narrower in scope. While borders of our nation changed many times over the ages, they were always limited to the area actually settled by Biblical Israelis. Land Settlement defined land ownership. For four thousand years we believed that the land of Zion was ours, but we defined our ownership of the land within reasonable, defensible borders, which could be settled. Even the Prophets did nothing to enlarge the claimed area in their prophecies. We read that some tribes CHOSE to settle in what is now known as Transjordan. We read that under King Solomon we occupied some land in what is now Lebanon or Syria. But neither holding lasted. So for those among us who interpret Biblical statements, Genesis 15.18 is a promise akin to Isaiah’s “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb...” An idealistic prophecy of a futuristic hope.

Throughout our history only settled areas were deemed our land. Today, only settled areas are our projected areas of ownership. Our borders of Israel will be whatever a peace process determines. For three thousand years we believed in a “social covenant” with God, a relationship similar to marriage. Creation and maintenance of Zion is not a one-time deal promised by God. It is an evolving relationship based on trust, love and faithfulness. We became a Jewish society eighteen hundred years before we established a Jewish State. In these last eighteen hundred years we created voluntary welfare associations, academies (Yeshivot), burial services (Chevre Kadisha) and organizations to care for the poor. We created an entire social network. We were a religious people. But we were not a state. We could manage our affairs but we could not prevent pogroms and the Holocaust. Israel is a society that has had to deal with creation of our own state for our social network, our defense and for greater freedom of thought. We had to invent the State, fight for it and regulate it. We marched with a love of Zion to accomplish what we could. It is still a working hypothesis. Israel changes as it grows. Sometimes, its birthing is difficult. But it lives.

In 1948, part of Jerusalem was under Jordanian occupation. In 1949 our borders were temporary. They were ceasefire borders. In 1967 we conquered Jerusalem and the Golan Heights and our borders expanded. We claimed sovereignty within these borders. We defended whatever borders we had. We argue now whether annexation of the West Bank is advisable. The very argument triggered an international movement for cooperation. Hopefully, a future settlement will set new borders. Only peace agreements will make them stable. This is how I interpret divine promises from long ago. Ben Gurion declared simply that the law is whatever the people determine it to be.
Apeirogon(n): a polygon with an infinite yet countable number of sides. This is an apt title for Colum McCann’s book set in Israel and the West Bank. The facets of each issue in this ongoing conflict are innumerable. The format of fiction has the ability to transcend binaries. This point was illustrated by Milan Kundera, when he won the Jerusalem Prize in 1985, by using Anna Karenina as his example. “The novel is an imaginary paradise of individuals. It is the territory where no one possesses the truth, neither Anna nor Karenin, but where everyone has the right to be understood”. Conflicts are too often viewed as black and white while this rarely reflects the facts on the ground. The right to be understood is what is too often overlooked.

This book is the story of two real-life fathers, united in grief, who each lost a daughter to violence: Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian and Rami Elhanan, an Israeli. Rami’s daughter, Smadar, aged 13 was killed by a suicide bomber while visiting with friends on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. Bassam’s daughter, Abir, killed at age 10 by a stray rubber bullet from the gun of an Israeli soldier. Both fathers joined the Parents Circle (theparentscircle.org.), a remarkable Israeli-Palestinian organization of families who have lost an immediate family member in the ongoing conflict. They came to see themselves in each other. Their feelings of love and devastating loss were exactly the same. They were, in fact, kindred spirits and became best of friends. The real life events reflect the infinite yet countable complexities surrounding the deaths of these precious girls and the infinite grief that follows.

The 1,001 fragmented chapters (a nod to The Thousand and One Arabian Nights) that comprise this book are also an echo of the infinite complexities of today’s Middle East. This format is unique and a bit disconcerting to some. The chapters number 1 through 500 and then count down from 500 to 1. Some chapters are just one sentence. A few are photographs and two chapters are stark blank pages. The middle sections of the book that are directly from interviews with Bassam and Rami are wrenching yet full of understanding and compassion. McCann refers to the book as a “hybrid novel” in which the form is changeable. Its position is on both sides and neither side; it presents facts that are sometimes embellished with the reworking of the fathers’ words (with their permission). This story is not linear, again adding to the fragmented and disconcerting feeling.

Yet somehow, this is a hopeful book. It is an important book. Maybe, just maybe, the humanity of individuals like Bassam and Rami can prove to be stronger than the hateful politics that has engulfed the region.
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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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