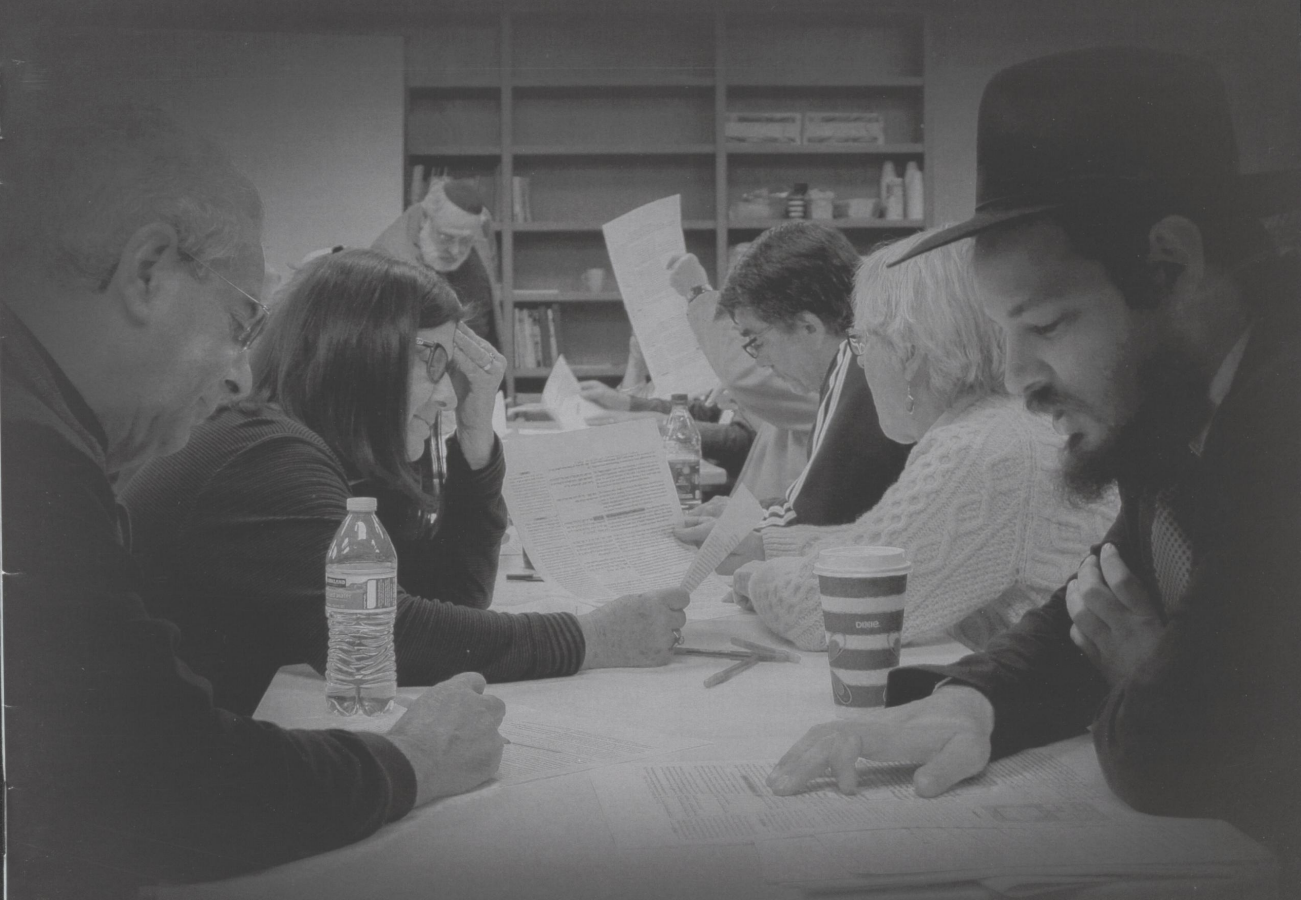


Shalom



COMMUNITY

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Rekindling Shalom in the Bluegrass:

A Welcome to *Shalom*

When I first arrived in Lexington, *shalom* was one of the first words someone spoke to me. It wasn't exactly towards just me, but the entire yoga class. Normally, I would have expected a *namaste* at the end, but it was clear, she said *shalom*. As I was resting in the dark, I remember when I had wrestled with using Sanskrit during my yoga teacher training. Wasn't there the not praying to idols or other gods? I had learned this in Sunday school from Mrs. Shudmack. What was I doing? And was it right? My Jewish friend Dara suggested I use the *Shema* instead of the Sanskrit mantra we had newly memorized. I remember barely whispering my own mantra while everyone else's voices came together. But here, in Lexington, with its Christian leanings, her *shalom* rang out full of compassion, blessing, and unapologetic.

I felt so fortunate. I had stumbled into the yoga studio with another Jewish yoga teacher. I felt a deep connection to Brooke and she made me feel at home in a new home. In my mind, I imagined finally having a close connection with another Jew. While I had been active in Jewish youth group in high school and Hillel in college, somewhere after college, Judaism became more private. Something that was part of my identity and the identity of who I was in relationship to my family, but something that remained more dormant as I cultivated my other interests, creative writing and yoga.

It took me a few weeks to ask Brooke about saying *shalom* at the end of class. Actually, I didn't. I approached her at the desk after class and asked her if she went to the temple or the synagogue. "Neither," she said, in the same soft but strong voice that reached into my heart.

"I had a lot of Jewish friends growing up. I always wanted to be." If she had not been so earnest, I think I

would have been angry. My thoughts were little poison stars shooting through my mind. Why is she taking something that is mine? Something that I struggled to own, but she has borrowed it so perfectly.

I was jealous. But in some way, perhaps, she was or had

been, too. She wanted something that I naturally had landed in. Something about my faith and culture resonated for her, and she was helping me to see how much I ached for it again at this point in my life. *Shalom*. Hello. Goodbye. Peace. *Shalom*, at it's simplest. A welcoming and a parting. And finding peace within all of that. And isn't that what friendship is? Someone who helps us to welcome and release and find a space of comfort in all of it. So, of course, I invited her over for Shabbat. Shabbat became yoga and lunch dates and realizing that we had the same passion for bringing mindfulness and embodiment to other women who need it the most. Through my friendship with Brooke, I have also returned to another aspect of Judaism that resonates the most for me. *Tikkun olam*, making the world better and being involved in social justice. Together, we teach yoga and meditation practices at The Nest. We are currently developing a curriculum that will support women and families working with the stresses that result from violence, addiction, and poverty to promote awareness, compassion, and wholeness in the midst of transition.

Sometimes I don't know which led me to which. Judaism to yoga, yoga to Judaism. Ironically, it was at the Youngstown JCC where I first took a yoga class. I now know that while something in me that had wanted them to be separate, in my world, they work better together. Complementary practices that affirm and enrich the other.

In this issue, you'll encounter others struggling with and finding identity and community. Stories of conversion, of questioning, of travel, of remembering and forgetting. It is my hope that you will find yourself in someone else's words or worlds and remember to choose connection rather than separation as I did with Brooke, and as I did within my own self.

Shalom is a kaleidoscope in which shifting creates beauty, the complex patterns of feeling. The dance of greeting and leaving only to return again. One word, or one person can be a doorway. And that is my hope for what this magazine can be. A gateway into yourself and into our community. ■

B'Shalom,

Carly



Carly Conatser | Editor-in-Chief

Jewish *Family* and Community

Rabbi Moshe Smolkin | Contributing Writer

In 1948 after 2,000 years of longing and living in distant lands, the modern State of Israel was created. Whether they came from Ethiopia, India, Iraq, France, Turkey, Britain, Argentina, Australia, or the United States, Jews came from across the globe and returned to Eretz Yisrael, to the Land of Israel.

Israel is rich with diversity: with several nationalities, political orientations, races and religious views. This richness has added to the vibrancy of Israel, though there have certainly been times of friction. Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews have had major conflicts. Secular and religious Jews have fought over the nature of the country. The political right and the left have had intense arguments over the best ways to care for society and to achieve peace. Yet in spite of the conflicts, one of the things that I loved best about living in Israel was the fact that I often felt I was among family.

The feeling of family in Israel can be both wonderful and challenging. Sometimes the interactions can feel intrusive, but there is also great comfort and warmth. Even when people gave me unsolicited advice, I knew it came from a place of caring because people saw me as part of their family.

That sense of *mishpachah*, that sense of family, is vital in bolstering community. It is that sense of family that has kept Jews united throughout the millennia. It is that sense of family that can unite

Jewish communities in Israel, and **it is that sense of family that brings our Lexington Jewish community together.**

Lexington has such an incredible Jewish community, and one of the things that makes it so beautiful is our



“ There are times where our Jewish community could have broken apart forever, but because we are family, we hold together.

sense that we are part of one Jewish family. We love one another and take care of one another. We attend each other's celebrations and support each other in times of sorrow. We learn together (like at Global Day of Jewish Learning), and we create connection (like we are doing now through Shalom Magazine).

Certainly there are differences. Members of our community span the political spectrum. We have different practices of Jewish observance. We have different understandings of God and Judaism's role in our lives, and yet we are part of a family.

That sense of family, that sense of love for one another is crucial. It means that we are committed to one another, and that though we have variety of approaches and opinions, we are devoted to taking care of one another and to keeping the family together.

It could be easy to break apart. One group of Jews might say that the *mezuzah* must be vertical. Another group might demand that the *mezuzah* be horizontal. We could easily break into factions, but no, here we compromise and allow the *mezuzah* to be diagonal.

It could be easy to break apart. One group of Jews might say that we sit for *Kaddish*. Another group might insist that we stand for *Kaddish*. We could easily break into different groups, but no, even within one congregation there can be found people who stand and people who sit.

There are times where our Jewish community could have broken apart forever, but because we are family, we hold together. We are part of a single Jewish community.

Sure, there are different congregations. That's good. It enables us to have our individual ways of praying and practicing. There were twelve tribes of Israel, each with their own emphasis, but all were tribes of Israel, all were part of the family. So too, in our Jewish community there are different ways of expressing our Judaism, and yet we are all linked together as one community.

In Judaism, a diversity of approaches is often seen as a blessing. The Talmud is filled with multiple approaches to topics, and our sages say that there are 70 ways of viewing Torah. By hearing and understanding the different points of view within our community, we deepen our respect and love for our family and come to a greater understanding of how we as a Jewish family connect with one another and with God.

May God continue to bless us with the insight that we are part of the Jewish *mishpachah*, the Jewish family. May our knowledge of one another and our respect for one another continue to grow. May our community continue to brighten our world, showing kindness and compassion. And may we reach the time when all people realize that they are sisters and brothers in one human family where each of us is a child of God. ■



Rabbi Moshe Smolkin is in his 9th year as the rabbi of Ohavay Zion Synagogue. He holds a B.A. in Mathematics from Brandeis University and a M.A.T. in Mathematics Education from Tufts University. He taught high school math for five years before attending the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University in Los Angeles, California. While in rabbinical school, he interned as an interfaith chaplain at UCLA Hospital. He also spent a year learning in Jerusalem. During the last two years of rabbinical school, he interned at Mishkon Tephilo in Venice, California. After being ordained in 2009, Rabbi Smolkin and his wife Talia moved to Lexington. Rabbi Smolkin and Talia have been blessed with two wonderful children, and are immensely grateful for our warm and caring Lexington Jewish community.

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The Jewish Sorority Girl Life at the University of Kentucky

Amy Groswald | Contributing Writer

My decision to attend The University of Kentucky was because I had a gut feeling that the university I had previously decided to attend was not the one for me. I wanted to attend a university where I felt the people were friendly and welcoming and The University of Kentucky fit this requirement for me. I also felt that UK would better prepare me for medical school and provide me with more academic and extracurricular opportunities than my initial choice. This helped me to feel more comfortable with my new choice of attending a southern university.

Since my twin sister was in a sorority at Indiana University, she encouraged me to rush and I thought nothing about the fact that I was about to be talking to hundreds of girls who have never met a Jewish person in their entire life. I remember calling my mom up after the first day and telling her how at some houses I said that I was Jewish and talked about my experience being a counselor at a Jewish summer camp.

She immediately told me not to talk about being Jewish or else I would get cut. I was surprised to hear this because everyone I talked to seemed super supportive and genuinely interested in my religion. The next couple of days of recruitment I made sure not to talk about being Jewish and left out the part about working at a Jewish summer camp.

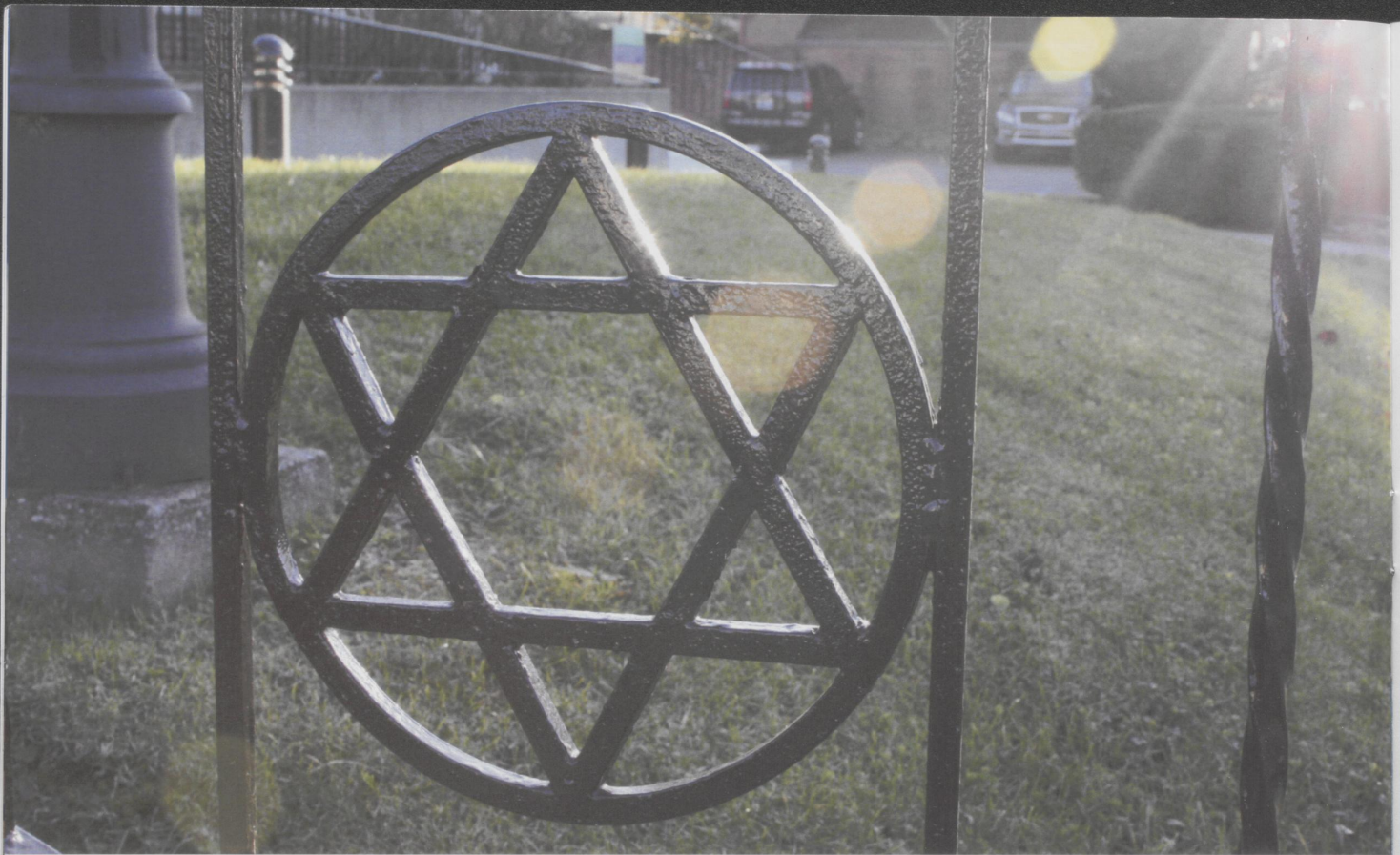
By the end of the week I found my home in my sorority, Alpha Delta Pi. I had talked to the chaplain of the sorority twice in that week and loved her charisma and her sweet personality. She was, and still is, possibly the nicest girl I have ever met. At the time when I was rushing, I did not know what a

chaplain was. Later, I found out that she is in charge of all of the religious events that go on within the sorority including prayer before meetings and bible study groups.

Joining a sorority on a campus that is known for being Christian was unsettling at first. But, I loved how every single girl I met was so friendly and welcoming as well as being academically driven. Academics is an important part of why I am at the University of Kentucky, so joining a sorority filled with academically driven and genuinely sweet girls initially helped to outweigh some of my discomfort. We pray as a chapter, and in the beginning it made me feel super uncomfortable. My friends would ask me to go to church with them, and I would just kindly say no thank you. I have had experiences at the University of Kentucky where I have been walking to class and there have been people trying to hand me mini New Testament books, or sweet southern girls asking me to join their bible study.

Sophomore year, there was one girl who stopped me at night while I was walking back from the library to my sorority house. She asked me if I wanted to join her bible study. I said no thank you, but she continued to ask me about my relationship with G-d. Although, as a Jew, I believe in G-d, I had never thought about my relationship with G-d.

Something about her continuing to ask me about my relationship with G-d and obviously hinting to come to bible study made me angry and confused. At this point, I had only been to Hillel a couple times but did not spend much time there. I was living in the sorority house with 40 other girls who were mostly religious and Christian with bible quotes artistically painted on canvases around their room. Not only was I exposed to these bible verses in the house, but on Instagram; the other girls in the house would post pictures with



bible verses as captions. I began to realize how uncomfortable and alone I felt.

I always felt like I belonged in my sorority and loved being around my friends, but I began to realize I was not fully comfortable. I began to bring up conversations about religion with some. They all loved asking me questions, and I loved learning about their religion and opinions so I could better understand their points of view. Although having them understand my religion and me learning about

theirs made me feel more comfortable, it also made me feel more confused about my religion and why I didn't seem to have the same passion as other girls did with their faith. I remember one night I was talking to my sister on the phone outside of the sorority house. She could tell I was upset and confused with why I had this uncomfortable feeling towards those that were so outwardly religious.

I was never super religious or involved in youth group growing up in Indianapolis. Yet, there was a large Jewish community around me, and I never realized

how important my faith was to me. I went to Jewish summer camp which made me realize how much I loved being Jewish, but I didn't fully understand how much of my identity revolves around being Jewish until I came to the University of Kentucky.

Halfway through my sophomore year, I found out my house mom was Jewish. Imagine that, the fact that I

“ When we both found out that we were both Jewish, we immediately hugged each other and happy tears glistened in my eyes.

had been living in the sorority house for almost an entire semester and I had no idea my house mom was Jewish! I immediately thought back to what her real last name was---Kaplan. Of course!! We call her Mom Kap, so I had never thought about that. When we both found out that we were both Jewish, we immediately hugged each other and happy tears glistened in my eyes. Throughout the second semester I talked to Mom Kap and realized I am probably not the only Jewish girl in a sorority or even on UK's campus feeling this way. That is when I

decided to get more involved in Hillel. Not only did I miss being around Jewish people, but I wanted to ensure that Hillel would be a place for Jewish students on UK's campus to come and feel comfortable. I wanted the way Mom Kap helped me during my emotional struggle during sophomore year to be what people could also find at Hillel. Since then, my goal has been to grow the group and form a true Jewish home away from home.

In the end, since there are so few Jewish girls at the University of Kentucky, whenever I am able to find a Jewish girl it makes it that much more special! The ones whom I have stayed close with always agree that even though the selection of NJB's (nice Jewish boys) here are limited, we have loved our Jewish experience at the University of Kentucky and would not change anything about it. Sometimes I will see a girl with a computer sticker that has something to do with Israel, Hebrew, or Judaism. I immediately ask her if she is Jewish. Though this may be creepy to some, it has been a way that I have found so many other Jewish students on campus. Whenever you meet one Jewish student, they are bound to know at least one other Jewish student whom you did not know previously.

Another way I find other Jewish students is because Eli Capiluto, the president of UK is Jewish. For Rosh Hashanah every year, he invites all of the Jewish people in the area and at the university to his house to celebrate. Whenever I finally meet a new Jewish student, there is a special bond we immediately have when we find out we are both Jewish. I have amazing

Jewish friends in three different sororities on campus and many more who are not in Greek life. I have a newfound appreciation for other people's religion and religious beliefs. After being at the University of Kentucky, I have begun to look up to those who are passionate about being involved in their faith and who find comfort in their beliefs.

I am lucky and happy to be able to say that I have never once felt any anti-Semitism

at the University of Kentucky and especially none in my sorority. I have never been around more supportive girls that truly bring out the best in me. They all think it is great that I have gotten more involved with my faith and love to see me grow in my Jewish identity. This year, I am serving as the president of Hillel and I am excited for how the Jewish community and Hillel will continue to grow in the years to come. Participation in Hillel has doubled since my freshman year, and I have high hopes of it doubling in the next year again. I can truly say that coming down south has made me closer to my religion than ever before. This year at Yom Kippur was the first year that I have ever fasted. I never realized how the absence of a Jewish community would help me deepen and explore my own relationship with Judaism. Nor did I realize how meeting others with a strong faith, would help me to discover my own. ■



Amy is a senior at the University of Kentucky from Carmel, Indiana majoring in Human Nutrition and minoring in Chemistry. Besides being involved in her sorority and being president of Kentucky's Hillel, she is involved with Service Corps and Relay for Life. Amy also has plans to go to medical school next year.

A Conversation

An Interview with Two Members of the Lexington Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom Chapter

What is your understanding of Sisterhood of Salaam and Shalom and how did you learn about it?

Jenny Sa: SOSS is an organization that brings together women of the Muslim and Jewish faiths to know each other, develop friendships, and work together to support each other's communities and join forces in causes that matter to both.

Deb Nelson: It is the Lexington division of a national chapter that is over a decade old. The aim is to bridge cultural and political divides between Jewish and Muslim faiths and brings women together in a social setting to help bridge some of these divides. I think many of us regret deeply that we can't do something about the political situation, but through our local chapter we can make human connections that helps to heal some of the ongoing repercussions of our political climate.

What was involved in bringing it to Lexington and why did you choose to take it upon yourself to do so?

Jenny: I read an article in the New York Times about the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom last year. Once I

read it - with much excitement - I contacted Rosie Moosnick, with whom I've discussed creating Muslim/Jewish engagement opportunities, as well as Shana Sippy and Nadia Rasheed. I asked them if they'd be interested in starting a chapter in Lexington, where I've lived and have been involved in interfaith work for years. They were all on board, and so the chapter was founded.

Deb: Rosie, Nadia, and Jenny have a history of trying to bridge this gap years ago. Rosie's book *Arab and Jewish Women in Kentucky: Stories of Accommodation and Audacity* was recently published, and she's been doing this work informally for years. Then someone else had heard about the national chapter and someone approached Rosie or Nadia and said we need something like this in Lexington. And Shana bridges this gap, because this is her academic work.

How did you go about organizing the local chapter?

Jenny: We followed the guidelines set forth by SOSS regarding chapter structure and size. We were limited to 20-22, with equal numbers of Jewish and Muslim women per chapter, ideally of varying ages and backgrounds. Nadia Rasheed and I fielded names of women we knew might have interest, and Rosie and Shana did the same for the Jewish side.

Did you have any worries or fears?

Jenny: I had no worries or fears. I felt confident that the women who join would do so because they want to be part of this movement and to meet women from the other faith tradition.

Deb: I personally don't, but I want to be aware that my perspective may not reflect what is actually happening for everyone else. I don't know if we have a mechanism to make sure that this is working for everybody.

Is there anything that has surprised you since the creation of the chapter?

Jenny: I was surprised at how quickly our chapter members bonded. There is a deep respect and friendship that has

Jenny Sutton-Amr is a founding member and Deb Nelson and Carly Conatser are members of the Lexington Chapter.

Among Women

Interview conducted by Carly Conatser | Editor-in-Chief

formed. We relish seeing each other every month and we support each other and celebrate each other. *Deb:* I didn't realize the food connection would be so prominent. We've had some pretty epic meals together and joke about creating a local cookbook. Our group is also very social; I was expecting snacks and more formal, directed and issue focused meetings.

Before the establishment of the chapter, can you speak about what the relationship was like between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Lexington?

Jenny: There has been a long-standing relationship

between the Muslim community and Temple Adath Israel through interfaith endeavors, and invitations to each other's houses of worship, and collaboration between our respective clergy.

Deb: No, I don't really get out that much (laughs). But, I think we're a small town, and it's an academic community, and people had already had a relationship and there have been some bumps with the Muslim, Christian, Jewish dialogue. But overall, relationships have been good because we have a lot in common because we are in the same community. Lexington is a medical and academic community. We have way more in common with each other because of our economic and social backgrounds.



Why is this so important for women? Do you think the men will follow suit?

Jenny: This is so important for women because they are masters of social integration. Women are the glue that hold society together and women have the power to sway public opinion. Women are teachers to their children and to their communities. Women are natural connectors. While I believe that men desperately need the SOSS model in their lives, I believe it will be more challenging for men to follow the chapter model set forth by SOSS.

Deb: I don't think it's more important for women than for men, but it is easier for women because we convene around food and children, and we make it our business to form certain types of social relationships. It comes naturally to us because we convene in our own communities. In the Jewish community, it is easy to get women to convene around anything. I think women are natural conveners. I think the women who were asked to be in it were women who like socializing.

How do you think being involved has changed you, the other members, or our Bluegrass community?

Jenny: I have made new friends, have learned of traditions in Judaism that I didn't know before, and for that I am grateful. I feel enriched because of this experience.

Deb: Even though I consider myself an open-minded person with no prejudices against Islam, this group has helped me to really see particular people rather than just an ideological conception of both Muslim and Islam. Now, I think of particular women and their stories and food whereas

before I would fight against having a negative association, and now I will naturally have a positive association. Before there was effort because I didn't have any association, so I had to work to hold my position.

Does this match up to what has happened in other communities? Or your expectation of what would happen?

Jenny: Our chapter matches up to other communities and may excel over others.

Deb: I think because of both of our rabbis standing shoulder to shoulder on many issues, it could be that the work in both congregations prioritizes immigration and refugees issues. We've been to rallies and I've been to the Mosque, so there's a lot going on in Lexington in regards to bridging communities, and the Sisterhood naturally fits into the larger dialogue within our community.

Do you have a vision for future direction of the chapter or the relationships cultivated as a result?

Jenny: We have a vision to become more activist minded. We will actually engage in a shared charitable event soon and will seek out more ways to leverage the talents, education, culture and religious diversity of our members to serve our city.

Deb: I'm really happy, and I think it is a great thing. My concern for our country is far beyond Jews and Muslims and the divides that we have in our country in regards to economic groups and race. This shows there is no substitute for bonding over food and family. Whenever there is a divide, there is a need for comfort and familiarity, and this is a need we have as a whole culture. ■



To learn more about the national SOSS organization please visit:
<https://sosspeace.org>

The Lexington Jewish Romeos Lunch Group

Marty Solomon | Contributing Writer



Five Jewish men began having lunch each Friday afternoon in 2006. They coined their name of ROMEOS, Retired Old Men Eating Out.

They were (from left to right) Abe Levine, Steve Kesten, Dave Doctrow, Cokie Hymson. The fifth member was Marty Kaplan who is missing from this photo.

There is no agenda, no dues, no membership requirements...all one needs do is to show up on Friday.

Over the years the participation has grown. Romeos have continued to lunch each Friday where they vote on a different restaurant for the following week.

They have probably eaten at 20 or more different restaurants over the years, the limiting factor being parking and the ability to accommodate a large table for all. Consequently, restaurants in downtown Lexington are seldom used.

Over the years, some participants have passed away and some have discontinued attending. But as of this publication, there are thirteen regulars. ■



Front row: Jerry Cerel, Jerry Wurmser, Brent Haskell, Dave Doctrow, Jack Miller, Milt Gellin, Lowell Nigoff
Back row: Marty Solomon, Marty Kaplan, Dan Yarus, Pete Sobel, Gary Hoover, Ira Gewirtzman

In This Dream

Susan Cobin | Editorial Board



Originally from Los Angeles, Susan Cobin has lived in Lexington for 17 years. She has published poems in dozens of literary magazines, including *The Malahat Review*, *Kayak*, *Poetry East*, *Permafrost*, *Cimarron Review*, and most recently *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Black Fox Literary Magazine*.

*I am in a synagogue.
Bones shrink under the floor
as I recite the Kaddish without moving
my teeth. Someone lights
a lamp with wine and in darkness
a hot wind stretches*

*its green arms toward
the Torah whose wings click
and wrestle through
the ceiling that fans
open and close.*

*The praying feet and mouths
sound like hundreds of olives
rolling on sand. The men
turn into tall brooms;
the women sweep
them up.*

*I am dark and crooked, a fish
who curls like a vowel
and floats out the door.*

--previously published in Blue Unicorn

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A Lexington Family Honors its Rescuer

Hanna B. Smith | Editorial Board

Michael points to a picture of his aunt in her wedding outfit. This picture is part of a wall of survivors in the De Sousa Mendes Foundation's museum memorializing people rescued by the consul's actions.



14

On April 24, 2017 the Kentucky Theater in downtown Lexington showed a movie titled "Disobedience." The film features the life of Aristide de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul who rescued many Jews fleeing the Nazi war machine, when he issued visas to refugees in 1940. This movie was brought to Lexington by Dr. Michael Rie, a member of the local Jewish community, in conjunction with the annual Yom HaShoah (Holocaust) memorial service held on April 23.

Dr. Rie's maternal grandparents and two of their children were able to escape from France in 1940 when the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux issued them a transit visa that allowed them to cross from Nazi-occupied France into Spain and Portugal from where they were able to travel to the United States. Their third child, Dr. Rie's mother, was married to an American citizen and thus escaped France.

Remembering his carefree childhood and youth within an extended family whose members lived within walking distance in the same New York borough, Dr. Rie muses that none of that would have been possible without the heroism of Consul de Sousa Mendes. Like most families today, Rie family members have spread out across the USA. Viewing the movie "Disobedience" was part of their 2017 reunion, reminding themselves how close they had come to extinction and to instruct the young members, children and grandchildren, in the family's history. Also, acquainting the Lexington public with the story of the heroism of Aristide de Sousa Mendes and thus keeping his memory alive,



is Dr. Rie's way of saying thank you.

Aristide de Sousa Mendes was the scion of an aristocratic Portuguese family, a husband and a father. In June 1940, while he served as Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, France, thousands of refugees, most of them Jews, gathered outside the Portuguese embassy begging for visas to get out of France and the reach of the Nazi death machine. Safe passage through Spain to Portugal enabled the refugees to leave Europe.

Officially, Portugal was a neutral country, though its dictator, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, favored Hitler. Salazar issued a directive, called Circular 14, which informed all of Portugal's diplomats to deny safe haven to refugees, especially Jews, Russians, and stateless persons.

Consul de Sousa Mendes defied this inhuman order, choosing to follow his conscience instead. In addition, he was inspired by the example of Rabbi Chaim Kruger, a refugee who refused to accept a

visa until all the other refugees in Bordeaux were able to escape. The rabbi's role in collecting passports and delivering them in batches enabled De Sousa Mendes to issue the visas faster and more efficiently. Within a few days the consul issued thousands of visas, 10,000 of them to Jews. The Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer described the consul's action as "the largest rescue action by a single individual during the Holocaust."

Salazar severely punished Aristide de Sousa Mendes for his disobedience. De Sousa Mendes was stripped of his diplomatic position and barred for life from earning a living. In addition, his children were blacklisted from attending university or any meaningful occupation. The family sank into abject poverty. Any attempt at pleading his case was ignored by the dictator Salazar. During that time the only help came from the Judaic Association of Lisbon which fed the family in its soup kitchen and paid their medical bills. In 1954 Aristide de Sousa Mendes died at the Franciscan Hospital in Lisbon. Lacking his own burial clothes, the hospital gave him a Franciscan tunic.

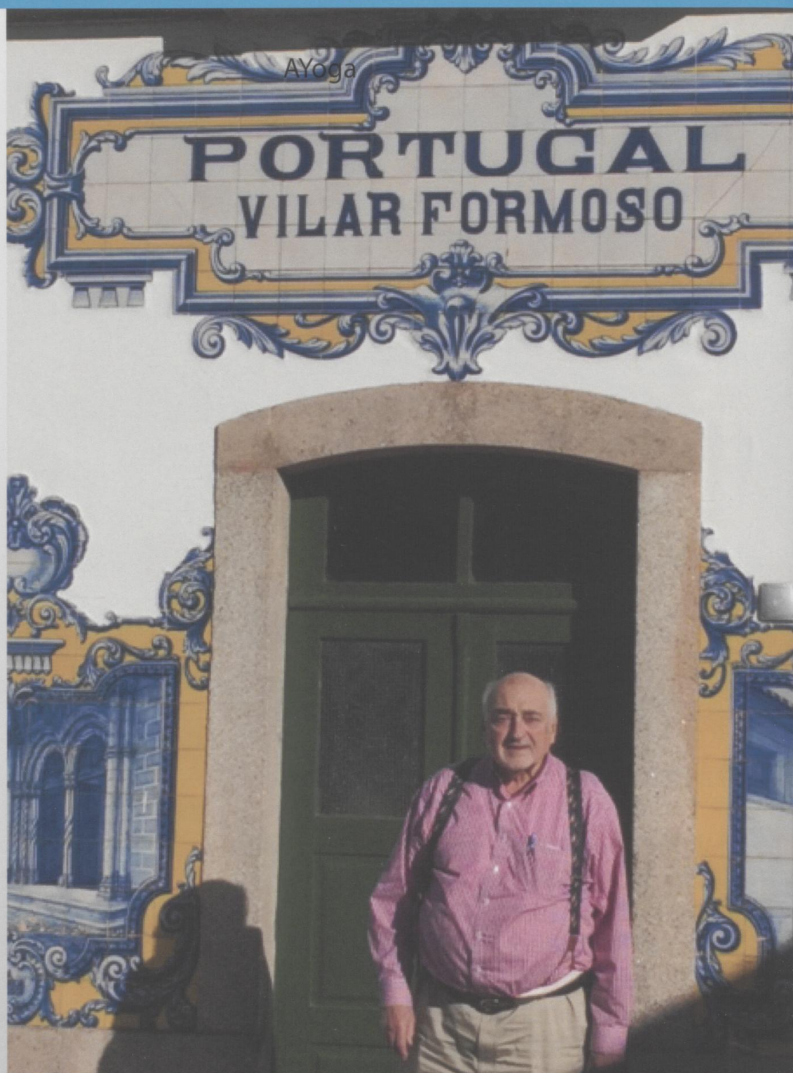
“The Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer described the consul’s action as “the largest rescue action by a single individual during the Holocaust.”

Recognition of his rescue work came to de Sousa Mendes posthumously, even as his children and grandchildren fought to clear his name. In 1966 the State of Israel declared him a “Righteous Among the Nations,” and in 1986 the United States Congress issued a proclamation honoring de Sousa Mendes’ heroic acts. Eventually the Portuguese parliament, during the presidency of Mario Soares (1986 – 1996), recognized Aristide de Sousa Mendes by posthumously promoting him to the rank of Ambassador. President Soares personally apologized to the de Sousa Mendes family.

Aristide de Sousa Mendes was a staunch Catholic. To better understand the motivation for his rescue mission, I sought advice from Bishop John Stowe of the Lexington Catholic Diocese. Bishop Stowe taught me that the consul’s actions were based upon the biblical principle of “love your neighbor as yourself.” This concept is further enhanced by the New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan. Any person in need is considered a neighbor who must be helped.

De Sousa Mendes was an employee of the State of Portugal and therefore bound to obey its laws. Circular 14, a directive and not even a law, was immoral, and therefore he disobeyed, saving the lives of thousands of people.

Antonio Salazar, Portugal’s dictator in the 1940s, is reminiscent of Haman in the Purim story. Because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, he ordered all the Jews in Persia killed. Salazar not only punished Aristide for disregarding his directive, but he aimed to destroy the de Sousa Mendes family as well. Fortunately, neither Haman nor Salazar got his wish. According to my sister-in-law who is of Portuguese origin, De Sousa Mendes and his rescue action are well known in Portugal today and he is much respected. ■



(page 15) The train station of the town of Vilar Formosa was one of the stations around Portugal where the refugees with visas arrived and from where they moved on to other countries.

(Above) Michael Rie in front of the train station of Vilar Formosa.

For further information, please contact the Sousa Mendes Foundation at <http://sousamendesfoundation.org>

The Jerusalem Kentucky Artichoke

Jim Ridolfo | Contributing Writer

During a seven month trip to Israel

in 2012, my wife Janice and I fell into a ritual of buying Jerusalem artichokes, or artichok yerushalmi, from the large merchant baskets in Machane Yehuda. For Shabbat, we would wash a few pounds and then bake them with onion, garlic, fresh fennel, sea salt, and olive oil. Sometimes, we would mash them up into a popular creamy-yet-parve soup recipe. For a brief time in our life, Jerusalem and its artichoke - really a tuber, like a potato - became part of our ritual of cooking. When we left Jerusalem and returned to Kentucky, I didn't expect to see the Jerusalem artichoke again. It wasn't until 2014 when I learned from Southern cookbooks that the Jerusalem artichoke was not from that part of the world at all, but was a product of the post-1492 exchange, along with tomatoes, potatoes, corn, and prickly pear. The following spring, Robin Michler, my friend and expert gardener, was kind enough to dig up some Jerusalem artichokes from where the Kentucky Native Café now resides, and since then we've had a wall of Jerusalem artichokes in our backyard.

Jerusalem artichokes are a relative of the sunflower, and in the late summer they turn from a ten foot pole of green to a banner of yellow flowers. On a fall day in 2015, I realized that practically every yellow flower I saw along the Cane Run River in Lexington was a Jerusalem artichoke plant. While I



had previously thought about the Jerusalem artichoke as something for soup in Jerusalem, back in Kentucky, I started to imagine Shawnee in the village of Eskippakaithiki ("blue licks place" in their language), or what's now Clark County, harvesting Jerusalem artichokes as a winter food staple.

Since we planted our crop of Jerusalem artichokes, we've roasted them, made soup, and even Jerusalem artichoke relish, a turmeric and vinegar condiment originally from South Carolina. But perhaps our most favorite use is for latkes. While the potato is from South America, the Jerusalem artichoke is from here. Even though Thanksgiving and Chanukah will not coincide for another half century, we've found the seasonal transition from Jerusalem artichokes on our Thanksgiving table to fried Jerusalem artichoke pancakes a new and enjoyable Kentucky ritual. Our toddler now enjoys the ritual of digging up artichokes for future latkes, a process which involves rakes, shovels, and sifting through soil.

As for the taste, they're slightly more crunchy than a potato latke. Without any spices, the color of Jerusalem artichoke latkes is more white, and in the recipe below I add 1tsp of turmeric. The Jerusalem artichoke latke recipe is a variation of Leetai Arazi's December 2014 recipe in Food & Wine magazine.

Jerusalem Artichoke Latkes

*3 cups Jerusalem artichokes
(weight after cleaning, shredded)
1 cup russet potatoes (shredded)
1 yellow onion
3 eggs
1 tsp kosher salt
1 tsp ground turmeric (optional)
1 oz chopped green chives
¼ cup all-purpose flour
Peanut oil for frying*

1. Grate the Jerusalem artichokes and russet potato by hand using a cheese grater. Rinse the shredded artichoke and potato thoroughly in cold water. Remove from cold water and place the shredded artichoke and potato in one bowl, and then fill another bowl with water. Use the weight of the second bowl to squeeze out any remaining liquid from the shredded mixture. Dump out any liquid, and continue this process until the mixture is as dry as possible.

2. Chop and shred the onion and mix with the artichoke and potato. Once more, repeat the process of squeezing and draining liquid.

3. Beat the eggs in a separate bowl, and add the salt, flour, and turmeric (optional). Add to the artichoke, onion, and potato.

4. Heat a skillet of one inch deep peanut oil to 360 degrees fahrenheit. Use a thermometer to monitor the oil's temperature, and drop in 2-3 oz. of latke mixture at a time.

5. Remove from oil and place latkes on a paper towel. Serve with chopped green chives and, if possible, Jerusalem artichoke relish. Applesauce or sour cream is good, too.



Jim Ridolfo works at the University of Kentucky as an associate professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Studies and Director of Composition. When he's not at work, he gardens, hikes, bikes, and cooks eastern Mediterranean inspired food with his wife Janice and son Lior.

An Unlikely Community:

A Drinking Club with a Running Problem

Betty Nigoff | Editorial Board

You've probably heard about what a "hashtag" is, and you've probably had a "hashbrown" or four in your day, but have you ever heard about "hashing?"

Hashing is a mixture of athleticism and sociability, hedonism and hard work. An exhilaratingly fun combination of running, orienteering, and partying, hashing is a refreshing escape from the humdrum of an ordinary work-week.

Hashing began in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1938, when a group of British colonial officials and expatriates founded a running club called the Hash House Harriers. Runs were patterned after the traditional British paper chase. A "hare" was given a head start to blaze a trail, marking his devious way with shreds of paper, all the while pursued by a shouting pack of "harriers." Only the hare knew where he was going, and the harriers followed his clues to stay on trail. Apart from the excitement of chasing the hare and solving the clues, reaching the end was its own reward because there, thirsty harriers would find cold beer and water.

I learned about hashing on the internet about 10 years ago, when I saw something about a group that runs

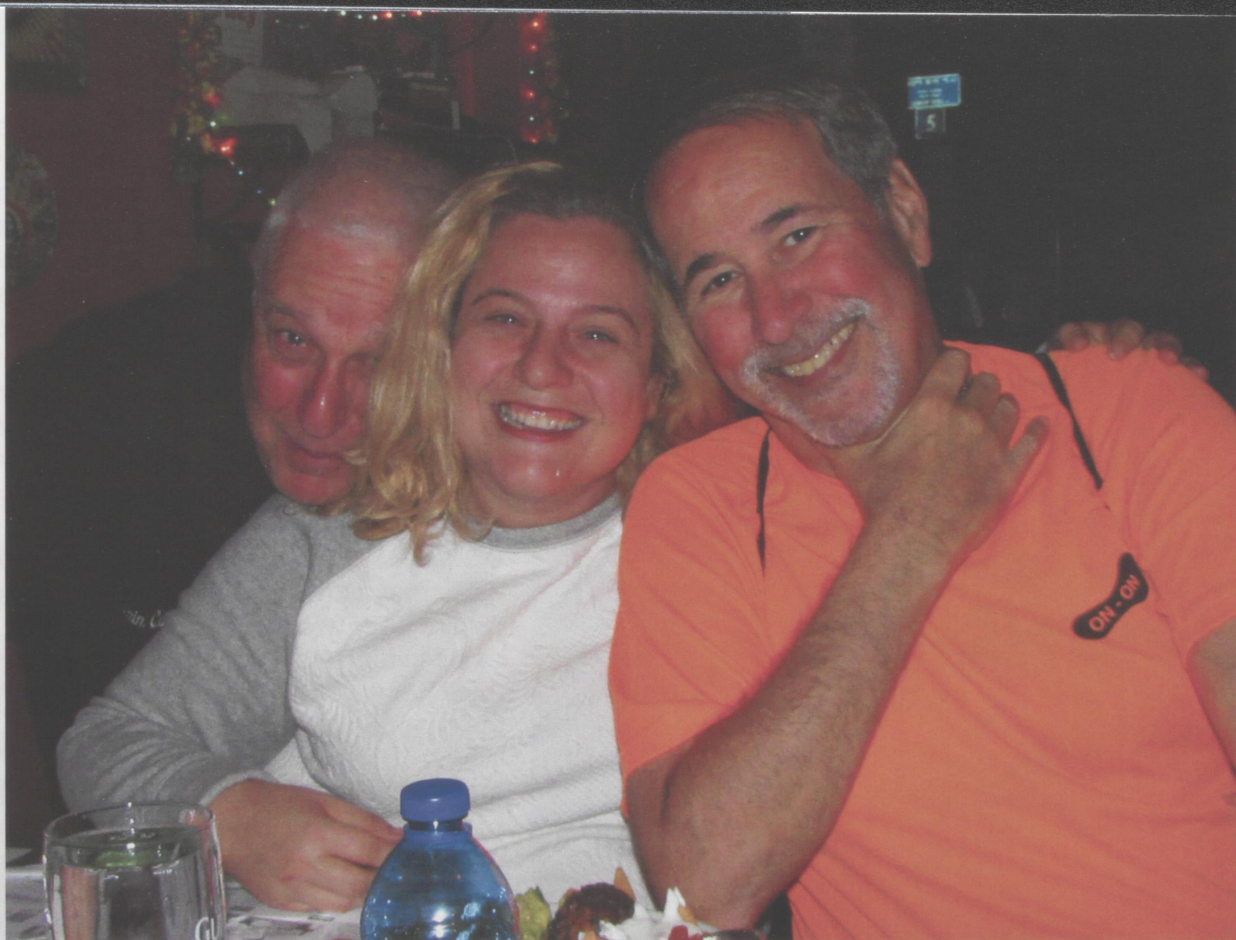
and drinks beer. Since my husband, Lowell, and I like to engage in both of those activities on occasion, we thought combining them at one event would be fun, and decided to get involved locally. We met three seasoned hashers at a bar where we talked about hashing and had a beer, and then went out to run. Since this was only a short trial run, we ended up back at the bar in about 15 minutes for another round. The people were really nice, and we decided to join them again two weeks later for a real hashing experience.

We met at The Arboretum in Lexington where we began a 3-mile trail marked with flour and chalk. Beer was available along the way, either hidden along the trail or purchased in a bar. After we all finished the trail, we gathered to convene our "religious circle."

In the "religious circle," we engage in a practice of calling out accusations - either for ridicule or praise. We welcome visitors and virgins (first time hashers), penalize those who weren't at the last hash, rate the trail, tell the hare all the mistakes he or she made in laying the trail, penalize the first and last people to finish, sing "Happy Birthday" to those celebrating that month, and share announcements. Penalties include drinking beer or water or some other drink, and we sing the wrongdoer a raucous song.

Near the end of the event, we refer to our "hash hymnal," a collection of songs that are sung worldwide. The concluding song is "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" with hasher-adapted words and hand motions. We frown on racist behavior (wearing a shirt from an official race), competitiveness, new shoes, short-cutting the trail, and using "mommy names," or names you were given at birth. After one hashes about 5 times, they are asked many embarrassing questions, and after much thought by the group, are given their own special "hash name," which is to be used by everyone during the hash.

Our hashing group, lovingly named "Horse's Ass Hash House Harriers," is a "drinking club



with a running problem.” We’re a loosely organized community of men and women who meet every other week to chase the “hare.” Our trails are never boring. We run streets, railroad tracks, and back alleyways. We also ford streams, explore storm drains, and scale fences. Our local group consists of doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, lawyers, teachers, graphic artists, website designers and programmers, marine biologists, and a host of other occupations. We sing inappropriate songs, swear, act crudely, and basically have a good time!

We have about 15 people who attend the hash regularly, with ages ranging from early 20’s to early 70’s, and all different running levels - including walkers! This isn’t a race...it’s about following a trail to find the beer, reaching the end, singing songs, and

having dinner and drinks when completed. Sometimes there are themed hashes: a red dress run for Valentine’s Day, green dress run for St. Patty’s Day, and blue dress run (with a stain) for Monica Lewinsky. We also dress up for Halloween, World Peace Through Beer, and whatever the hare suggests.

There are over 2000 chapters around the world like ours, with newsletters, directories, and even regional and world hashing conventions and ocean cruises. Lowell and I have hashed with our local group over 200 times in the past 10 years, and have also hashed in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Trinidad, Key West, Louisville, and in the Caribbean. Hashing is not for everyone, but we sure enjoy being a part of this fun-loving community! ■

Check out “Horse’s Ass Hash House Harriers” on Facebook or at their website:
<http://www.lexingtonhah3.org>



Young Bluegrass Jews

A Profile On Young Adult Engagement In Central Kentucky

Daniel Baker | Shalom Staff

Throughout the Jewish world, we often hear many ideas about young adult engagement, particularly about how it is a group we want to engage and, possibly more often, about how it relates to cultivating donor relationships. While donor relationships are a fruitful and necessary part of engagement, wouldn't it be refreshing to understand the many other ways in which young Jewish adults are contributing to and engaging in Jewish life in Central Kentucky?

This is a piece written by a young Jewish adult hoping to show you that we are here, we are engaged, and we are enjoying a Jewish life as young adults within our community.

Young Bluegrass Jews, or "YBJ," is a diverse and unique social group within the local Jewish community catering to young adults in their 20's and 30's. With programming that focuses on social engagement and

holiday observance, **YBJ seeks to build community among young adults**, all of whom have different methods for observing their faith, and provides comfortable space

for varying religious and cultural observances.

Did you know that a Young Bluegrass Jew (YBJ) member serves on the Jewish Federation of the Bluegrass (JFB) Board of Directors? What about the YBJ family who sends their children to Ohavay Zion Synagogue's Gan Shalom Preschool? Do you know which YBJ members sing in the Shir Adat choir at Temple Adath Israel? Or what about the YBJ members who hold Shabbat services for the campus community at Chabad of the Bluegrass? And, did you know that a "YBJer" serves as the Assistant Director to Camp Shalom?

Given that YBJ caters to a unique demographic not well-represented in programming and involvement practices locally, its main focus is to bring young Jewish adults together in their own space. JFB Board member and YBJer Erin Fulton says it best:

"[YBJ is] serving a kind of underrepresented demographic, since a whale of a lot of the programming the synagogues and JFB put on otherwise is geared towards children, parents with small children, or retirees. YBJ gives me the opportunity to interact with people

who have something in common with me and whom I otherwise would likely never come across."

You might be wondering who is considered part of this "underrepresented demographic." It is fairly common to see Jewish community institutions catering programming mainly for children in religious schools, or families with young children, or the older members of our community. We see programs ranging from educational to social and to religious, but few focus on connecting young adults in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them at their current stage of life.

Young adults are in a stage of life which is constantly changing and forcing them to make decisions on career choices, where to live, where to spend their money, and how to interact with others. Many young adults move multiple times while pursuing graduate degrees or advancing their careers. Some of them come from large and heavily involved Jewish communities, and others come from smaller ones. The dramatic differences they face when coming to Central Kentucky often finds them seeking a minimal level of involvement while still catering to their needs as young Jewish adults - a set of needs varying widely from one person to

the next and depending greatly on their individual upbringing and level of observance.

For some of us, we struggle between finding a balance between our religious lives and the other things to which we are committed. The reality is that we find our interests and responsibilities competing for our attention each and every day. We are consumed by higher education requirements, the demands of a new job, and even getting involved in social justice work or volunteering for organizations within our community that speak to us and impact us emotionally. Through all of these commitments, we also prioritize opportunities for social interaction in order to connect with other young adults, and, we even try to schedule in time for relaxation and self-care. All of these tasks and responsibilities combined rarely leaves much room for a "Jewish life." But, despite this, we still remember the expectations our parents and grandparents have for us - to get

"...YBJ gives me the opportunity to interact with people who have something in common with me and whom I otherwise would likely never come across."

involved in a Jewish community and to live a Jewish life.

So, how exactly are YBJ members engaging Jewishly?

Each month, we gather together for a Shabbat dinner at a member's home. We light candles, recite *Kiddush*, and enjoy a delicious themed meal complete with challah and an often-too-sweet wine. This series is modeled after the former Generation TAI (Temple Adath Israel) "first Friday" Shabbat dinner after services. (And, by the way, Generation TAI was organized by YBJ members!)

Many people, regardless of whether they are "young" or "young at heart," like to engage in a casual beer or two after a long day at the office. YBJ members gather every few months for a "Brews with Jews" event at a local brewery. They talk about their days and make plans for other opportunities to come together, all while celebrating being Jewish together. (And they also like to *kvetch*, but who doesn't?!)

YBJ members also enjoy gathering for holiday observances, such as pre-Yom Kippur dinners or Purim shenanigans. We plan Passover seders at our homes and post-Passover pizza parties to devour *chametz* with friends. Don't think we forget about

lighting chanukiyot and playing dreidel!

Though a lot of our programming is social in nature and planned by our members, we also enjoy participating in programming throughout the greater community. We attend the community Yom HaShoah commemorations and Yom Ha'Atzmaut festivities. We teach at the religious schools. We volunteer at Lexington's Jewish Food Festival. We stand next to you to recite the Shema and rejoice as the Torah procession marches around the sanctuary.

We, like you, participate in Jewish life in our own way and on our own time. This is only the beginning of our "Jewish journey." Our positive experience here and now, as Young Bluegrass Jews, will lead us into a long life of Jewish involvement later on - when we're married, when we have children, when we've planted roots and dedicated ourselves even further to our Jewish community and a Jewish life.

So, the next time you hear about young adult engagement, remember that we're pretty well engaged overall. Even when you don't see us or hear us at everything you attend, remember that we're living a Jewish life in our way and we're engaging in a Jewish life of which we are proud. It's why we keep doing it and why we keep coming back. ■



Daniel Baker is the Director of Marketing, Outreach, and Engagement for Jewish Federation of the Bluegrass. A late-20's self-proclaimed "pizzaholic" and proud young Jewish adult, he focuses much of his engagement efforts on finding opportunities for fellow young Jews to connect and engage in a Jewish life meaningful and relevant to them. He encourages all "YBJers" to reach out if and when they are interested in connecting with other young adults by sending an email to daniel@jewishlexington.org.

Love Thy Neighbor

Judy Goldsmith | Contributor

I have been thinking about the imperative from Vayikra, "love thy neighbor," and weighing that against the notion of "respect thy neighbor."

Love is a difficult concept in this age of Facebook "friends." In my frequent eavesdropping on campus, I have heard "I love, love, LOVE your outfit."

Is that what we mean by love?

Is this speaker saying that the outfit in question brings them pleasure, that viewing it makes them happy? My friends (mostly) make me happy. Is that enough to say that I love them? Or does love mean something more? And do the people I love always make me happy?

People we love can make us unhappy, by deliberately or accidentally being mean. By being needy when we feel unable to give what they need. But there is a deeper connection with them, that transcends the meanness and neediness. That deeper connection, one that (I hope!) brings joy or contentment; and our relationship with them is a gift that we nourish. Love happens and is given, but good relationships take work. The work is about listening, even when we are reacting with anger or hurt. Hearing what the other means. Finding ways to communicate, even when what we want to convey is hard to hear. Learning the patterns of communication and sharing that work best with that person, and practicing them.

That's a lot of work for our neighbors. This is not just about the people we live near, but about all of those we encounter, in the neighborhood or the store, at work, even online. That's too many people, for most of us, to learn all those patterns and put out all that energy. How can we even begin to love like that? How can a love so vast be anything but vacuous and impersonal?

Then there are The 36 Questions. This is from a psychology experiment, written up in a paper, "The

Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A Procedure and Some Preliminary Findings." In the paper, the researchers claim that spending 45 minutes answering these questions, including spending 4 minutes staring into each other's eyes, leads to feelings of intimate connection --- whether or not the individuals agree that they want to fall in love, whether or not they are ideologically aligned, whether or not they were even primed to expect to like each other.

The questions include things like, "For what in your life do you feel most grateful?" Followed by, "If you could change one thing about the way that you were raised, what would it be?" They include questions about the pair of you, and how you perceive the other person to be feeling about something they just told you.

Further discussion in the popular literature (an NPR piece pops up definitively on Google searches) says that this procedure does bring about feelings of closeness and intimacy, but not necessarily love. But --- as we say in computer science --- does it scale up? Can you answer the same questions for all your neighbors, and get the same results? I imagine that, after a while, your answers would become rote. You'd become accustomed to staring into someone new's eyes, and it would feel less revealing. And of course, there's the question of how many people would actually do this with all their neighbors.

These thoughts were brought on by reading a review of a novel about a Muslim boy who is recruited to extremism. According to the review, his vulnerability to the recruitment starts when his friends turn on him and blame him for something that goes wrong that is not his doing. This continues, post 9/11, when all Muslims come under suspicion. Just as easily as we can feel connection with others, we can feel separation.

How, then, are we to act in the world, to be in the world, to practice Tikkun Olam?

The simple, or simplified, answer is: Listen. Be curious about others' lives. Give them room if they want to vent. Don't assume.

As a member of an underrepresented group (women in tech jobs), I understand how simplified this is. I get asked, disturbingly often, "What do Women think of ...?"

I am a woman, yes. I do not want to be the token

woman, the representative of All Women. I have no idea what All Women think about anything. Don't ask your Muslim acquaintance what Muslims think about ... anything. You could ask, if you want, what the Koran says about something. What they think about that something. Or better, you can ask if that is something they are interested in discussing with you. Because chances are, too often, they've been asked to Represent. ("What do Jews think about ...?")

Also, this isn't just about Muslims. It's about any group you aren't part of. Kids members of another political party or economic class. People with a different skin color than yours, a different religion, or different nations of family origin. Different profession. That's a lot of loving to spread around. How about we start with respect. That doesn't require that we build deep emotional connections with everyone. It does require listening, maybe hearing. Which requires stopping to ask appropriate questions. And to be willing to answer questions, even if the questions seem clueless or weird. Whether the questions come from a list of 36 magic ones, or are driven by a desire to know how someone different lives in the world. ■



Judy Goldsmith is an academic and writer who has published a few short stories and many technical papers, including one technical paper that contains a short story. She shared the privilege of writing the Lexington Havurah column for Shalom for many years. Her current obsessions include the role of social networks (real and online) in influencing voters; representing preferences so computers can compute things about them; using science fiction as case studies to teach computer ethics. She is currently working with several colleagues on a textbook for science fiction and computer ethics.

A Place to *Belong*

Andrea Stang | Contributor

July 2008

We were arguing as we walked out of the wide, wooden doors of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church. We had just witnessed a christening for one of Alek's relatives, and fighting for the children I knew we would one day bring into this world, I said "no." No to communion. No to the Eucharist. No to Catholicism. Alek was raised with these practices and could only envision his own kids experiencing the same rituals he had practiced as a child. I was raised non-denominational. My parents had never pushed religion on me, and I wanted the same for my children. So we argued—the only fight we had before we joined our lives into one.

We were young—20 and 22—but we were confident that we could make it together. Eventually, and in the interest of peace, I relented, agreeing to our future children's first communion in the church that believed I was going to hell because I wasn't baptized. I might've still been a little bitter about it, but I figured it couldn't hurt for them to have a foundation in something, even if it wasn't the something for which I was fighting.

I was ten years old and sitting in the back of the Sunday school classroom at my friend Janice's church. Everyone was staring at me because the teacher had asked, "What thing do you love most in your life?" and I had just given my answer. It was the wrong answer. I had said, "My computer, because I bought it with my own money." Everyone else followed with what I soon discovered was the correct answer, "God."

I can't really blame my ten-year-old self for not knowing the "right" answer because my parents had stopped bringing my brother and me to church four years earlier. I had not been indoctrinated by the mainstream Christian religion, and in the Bible Belt of Kansas, that was rather embarrassing. My visit to my friend's church sparked a religious investigation for me. I began to read the Bible and try out prescribed prayers from the kid version I was given by a well-meaning relative. I wrote my real, from-the-heart prayers on tiny pieces of paper, which I then folded into tiny stars and stuffed into a circular metallic box with latticed sides and a shiny rose on top. "Please keep my brother safe. He drives way too fast." "Can you make sure my parents don't get a divorce, please? They've been fighting a lot and my mom says if they do, she gets custody."

God always answered my little paper prayers and so even though I didn't go to church, it seemed that we were on good terms. When I was diagnosed with cancer at sixteen, I even calmed my fears by telling myself that if I died from the disease, it was because God wanted so badly to hang out with me that he couldn't wait until I was old. And if I didn't die? That was because I was meant to go on and accomplish wonderful things on Earth. I'll admit that it was a bit conceited on both sides. But I never considered whether or not I lived to be a litmus test as to whether or not there was a God. The evidence of His existence, if I needed it, was in the well-wishes and prayers that poured in from all over the world on my behalf. Friends my family had not spoken to in years called and wrote to say they were thinking of us.

One woman, in particular, made me think about faith in a deeper way. In high school, my mom was close friends with a woman by the name of Paula Rader, but they hadn't spoken in years. I received a get-well card from her the same week that Paula's husband confessed to being the BTK serial killer. She had one of the darkest, faith-shaking experiences I could imagine—finding the man she had loved for over thirty years, the father of her children, capable of binding, torturing, and killing ten people. Yet, she was magnanimous enough to think of others during her time of deepest suffering. She even continued attending her church. Maybe her faith was pulling her through the noise and chaos. I began to think my faith could do the same for me.

What Alek remembers about "faith" was going to his great Mémère and great Pépère's house after mass as a kid. He recalls suffering through the long service filled with kneeling in front of the bench and reciting prayers and various rituals in order to have the fun times with family afterward. Faith was never the mystery to him that it was to me. For him, it was family, and when he wasn't around his family, faith no longer played a predominant part in his life.

In 2010, Alek was a Blackhawk mechanic in the Army, and after a yearlong deployment to Iraq, he had returned without faith in humanity, in religion, in God. He claimed that seeing the cradle of civilization scattered to dust over "holy" wars was enough to push him away from following a mainstream religion. I was hurt that it seemed he had made the decision without me, without seeming to consider how hard it had been for me to agree to his previous request of how we should

raise our children. It was as if he had made the decision without acknowledging what it might mean for my faith.

What it turned out to mean for my faith was that I would lose it. How could the man I loved and respected abandon religion while I held on to it? I tried to talk to him about his decision, but he compared his previous involvement in religion to a magazine that arrives in the mail that you never read. In reality, you have no interest in its contents, but you subscribe anyway. Just to have it arrive at your doorstep. Just to convince yourself or your guests that you are a part of something. That you belong.

May 2011

Together, we weathered several years without faith. We lived our lives still holding values originally thought of as commandments: not killing, cheating, or stealing. We even began performing marriage ceremonies. Some of our military friends wanted cheap weddings, so Alek was certified online as a nondenominational minister, and I began employing my photography skills to capture the spirit of the elopements. But we both felt something was missing.

When we relocated to Kentucky after Alek left the Army, we were living in a beautiful rental house—beautiful, but empty. It was in this house that I slipped into a deep depression without a social or career outlet. It was a three bedroom, two bathroom house, but two-thirds of it was empty ninety percent of the time. We were alone together. Our relationship began to suffer too, as I began resenting Alek for moving me away from family, friends, and a chance at a profession. Even our new puppy, Loki, couldn't take the edge off. The potty accidents on the hallway carpet and needle-sharp puppy teeth on bare toes caused tension in an already tense space. We needed a project. Gardening was the first. We planted rows and rows of vegetables, but soon cucumbers took over and rabbits ate our tomatoes.

In an attempt to regain a community, we tried attending a nondenominational Christian church. I had hoped it would be like the one my family attended when I was very young: light on Jesus, heavy on day-to-day morals and values. The sermon style was similar, but we couldn't see past the excessive value placed on material items with the purpose of enticing followers—ten plus flat screen TV's, a coffee bar, smoke and lights, a rock band. Even though the church was packed, it felt devoid of something bigger.

This misadventure left us deflated. We had tried other outlets, searching for a community through monthly meetings of wedding photographers and by meeting up with Alek's colleagues, but nothing felt right. Each new acquaintance in Lexington asked us which church we attended, as if that were a prerequisite for friendship.

August 2012

After nearly a year in Lexington, I found a teaching position at a school for creative and performing arts, and Alek left his job to pursue a degree in professional aviation. We started noticing each other in the hallways at home again. We brought up one another's accomplishments in conversations with friends and family. We began hiking at Red River Gorge, camping under the stars and curling up in sleeping bags. Our love ebbed and flowed in correlation with our ambition; it always had. I had fallen in love with Alek's excitement about his goals in life, and he had always admired my aspirations.

We bought a house and began building a more permanent foundation in Lexington. But despite the many home projects we completed—building a chicken coop, tilling a garden, starting a beehive—there was still emptiness in our hearts, where we longed to plant a sense of community.

During his first semester of school, Alek enrolled in a world religions class, which required him to complete an in depth study of one religion. A local religious leader, Rabbi Marc Kline, had visited his classroom recently, and Alek respected the way he defended Judaism in class discussions without belittling other religions. In a conversation after class, Rabbi Kline invited him to visit the local reform Jewish temple.

When Alek brought the assignment home, shared his experience meeting the rabbi, and asked my opinion, I agreed without hesitation that we should attend a service at the temple. I had always been a window shopper when it came to Judaism. It caught my eye as early as fifth grade, during a world religions unit when the teacher had told us about the 613 mitzvot. I was enthralled that there were more than ten "commandments" in the Jewish world. But at the time—as a resident of a small Midwestern town with a seemingly nonexistent Jewish population—I had seen no real way to investigate it. So I relished this excuse to walk through the temple door.

"Barukh atah Adonai..."

I struggled with the unfamiliar words on the page in front of me, in the book that opened from left to right and whose pages read in the opposite direction. I

squeezed Alek's hand, strangely at home in the foreignness of it all. In the sanctuary, each light fixture featured the Star of David, and I felt the new presence of a six-pointed star of my own—my husband, the community, the temple, the Torah, *Adonai*, and me.

In our first service at Temple Adath Israel, Rabbi Kline stood on the bima platform, three Torahs glittering with Keters encased in a wooden ark behind him, and shared a bit of scripture explaining that each Shabbat evening, two angels would guide each member of the congregation home from the synagogue. We didn't take it literally until we met two elderly women after services. They made us feel welcome by asking questions about where we had come from and inviting us to the weekly Oneg Shabbat. Yet we didn't feel pressured to continue attending. Their welcome felt more like a host leaving the door ajar behind them rather than pushing us through.

We took it as a sign that as we continued to attend services, each week we would meet two new people who would invite us out to dinner. It seemed as if these people were the angels Rabbi had mentioned, gently welcoming us to a spiritual home.

In fact, one of our first acquaintances was Reva Schottenstein, the creator of a group called Generation TAI, a play on Generation Y and the temple's acronym. This social group was composed of Reva and about four other young graduate/doctoral students and professionals. The idea was to gather for a small but spiritually and socially impactful dinner once a month, and each time, more members joined, until there were over forty of us attending regularly. I admired these young members' commitment to forging strong connections to their faith and traditions, regardless of their backgrounds. We shared regular discussions of what it meant to be Jewish and how being Jewish fit into the twenty-first century style of our lives. We drank wine and felt free to swear when exuberance won out. It was nothing like the religious get-togethers I had experienced growing up, where using alcohol and foul language were a good way to be exiled.

Both Alek and I were comfortable in this version of faith that we seemed to be defining for ourselves. But I was concerned—was I attracted to this particular community of friends and this particular rabbi, or was it the Jewish faith as a whole with which I was becoming infatuated?

September 2013

After attending Temple for a year, we had finally built

that community we so desired, particularly in Generation TAI. Eventually, I faced the question that had overshadowed me: was I going to convert to Judaism? I knew it was up to me. This time it was my decision that would affect the way Alek lived his life. I knew he would not be converting soon, if ever. He had crossed the threshold from atheist to agnostic, but still had a long way to go before he considered himself religious again. However, he was an essential part of my new community, voluntarily attending weekly Shabbat services with me for over a year. I was surprised but pleased that he took such an active part in my journey. He seemed to relish the community of friends we were building just as much as I did. I think he also gleaned strong messages from the rabbi's sermon about how to more purposefully live his life.

I'm sure a bit of his reasoning for participating was my interest. I had more than flirted with the community, the teachings, the discussions, the traditions, and the beliefs of the Jewish faith. I had fallen in love. Not just with this community, but also with the worship songs in Hebrew, the kids in costumes during Purim, the candles lit during Chanukah, and the prayers I now said over challah and Manischewitz.

I battled the decision for a while. But I finally approached the rabbi and asked what it would take to start the process of conversion and how I would know when I was ready. He said, "Instead of you asking me three times, as is the Orthodox tradition, I will ask you three questions. First, are you willing to study for life? You are never finished learning about your faith. Second, are you willing to be an active part of this community and give back when and where you can? Third, are you willing to accept Judaism as your faith to the exclusion, but not disrespect, of all other religions? You will know you are ready when you answer yes to all three questions and begin saying 'we' instead of 'you' in reference to the Jewish people."

Rabbi Kline's words reminded me of my marriage. When had it become "we" instead of "me" or "you?" Judaism and love did seem to share the same entrance fee. Alek and I had to continually study one another to learn how best to communicate. We had to be an active part of each other's lives and give of ourselves every day. We had to commit to one another to the exclusion of all others.

Rabbi's words also helped me recall my initial connection with the star—how I had noticed the Star of David on the light fixtures at Temple. Before that day, I had not considered all six aspects—my husband, the community, the temple, the Torah,

Adonai, and me—to be necessary for my journey in faith. As a child, I had been taught it was just between me and Jesus—this man who I was told walked on water and healed the sick. This man who was God's only son and who—I was told—died for our sins. But that was one interpretation. It had become clear to me that if I was going to regain faith, my religious reasoning needed to be more involved than that. I needed to have the freedom and take the responsibility to interpret for myself.

Throughout my studies with Rabbi Kline, I began to learn more about the Torah, this ancient text, which must be assembled meticulously to remain a kosher document. The parchment is made from animal skin, the quill from a turkey feather, the thread to sew the pieces together from animal veins, and all 304,805 letters are handwritten with specially prepared ink and without vowels or punctuation.

As an English teacher, it mystified me that the Torah did not include either. Every grade-school kid knows the classic ways that missed punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence. My favorite being “A woman without her man is nothing,” versus “A woman: without her, man is nothing.” In the holy texts, especially, punctuation seems essential to solidify our understanding. But that is just the allure of Judaism for me: people are meant to argue, debate, and discuss the words of the Torah. Each reading and reorganization of vowels and punctuation reveals a new dimension of the text and its possible meanings. Many believe that since God is infinite, his wisdom—Torah—should also be infinite, and that's what the lack of grammatical constructs accomplishes.

The Torah alone intrigued me, but the Talmud (Hebrew for to teach, to learn, and to study) pulled me in even further by its existence as the earliest rabbinic interpretation of Jewish oral law. For two thousand years, Rabbis debated and commented, without punctuation or vocalization, on Jewish law through this text that is not linear but rather dialogical. I learned that Jewish education demands interaction in an active learning community showered with energy and dialogue, debate and discussion. I learned that the book was meant to still work within me, even when it wasn't open. That concept enchanted me.

March 2014

In our marriage, Alek and I were in it for the long haul—to journey in and out of health, in and out of wealth, in and out of faith. I had the same sensation when it came to Judaism. Using “we” seemed like

second nature for me. But even if I had not felt the need to convert, I didn't need to be Jewish to get into heaven. That alone was a resonating thought for me, given my former battles with Alek about Catholicism. Jews believe that all those who live ethical lives, no matter the tradition, will be “close to God” in the world to come. It also helps me better come to terms with the idea of Alek not converting. If our children choose the same belief, they will grow up without the inferential burden that their dad is going to be punished for not believing the way that they do. Another point of interest for me is that all Jews are spiritually equal; in this faith, there is no Pope that has a lifeline to God.

I'm learning that my conversion to Judaism was as equally about belonging as it was about faith. It was about culture just as it was about religion. Culture, ethnicity, and religion are inseparable in the Jewish tradition. And regardless of whether or not he ever converts, that's a community in which Alek and I can agree we want to raise our children. ■



Andrea Stang is a writer helping businesses stand out online. She has an MFA in creative writing nonfiction and taught literary arts for three years at the school for creative and performing arts (SCAPA) in Lexington, KY. Now, Andrea and her family live in their hometown of Wichita, KS where she founded a coworking space for creatives that offers book clubs, yoga classes, and writing retreats, all while promoting authentic connection and inspiring support. She still tries to make it “home” to Lexington each Passover.

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