

Rabbi Burt Aaron Siegel

The Shul of New York
A Synagogue for Spiritual Judaism

News From The Heart

Fall 2012/5773

www.theshulofnewyork.org

In the Year 5773

by Rabbi Burt

Our new Jewish year of 5773 marks the beginning of the celebration of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah year of the Shul of New York. Later in the year there will be a gala celebration that I hope you will support and participate in. We all know how fast thirteen years go by!

As the founder of our congregation, I honestly had no idea that we would develop into the vibrant and thriving synagogue we are today. Thirteen years ago, a small number of people met at the Orensanz Center, the third oldest still-standing synagogue building in the United States, built in 1849. We are ever grateful to Al and Angel Orensanz for generously providing space to our little congregation in those earliest days. As we embarked upon the adventure of creating a synagogue, I did my best to hold a vision of a liberal, welcoming, warm, loving synagogue. I did my best to infuse a little creative spirit into the soul of that little congregation. That vision and that spirit of creativity took hold.

Little by little, that creative spark began to inspire the creativity of those who joined with me. I will always be grateful for the committed leadership of those who were with us at the very beginning. Together, we began creating a synagogue that extended a special welcome to those who felt alienated—never able to be part of a synagogue that they could call a spiritual home; to inter-faith families; to people seeking a non-dogmatic spiritual experience of Judaism they could really and authentically live by; to people looking for a joyous, life-affirming, loving religious faith. (Continued on page 2)



Rabbi Burt at Orensanz



A gift from 43 years ago allows Joan Mirviss to return the favor many-fold and help others celebrate their own Bat Mitzvahs.

A Bat Mitzvah-Mitzvah

by Joan Mirviss

As I approach the big six-zero, a time in the Asian lunar calendar when one has finished one's first "life" and is born again, I decided that at long last I should plow through an array of documents lying idle for many decades in my safety deposit box. To my surprise, I came upon an envelope containing numerous US savings bonds dating to October 1965, when I became a Bat Mitzvah. Indeed, at Temple Beth El, a conservative congregation in Stamford Connecticut, I was the first girl to be allowed such an honor (albeit without being permitted to touch the Torah and participating only in the Friday night service).

These bonds, all from beloved relatives — grandparents, great aunts, and uncles, all now deceased—stirred many memories. To this day, I am unsure why they were never cashed in to pay for college or graduate school. At that time in my circle of friends and family, cash gifts of \$25 was the norm, so it is not surprising that the face value amounted to only \$425. However, upon redeeming them at the bank this spring, I received nearly \$3,000. While not a huge sum, it is not an (Continued on page 2)

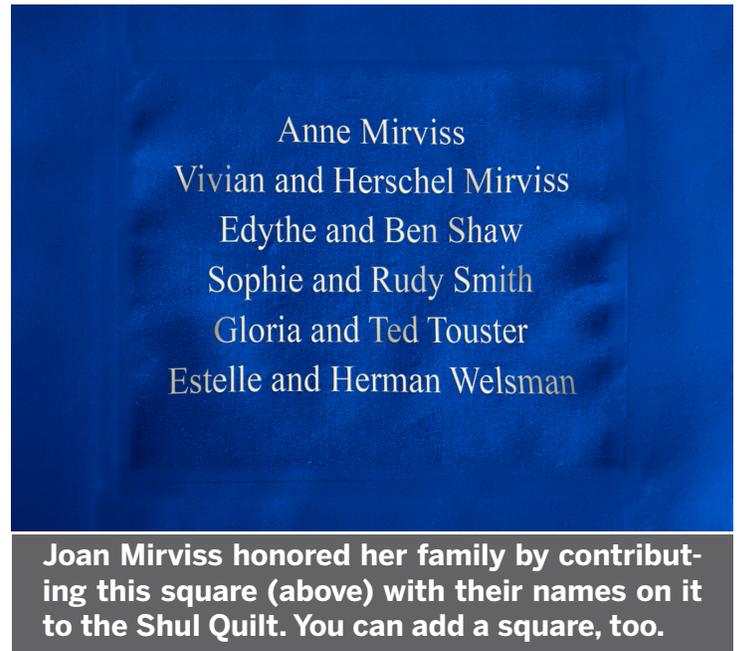
In the Year 5773 (Continued from page 1)

And so the journey began. Because the Orensanz Center became one of the most popular places in New York City for conferences, art exhibits and celebrations, we were compelled to move on, although we have continued to be welcomed by Al and Angel on the High Holy Days and other times during the year. We travelled from one place to another understanding that a congregation is not a place but a spirit, a community, a shared vision. We finally found the Quaker Meeting House, a lovely home for our services along with other venues for other programs.

Thirteen years ago, our Shul of New York was one of the first to open the doors wide to interfaith and non-traditional families. We were among the very first to feature a band, pouring such heart-lifting joy into our services. We were among the very first synagogues in which Jewish spirituality is deeply explored. We were among the very first synagogues to ask only for voluntary contributions without putting a price tag on synagogue affiliation. Just thirteen years later, other synagogues have increasingly become like our synagogue in these ways. I would never have the chutzpah to say that they deliberately emulated us; we were just ahead of the times.

So our vision of the future is to continue on this exciting path. The synagogues of today, throughout the world, face more challenges than ever before. Let's be a synagogue for the 21st century that will deepen our human spiritual experience. I deeply thank, with the deepest sincerity of my heart, all of our leaders—the first generation and our devoted leaders today—who have proved that the little congregation that began thirteen years ago could become an important piece of the spiritual fabric of our city.

The time of Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a time of new awareness. My hope is, and I know it's shared by all, that with loving awareness, we continue to be ahead of the times—maybe in really surprising ways. I hope you will always be truly proud to be a part of the Shul of New York.



A Bat Mitzvah-Mitzvah (Continued from page 1)

insignificant amount either.

So what to do with these funds given to me forty-six and one half years ago, by these people of beloved memory? Surely they should not be spent on a whimsical, personal purchase. Finally I concluded that a contribution back to the Jewish community would be the best way to honor them and what better recipient than the Shul of New York? Dear friend, Vera Michaels arranged a marvelous lunch with Rabbi Burt and we jointly determined that the funds should be used to assist others wishing to study to become a Bat Mitzvah. It was Vera's idea to further honor my family by memorializing their names on the Shul Quilt. So, in addition to my pleasure at helping prospective students, I had the great joy of showing my own still-surviving parents a photo of the square of the Quilt containing the names of their long-departed siblings, aunts, uncles, and parents. Needless to say, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

A nice way to turn an old mitzvah into a new one.

Want to stay in-the-loop with The Shul of New York?



Visit our Facebook page!

Search www.Facebook.com for "Shul of New York"

Behind the Scenes at the Shul

by Doug Seidman

Do you ever wonder what happens behind the scenes at The Shul of New York? Like many organizations, the Shul has a set of By-laws that provide a framework for our governance. We are run by a Board of Directors with the help of an Auxiliary Committee. The Board and Auxiliary Committee are PowerVolunteers!

How does it work? Let's start with the Auxiliary Committee. Our current Auxiliary Committee members are 8 in number and each person has a particular area of activity: Laine Barton (Shul School); Dani Durkin (Facebook); Steve Ganz (Ritual Objects); Lisa Lewis (Shul School); Florence Roen (Oneg); Claude Samton (Newsletter); Carrie Schwartz (Oneg); Paul Stutz (Finance). Each serves a one-year term that starts every August 1st and each is eligible for re-nomination for additional terms. People are nominated to the Auxiliary Committee because they have provided or will provide significant services to the Shul (either through service on a task force/committee or through other substantial help with Shul activities). It is customary to serve on the Auxiliary Committee before seeking membership on the Shul Board.

The members of the Board of Directors serve 2-year terms, also renewable. Terms start August 1st and are staggered so that half of the positions are up for renewal each year. The Shul Board currently consists of 13 people:

John Balan, Kenny Bookbinder, Joan Brancaccio, Mary Ellis, Mike Hearn, Dara Kessler, Sara Lavner,

Marsha Leo, Joy Mach, Rich Mach, Vera Michaels, Doug Seidman, Karen Seidman.

You may wonder how the Shul selects Board and Auxiliary Committee members. Each year a 3-person Nominating Committee is appointed by the Co-Presidents of the Board, with at least one member of the Committee NOT being a Board or an Auxiliary Committee member. This committee make-up helps fight insularity and provides an interesting opportunity for congregants who are not involved with the running of the Shul to meet people and get a glimpse of the way things work. The Nominating Committee solicits nominations in May and vets candidates for both the Shul Board and for the Auxiliary Committee. People can nominate themselves or someone else. (Remember this next May if you're interested or know someone who is!!) Each nominee (new and renewing) is called individually to discuss possible Auxiliary Committee or Board service. In the case of the Auxiliary Committee, the Nominating Committee will also find out what particular area of activity each candidate promises to pursue. The Nominating Committee then presents the Shul Board with a list of candidates for both bodies to be voted upon at the June Board meeting.

We're proud that the Shul of New York is constantly developing. Getting good people to serve on our Auxiliary Committee and Board is crucial to our success. If you or someone you know is interested, please let us know by contacting seidman4@gmail.com.



From left: Karen Seidman works a table at Orensanz; Bill and Sarah Lavner at Friends Meeting House; Vera and Mike Hearn at Orensanz, High Holy Days.

On Becoming Jewish

By Uschi Schwartz

(Ms. Schwartz shared her remarkable story with us at a Friday service in August, 2012.)

I'd like to first start by telling you a little bit about myself. The story starts out a bit heavy but bear with me, as it has a happy ending.

I grew up and live in Melbourne, Australia. My family history is a diverse mix with ancestors from all corners of the globe: Italian, Chinese Irish and German. My maternal Grandmother is German and was orphaned at the age of six during WW2 as the Nazis took her mother away.

Even though we weren't Jewish, I have always known the horrors of the Holocaust and have grown up aware of the pain my grandmother has carried her whole life.

I was not brought up with any religion but I always have had a deep belief in God. When my late husband died, I found it particularly disorientating that I did not have the knowledge and sense of connection to the important process and rituals that have been handed down through generations that help us to understand and deal with such a difficult time.

A very close Jewish friend explained the rituals of his faith, I felt a strong connection and a desire for depth and further understanding, and this was long before meeting my husband, Danny.

I met Danny Schwartz a couple of years after losing my husband to brain cancer. I loved my late husband dearly and could never imagine finding such happiness again. When Danny introduced me to his family I immediately felt a strong sense of connection. I realized so much that I loved about Danny was attributed to his Jewish upbringing.

I felt an overwhelming sense of peace in following their traditions, observing the Sabbath just as they do, going to Shul on Shabbos, celebrating the holy days and listening and learning from our very special Rabbi. I started to feel like my questions were being answered.



Uschi holds the Torah as Rabbi Burt performs her conversion ceremony.

Danny's mother has become like a mother to me, I love her knowledge and her teachings, we have a very special relationship and this has further deepened my love and understanding of the Jewish faith. I also treasure my relationship with Danny's daughter and acknowledge the foundations and strength she has gained from her Jewish upbringing.

After participating in almost two years of the Jewish calendar and traveling twice with Danny's family to Israel at Pesach, being immersed in the richness of Jewish life, I felt certain that I too wanted to be Jewish.

In fact in Israel sharing Pesach amongst the Jewish community, attending the Kotel and The Great Synagogue, feeling at such ease and comfort with my surroundings, I found it puzzling that I wasn't already Jewish.

Yesterday Danny celebrated his 50th birthday and I gave him the best present ever, a Jewish wife!

Danny and I are so grateful to my mother for being so supportive and so happy for us. *(Cont'd. on next page.)*

A Modern-Day Solomonic Solution

By Lou Blumegarten

I lead a lot of walking tours of one of New York City's two great cemeteries, Woodlawn Cemetery in the northern Bronx. Woodlawn has more great mausolea than any other cemetery in this country and residing there is a man named Austin Corbin, not a household name these days; but in New York in the late 19th century he was quite important.

Austin Corbin (1827-1896) consolidated the various railroads on Long Island into the Long Island Railroad which he headed and was a major real estate owner and developer in Brooklyn. And he was a notorious anti-Semite. Corbin was the President of the American Society for the Suppression of the Jews.

There is a street in Brooklyn named Corbin Place that was named after him. In 2007, a New York Daily News columnist wrote a story about Corbin and about Corbin Place which it turns out is inhabited by a lot of Jews (especially those from the former Soviet Union who have plenty of experience with anti-Semitism). After that article appeared there was a hue and cry in Brook-

lyn with citizens and elected officials saying that the street name must be changed. It's a hassle to change the name of a street and many people did not want the name of the street to be changed even if they felt uncomfortable with the fact that Corbin was a notorious anti-Semite.

The Brooklyn Borough Historian came up with a Solomonic solution to the problem. He recommended that the street not be renamed, but that be named after another Corbin, Margaret Corbin, a woman whose husband in the Revolutionary War in upper Manhattan who had been killed while manning a cannon. Margaret Corbin took over the cannon and is considered an American Revolutionary War hero. There's a Margaret Corbin Place in upper Manhattan, which you see if you take the A train to 190th Street station to go to the Cloisters. When you alight from the subway to the street there's Margaret Corbin Place.

So the street in Brooklyn is still named Corbin Place, but after Margaret, not Austin.

The time I have spent with Rabbi Burt has been a wonderful experience. He is a wealth of wisdom and realize I have had the privilege of meeting a very special man. Rabbi Burt's insightful knowledge is the reason I have travelled so far and I look forward to our continued friendship and learning.

Thank you so much Rabbi Burt. You made the Mikvah yesterday such an incredible experience. We could not have imagined the power of this ritual. I can only describe the feeling like that of a marriage.

Thank you, Rabbi Burt, Rabbi Denis and Rabbi Renee, for making it a day we will never forget.

And, thank you all for welcoming me here today for what is such a deeply joyous occasion for both Danny and me. And, with this welcoming it will only strengthen my involvement and commitment to the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom.



Lou Blumegarten holds the Torah.

Adam's Reverie

by Adam Feder

Today while driving through the city with my four year old son Ben and a family friend and her two daughter's (ages five and seven years), I got to witness something awesome. They gave me a great gift.

We had just spent the afternoon in The Central Park Zoo. As you remember, we had some hot days at the start of July and for that reason we had driven my friend's air-conditioned Lexus all around town for the day's adventure. It was a wonderful, perfect and luxurious way to travel in the heat with the kids for the day.

Leaving the Zoo, at the end of the day, we got back into the hot car. Three kids buckled in the back seat, the AC cooling us down, we drove off. A mix tape in the car stereo played on in the background. Listening to my son and his 2 pals talking, poking, chewing and laughing in the backseat, spent and natural, put me into a delicious reverie. Memories stirred and I recalled some salty and visceral memories of hot long summers past. Now, I'm sure the sudden addition of AC to the environment had some connection to my surprising elevation of mood. Also, the fact that the three kids were now buckled in and immobilized and no longer required my constant following, directing and herding added a sudden (needed?) and soothing relief. The kids too settled down, surrendering to the physical restraint and soaking up the cool air.

So, we drove and somewhere as we crossed Central Park on the 85th Street Transverse a song came on the stereo, "The Cave" by Mumford and Sons. The party started with Ava (age seven) singing along to some of the words in the 1st verse. Then Benny and Vela began to move in rhythm as if on queue. The volume rose and when the banjo broke into a textured cadence of notes on the chorus, the kids caught fire and spun-out into a wild spontaneous dance.

Pulling against buckles and safety straps, the music literally moved through them—it played through them. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. They sang and flailed and the depth of their joy and freedom was my own. We all caught fire. We had a moment; the moment where the music plays us. And, in that moment we knew it. We were simultaneously an experiential stereo transmitter and receiver; harmonized, unconstrained,

open and free-singing on the wind. Everything was heightened. Our awareness was woven together. Our listening and authentic response was sublimely creative.

Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech HaOlam for the gift of life!

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This week marks sixteen years since the death of my mother, Carol Feder. She was a great woman. Forever a nurturer, she cared for and loved each of us in turn: her family, the people and families she worked with and her own children. She even cared for us in her dying. My mother was a great listener and she listened well. And though she died at fifty eight, she lived deep with love and her joyful patient listening and her love are my own.

There are many things and experiences that I yearn to share with her but am unable to now. Like, for example, she never attended a Shul of New York High Holiday Service. She never met Rabbi Burt or any of the musicians of The Shul Band. Most poignantly she never met my beautiful wife, Antje, or our two children (her grandchildren).

We have so many poignant and painful moments in life as we outlive the one's we love. If I had one day now to spend with my mother, I would shower her in love and show her how completely she got her job done with me and how much I cherish my life. And, I do experience my mother in my life. I experience her in my patience and in my listening.

Though it was my father who had the outer life in music, himself amazingly accomplished—more about him another time.....It was my mother who was my musical champion. It was my father who was the great cook and taught me to boldly make my way around the kitchen, but it was my mother who made the meal into a welcome celebration. In her patient care, I found the courage to live 'out-loud' in life and to grow through time. It reminds me of the loving space my wife, Antje, gives Ben to find his own balance in navigating powerful and difficult feelings of frustration as he continually butts up against boundar-

ies in life. Antje says ‘No!’ and will hold Ben and talk with him as he cries and as he struggles to put words to his thoughts and feelings. It is an interaction so tender and makes me think of my mother.

Another impact that my mother’s patient and loving listening had in my life is that when I fell in love with music as a child, my mother’s love had me go to it and stick with it. My mother’s love had me follow my own love.

On days like today, in heat and reverie, when life’s wild and precious value reveals itself, however fleeting, in spontaneous experiences of joy and love, I know for sure that the value of life is not in a measure of years or in the accumulation of wealth or in ‘getting somewhere’, but resides in the depths of my own love. I seem to discover again that the value of my own life is in my attention. This is where we carry our own unique beauty. Our beauty is not a stagnant feature. Our belonging is not from outside. Our beauty is not an abstraction. It is a love and we know it in what we love.

The takeaway from today is that I feel grateful and at peace and I feel that gift has been given to me and I find myself asking three questions: “What is my heart drawn towards?”, “How do I turn away?” and “How do I distract myself?” These seem like good questions to pay attention to as the cool rain finally begins to fall and the city is lulled back into comfort and as inevitably the awe in “the mystery of it all” begins to cloud back over.

Thank you, kids, for a great day!



Adam Feder is Music Director of the Shul Band. He also plays guitar and performs vocals.

Indie-wha???

The Shul Family Programs have an important fundraising drive underway, designed to provide needed support to help grow this vibrant, vital program. The campaign is hosted on the website Indiegogo, “the world’s largest global funding platform,” where it is easy to make a contribution AND receive great PERKS! Each perk includes a thank you email acknowledging your tax-deductible contribution, and some donation levels include High Holiday tickets for adults! Check it out.

Here’s what you can receive at each donation level:

- \$18:** a great Shul magnet
- \$36:** the NEW Shul School CD featuring Rabbi Burt, Adam Feder and members of the Shul Band
- \$90:** a classic Shul Band CD
- \$180:** an Annual Subscription to Family Programs for 1 kid
- \$270:** an Annual Subscription to Family Programs for 2 kids
- \$360:** an Annual Subscription to Family Programs for 3 kids
- \$360:** an Annual Subscription to family programs for 1 kid and 2 adult High Holiday tickets to services of your choice
- \$450:** an Annual Subscription to family programs for 2 kids and 2 adult High Holiday tickets to services of your choice
- \$540:** an Annual Subscription to family programs for 1 kid and 4 adult High Holiday tickets to services of your choice
- \$630:** an Annual Subscription to family programs for 2 kids and 4 adult High Holiday tickets to services of your choice
- \$720:** an Annual Subscription to family programs for 3 kids and 4 adult High Holiday tickets to services of your choice
- \$1080:** an Annual Subscription to family programs for up to 3 kids and 8 adult High Holiday tickets to services of your choice

It has been said, “Nothing you do for children is ever wasted.” Please make a contribution today at www.indiegogo.com. Search for The Shul of New York 5773. Thank you for your generosity. Thank you for making a difference.

A Path to Peace and Judaism

By Mary Ellis



Editor's Note: The original Shul logo was created by founding Shul congregant, Paula Gold Fader. Mary-Ellis continued the creative process as she describes in this article.

I was brought up in an anti religious environment bordering on anti semitic. Although my father was raised in an Orthodox home, when he became a Communist he denounced his background and shared very little about Judaism with his children. My mother was born Jewish and raised by her mother who had converted to Christian Science so she had even less to share about being Jewish. The fact that they named me Mary after my grandmother didn't help me to feel any more connected to my roots. I was always told that Jewish girls were named Mary in Europe because Mary was really Jewish. In my whole life so far I have met maybe two other Jewish women named Mary.

Fast forward to twenty four years ago when my son Noah was 10 years old and came home from school one day and announced that he wanted to have a Bar Mitzvah. Up until this time we had been celebrating the holidays and not much else. We did not belong to a Shul and I was a struggling, broke, single parent very lucky that my son had a scholarship to The Little Red Schoolhouse. Fortunately, another parent introduced me to Vera Michaels who told us about Rabbi Burt. The first time I heard the Rabbi speak was to a very tiny congregation in a basement on Barrow Street in the West Village.

He related the Torah portion to real life and talked about love, community, inclusiveness, kindness and spirituality! His words felt like they were meant for me and it was the first time that I felt any connection to my religion. This was the beginning of our relationship to The
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Baby Bliss

By Dani Durkin



Please welcome Beckett Dov Lowther, born July 14, 2012 at 1:10pm PST, 8lbs. 10oz, 20.5" to happy parents Dani Durkin and Dave Lowther in Santa Monica, CA. As a member-at-large (and former Board member) of The Shul of New York now living in Brentwood, CA, I'm delighted to announce the birth of my beautiful son, Beckett Dov. A diagnosis of Cushing's Syndrome in 2008 caused me to, unexpectedly, leave New York City and return to my roots in California to have surgery and recover from my illness—an on-going process. Although the last several years have been exceedingly challenging, the addition to my life of Dave Lowther and our gorgeous new son, Beckett, has brought joyous light and love to my world.

It is my hope that, one day, Rabbi Burt will perform a Baby Naming ceremony, and I look forward to sharing The Shul of New York with my new family and traveling again to New York. Thank you so much to my Shul of New York family for all of your LOVE over the past few years. Please celebrate with us! L'Chaim and Shalom!!!



Dani with her newborn baby, Beckett

My High Holy Days Memories

By Bill Lavner

I grew up in a newly-built Canarsie (Brooklyn) housing project in the 1950s that was overflowing with young families, many of us Jewish. In my building alone there were probably twenty Jewish kids within two years of my age. None of the families were very religious but a group of us ate kosher food at home, went to Hebrew classes and were bar mitzvahed. And, we attended shul on the high-holy days. In reflecting back on my experiences, I now realize how surprisingly enriching they were.

I recall getting dressed up and joining my friends in front of our building to begin trudging across a gigantic field of grass, rocks and “stickers” which would attach themselves to our shoe laces and would painfully resist efforts to remove them. In the early days our synagogue was a Quonset hut, a pre-fabricated structure of corrugated steel obtained from the military after World War II.

I remember exchanging glances with my friends during the service and making faces indicating to each other how impatient we were to go home and break our fasts. Interestingly though, we did not race home to dinner afterwards but mixed with others of our friends. I became aware that I was amongst my tribe and we were drawn together by the synagogue.

As we got older a new synagogue was built and we took lessons there preparing for our bar mitzvahs and as the next number of years passed the same group of us would take long walks after the morning services along-side the Belt Parkway and Jamaica Bay. It was an annual ritual that we now look back on fondly. One such hike stands out today.

We were crossing a foot-bridge a couple of miles from home and I detected some rhythmic chanting from underneath. We peered down and witnessed a group of about twelve black men in full religious garb reciting a prayer. We watched in awe for several minutes before walking on. On the way back we looked but they were gone, like a mirage.

When Sara and I adopted Lilly from Korea we joined a West Village synagogue and she was bat mitzvahed there. It was listening to her singing the Haftorah that alerted us to how beautiful her voice was. A year later she joined

Adam Feder’s band and began singing at the new Shul of New York with Burt Siegel as Rabbi. Sara and I followed Lilly and we’ve been regularly attending ever since. Sara is on the board and I’m the new editor of this newsletter. Lilly will sing at the high holy day services.

We will be amongst friends and family.

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***NOTE:** I am the new editor of this newsletter and I welcome your thoughts and comments going forward. I came up through sales in the Magazine Publishing Industry, reaching the position of Publisher for a trade magazine run by The Economist Group. None of that experience helped me in presenting this offering but many congregants and board members contributed with joy in their hearts. I look forward to interacting with many others of you for subsequent editions.

Contact me at: [wlvner@me.com](mailto:wlavner@me.com)

Save the Date!

**Our wonderful Shul
is coming of age!**

Celebrate

***The Shul of New York’s
Bar/Bat Mitzvah***

at the magnificent

**Orensanz
Foundation**

Friday, May 3, 2013

**The special Shabbat service
will be followed by a gala party!**

Hebrew Class (with Pesto on the Side)

by Denny Engel

Summer time sidewalks are sizzling and humidity hangs overhead like an invisible curtain. Walking the streets, one catches snippets of conversations in many languages. An image of the tower of Babel springs to mind. Bodies are scantily clad and the somber colors of winter give way to bursts of color, a feast for the eyes.

The Shul of New York Hebrew Class has taken a break for the summer. Our Rabbi is away pursuing his Spanish studies and members take vacations to near or far cooler spots. I was In Israel myself when Bill Lavner contacted me with a request to write about the Hebrew class.

Coming together at the gatherings on Friday evenings and holidays, we all read from the Shul's prayer books, with many of the passages transliterated to facilitate the reading of prayers or songs in Hebrew. Some members are fluent in Hebrew, some have Hebrew School experience and Bar or Bat Mitzvah memories of the Alphabet. We all share ancient roots and we reconnect with our heritages on one level or another. That experience gave birth to the idea of offering a once a month gathering to provide an open door to those who want to learn the language and get a better understanding of the meaning behind the sounds.

The meetings have taken place at the lovely home of Bill and Sara Lavner who graciously offer the space. We meet in the evenings of the first Wednesday of each month.

Usually people gather around the dining room table and feast on Sara's pesto dish with a glass of wine. Some conversation follows and then the group splits into two. The beginners group study letter recognition, the vowels and putting these two together by sounding them out. The students need to practice each lesson and master what they have learned. Each consecutive lesson is built upon the previous one. Each Student gets many chances to read out loud and there is a spirit of camaraderie and joy at each other's achievements.

A sample of an advanced interaction includes: a prayer taken from the Shul Book as well as one song. Both are written in Hebrew, with word definitions in English. A discussion about origin of words and the verbs takes place. Students take turn reading lines and the song might be sung. The meaning behind familiar sounds makes it rewarding. Each month there might be additional fun handout like a picture showing how all the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet can be found in the Magen David—the Jewish Star. Another handout might touch upon Gimatria—Hebrew Numerology—or a simple crossword puzzle. At the end of a prescribed time we merge together for desserts and a wonderful talk with the Rabbi on Jewish themes or agendas. If you are interested in deepening your understanding and to connect to this beautiful language that is your birthright, come and join us for learning and fun.



From left: The blowing of the Shofar, 2011; The congregation enjoys High Holy Day services; and the Adachi family during their baby-naming ceremony.

Adult Bat Mitzvahs

Three Views

1 My Adult Bat Mitzvah by Carrie Shwartz

I decided to become a Bat Mitzvah as I became more involved with the Shul. I wanted to learn more about Judaism and what it meant to me. I thought who better to learn it from than Rabbi Burt who taught me meditation at Gilda's Club 14 years ago. I was going to the Shul on and off for many years until one High Holidays I decided to go more regularly. Mulling it over for a few years, when my friend Florence chose to become a regular, we decided to do so together.

Once in the class I realized it was the right decision. I enjoyed learning the Hebrew language as well as listening to Rabbi Burt's stories about the origins of Judaism and the various holidays and meanings of all things Jewish. You can tell that the Rabbi enjoys teaching and that made it all the more enjoyable. The whole experience was amazing for a 52-year-old to have such a new experience at that age. It made me look at my life differently as well as made me appreciate and look at the religion in a different way. It also made me understand my family history better and the rituals that they had especially my great grandmother who was orthodox.

From the time of the first class and receiving the books through standing on the Bima at Angel Orensanz in front of my family and friends I realized what a great journey it was. I made some new friends who will be with me for the rest of my life as well as connecting with more people at the Shul. My accomplishment demonstrated to me a confidence I was unaware of. I am still learning each time I go to the Hebrew class as well as Shul. I enjoy helping with the Onegs as well as meeting new people all the time.

I think that if I didn't become a Bat Mitzvah I would still be going to Shul twice a year and would have missed out on a great experience and all the wonderful people that I've met.

2 My Adult Bat Mitzvah by Audrey Ganz

Having participated in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah class and becoming a Bat Mitzvah was a more powerful experience than I expected. I enrolled in the class hoping to learn the basics of what it means to be a Jew.

I had attended eight years of Sunday School and three years of Hebrew School, and yet I did not feel a meaningful connection to Judaism. I did not feel comfortable asking questions about Jewish laws, rituals and beliefs that I did not know, understand or necessarily believe felt congruent with my world view. I wasn't sure I could be true to myself and be a member of a congregation.

One of the greatest outcomes of this experience is my becoming a member of the Shul of New York, a community of Spiritual Judaism. I now can participate in prayers, services and holidays with a sense of acceptance and belonging.

It is a tremendous freedom and relief to be able to openly question and discuss Judaism with Rabbi Burt, with members of our class and my new friends in the congregation. I feel accepted into this community as I am and I am not being told how I should be or how I should think.

Being able to discuss and explore the universality of religious beliefs that connect us as a part of humanity, and to join in interfaith services, enriches my experience of Judaism and my spiritual life.

The actual Bat Mitzvah was moving and spiritual. It was thrilling to be on the Bima with my class and with Rabbi Burt, and confidently partake in the rituals, the prayers, the reading of the Haftorah and Torah. It was a very memorable experience.

Now whenever I enter the Shul I am reminded how glad I am to have become a Bat Mitzvah.

3 My Adult Bat Mitzvah Journey by Florence Roen

Last year Rabbi Burt gave a sermon telling the congregation not to let fear stand in the way of pursuing new ventures. After digesting his words, I decided to face my fear of learning a foreign language, which has always been very difficult for me, and enroll in the adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah class. *(continued on page 15)*

SHUL SCHOOL

By Lisa Lewis

PROGRESSION

Below: Children participate in Shul Kids programs during the High Holy Days.



Our Shul family community is growing by leaps and bounds. Served by Shul School and the Shul Family Programs, families have a wonderful menu of opportunities to choose from. A few short years ago our Shul School was a “one-room school house” at the Henry Street Settlement. This year we’ll have four levels from Pre-K through Bar/Bat Mitzvah training meeting once a week! The teachers are all creative and fun and the kids have a great time in addition to actually learning. Two years ago we introduced the “Shul School Superheroes,” a social service group involving Shul families (some in Shul School and some not). At the start of each year the kids in the group decide what societal issues are most important to them and we design three projects around their choices as our activities for the year. We have planted community gardens, served in soup kitchens, and made many food baskets for homeless and marginalized people in NYC. We took field trips to the Hannah Senesh exhibit, The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit and Succah City, which was in Union Square. We’re looking forward to even more field trips coming up.

This year Shul School has two great new additions. Language studies during class will now take place at “Hebrew Huddle.” Kids will work in small, skill-matched groups to learn the Hebrew language in addition to the living study of Jewish identity and spiritual values. Our school-wide “kum-sitz” (Come Sit!) brings all class levels, teachers, parents and caregivers together to share and learn prayers and songs as a community. This year, in addition to our family holiday events and Family Fridays, we are adding a special Family Shabbat where we share a meal, have some Shabbat learning and much music and dancing with the Torah! (Last time our parade made it to the streets!) At selected regular Friday night services, to make it easier for parents to attend, we are planning to offer supervision of younger kids by high school kids who are earning community service credit.

Shul School starts September 10, 2012 at Simple Studios 134 West 29th Street, between 7th and 8th Ave. There is still space in all levels so check us out at www.shulofnewyork.org/shulschool. Your child can attend a FREE trial class and we offer discounts for registering before Fall. We will have special Kids’ High Holiday services at Rosh Hashana and at Yom Kippur. Register soon—these promise to be amazing events for all ages. Sound great? Wish you were a kid? We welcome kids of all ages! You can show your support—with or without kids—by contributing to our upcoming Indiegogo campaign, raising funds for Family Programs.

Shul Kids ROCK!

My Story (And I'm Sticking To It)

by Fran Kuzui

Every year our Shul of New York congregation gathers at the Orensanz Foundation to observe the High Holy Days. This will be my third amazing experience of the joyous music, deep spiritual insights, sense of belonging, connection to my birth religion, communion with my family both present and passed, and powerful feelings of love that Rabbi Burt and the Shul impart to all of us. I'd like to share my story of how I became a member of our beautiful community.

I always tell my friend Joan that she's the proof that God loves me. After all, I met her during the High Holy Days when we both came to the Jewish Community Center in Tokyo. All are welcome and tickets are available to non-members. All seats are reserved. That year I arrived as the services were beginning, checked my location and went directly to my seat, stopping to offer a friendly smile to the woman sitting next to me. The congregation in Japan is a mix of people from all over the world, with a growing number of Japanese people. It wasn't always that way.

I first attended the JCC in Tokyo in 1977. I've worked in the film business all my life and several months before I'd been hired to work on a Japanese movie that was shooting in New York. On the first day of the job I walked into the production office and there was a very serious looking Japanese man telling a joke. I still remember every detail of the moment because it was love at first sight. I didn't believe in the concept, so I didn't pay much attention to it at the time. His name was Katsusuke (or Kaz) and he asked me to dinner and we've been in each other's lives ever since—35 years!

When Kaz returned to Japan to finish the film, he suggested that I come visit him. Thousands of dollars in phone calls and many letters later, the producer of the film thought it was such a romantic story that he sent me money for a plane ticket. I instantly fell in love with Japan and my feelings for Kaz deepened as well. When the fall came around I was still in Tokyo. So I sought out the JCC and attended my first services outside of NY. There were no Japanese people and I was shocked that the Rabbi had a French accent.

Kaz and I have been very fortunate to be able to live between Japan and the US for all this time. In the 1990s we moved to Los Angeles for our work. I attended High Holy Days services at the local synagogue, and when the rabbi

called up the MC of a popular TV game show to read from the Torah with, "Bob Barker, come on down!" I knew I was at the wrong place. After that I would arrange to be in Tokyo when the High Holy Days came around.

I sat next to Joan for the entire holiday and we continued to smile politely. On the second day of Yom Kippor we turned to each other and said, "L'shana tova" as Jews were doing all over the world. We hugged. Then we looked each other in the eye and said something like, "What time should we meet for coffee tomorrow?" The friendship was born and has grown.

For several years after Kaz and I moved from Los Angeles back to NY Joan urged me to attend services at the Shul of New York. Two years ago I thought I'd give it a try. I was tired of always feeling like a tolerated guest "uptown." I walked through the door and... I belonged. It was again, love at first sight.

There's a long link here. I thank Joan Mirviss for inspiring me to come to my first services at the Shul. Joan would probably thank Vera and Mike Hearn, our original co-Presidents of the Shul who brought her to services here for the first time many years ago, and they might thank others who have helped the Shul grow and those who keep it alive. We're all here together this year because we've chosen the Shul of New York and made an effort. Most of all we must thank Rabbi Burt, our co-Presidents Karen Seidman and Kenny Bookbinder and the many volunteers who work so hard to make this happen for us. I'd love to know your story. How did you wind up here?

The Shul has a blog! If you email me your stories I'd love to share them with our community. Would you please send them to me at: fran@shulofnewyork.org.

L'shana tova!

*** [Turn the page
for more opportunities
to let Fran Kuizu
make you laugh!]**

Old Jews Telling Jokes

By Fran Kuzui

Here we are at the High Holidays again. Each year we turn from the physical to the spiritual, examine our priorities and turn inward. It is said that the Book of Life is opened during these holidays and God decides who will be granted another year of life. One of the other aspects of the High Holidays is we memorialize loved ones who are gone from our lives but live on in our hearts.

I recently saw the most entertaining play called "Old Jews Telling Jokes". Perhaps you've seen it or at least seen ads for it on the sides of buses all over town. On my way out I picked up the souvenir book of the same title. The message of the play and the book is that we tell Jewish jokes as a way of connecting with our collective past and keeping our connections to each other. I love that thought.

So while we are preparing for, or are in the midst of experiencing the profound spiritual journey of the High Holidays, I'd like to take a moment to smile with you and share some of my favorite jokes. I like to think our ancestors are still sharing them with each other. So, maybe you've heard them already?

A man checks into a rooming house and tells the owner that he's exhausted and wants to sleep. The woman at the desk checks him in and wishes him a good night and good rest.

He climbs into bed and just as he's drifting off he hears from the other side of the wall, "Oy vey, I'm so thirsty!" His eyes pop open. "Oy, vey. I'm so thirsty. It's terrible, I'm so thirsty." This continues for a half hour. "Oy, vey. You can't imagine how thirsty I am!"

The man can't stand it any more. He goes to the kitchen, grabs a glass and fills it from the tap. He bangs on the neighbor's door. When the man answers he thrusts the glass at him and demands that the neighbor drink it immediately. Thinking he's solved his problem, the man returns to his room and jumps into bed.

Not five minutes later, coming from the other side of the wall is, "Oy, vey. I was so thirsty..... You'll never know how thirsty I was..."

My wife and I always hold hands. If I let go, she shops.

The doctor gave a man six months to live. The man couldn't pay the bill, so the doctor gave him another six months.

A man called his mother in Florida. "Mom, how are you?"

Not too good," said the mother. I've been very weak."

The son said, "Why are you so weak?"

The mother answered, "Because I haven't eaten in 38 days."

The son replied, "That's terrible. Why haven't you eaten in 38 days?"

The mother answered, "Because I didn't want my mouth to be filled with food if you should call."

A female journalist from CNN heard about a very old Jewish man who had been going to the Western Wall to pray twice a day, every day, for a long time. So she went to check it out. She went to the Western Wall and sure enough, there he was walking slowly up to the Holy site.

She watched him pray, and after about 45 minutes she saw him turn and walk slowly away. As he made his way, leaning heavily on a cane, she approached him and asked for an interview.

"Pardon me sir, I'm so and so from CNN. What's your name?"

"Morris Feinberg," he replied.

"Sir, how long have you been coming to the Western Wall and praying?"

"For about 60 years."

"60 years! That's amazing. What do you pray for?"

"I pray for peace between the Christian, Jews and Muslims. I pray for all the wars and all hatred to stop. I pray for all our children to grow up safely as responsible adults and to love their fellow man. I pray that politicians tell us the truth and put the interests of the people ahead of their own."

"How do you feel after doing this for 60 years?"

"Like I'm talking to a wall.

"So would it hurt to send a joke or two from time to time?"

We'll put them on the web site or add them to our newsletter. I promise. You can reach me at fran@theshulofnew.org.

A Path to Peace and Judaism

(Cont'd. from page 8)

Shul of NY. Since then I was part of the first adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah class, Kenny and I are on the board, and being a painter and graphic artist, I was asked to design the Shul logo. Actually I was inspired to write this article to share how the logo idea came about. I thought it was necessary to share my beginnings to give you some history about how the art evolved and how extraordinary to me coming from so little inspiration from my family that I have arrived at this amazing place!

In my souvenir business I try to capture the essence of a location or historical icon with as few lines and clutter as possible. The challenge is to make a visual statement with the most clarity and impact. Literally, what you see in an instant is what it is all about. This was my approach to the Shul logo. The simple clean line drawing describes our inclusive temple that surrounds a bursting heart with so much love to share with all who come through our doors. When I did this drawing I knew right away it embodied everything I feel about this very rare and special community!

Adult Bat Mitzvahs *(Cont'd. from p. 11)*

When I first began studying, it was all about the destination--the party. But I learned so much each week, that I quickly realized that it was all about the journey, not the destination. Studying Hebrew with Rabbi Burt was not just learning letters, sounds, words, and phrases. He told stories from the Bible, explained the history of ancient civilizations and how the people survived. Class members discussed the relevance of what happened long ago to today's world. I learned about holidays and traditions that I have practiced my whole life but never fully understood. The weekly classes were fun and made me feel alive and excited about learning. I was exercising my "old brain."

By the end of my year's study, I was able to read my portion of the Torah in Hebrew and sing my Haftorah portion. Thanks to Rabbi Burt, it was a wonderful year of laughter and learning.



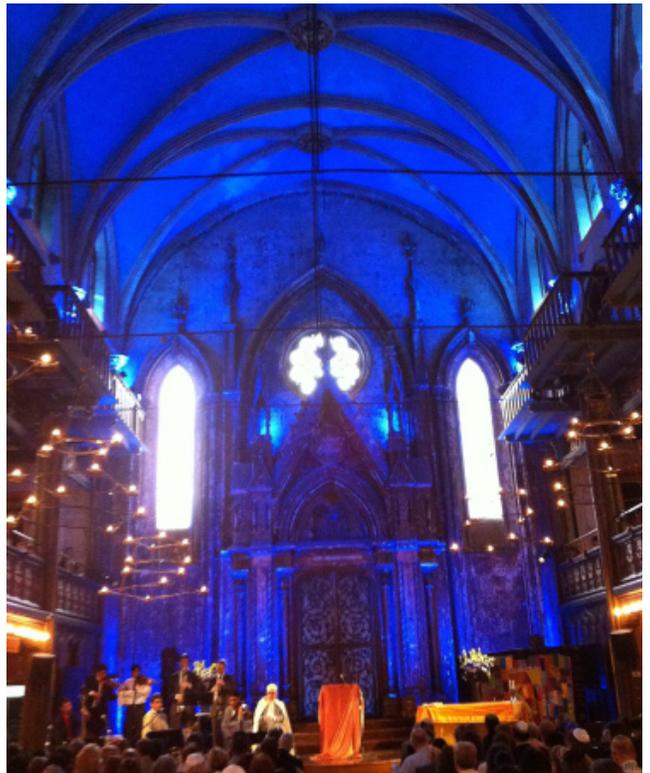
Kenny Bookbinder (Shul co-president) and Mary Ellis (Shul board member) on the Bima at Orensanz.



Julia Rose, who will celebrate her Bat Mitzvah in the coming year, shows off her high-tech wheelchair, which allows her to stand when the congregation rises.



Claude Sampton



Yom Kippur at Orensanz, 2011

Can a kid feel excited about Jewish education?



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For more info, email Marsha at mleo1@nyc.rr.com or visit: www.theshulofnewyork.org



Rabbi Burt engages a group of children during High Holy Day services.

Please donate to the Shul of New York through our IndieGoGo campaign!

Visit www.indiegogo.com and search for The Shul of New York 5773.



Many thanks for your generosity in helping to make our programs possible!

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