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DECEMBER/JANUARY 2023/2024

THE JEWISH VOICE

Informing and Connecting Jews in El Paso & Las Cruces



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FEB. 25, 2024
5 P.M.

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Letter from the Director

By Marla Cohen, Executive Director
Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces

October 7 marked a changed world for Israel and the Jewish communities around the world. The Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces mission pivoted from trying to wrap up a campaign to focusing on raising money for Israel. As of November 27, 2023 JFNA raised over \$666M for emergency Israel aid, and Israel bonds raised over \$1B. More than 38 hostages have been released.

This war will test us in many ways. Visit our website for updates and ways you can take action. Our resilience and commitment to Israel, I do not doubt. Our exhaustion from combating anti-Semitism from those who should know better to “the simple son who doesn’t know how to ask a question” will wear us thin. On top of that will be our waves of fear and anxiety, from watching the news to learning about what is going on with our friends and families. El Paso has shown a great deal of support for Israel, many of our interfaith partners have shown up for us in their own way, but we still have antisemitic incidents occurring. People are scared and not reporting. Please report incidents to the Police, get a case number, and then report to the ADL and FBI.

Due to the war, many of our institutions have renegotiated their programming offerings. We need to shift the schedule for launching “Latitudes-Discussion with Sister Cities.” Our partner agencies in Israel must remain focused on addressing Israelis' immediate needs. I wrote about this program in the last issue of the Voice. It will explore many issues relevant to the Borderlands, Ciudad Juarez, and Israel, such as water and agriculture, borders and human migration, democracy and voting, pharmaceutical industry, cyber, and security. We will move this program forward as such conversations educate our community and lead to more significant partnerships to fight anti-Semitism.

I also ask you to commit to the Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces. Besides fighting antisemitism through gatherings, and community events such as Shofar Across Borders and Hanukkah at the Plaza (December 13), we are producing engaging programs like Borderlands Cafe Europa (The White Sands Missile Range Museum has been a highlight to date), PJ Library and the new teen philanthropy unveiling in 2024. Come shop at Kendra Scott on December 3. A portion of your jewelry purchase will go to the JFed campaign and Israel emergency aid. We thank you.

The Jewish Voice

is a publication of the  **Jewish Federation**
of El Paso & Las Cruces

The Jewish Voice, published six times a year, is dedicated to informing, educating, and uniting the Jewish community by providing news items of local, national, Israeli and international concern. The Jewish Voice will consider for publication any materials submitted that support the mission of Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces and have relevance and appeal our Jewish community. Articles are subject to editing at the editor's discretion and are subject to space limitations. Letters cannot be longer than 150 words and articles must be kept to a maximum of 1,000 words.

Please email to thevoice@jfedepc.org.

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Hanukkah Events

Las Cruces' 14th Annual MEGA
CHANUKAH ON THE PLAZA
SUNDAY, DEC. 10 4:00PM DOWNTOWN PLAZA de Las Cruces

LATKES & DOUGHNUTS
GIANT MENORAH LIGHTING
CHOCOLATE GELT DROP
LIVE CONCERT BY: DAN BERN
FUN CHANUKAH CRAFTS & GIFTSHOP
RAFFLES/PRIZES

AND SO MUCH MORE...FREE EVENT & OPEN TO ALL

For more information visit:
www.CHABADLC.org/CONCERT

Hanukkah at B'nai Zion

December 8-10

Shabbaton with

Benji Lovett

Scholar in Residence



Temple Beth El

Friday December 8th

Special Hanukkah Friday Night
Service

Music, Latkes, & Candle Lighting

Chanukah Playland

at Chabad Lubavitch

Sunday, December 10 | 2:00 PM

Chabad Lubavitch Center for Jewish Life

RSVP: CHABADELPASO.COM/PLAYLAND

OR 915-204-6581



Vodka and Latkas

Saturday December 9

6:00 - 8:00 PM

\$10/person

Temple Mount Sinai

rsvp at templemountsinai.com



Join us



Sunday, December 3

2:00-4:00 PM

at  KENDRA SCOTT

Shine Bright, Do Good

Use code GIVEBACK-FNHZY online from Dec 3-4

20% of sales go to Campaign and the Israel Emergency Fund

Celebrate Hanukkah

at San Jacinto Plaza



December 13

6:00 – 7:00 PM

Sponsor a Candle: \$1800

Food trucks, music, & more!



Jewish Federation
of El Paso & Las Cruces



A Grateful Farewell to a Dedicated Staff Member

For more than 85 years, the Jewish Federation of El Paso, Jewish El Paso and the Jewish Federation of El Paso and Las Cruces (JFEDEPLC), has been an exceptional example of community and committed leadership, replete with dedicated individuals engaging together, connecting, supporting, and celebrating Jewish life, values, and culture in El Paso, Las Cruces, Israel, and beyond. For the last 26 of those years, Sue Bendalin has been instrumental in the Federation's success in providing an umbrella under which the Jewish community here could thrive, learn and celebrate our common bond. So, it is with great gratitude and respect for her service that we announce Sue's retirement from JFEDEPLC.

Sue grew up in our desert southwest in a loving family, and was the center of a multitude of friends and family spanning state borders with whom she celebrated our goals, lifestyle and faith. She is never without a story, sharing with each person she meets, that she had just seen their family member at Temple, Synagogue, or a recent event, and explaining their connection to our community. Sue has been an encyclopedia teaching the history of our Jewish Community to locals as well as newcomers. It is clear that she was and is a Torah for this community. For me personally, Sue was instrumental in my successful transition as Executive Director of JFEDEPLC. She helped me

learn a whole new forest of family trees and kept me informed of everything from who just had a birthday, to who is in the hospital, to who just passed away. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from Sue Bendalin and know she will continue to be lovingly embraced by the community she served with dedication for so many years. Please join me in wishing Sue a very happy retirement.

With deepest respect and gratitude,

Marla Cohen,
Executive Director, JFEDEPLC

Mazel Tov's

Lilah Berkson's Bat Mitzvah



Saturday, November 4, 2023 Temple Beth El, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

From left: Rabbi Evette, Temple Beth El, Lilah Berkson, & Monica Kimball

Blanca Carrasco Awarded for Excellence

On November 14, Blanca Carrasco received the 2023 UTEP College of Engineering Staff Excellence Award. This award is given to reward exceptional clerical, administrative and



technical departmental staff who further the mission of the, departments, college and university.

Consecration Class of '23

Every other year, Temple Mount Sinai's Religious School participates in the ritual of consecrating our youngest students into their Jewish education.

This year, 12 students, between the ages of 4 and 7, participated with their families and the community as we symbolically and physically surrounding them in Torah to consecrate their lifelong journey into Judaism.



Temple Mount Sinai Consecration, September 29, 2023. Courtesy of Mindy Escobar-Leanse



Prayer for Peace

*Co-written by the Mitzvah Corps Class,
Temple Mount Sinai & Turkish
Raindrop House middle school students*

Oh, Creator of humanity, may you lead us in the correct path of life and hear all of our voices. Please bless this world with peace.

The One and Only Lord, please don't let the fire get bigger, and find ways to make it smaller.

No matter the differences of each human being, we still will be judged for the actions we did.

May the differences seen between the people of this world, not be obstacles, getting in the way of peace, but as a gift allowing us to learn and grow from each other, giving the gifts of knowledge and acceptance.

Please bless our world with Peace and help the world come together to help resolve major problems.

Oh Creator, help us understand and respect our culture and please bless this world with peace.

O Creator, may you lead us into a path of love, kindness, peace and friendship.

The One and Only Lord, please help humanity get lead in the right way. Help make the world a better place.

Let us be one part of the great whole, for our cultures are one.

Oh Creator, bless this world with peace and harmony and end all the wars around the world

ALL: For we are all related to each other in our cultures, in our hearts and in our beliefs.
As-salamu alaykum. Shalom Aleichem. Peace be with you.

Mitzvah Corps, Turkish Raindrop House Write Prayer for Peace

By Ellen Goodman

On November 12, 2023 the Mitzvah Corps (middle school) class of Temple Mount Sinai met with the middle school class from the Turkish Raindrop House. Lufti Dagci, the leader of this organization invited us over to meet and to get to know the kids who are the same age as our Mitzvah Corps kids. The underlying tenant of this class is to show our students ways to make this world a better place.

If it is filling bag for a food kitchen, or pulling weeds in a public garden, we want to teach them that they can be involved, in their own ways, to make this world a better place for all.

Here, they learned the similarities in our cultures how their words can have the power to help effect change not only in their lives, but in the lives of others. The words written are reflected in an opening statement, and then individual prayers come next ending with a very powerful ending statement.

Reflections: Am Yisrael Chai



By Samantha Levin,
Cherry Hill School

I woke up on Shabbat, October 7th at 4:47 a.m. and found an urgent text message from my dad telling me that a full-blown war broke out in Israel and to turn on any news channel. My parents, following a life-long dream, made aliyah three years ago. My mother happened to be in Los Angeles visiting my grandmother, having left El Paso one day before. While here, my mom and I recalled how her visits always seemed to come before some calamity. As an army family, we move a lot.

Mom was helping me unpack in a new home when Hurricane Sandy hit; she visited right before the country shut down for COVID-19. She was even with us once when my dad was hit by a bus, riding his bike to work. We joked with a sense of irony that something bad must be on the horizon. Little did we know.

They caught us with our pants down, and some southern towns are still not cleared of terrorists," read another text from my father a few hours later. I was horrified. I sat numb, watching CNN in a state of shock and disbelief. This was not a terror attack; this was a pogrom, a massacre, a modern-day genocide. My grandfather, Dad's father, 94 years old, is a Holocaust survivor who witnessed his father being shot dead by the Nazis in cold blood. This was real and raw. The Holocaust was no longer something I heard about from Saba, or a school program, it was happening

in real-time on TV, and the modern-day Nazis were airing their atrocities live.

By 7 AM, I couldn't hold off and woke my husband, Michael. I don't even know why I waited that long. For us, Israel is beyond personal. Ours is a proud Jewish and Zionist household. I grew up that way. We have lots of close family living in Israel, we would visit Israel at least every other year, and I went to Zionist day schools and summer camps. I marched in the Salute to Israel parade yearly on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. I spent my post-high-school gap year in Israel, training as a medic and volunteering with Magen David Adom. Michael's deep connection to Israel came a little later in life. His Birthright trip was followed by studies at Hebrew University and two years serving as a paratrooper in the IDF.

Like Jews worldwide, I felt a need to take action, to contribute my little something to our hurting brothers and sisters. I immediately contacted the Jewish Federation of El Paso & Las Cruces to see how I could help. Marla Cohen, Executive Director, immediately assembled our Jewish community leaders to help put together an Israel Solidarity event for our city. The turnout and cooperation was heartwarming and not surprising. At the Cherry Hill School, where I am the Hebrew teacher, I witnessed my students singing Hatikvah, which brought tears to my eyes.

I feel an emptiness inside me like there is still more for me to do. At school, I realize the importance of my work. My grandfather taught me that the best revenge against Hitler and the Nazis was educating the next generations of Jewish children through the language and history of Israel and Jewish values and traditions. And, of course, a vibrant and secure Israel, the Jewish homeland. I am proud that my students are receiving that education and are taught to stand up against hate and anti-Semitism because history repeats itself as we see it today. Please, God, this time, never again. Am Yisrael Chai.

Into the War

by Walter Chayes

Walter Chayes is a semi-retired investment counselor and avid cyclist who has lived in El Paso for 50 years. He is a founding member of the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. Growing up in New York City, he became actively involved in the Zionist movement as a teenager. Israel and Aliyah have always been central to his identity. In the summer of 2022, Congregation B'nai Zion, the Holocaust Museum, and Temple Mount Sinai sponsored a tour to Poland and Israel. This was the last of Walter's several trips to Israel, and as he went from place to place, he realized how much the country remained a very real part of his soul; yet, traveling as a tourist, he felt something was missing.

Then came the October 7 attacks. When a Solidarity Mission was announced, sponsored by the Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA), he leapt at the chance to do 'something special.' And so, with the concerned support of his wife, Theresa (and despite his own misgivings), Walter joined 24 federation leaders for a first-hand experience of the Hamas onslaught. Over two

days, the group traveled from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea to Ofakim, a town 12 miles from Gaza. They met survivors and families of hostages, toured service centers, and visited a devastated community.

October 31 El Al Flight 787

I flew to Israel a day before meeting the group in Jerusalem to spend time with my cousin in Tel Aviv. The flight from Los Angeles was more than half empty. Where were the bearded old men? Little children running in the aisles? Young couples bantering in Hebrew? There was a somberness to the flight as if the passengers knew we weren't traveling to Israel for a vacation.

October 31 Tel Aviv

My cousin Tovy lives in Givataim, a neighborhood outside of Tel Aviv. Twenty minutes after arriving at her apartment, the siren on Tovy's cell phone wails. The sound is immediately followed by sirens going off throughout the city. Tovy leads me to the safe room, closes the reinforced door and then slides a steel curtain across each window. We hear several booms in the distance--the Iron Dome is working!--and exit a few minutes later. I hear commotion outside our window and Tovy explains that the kids have learned to play right outside the front door of the apartment building so they can dash inside when the

alarm sounds. As if on cue, the sirens blare again. Two loud booms soon follow. What a hard way to grow up, I think. As we leave for dinner, Tovy shows me a beautiful wooden cabinet standing beside her front door. "This was made by a lady in Kibbutz Be'eri" she says, then adds that after the attack, she tried to find out if the woman was OK. "They found her body at the Kibbutz. Her husband and children are missing." Outside at a restaurant a few blocks away, I enjoy a great roasted veggie pizza, washed down with a Tuborg beer. The evening is cool and tranquil other than the occasional soldier passing with his rifle. How easy it is to forget what is happening, I think. Suddenly, the sirens sound again. As if perfectly rehearsed, everyone rises in unison. There is no panic; just an orderly fast walk because everyone knows they have 90 seconds to head to the basement of the restaurant. We emerge ten minutes later, pay our bill, and head home. In the cool quiet evening air, I marvel that one can become accustomed to living here. Entering the apartment building, I notice children's bicycles parked in the hallway and wonder how parents explain to a four-year-old that it's time to go to the safe room because just a few miles away there are people who are trying to kill them.

November 1st Jerusalem

Magen David Adom (Israeli RedCross) has 70 centers throughout Israel. On October 7th, MDA's phone lines are overwhelmed. We learn that the first ambulance drivers had been shot and killed as they approached Kibbutz Be'eri and that armored ambulances were dispatched thereafter. At the time of our visit to the Jerusalem center, MDA needs 18,000 units of blood a day, all to be stored in underground bunkers. Training is being offered to thousands of volunteers, ranging in age from 15 to 90.

The most heart-wrenching part of the day is meeting with families of the kidnapped hostages. They show emotional strength while discussing their plight but are clearly under tremendous stress. They are frustrated because the International Red Cross has come to Jerusalem demanding evidence that captured Hamas terrorists are being treated well but have no plans to go into Gaza to inquire about the Israeli hostages. They beg us to apply whatever political pressure possible in the United States to force international intervention to release the hostages. The only optimism that the IDF has offered to the families is to say, "We know things, but we can't tell."

Nefesh B'nefesh (Jewish Souls United) is nonprofit organization with the goal of helping olim (Jewish immigrants) when they arrive in Israel. That mission changes on October 7th. A 24/7 hotline is established to connect soldiers who have parents scattered around the world. Teams are formed to handle funerals, provide Shiva visits, and perform no-cost weddings to military personnel. A database of volunteer physicians has been created that highlights the need to recruit trauma surgeons and forensic pathologists. On this day, the database contains 5000 volunteer physicians. The remains of 400 hundred victims lack sufficient DNA for identification. The Jerusalem Civic Command Center (JCCC) is a consortium of seven non-government agencies set up in an acting school in the heart of Jerusalem. It includes a call-center, a warehouse, and a transportation team to deliver needed supplies. Over 4000 volunteers staff the call center, find housing, supply hot meals and clothing to the 200,000 people displaced from the north and south, and now housed in country's center. We watch hundreds of volunteers, mostly college students, busy packing food, paper goods and clothing. We visit an area set aside for displaced parents to bring their children to play games, obtain clothing and find emotional support.

November 2 The Dead Sea and Ofakim

Hotel David at the Dead Sea continues to serve guests, but the resort now houses survivors from Kibbutz Be'eri and serves as an outpost for the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Center. The Jewish Agency is working with 9,000 families. One hundred ninety-seven (197) families are now headed by a single parent. Children have lost parents and parents have lost children. The families are too traumatized to be independent. Each is assigned a caseworker. The feeling is that the government is dysfunctional and will take too long to help. Everyone must rely on the NGOs.

Meeting with Kibbutz Be'eri Survivors.

This is certainly the most difficult meeting of my trip. The sentiment of the survivors is that the army has been lying to them about their safety; it will take a long time to trust them again. They need to know that Hamas will be destroyed. We talk with Michal, a thirtyish blonde woman. As the Kibbutz was being attacked, Michal was in a safe room, talking on her cell phone with her parents who are a few houses away. She heard them being captured. She later learned that her mother and father were led outside, wrists bound, and shot in the back of the head.

"If they couldn't open a door, the terrorists burned the house down. They came to murder, burn and rape, like 2000 years ago," Michal said, and then added "It's too early to mourn. We're still in shock. We know we will all need mental care." Michal tells us that the first emergency call to the army was made at 6 a.m. The first soldiers arrived at 1 a.m. the following morning. In addition to the sense of shock and depression, there is a palatable anger in Michal's words. "I have gone from depression to thankfulness to anger."

Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) The JDC has opened a kindergarten at Hotel David for displaced children, bringing in teachers to pick up the material being taught in the kindergartens of the kibbutzim before the disaster. Teachers have received special psychological training to be attuned to the emotional needs of the displaced children from the moment they arrive. Each child receives a backpack, water bottle and food container to make them feel at home.

Ofakim This town of 40,000 lies 12 miles from Gaza. Safe rooms are built into three-quarters of the homes. Residents living in the 25% of homes without safe rooms must rely on public shelters. The shelters were locked on the morning of October 7. Ofakim's small security force had been dispatched to the music festival so the town was unprotected when 14 Hamas terrorists attacked. Ofakim's mayor called his friend, Yoav Gallant, Israel's Defense Minister, and demanded a helicopter and military support. Gallant told the mayor that resources would be there as soon as possible. The army arrived seven hours later.

The terrorists had machine guns, hand grenades, and rocket-propelled grenades. Residents went after them, armed only with pistols, and managed to kill seven terrorists. Many of the people of Ofakim lost their lives.

I visited the house of an elderly couple who were held hostage for 19 hours before special forces killed their five terrorist-captors. This was perhaps the only 'happy ending' to the many heart-wrenching stories we heard. Beyond the War Zone The corridor leading to the airplane is lined with posters of the hostages, each face underscored by large letters: Bring Them Home Now. The picture of a four-year-old boy tugs at my heart. I think of the families and survivors, the rapid response of the service agencies. I'm reminded that the Israelis are incredibly resilient people. They will survive, in large part due to their technological and military expertise, and perhaps most importantly, thanks to their emotional strength.



In the US, the short-lived sympathy for Israel in response to the horrific attacks has quickly mutated into a hatred of Jews never seen in modern times. This is the first war in Israel that threatens to spread throughout the world, provoking not only anti-Zionist but also antisemitic backlash. There are dramatic outbreaks of anti-Semitism and universities around the world; the welfare of Jewish students from New York to California has been threatened.

Israel will certainly win this war and learn from this terrible experience. JewHaters will hopefully recede into the background. However, we need to remember that this venom always lurks just beneath the surface as it has for 2000 years.



Jewish Camp

First-Time Campers

Libi Lanski and Isabella Levin, both 9, attended Camp Ramah Darom this past summer. They are both students at The Cherry Hill School and close friends. Both girls received the One Happy Camper Grant from the Jewish Federation which gives \$1,000 dollars off for every Jewish camper going to sleepaway camp for the first time regardless of financial background. It is given on a first come first serve basis. For more information on this grant please visit JewishCamp.org

Samantha: Ramah has locations around the U.S and Canada, has an excellent reputation, and a huge network that sticks around through college and beyond. My grandmother was a director of one of the Ramah Camps in the northeast many years ago so I had some familiarity of what Camp Ramah is about. When we got to El Paso, several members of the community recommended Ramah in Georgia and said the camp site was not only beautiful but also an amazing experience with excellent leadership. It was really important to my husband and I that the camp we were sending our kids to has a strong connection to Israel, is kosher, and is shomer shabbat. We want our kids to have that special experience in camp. There is nothing like shabbat at camp and we want them to live it from kabbalat shabbat on Friday through Saturday night's Havdalah.

Wendy: We initially looked into Ramah Darom since Isabella was going and we thought it would be great for Libi to have a friend from El Paso with her. But it was exactly what we were looking for, for her and (next year) Liam. A place for the kids to expand their Jewish pride and their love for Israel and surround themselves by Jewish kiddos from all over the country. Added bonus was it was outside Atlanta so we could visit friends (and have close friends to the kids if they needed help). We are so excited for both Libi and Liam to attend next year! We are so thankful to the Jewish Federation for the One Happy Camper Grant-it made the financial part of sending the kids for the 1st time, even easier!

Were you nervous to go to sleepaway camp for the first time?

Libi: Yes, I was a little nervous because I was meeting new people I didn't know, but I was excited to make new friends.

Isabella: A little bit because I was far away from home.

What was it like arriving at camp on that first day?

Libi: It was very fun! I was happy to be there and excited, but I wasn't looking forward to the lice check.

Isabella: It was interesting because when you get there it looks so new and different from El Paso. I didn't like the lice check but it was nice meeting new people.

Do you feel that Camp Ramah gave you a deeper connection to Judaism? Israel?

Libi: Yes, we got to learn a lot about being Jewish, more davening than I usually do and it made me feel more connected to my Jewishness. Yom Israel made me want to go and visit Israel.

Isabella: The Jewish activities were fun, I especially loved Yom Israel and it made me excited to meet up with my counselor who live in Israel when I visit this spring. I also can't wait to go see what a shuk is like! We learned about shuk's on Yom Israel and it was so cool. Every night my counselors said the shema to our bunk and I still say it every night.



What was experiencing Shabbat like at camp?

Libi: Shabbat was amazing! There was dancing, singing, services, food, and so much more! It was my favorite part of camp!

Isabella: Shabbat was so fun! We would sing songs while standing up on chairs and the food at Shabbat was so good. Especially the "Shabbat morning cake."

What is your favorite memory of camp?

Libi: The friends and counselors I am now connected with forever. I cannot wait to see them again.

Isabella: Doing the swing/zip line, blobbing one of my counselors on the lake, and doing Shabbat activities.



What was your favorite daily camp activity?

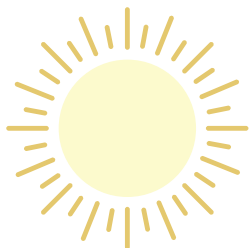
Libi: Tennis, drama, art, and yoga.

Isabella: Climbing, swimming, Hebrew, and the meals.

What are you most looking forward to next year for Ramah summer 2024?

Libi: Seeing all my friends, counselors, meeting new people, and Shabbat!

Isabella: To see my friends and counselors, and I hope to do even more climbing than I did this past summer.



Camp Shamayim Reunion

January 27th, 2023 | 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Ardivinos Desert Crossing

Celebrating 75 years of the original Camp Shamayim Day Camp property

Havdalah | Talent Show | Snacks

We Stand With Israel

Reflections on the Current Situation from Someone who Recently Visited

Written by Barry Armour

As an American and as a Jew, I, like many people across the United States and around the world, both Jews and Gentiles alike, have spent a lot of time the last several weeks watching the news coverage of the events in Israel and the Middle East following the massacre of approximately 1400 men, women, and children on Oct. 7, 2023. Like many Jews, the events of Oct. 7 have been challenging to process, and, at times, it has been hard to know how to feel. There have been feelings of anger as well as feelings of helplessness. There have also been feelings of dismay and incredulity as I have seen the response to the massacre, especially in the United States and around the world. College students across campuses from Harvard, Columbia, and Yale all the way across the country to UCLA and Berkeley have marched in support of the "Palestinian resistance" while, at the same time, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Center on Extremism has reported a nearly 400% increase in anti-Semitic incidents, such as harassment, vandalism, and assaults, since the Oct. 7 massacre. Throughout the United States, swastikas have been placed on Jewish businesses, community centers, and synagogues. Jewish students have been harassed just trying to get to class. At Cornell University, a student posted online and threatened to shoot up the Jewish dining hall and called for people to slit the throats of Jewish students. In Vienna, Austria, swastikas defaced a Jewish cemetery, and a ceremonial building in the Jewish part of the cemetery that housed sacred artifacts was burned down for the first time since it was destroyed in Nov. 1938 during Kristallnacht.



Photos: Patrick Craig, Interfaith Vigil

Over the course of the first month, I saw the outrage people exhibited in response to the greatest loss of Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust with shock and horror, but I also heard about the college professor who proudly said that they were exhilarated by the Oct. 7 attacks. Why is it that I can feel heartbroken when Palestinian civilians are killed, but there are others who, when Jewish men, women, and children are murdered, tortured, beheaded, raped, and the subject of acts that would, or should, be thought of as unthinkable, celebrate the deaths, while, at the same time, the people who are responsible for the murder of Jewish civilians with barbarity and a wanton bloodlust are referred to by certain politicians and college students as freedom fighters while some in those same groups call for a genocide against the people who were subjected to the beheadings and rapes? Why is it that some people are quick to blame Israel for an attack on a hospital yet are slow to walk back their blame, if they do it at all, with the same quickness and vociferousness? Even when presented with evidence to the contrary, why is it that they still cannot come out and blame those who are actually responsible with the same force with which they condemned

Israel? Israel as war criminals and claiming that they are engaging in genocide and the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people now that Israel has responded to the Oct. 7 attack militarily. People who celebrated the murder of Jews on Oct. 7 or who tepidly mourned the loss of Jewish lives now call for a cease-fire now that Palestinian civilians are being killed in Gaza. It is an unfortunate rule of war that people, often innocent civilians, die, even when care is taken to ensure their safety or to minimize the number of civilian casualties, something I truly believe that the Israeli military is trying to do. I am heartbroken at the idea of non-combatants being killed regardless of whether they are Israeli or Palestinian because it is possible, at least I believe it is, to mourn the loss of life no matter who it is. However, I do not see that sentiment expressed universally. Rather, there seem to be a great number of college students in the United States who believe that the Israeli citizens had it coming but that the suffering endured by the people of Gaza is a war crime and an attempt at ethnic cleansing or genocide. The divide between support for Israel and Palestine is definitely generational, which is partly why I cannot understand the response to the events of Oct. 7 on college campuses across the

United States. It does seem to me, however, that facts seem to have little to no place on these campuses insofar as they relate to the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I do not know if it is because of a lack of Holocaust education or a failure to understand the impetus that led to the Zionist movement in the late from anti-Semitism, or 19th century, namely the fact that all the pogroms against the Jews of Europe caused a desire to have a country where they could be free if it is due to getting their news from social media, but whether stemming from indifference or ignorance, there is a definite lack of facts.

For example, I recently saw a news story that contained clips of interviews given by various Hamas spokespeople. In one, the spokesperson was asked about the hundreds of kilometers of tunnels underneath Gaza and why Hamas did not construct bomb shelters for the residents of Gaza. The spokesperson's response said a lot about what Hamas views as its priority. They said that the tunnels are for fighting and that it is the responsibility of the United Nations to protect the people of Gaza. In another interview, a Hamas spokesperson spoke about the millions of Soviet lives lost in defense of the Soviet Union

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during World War II as well as the number of deaths endured by the people of Vietnam and Afghanistan during the Vietnam War and after the Soviet invasion, the point being that achieving their goal requires sacrifice on the part of the people of Gaza. Mind you, Hamas has been the elected government of Gaza since 2006-2007, so this is not only the government saying that it is not their responsibility to protect their own citizens, but that their deaths are needed to achieve their ultimate goal. And yet, this is the same government entity that prevents its citizens from leaving the area when prompted to do so by Israel and then uses civilian deaths as propaganda to decry the horror of the Israeli response to Oct. 7. On the one hand, it is emblematic of the double standard that only seems to be applied to Israel. The deaths of Israelis are celebrated, but when they respond, people call on them to agree to a cease-fire.

In the interview I mentioned, the Hamas spokesperson went on to say that the events of Oct. 7 were just the first wave, that there would be a second and a third, even a fourth, wave, yet I have not heard any of the college students or progressive politicians calling for Hamas to stop what they are doing, only Israel. And it seems to beg the

question: What did Hamas think that Israel was going to do in response to such an attack as that of the one perpetrated on Oct. 7?

I do not hear any condemnation of Hamas for the conditions within Gaza, yet I have heard Israel labeled as colonizers. However, if you read about the Nov. 1947 vote in the United Nations, it proposed a two-state solution, one that the Jews accepted, which is why they declared Israel's independence in May 1948. It was the Palestinians and other Arab nations that rejected the proposal, which is why they declared war against Israel shortly after the declaration of independence. As a result of the fighting, Israel captured 78% of the land that was to have comprised Palestine, the other 22% consisting of Gaza and the West Bank, which is where most Palestinians fled. Israel was attacked, yet they are called colonizers for occupying the land they won as a result of the war. How is that Israel's fault? How does that make them colonizers?

Several days after Oct. 7, I had my weekly meeting with my manager at work, and she asked me how I was doing. She asked me if I had any family in Israel and initially, I said no since my family does not have any direct

family in Israel. However, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the people of Israel, and all Jews around the world, are mishpocha. They are family. They are my brothers and sisters. Earlier this year, back at the end of June, Mom and I took what Mom calls the trip of a lifetime as we joined the group from Congregation B'nai Zion and Temple Mt. Sinai on a tour of Poland and Israel. We visited Jewish cemeteries in Krakow and Warsaw and museums dedicated to the history of the Jewish people in Warsaw and Tel Aviv. We visited several kibbutzim, although we did not visit any of the ones near Gaza that have been in the news. Rather, we visited kibbutzim in the Galilee region, including the Ghetto Fighter's kibbutz, which was founded by survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto and is home to the world's oldest Holocaust museum, the Ghetto Fighter's House, as well as the northernmost kibbutz, which lies along the border with Lebanon. While touring the kibbutz, we were told that Hezbollah was watching us from the heights across the border in Lebanon. Standing there gives you a newfound perspective. Imagine living along the border with people who have thousands of rockets aimed your way and who want nothing more than to wipe you off the face of the Earth.

When you drive along the road in that part of Israel, the Lebanese side of the border has Hezbollah flags waving, while the Israeli side is lined with trees, not for their beauty but because they act as a means to protect vehicles on the road from sniper bullets. It is a perspective that I could only gain by actually being there and experiencing it firsthand.

Interestingly, one of the things I learned on my visit to the Kibbutzim is that the majority of the agricultural products grown are not consumed by Israelis but are sent to countries in Europe and throughout the Middle East. However, they are sent in plain white boxes without anything to indicate that they originated in Israel so that the Arab nations that receive them can pretend that it is not coming from Israel. Yet, somehow, Israel is the villain in the minds of these many college students.

To walk down the stairs into a bunker at the kibbutz, a place they use when rockets are fired at them is an interesting experience. It is hard to fathom having to run to your designated bomb shelter when the rockets start flying. The alarms go off, especially to think back on it now, given that similar bunkers were the site of death and destruction on Oct. 7. People who ran into the bunkers for safety were killed by grenades thrown down the stairs or by bullets fired from machine guns into the crowds



huddled inside for safety. People were burned to death when their houses were set on fire and burned down around their safe rooms. Since I am blind, I have not seen the images that have been shown on the news, so I have been insulated in a way from the atrocities. Try as I might, I am not sure that what I can imagine and conceive of in my mind comes anywhere close to the reality of what happened.

As a student of history, I have read about and studied anti-Semitism. In college, I took an entire course on the history of the Holocaust, so I have read the debunked "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and the transcript of the Wannsee Conference. I

can tell you the name of the person who coined the term "anti-Semitic" and talk about how anti-Semitism has morphed from blaming Jews collectively for the death of Jesus to the idea of the Jewish race that the Nazis used to the modern-day blurring of the lines between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Despite all the study and learning, I still cannot understand why it is that there are people who want my existence eliminated simply because of the religion I practice. Why is it that people believe that the attack against Israel is justified or that people who engage in wanton bloodlust, people who rape women and kill babies and behead people are freedom fighters?

As a Jew, it is difficult for me to understand the notion that Jews had what happened on Oct. 7 coming to them. Why is it that Jews seem to be the only minority group that is attacked from both sides, from the right and the left, from conservatives and liberals alike? Jews have people marching to unite the right and chanting “Jews will not replace us” and Jews have people marching in support of the so-called Palestinian resistance and chanting “From the river to the sea,” but how is it resistance when you burn people alive?

Growing up along the Texas-Mexico border, in a city that is something like 85-90% Hispanic, not to mention 85-90% Catholic or some other Christian denomination, I always knew that as a Caucasian and a Jew, I was in the minority. In El Paso, however, I rarely, if ever, gave it any thought. My friends had Hispanic surnames and they celebrated Christmas and Easter while I celebrated Hanukkah and Passover, but it never mattered. They came to my Bar Mitzvah and I attended their confirmation. One of my friends even came to the house for one of our seders. When my family attended services at the synagogue, there was nothing unusual or out of the ordinary about it. By comparison, in recent

years, as the number of anti-Semitic incidents around the United States increased year after year, in the wake of individuals shooting up synagogues in other parts of the country, it stands out that, when I attend services now, the doors to the synagogue are locked and we need to be buzzed inside and that there are times when police are standing by the doors to the synagogue or sitting in a police cruiser in the parking lot. The fact that I attended an active shooter training at the synagogue and that, while not foremost in my thoughts, somewhere in the recesses of my mind is the fact that I am thinking of my surroundings,

where the nearest exit is, where I could hide if I needed to, or how I might use my folded white cane as a weapon if it came to that. For those of us in the United States, these are the thoughts we wrestle with when simply trying to practice our religion, but for the people of Israel, the thoughts are taken to another level.

Visiting Israel earlier this year was an amazing experience, especially after having come from Poland. While in Poland, I had the opportunity to visit the concentration camps at Auschwitz and the subcamp at Birkenau. It was a profound experience, to bear witness to





man's inhumanity to man. One thought that struck me as I walked into Birkenau and stood where the selections were once held is that, as someone who is blind, had I been sent there I most likely would have been sent to the gas chamber, however, being an identical twin, I might have been spared just to be subjected to so-called scientific experiments. While in Poland, we also visited the town of Kielce, the site of a pogrom on July 4, 1946, 14 months after the war in Europe had ended, and yet, on that day, 42 Jewish men, women, and children, people who had survived the Holocaust, were murdered by their neighbors simply for being

Jewish. On Oct. 7, there were other Jewish men, women, and children, some of whom were Holocaust survivors, who were likewise killed for no reason other than that they are Jewish.

While in Israel, I got to travel all over the country, all around Jerusalem and the surrounding area. I visited Yad Vashem and got to walk along Masada and ride a camel. I was able to get my feet wet in the Dead Sea as well as the Mediterranean Sea and visit the Golan Heights and the grottoes at Rosh Hanikra. However, one of the most meaningful experiences was our visit to the Druse community in Kisra Sameah.

Recently, we found out that one of the IDF soldiers killed in Gaza was a member of the Druse community. The Druse are not Jewish, but they are Israeli, and they fight and die to defend their country because it is their country as well.

Another memorable experience was actually a trip to get ice cream. The shop we stopped at was one recommended by our tour guide, a dual American and Israeli citizen named Talia. Not only was the ice cream very good, but the shop itself was special because it is jointly owned by a Jew and a Muslim. They work together, so it is possible to peacefully coexist, but it is a choice one has to make and, unfortunately, there are people, Palestinian and Israeli alike, who do not believe in that. To be fair, these are the extremists, but just as Hamas should be condemned for their actions, so too should the Jewish extremists in the West Bank who kill Palestinians simply for being Palestinian. In the United States, incidents of Islamophobia have increased 244% since Oct. 7. Just like all Jews should not be held collectively responsible for the actions of Israel's government, Arabs and Muslims should not be held collectively responsible for the actions of Hamas.

I have never labeled myself a Zionist, although I have always supported Israel's right to exist. After visiting Israel earlier this year, I still believe in Israel's right to exist. I did not know what, if anything, I would feel visiting Israel for the first time, but I did feel a connection to the land. There is something about walking on the same ground as the people you read about in Sunday school. I am not saying that my visit to Israel suddenly made me Orthodox, but there was a connection that is hard to find the words to explain. The people of Israel, like the people of many countries, want to live in peace. I truly believe that, however, they live in a neighborhood where they are surrounded by people who want to eradicate their existence. Many of Israel's neighbors have come to recognize their right to exist, and, whether it will happen in my lifetime or not I do not know, but maybe, at some point in the future, those countries who do not currently do so will also recognize Israel's right to exist, so that the

people of Israel and the Palestinians can live in peace, scratch out an existence like all of us fiddlers on the roof try to do day in and day out as we watch our children and grandchildren grow up. But Israel cannot will such a future into existence on their own. They need partners who are willing to coexist. The current hostilities were not instigated by Israel but by Hamas, which is something that, even just a month after it happened, people seem to have forgotten. Remember that it was Hamas that kicked the hornet's nest and instigated all of this. Israel is defending itself, as it has a right to do, and the degree to which they are defending themselves is so that Hamas cannot carry out another attack, the second, third, and fourth wave their own spokespeople have said is coming. The people of Palestine will not be free until they are free from Hamas. It is possible to both support the right of the Palestinians to have a country of their own, while still standing with Israel. I stood with Israel on Oct. 7 and I still stand with them now.





Photo: Patrick Craig

March for Israel

Written by Cindy Metrikin



Cindy Metrikin and Amanda Levine at the March for Israel in Washington D.C.

Last week, my daughter, Amanda and I had the privilege of attending the March for Israel in Washington D.C. It was an exhilarating and overwhelming experience. We stood shoulder to shoulder with thousands of people, but we were as one. The deep pain and angst we have all been experiencing as Jews was transformed into an overriding feeling of unity and connection.

The power of the USA/Israel bond was palpable. We were fortunate enough to be quite close and we could see the large Israeli and American flags on the stage together. Below the banner which stated

“Americans March for Israel”, we could see the dome of the Capital Building in the distance. I found that tremendously moving. At one point a seagull flew overhead, which felt a little surreal, as I imagined it representing the dove of peace, presaging a peaceful outcome to this agonizing conflict.

I’ve never been in a crowd of 290,000 people, I don’t think any of us had. The speakers and attendees showed we are not alone. We are struggling, we are hurt, we are vulnerable, we are scared, we are worried but we are not alone, that is certain.
AM YISRAEL CHAI



Get to know: Larry Lesser

The Jewish Voice caught up with national award-winning UTEP professor Larry Lesser whose 2 decades of contributions to our community include JV columns, talks (for adults, teens, EPJA students), concerts, a funded speaker series, and congregational board service.

JV: In your March 2020 Journal of Statistics Education interview, you said you started songwriting the same year you became a math major in college. Were you encouraged to pursue music as a career or was it a creative outlet?

LL: Music has always been more serious than a hobby for my identity and growth. But while I saw after after my first album (in 1992) that it would be too hard making a living from it (and it's gotten even harder with people streaming and expect locals to play for free), I'm happy that hasn't kept me from doing much of it with professional quality and I'm blessed to have had songs make a difference when we come together, ranging from "Healing Song" at TMS services to "Sderot Sky" at gatherings for Israel to fun ditties like my "El Paso version" of the dreidel song. Music and Judaism are way too important to leave to the full-time professionals!

JV: You have stated how music is a mnemonic to remember math content. What inspired your parody "American Pi" (which won the National Museum of Mathematics' Pi Day of the Century song contest)?

LL: Yes, songs are great mnemonics with their many "hooks" (rhyme, rhythm, melody, emotion, etc.). "American Pi" was sparked by noticing how the meter and rhyme in the chorus of Don McLean's #1 hit "American Pie" supported recalling pi's first 6 digits, and verse structure lent itself to touring pi's interesting (partly-American) history. Besides contest awards, my educational songs have helped yield NSF grants that brought money to UTEP.

JV: A press release for your newest album notes that "Post-college relationships launched his journey through 5 denominations to a more knowledgeable, spiritual and conscious connection with his heritage, and these songs on the Sparks CD reflect his experiences. Having David Wilcox and Nance Pettit visit during their Out Beyond Ideas tour sparked the idea of writing songs out of textual nuggets of spiritual wisdom, and from there the concept grew." How did you choose those nuggets of wisdom?

LL: As the liner notes share, what grounded me were "bite-sized" text or stories that encapsulated values that work for seekers

and believers across denominations, or even beyond Judaism. Many songs were inspired by my growth and experiences in our diverse community, with 21 of the album's 24 songs written in El Paso!

JV: Reflecting on your album Sparks being a Finalist in the 2021 New Mexico Music Awards for Best Album as well as for 3 other very different categories: best bluegrass song, best religious song, and best humorous song (which you won), how does the album reflect your Jewish journey now?

LL: [CEO Emeritus of USCJ] Rabbi Jerome Epstein saw each song had multiple copyright years and noted (correctly) that lyrics must have evolved as I did, and the songs and I are still works-in-progress! From playing diverse events (Opera UTEP, museum exhibit opening, congregation services, Jewish food festival, New Mexico Music Awards gala, Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies conference, a Cantors Assembly event, etc.), I fine-tune music, lyrics, or song introductions. What stays constant is my aim to connect across exaggerated boundaries of genre, denomination, demographics, etc. because my Judaism and muse don't fit in one box!



Two Jewish Historical Societies Meet in Houston

By *Tumbleweed Smith*

A joint meeting of the Texas and Southern Jewish Historical Societies took place on the campus of Rice University in Houston the weekend of October 20-22. The level of education, intelligence, accomplishments and dedication of the presenters on the packed agenda was dazzling. For the 120 people attending it was a stimulating, enriching and motivational event. Dr. Josh Furman, associate director of Jewish Studies at Rice and his staff worked for months getting ready for the gathering, which had the theme Space and Place in Southern Jewish History. Some of the topics included "Jewish Race, Place and Memory in the Deep South" and "Exploring the Jewish History of the Texas Borderlands" and "Southern Jewish Reactions to Klan Anti-Semitism in the 1920s."

There were roundtable discussions on a variety of pertinent issues regarding preservation of Jewish research and projects. These included oral histories, film, art and poetry, stressing the need to save Jewish experiences and stories for generations that follow. Both societies are diligent about maintaining archives.

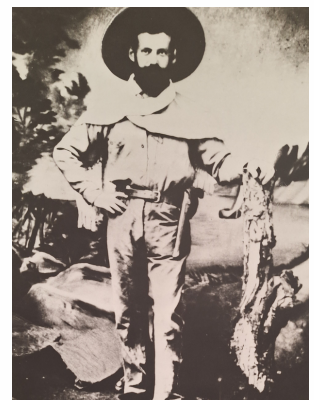
Many people on the program had received grants from Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS). Keynote speakers were Bryan Stone and Tyina Steptoe. Dr. Stone spoke on "Very Small Histories in a Very Large State" and highlighted the Jewish history of a small Texas town. Dr. Steptoe's topic was "On My Block: The Ethno-Racial Landscape of Jim Crow Houston."

During the conference TJHS Past President Lonnie Schooler made public the creation of the Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Fund for Educational Outreach. Donations so far exceed \$30,000. Rabbi Kessler founded the Texas Jewish Historical Society in 1980.

Saturday night was a Havdalah and performance by singer and songwriter Joe Buchanan. The winter meeting of TJHS will be in McAllen January 26-28. Hosts Lynda and Michael Furgatch promise a good time with a borderlands flavor.



The players on the Temple's Y-Church League team are (*front row, from left*) team camptain Harold Potash, Errold Lapowski, and Isidore Grossblatt; (*back row*) Henry Blume, Ralph Aaronson, Max Katz, Herman Silberg, Robert Marcus, and Rabbi Zielonka. (*Courtesy Temple Mount Sinai*).



Ernst Kohlberg

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HIDDUR MITZVAH

Beautification of a Mitzvah through Ritual Art

By *Robin Krasne*

On Sunday, October 15th, the Jewish Community came together for the first in a series of Hiddur Mitzvah events hosted by Congregation B'nai Zion. These events have been generously supported by a grant from The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso.

Hiddur means "to beautify" in Hebrew. This exciting event series focuses on creating artistic ritual objects to enhance and beautify the practice of fulfilling mitzvot surrounding the Sabbath. In Exodus the text reads "This is my G-d and I will glorify him." Creating objects enriches the religious observance by adding an aesthetic dimension while making the observance of mitzvot more engaging to the senses.

This first event concentrated on creating beautiful tile mosaic Shabbat candlesticks. The 85 attendees were involved in a hands-on project which resulted in works of art which will enrich their Shabbat.



The second event in this series will take place on January 21st at Congregation B'nai Zion. Participants can look forward to creating challah boards for themselves or to share with loved ones. Watch for details to come soon.

Mark your calendars also for the final event of this program series, which will take place on April 7th. Those who attend will be guided by a special guest artist, who will lead the attendees in creating a unique hand-painted Challah Cover. There will be multiple smaller sessions offered so all who wish to participate will have an opportunity to do so in an intimate class setting.

The Hiddur Mitzvah events help foster a sense of community as well as provide a deeper appreciation for the Jewish tradition of adding beauty to elevate our mitzvot.





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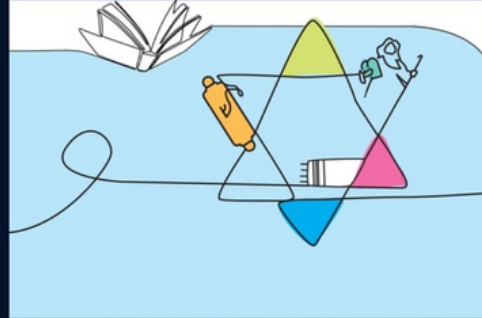
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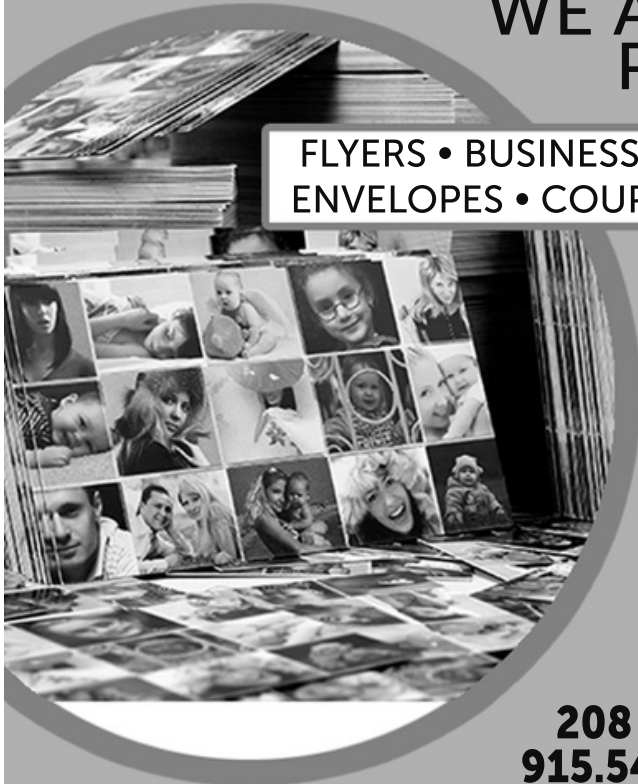
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Community Campaign 2023 | as of November 14, 2023

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NOW HIRING



The Jewish Community
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of El Paso

Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso is seeking an individual who has time for a part-time position with the Foundation. Duties will mainly be clerical, updating the website and Facebook page, attending board and committee meetings, taking notes, mailing out tax contribution letters, etc. \$20,000 in contractor pay per year for the position.

Send a resume or email describing your background to info@jcfep.org. On request a more complete job duties outline will be sent to you.



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BORDERLAND'S
CAFE EUROPA

Tuesday, December 12, 2023
11:30am - 1:00pm

Hanukkah Celebration @

Chabad Lubavitch of El Paso

with Rabbis Yisrael & Levi Greenberg

RSVP by Wednesday, December 6, 2023
by 10 a.m.

Wednesday, January 17, 2023
11:30am - 1:00pm

Watch for Details



Jewish Federation
of El Paso & Las Cruces



Jewish Federation
of El Paso & Las Cruces

Andrew Lawler

Andrew Lawler is an award-winning journalist who has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*, *Science*, and other publications. Author of three books, his work has appeared several times in *The Best of Science and Nature Writing*. A frequent and engaging public speaker, Andrew enjoys bringing his findings to a broad audience.



Under Jerusalem: The Buried History of the World's Most Contested City

A French senator digging in Jerusalem in 1863 uncovered a stone casket filled with human bones and gold thread. He claimed it belonged to a queen mentioned in the Bible, and news of the finds ricocheted around the world.

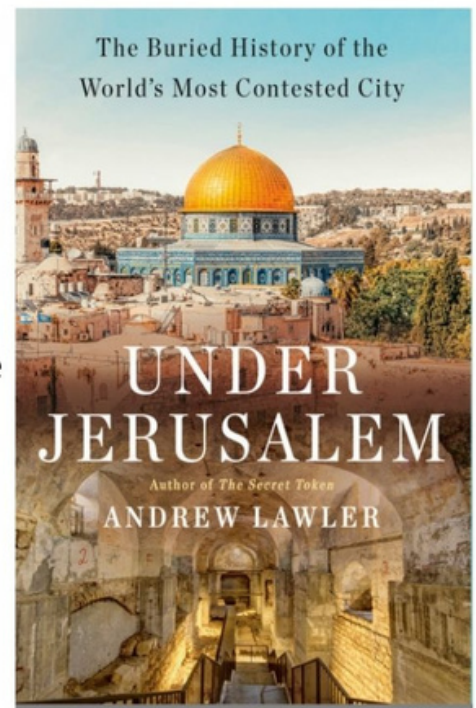
In the century and a half since, Jerusalem has drawn a global cast of treasure hunters, missionaries, archaeologists, and religious zealots eager to extract remains of the biblical past from beneath its streets and shrines. Their efforts transformed our understanding of Jerusalem's history, and sparked bloody riots, thwarted international peace agreement, and helped turn it into the world's most contested city.

Under Jerusalem takes readers into the tombs, tunnels, and trenches of the Holy City, bringing to life the indelible characters who have explored this subterranean landscape. With clarity and verve, acclaimed journalist Andrew Lawler reveals how their pursuit defined the conflict over modern Jerusalem—and ultimately could provide a map for two peoples and three faiths to peacefully coexist.



MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2024
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