

A wide-angle photograph of the interior of The United Synagogue of Hoboken. The view is from the back of the sanctuary, looking down the central aisle towards the front. The sanctuary features a high ceiling with a blue-painted section and white architectural details. A large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. The walls are light-colored, and the floor is made of dark wood. The pews are made of dark wood and are arranged in rows. In the foreground, a scroll is open on a table, and a small object, possibly a pen or a pointer, lies on it. The overall atmosphere is bright and clean.

שופר

The Shofar

January 2022/5782

The United Synagogue of Hoboken
www.hobokensynagogue.org

Looking up, or looking down?

by Rabbi Rob Scheinberg

Let me share a memory from January 2021, otherwise known as the “middle pandemic period.”

My daughter is a student at a high school in New York City. Last winter, she was attending two days a week in person, and three days remotely. In a normal world she would be commuting by bus or subway, but in the winter of 2021 we were not comfortable with this -- so when she would be going to school, I would drive her in and pick her up.

Whereas Fridays were normally designated for her as remote days, there were some occasional Fridays that were in-person days for her, but only for half the day. One such day took place in January 2021. On that day, it was clear that it would just not be worth it for me to drive into the city, drop her off, return to Hoboken, and then less than an hour later, drive back into the city to pick her up. It would be much better for me to stay in the city and work from remote. In a normal world, I would have parked the car, found a Starbucks or some similar place, and done my work while waiting for my daughter -- but this story takes place when there was no indoor dining in New York City, so it was better for me to work from the car.

However; for the last many years, my Friday morning routine has included visiting all the kids in the various preschool classes and singing songs with them. Or at least that's what I would do in non-pandemic times. When the weather permitted, I would sing with the kids outside, but in January of 2021 it was too cold to do this outdoors, and at that time, state regulations prohibited visitors inside preschool classes under any circumstances. This is why, last winter, I would spend a chunk of my Friday mornings sitting in my office playing guitar and singing over Zoom, and a big TV monitor would get brought into the classes so they could see me. Some of the kids started calling it “Rabbi TV.” I would sing songs with them and do some prayers with them.

But what was I going to do on this Friday in January? Well, I decided, I can bring my guitar in the car with me when I drive my daughter to school, and I guess I can Zoom these music sessions from the car, using my phone.

So that's what I attempted that day. I am parked illegally in Manhattan, sitting in the driver's seat of the car, using the Zoom app on my phone, with the guitar strap over my shoulders. And for some reason the Zoom is not connecting. Apparently I have the wrong Zoom link.

Frantically I try to contact anyone at the school. And perhaps you have also had this experience -- when I am agitated, my texting becomes more erratic, and I misspell more words. Fortunately, Autocorrect comes to the rescue. But when I'm trying to say that I need the new Zoom link so that I can sing songs with the preschool, Autocorrect apparently has a mind of its own, twisting around every word I am trying to type, and thinks I'm trying to go on a safari with my dentist or something else that makes no sense. (Though frankly it also doesn't make sense that I'm trying to play guitar with preschoolers in Hoboken from the driver's seat of an illegally parked car on Riverside Drive.) And I'm about to scream, because autocorrect is so garbling this urgent message I am trying to send to the preschool. I am so frustrated, and I begin to wish Autocorrect had never been invented.

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2022

by Jeremy Morley, USH President

We are looking forward to a wonderful 2022 even as we continue to juggle our events and resources to cope with the ongoing pandemic.

This year will be a momentous year for USH. We have so much to be grateful for and we are so thankful for the energy and commitment that our staff and amazing volunteers exert to support our activities.

We have launched a top-to-bottom Strategic Planning Initiative that is fully engaged already to create an exciting blueprint for the future.

We bid a fond farewell to Grace Gurman-Chan after 18 years as our Education Director and we look forward to spending time with Grace on many future occasions.

So many children and parents will treasure their special times with her and are full of appreciation for her immense contribution to their lives.

We have a solid plan in place for the balance of the school year and a tremendous search committee that is hard at work to secure a wonderful new Education Director for the next school year.

Here are some favorite snapshots of Grace at USH events.



A Special Note from Grace Gurman-Chan

Dear USH Family,

Walking into this building for the first time was magical. The paint was falling from this magnificent Sanctuary ceiling, the acoustics shook my soul. Every touch of each pew made me think of those who lived, prayed, and celebrated in this holy place.

The Rabbi invited me to services which I attended. After services he invited me to his apartment on the third floor of the new building. He soulfully celebrated Shabbat with a small group of charming, warm, and invested congregants. The moments together were intimately filled with discussions about the weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, and baby namings in this space, including the Rabbi's children. The congregants were warm, welcoming, charming, and hopeful. This Synagogue was going to blossom as well as the town of Hoboken.

I had already been a regional director of youth for the Reform Movement, a cantorial soloist in two movements, and teaching Judaic studies for years, and ran a Jewish camp.

How did I get here? I was getting married in a few days and wanted to appease my wonderful and supportive friend Samantha Geracht Myers, the mother of two delicious small children.

I had been working back in the secular world getting politicians elected and still teaching Judaic studies on weekends. On a wonderful clergy trip to Israel with my mother, I met this charming Chinese man with an English accent who was about to convert. My father was one of the first people to die of the bird flu and never took my mother to Israel. My clergy friends told me they had this trip and they needed me to sing. Mom and my future husband became best friends after this trip and the rest is fate. Ken, my mom, Jade and I lived life together until my Mom's death this fall.

Back to this community. We had a lovely Rabbi, a new movement to be part of, a building that was falling apart, lovely congregants, some children and a forty-five minute plus ride from Berkeley Heights. Hmmm... sounds great!

Well, with the support of my wonderful husband and mother I said, "Sure!" The rest is beyond magical.

Parents cooked meals so that teens could study in eighth grade; we taught Judaism using experiential techniques, politicians spoke to us on Civil Rights, Bible players taught us Bible by rapping, politicians talked to us about human rights through a Jewish ethical lens. We learned to lobby our members of Congress on issues that advanced human rights. We met Jewish historical figures in a living museum. We learned about science, art, and nature during the Jewish High Holidays to understand our connection and Jewish obligation to make the world a better place because we were here. Artists came to Hoboken to make yads, a portable ark, Havdalah sets, tzedakah boxes so we could enhance the commandments of Hiddur Mitzvah. We traveled to people's homes for Holiday programs. We developed a program called My Jewish Neighborhood and celebrated holidays in each other's homes. We had overnights at the Museum of Natural History exploring our thoughts on Jewish perspectives of science. We went to Liberty Science Center overnights as we explored blessings and why we say them, and we explored how the important food made its way to us. We fought for social justice in Washington D.C., Philly and Boston as we learned about our Jewish History and how we as Jews are part of American history.

Was it the stories of those who vandalized the Holocaust memorial in Boston? The Director of the program who helps drug addicts survive who shares his Jewish wisdom to help addicts live and prosper? The Kaddish we said at the 9/11 memorial? The Jewish gangsters of New York talk? Hammering tools at the Jewish Museum, Jewish archeological digs or the Eldridge Street Museum opportunity to read out loud Bar Mitzvah speeches of the past? Family tours of the Tenement Museum? Kosher Chinese meals in Chinese or saying the blessings of food out in public, just to name a few.

This community allowed me the opportunity to show our families that Judaism is right in front of us. We have this incredible opportunity to grow and love our history and the future in dynamic, historic, natural ways.

Thank you for trusting me with your children and your families and for taking me into your hearts so we grow as Jews b'yachad, together.

To my past and present teachers who took this journey with me, you are the flame that warms the heart and souls of our young people. It is your heart that has and will inspire their journey. May the path ahead be filled with adventure.

To my friend Samantha, a day does not go by that I do not think about how grateful I am to you. You are an outstanding Jewish role model/Educator and you shepherded this program with enormous sacrifice. We at USH honor your sacrifice and efforts to make KLC what it is today.

To all my Education Chairs, I know that honoring opinions of a dedicated and dynamic community is not easy and you all did it with such love and understanding. Thank you. David, you have this incredible heart to lead and the soul to understand the needs of our community that is a formula for success.

To the Presidents and Boards who helped to raise funds and who backed a journey that sometimes was unheard of, I applaud your generosity. Please know your support was monumental and was life changing to our families and to me.

Dear Rabbi, you have backed me and the program, diving in with me whole heartedly in uncharted territory. Your love of our community is boundless. Your support of me has been extraordinary. We visioned and we tackled obstacles. You inspired, loved and shared the wisdom of our faith, championing causes that were in uncharted waters for our youth and community. Our children love your wisdom, your heart, your leadership and the way you walk beside them. Thank you for all you have done with me to grow this holy community together.

To Rhonda, you have generously helped to secure a program that is filled with love, invested parents and students and marked the souls of all with your thumbprint and administrative expertise. You have partnered with me on this Jewish journey allowing our families to learn and grow in a nurturing environment. Thank you to both you and Adam for your generosity and commitment to seeing the lives of our families prosper and grow Jewish dynamic lives together.

To our Parents and students, I am overwhelmed by the generosity of your heart and commitment to making sure you are part of an engaging, dynamic Jewish community. Planning schedules, holding to the importance of making sure we deliver a curriculum and program that is unique and thoughtful has been a pleasure to direct. You all are all in and your children know it. May you all continue to live and grow in this supportive holy community.

Thank you Rabbi, Samantha, Rhonda, the amazing Presidents, Boards, Families, Children, Teachers, my supportive husband Ken, my gracious daughter Jade, mother Miki, and this holy community for the adventure of a lifetime called Judaism.

תודה

Grace

P.S. I hope to see you at Simchas and some trips in the spring.



Year in Review

Refugee Support Committee

By Razel Solow

The Refugee Support Committee (RSC) had a productive year. Thanks for your donations, volunteer time and interest. Here are some of the highlights:

Our Refugee Shabbat March event was a great success! Alain Mentha, the Executive Director of Welcome Home Jersey City (WHJC), spoke about ways members of our community could advocate for and support refugees and asylum seekers. Veronica, a Welcome Home client, fled Nigeria with her children for safety in the U.S. and discussed how the group helped her family.

In April, Rabbi Lee Bycel, author of *Refugees in America*, shared moving stories of his interviewees. USH sponsored the well-attended event, and other HIAS Welcome Campaign (the U.S. refugee action network) congregations also contributed toward his virtual appearance.

For (WHJC), RSC members:

1. **Fun Club** - volunteered virtually to teach ESL. Fun Club is now meeting in person on Monday nights at the Islamic Center in Jersey City.
2. **Coat Drive** – helped organize and distribute the coats, hats, scarves, and boots that USH members donated for men, women and children.
3. **Flow Initiative** – donated packages of menstrual products and distributed them on December 11.
4. **Toy Drive(s)** – advertised the regular holiday toy drive and a special toy drive for Afghani families who are living at Fort Dix.

The RSC also donated money for:

1. **The Lighthouse** (which houses asylees) – a refrigerator and monthly supplies.
2. **First Friends of NJ/NY** – their bond fund, which pays for the release of detainees.
3. **Legal assistance** – for a member of our community.



"Buy a Meal for the Shelter" Raises over \$2,000!

by Merry Firschein

For the second year in a row, Mitzvah Day 2021 programming included "Buy a Meal for the Shelter" donation program, in which a donation of \$10 would purchase a dinner for a client of the Hoboken Shelter. The Hoboken Shelter serves dinner to 80 clients each evening.

Through the compassion of the USH community, this year the Buy a Meal program received \$2,090 from our members. The Rabbi's Discretionary Fund topped off the amount so that USH would be able to provide three meals to Shelter clients. The Mitzvah Day team contacted Mikie Squared Bar & Grill, and the team there graciously agreed to deliver meals three days in a row. In addition, the restaurant team created three completely different meals for each night, and delivered them in a covid-safe way to the Shelter each afternoon.

The meals were delivered to the Shelter Sunday, Nov. 28 -- which coincidentally was the first night of Hanukkah -- Monday, Nov. 29, and Tuesday, Nov. 30.

The Mitzvah Day team -- Hope Koturo, Melissa Sandler, Merry Firschein and Rabbi Scheinberg -- thanks everyone for their contribution to helping provide our Hoboken neighbors a warm dinner. And we look forward to including this virtual project in our Mitzvah Day programming going forward.



Joshua M. Greene's *Unstoppable*

by Karen Leonardi

On December 12th, author Joshua M. Greene joined the USH community to discuss his book *Unstoppable*, detailing the incredible story of Siegbert "Siggi" Wilzig.

Siggi, a Holocaust survivor, came to America in 1947 at the age of 21 with \$240 in his pocket and no formal education beyond grade school. Upon his death in 2003, he had amassed a fortune of over \$4 billion in assets. But it's what happened in between and Siggi's tireless drive to honor the memory of the 6 million victims of the Shoah (including the 59 members of his family who perished), to educating the world by sharing his eyewitness account from the camps, to fighting the antisemitism that was at the root of the Holocaust in order to build a brighter future and prevent this atrocity from ever happening again.

Siggi's approach to business was unique and he operated on instinct, with no formal business education or training. He shattered barriers in two of the country's most antisemitic industries at the time, banking and oil.

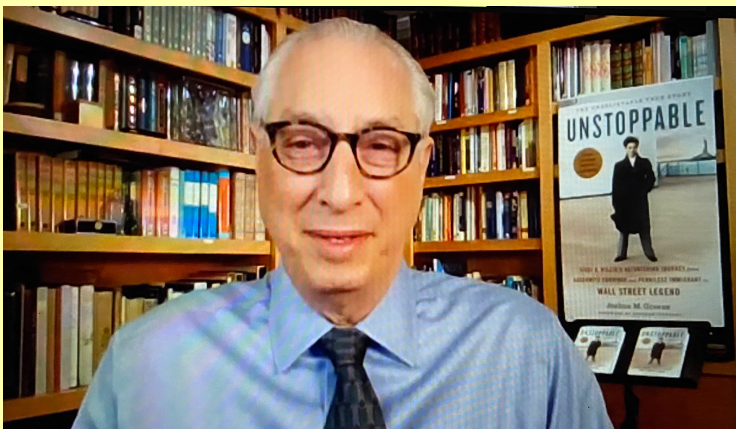
The instincts that propelled Siggi in business are also what helped him survive the camps. What is also unwavering throughout Siggi's story was his faith. When his mind told him he wouldn't survive, God told him to keep going. When talking of his survival, Siggi would say, "It was as if the Almighty had his hand on my shoulder to lead and guide me when I was all alone and in mortal danger." That's not to say he didn't have difficulties reconciling a beneficent God with the murder of so many innocents, in particular the 1.5 million Jewish children who were killed.

During the USH author event, Mr. Greene stated that Siggi's purpose and drive was "to build a platform of influence so when he spoke about the Holocaust people would have to listen." His success in business and oratory skills gave him the platform. And people listened.

Today Siggi's family continues to honor his legacy through philanthropic work and community outreach activities as well as speaking about the Holocaust and sharing Siggi's experiences.

Towards the conclusion of the author event, Mr. Greene was asked what he thinks Siggi would say if he were here today. He responded, "Do not give in to despair. The Almighty is there to lend a helping hand if you just ask."

If you are looking for an inspiring story that will resonate with you long after you have finished it, this is the book for you.



Author Joshua M. Greene discussing his book *Unstoppable* at the Dec 12th USH Author Event



Photo shared by the author of Siggi with his family in 2000

Upcoming Events & Activities

19th Annual Phillip & Claire Meistrich Brunch Series Continues!

Sundays @ 11 am

February 6th The Telling

How Judaism's Essential Book Reveals the Meaning of Life
by Mark Gerson

March 6th How Magicians Think

and Why Magic Matters
by Joshua Jay

April 3rd Lady Parts

A Memoir
by Deborah Copaken

May 1st Proof of Life

Twenty Days on the Hunt for a Missing Person in the Middle East
by Daniel Levin

To purchase, please visit Little City Books
in Hoboken or at

www.littlecitybooks.com.

Interested in writing a book review for a future edition of *The Shofar*?

We would like to highlight reviews from the community who read the featured books in advance of our brunch series sessions. If interested, please contact KarenatTheShofar@gmail.com.



Shalom Chaverim: Jewish Stories and Crafts
8 session Winter/Spring Series, Feb 28-April 27
A drop-off program for children ages 3-5

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Register at:
www.hobokensynagogue.org/event/shalomchaverim2021



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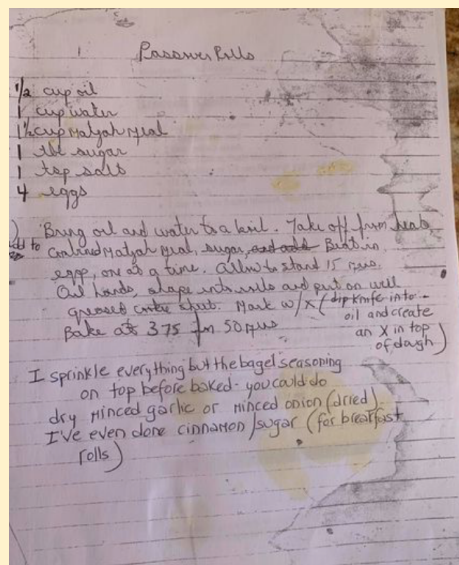
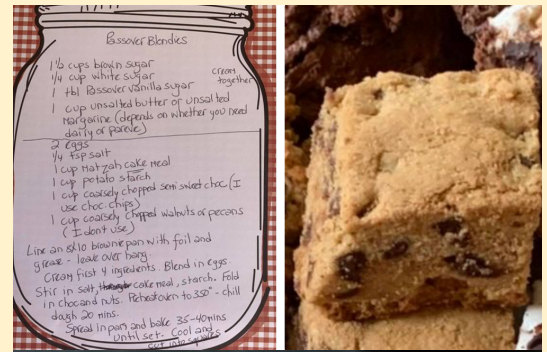
Contact director@kaplanpreschool.org for more information

CALLING ALL *cooks*

**....and those who don't cook (or
bake) but may have a favorite
recipe to share!**

Passover begins on April 15th and for our March edition of The Shofar we will publish a collection of **Passover Recipes**. Whether it's a traditional recipe, a twist on brisket, desserts to end Seder on a sweet note or creative things to do with matzah....we hope you will share your special recipe with us.

Please submit recipes **by February 27th** to **KarenatTheShofar@gmail.com**. Photos are welcome if you have them!



The people of Israel have left Egypt, but they haven't gotten far before Pharaoh has a change of heart and decides to race after them. When the people reach the Sea of Reeds, they become terrified. Moses instructs them to walk through the sea on dry land. Miraculously, that's what they do -- they walk through the sea and that's how they escape Egypt and escape their oppressors. The splitting of the sea is regarded as the most amazing miracle in the entire Torah. And yet -- no sooner have the people crossed through the sea, they start complaining again. Which leads the commentators to ask: how is it possible that the people could be so ungrateful, and so oblivious to this most extraordinary miracle that they just witnessed?

The ancient midrashic collection *Shmot Rabbah* (24:1) records this about some of those who walked through the sea: "When the people of Israel entered the Sea of Reeds, it was full of mud, because until [the parting of the sea, the floor of the sea] was damp from the water, and it resembled mud. [While walking through the sea,] one person would complain to another: "In Egypt we had mud, and in the sea we have mud!" It's so incredible that the Israelites could be in the presence of such an extraordinary miracle, but rather than being so glad to be free, they were annoyed that their shoes were getting ruined by the mud.

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner suggests that the best way to understand this midrashic story is that these complaining people were looking down rather than up. It's not that they were ungrateful for the miracle; rather, they actually missed the miracle -- they didn't see it, because they were looking down. Their memories of this occurrence will just be memories of trudging through the mud.

With my determination not to be like one of these complaining Israelites, I thought that perhaps I should think again about what had led me to be playing my guitar in a car on Riverside Drive, cursing the inventor of Autocorrect. Of course it was the pandemic that brought me to that unusual place. Without the pandemic I probably wouldn't have been driving into the city. But remarkably, the pandemic notwithstanding, it is miraculous how we can be maximally connected to people across the river and around the world. Even five years ago we didn't have effective technology to do some of the things that we have taken for granted during this challenging era.

About fifteen years ago, in the runup to the publication of *Mahzor Lev Shalem*, the Rabbinical Assembly was doing a webinar about our new book. Webinars were also new at that time, and to create the webinar, we went to a webinar studio -- during the very brief period of time when there used to be such a thing. Fifteen years ago, you couldn't imagine creating a webinar if you weren't doing it from a webinar studio. And fast forward fifteen years and I'm broadcasting live music from the front seat of my car. We all realize that had the pandemic happened five years earlier or ten years earlier, the amount of life upheaval would have been so much worse -- and it probably would have been significantly deadlier in every way than it has been.

This is not to say that we shouldn't complain about the horrifying effect of the pandemic on our lives. But maybe it means that I didn't really need to be complaining about Autocorrect on that day in January 2021.

Similarly, the Israelites leaving Egypt had what to complain about -- including the violence they had seen and experienced, and the years of oppression they had endured. The problem was not that they complained. The problem was that they complained about the mud.

From their example, may we learn to be judicious about what we choose to complain about. May we spare no opportunities to affirm when we are in the presence of miracles.

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