

Andrew H. Banoff



SUNDAYS

Reflections on 20 Years of Relationships with
Centenarians and other Elders

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Centenarians and other Elders

by

Andrew H. Banoff

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“As I read 5200 Sundays, I was reminded that life is G-ds call to responsibility. Our Association was founded on the belief that Judaism, while complex, is in fact a subtle faith. As leaders in our communities, we are here to make a difference, to mend the fractures we see, one day at a time, one act at a time, for as long as it takes. As Andrew’s writings illustrate his choices were not between faith and deeds; rather it is through his deeds that he has expressed his faith and embodied it in those he serves. Additionally, as he so poignantly expresses throughout his book, he has worked to bring happiness to the lives of so many. Happiness not through the absence of suffering, but through his ability to create the harmony that rescues the soul.”

Donald J Shulman

President and Chief Executive Officer
Association of Jewish Aging Services

“With Andrew’s natural optimism and empathy for others, he has made a real contribution regarding our conception of the aging journey. No longer is it always doom and gloom. Thanks to Andrew’s personal stories we can see the potential for longer term joyful relationships and the comfort they bring. All in all a wonderful message.”

Christopher York JD

Marilyn Puder-York, Ph.D

Stamford, CT

“Written like a one-on-one conversation with the reader, 5200 Sundays is a remarkable oral history. It celebrates the joy of storytelling and the resilient power of a life infused with purpose, vision and passion. It is an inspiring, generous and selfless gift to the world. By sharing insights gained from his personal and professional relationships, Andrew Banoff reveals why the institution he has led for the past 20 years is widely acknowledged as setting the gold standard of care for the golden years. I highly recommend 5200 Sundays to anyone who aspires to live a long life... or who knows someone living one.”

Marshall Levin

NoWAY Entertainment

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Dedication

I grew up in Queens, New York in a Jewish/Italian neighborhood filled with kids and families having stories just like mine. It was a middle-class neighborhood built on a swamp in the 1950's right near the Van Wyck Expressway and the Whitestone Bridge. I woke up every morning to the noise of airplanes coming in for a landing (or taking off) from LaGuardia Airport. All the buildings (co-ops) were 6 stories tall and were generally nice, safe places to be in the 60's and 70's.

Most of my family was killed in the Holocaust and my parents grew up relatively poor in the Bronx. They moved to Queens when they got married in the 50's because that's what Jewish families were doing when the "old neighborhood" started to change. Mom was born in Lithuania and came to "America" when she was a young girl on one of the last ships able to leave Europe in 1937 prior to shutting down before World War II. Dad was born in the Bronx and spent most of his childhood watching relatives come from Europe the same way, including the "survivors" who came after the war.

My parents lived in a small apartment in Flushing for nearly 50 years and their big move was from one side of the building from a one-bedroom apartment to the other side of the building into a two-bedroom apartment when I was one year old. The apartment was tiny by all modern standards (maybe 550 square feet) and no more than 1 person could stand at any time in either the kitchen or the single bathroom. Dad worked most of his adult life doing a "reverse commute" to Long Island and was very involved in my entire childhood. Mom worked part-time as a bookkeeper in the Co-op walking from Building #3 to Building #1 for her commute.

Then, of course, they moved to Florida when they finally retired, living there until Mom got sick and had to move back to Connecticut so I could help take care of them. It was the great American dream - immigrants build a life and save a few dollars so their kids can have more than them, and then retire to a warmer climate. Unfortunately, like so many, illness prevented them from ever really enjoying the retirement part of the story.

I never met my dad's parents (who had passed away before I was born) but did know my Bubba and Zeda (mom's parents) who were "old school" Eastern European Jews (Litvaks), who lived very simple lives in America. Zeda worked as a truck driver for a dairy company and Bubba was a homemaker. They were religious (Orthodox) Jews and suffered greatly from the impact of the war and all the family they lost. Between them, they were two of the few survivors of their 24 siblings who remained after World War II. They carried that burden with them in every aspect of their lives. Zeda did have one sister who survived in Lithuania and eventually made it to Israel. They were reunited after not seeing each other for 40 years when we traveled to Israel for my Bar Mitzvah, and it was beautiful to see them just sitting in the lobby of the Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv holding hands. Zeda died 2 weeks later while we were checking into a kibbutz in northern Israel, but I believe he was content having been reunited with his sister, seeing the State of Israel, and my Bar Mitzvah. Bubba was never the same without him but lived another 7 years and was very close with my mother.

I dedicate this book to my Bubba, Zeda and my parents, all of whom I love dearly. They are among the “typical” American immigrants who created this country and paved the way for all of us who followed. They came here with nothing but a dream and incredible bravery. They forged lives for their families despite incredible difficulties. They had very little but made sure their children had more, most importantly an education to be able to have choices as they grew up. These immigrants instilled values in us that changed the world, as the Baby Boomer generation (those born after World War II from 1946-1964) is the largest cohort of Americans yet. I am proud to be a Baby Boomer, but most proud to be the grandson of Frida and Benne Davis, and the son of Shirley and S. Erwin Banoff.



Mom and Dad's wedding – August 15, 1954 (with Bubba and Zeda and Uncle Alan)

5200 SUNDAYS

Billy Crystal wrote a book in 2005 called *700 Sundays*, which is my inspiration for writing this book. His book had nothing to do with elders in general, but rather his *relationship* with his father Jack, who worked hard and who lived only for the first 15 years of Billy's life. Jack worked two jobs so they only spent time together every Sunday, and he wrote the book to tell their stories.

"700 Sundays is not a lot of time for a kid to have with his dad, but it was enough time to get gifts. Gifts that I keep unwrapping and sharing with my kids. Gifts of love, laughter, family, good food, Jews and jazz, brisket and bourbon, curve balls in the snow, Mickey Mantle, Bill Cosby, Sid Caesar, Uncle Berns and ... "Consider the rose. Can you dig that? I knew that you could."

Billy Crystal

Based on his Tony Award winning play, *700 Sundays* is... a tribute to a family and the people who helped make him a man. Personal, poignant and funny, it will have you laughing out loud and sometimes crying – with the realization that Billy's family is also yours.

When you watch the play (now on YouTube or HBO), you see his stories come alive, telling them in a way very few people can.

I expanded his concept to *5200 Sundays*, because the essence of my stories come from the Centenarians who live at The Jewish Home (100 years = 5200 Sundays). Not everyone lives to be 100 years, as the *average* age is "only" 92! The oldest person I have known there is 107, and a few have been 105 or 106. These are remarkable accomplishments, and later in the chapter about the Centenarian Luncheon we will explore their secrets to longevity.

I have forgotten more than I will ever remember from these incredible people, but will do my best to capture their memories, life lessons, stories and anecdotes for you to enjoy. I hope some resonate with your own experiences and families, and together we will keep their experiences alive. Each person, each couple, and their families are worthy of their own books, and I recognize we are only getting a little glimpse into their lives and their *relationships*.

INTRODUCTION

After college and graduate school, I went to work in hospital administration, which was my chosen career profession, for nearly 20 years. It was a rewarding and exciting career that I have nothing but fond memories, good stories, great colleagues, and endless thanks for the opportunities which I was afforded. In the middle of 2002, I was working at a mid-sized community hospital which was part of a large national non-profit faith-based health care system. I loved my job, but change was in the air, and I was receptive to a new opportunity.

I received a call from a Search Firm about an opportunity at the local nursing home, The Jewish Home, which I knew from the outside as a good place. I had served on their Men's Club Board of Directors (as a volunteer) and played in their annual golf tournament. I knew their Medical Director, a few of their Board members, and knew through referrals from our hospital, it had a good reputation in the community. I had no interest whatsoever in long-term care and was a "hospital guy" who did not think it would be of interest to me. However, the executive from the Search Firm had a good reputation, and I didn't know if it would lead to other discussions, so I agreed to have breakfast with her. I was very impressed with the search process they had laid out, and the established goals for the new CEO. I agreed to meet with their six-member search committee. That group of people (Chuck, Carl, Dood, Dick, Rick and Suzanne) changed my life and I am eternally grateful to all of them for helping me realize this would bring me to the place I belonged. Of note, all six of them have stayed connected to the organization for these 20 years, as have so many of the Directors and other Volunteers.

I have been the President & CEO of The Jewish Home for the Elderly (now Jewish Senior Services) for 20 years, and it has been the most rewarding professional experience of my life. My path to get here was not planned, but it is the best thing that could have ever happened to me professionally. It has also changed me personally, as it has broadened my horizons in every sense of the word. In this book I hope to explain why – as it is the RELATIONSHIPS with the elders who I have been privileged to serve and get to know that have taught me so many of life's lessons.

This book could have been broadened to include discussions about governance, management, leadership and culture, but all those topics bring me back to relationships. These relationships with Residents and their families may be the core of the book, but I have added relationships with others to help frame the broader story. Senior Living organizations are dedicated to caring for elders in a variety of settings (skilled nursing, assisted living, home care, etc.) and these stories can be told in all of them. I hope this book serves as a resource for those considering entering the field, for those considering bringing a loved one to a senior living community, and for all the brave men and women who live, work, volunteer and support our elders in all settings. This is written to HONOR all the stakeholders in our industry, including but not limited to, the Residents and clients we serve, staff at all levels, volunteers, Board members and donors, first responders, regulators and other government officials, contractors, business partners, and everyone who makes this work possible.

I have served on the Board of Directors of the national Association of Jewish Aging Services (AJAS) since 2003, and as their Chairperson from 2019-21. This network of professionals has been a tremendous source of camaraderie, friendship, and inspiration for me. I have also served with countless leaders of non-profit senior living organizations through our national and state association, LeadingAge. There are so many people who do what I do across the country and the world for elders in their communities. We have taken many different paths to these roles – some like me, through hospital administration, others directly into nursing home administration, others through hospitality fields and many rising from the ranks of clinical leaders

(doctors, nurses, physical therapists, etc.) who bring other dimensions to their roles.

Each of these people have their own relationships, as do the millions of staff in senior living communities across the globe. I hope this book helps memorialize their stories and inspires them to share with others.

Finally, my 20th anniversary coincides with the 50th anniversary of The Jewish Home, which has been a landmark institution in our community for half a century! With admiration and thanks to each and every Resident who has ever lived here and every person who has ever worked or volunteered at The Jewish Home, here are their stories and the *relationships* that have been formed.

NOTE: The Jewish Home for the Elderly, The Jewish Home, the Home, Jefferson Street (original location), Jewish Senior Services, and The Harry & Jeannette Weinberg Campus/Park Avenue (current location) are all used interchangeably in the book and refer to the same wonderful organization.



2022 Chart of Programs and Services

RELATIONSHIPS

The best way to meet some of my friends is through their stories. I have met hundreds upon hundreds of Residents and clients over the last 20+ years, having taught me more than I can ever express. It is the biggest difference between working in a hospital and in senior living. All healthcare *business* is the same – strategic planning, budgets, boards, employee relations, regulations, etc. – but it is the people you get to know over a long period of time and the *relationships* you form that change you.

I have tried to organize their stories by some of the activities and programs we offer, and hope you “get to know” them at least a little bit. You all have people in your lives who create your own relationships, and can only encourage you to celebrate and embrace them too.

Beyond the Residents and clients are *their* families who we also serve and care for in the work we do. While this book is not about them, nothing would be possible without their love, support and trust as well.

In the Broadway play, *Hamilton*, there is a line, “... Immigrants, we get the job done”. I have been talking for years about the fact we are ALL immigrants, and it is only a question of which generation and from what country our families came here. The staff of Jewish Senior Services represents people from 94 countries, and we are proud to have all of their flags displayed in a framed picture on the first floor of the building for all to see. This organization (and all healthcare organizations) is only as good as the people who provide the care and support for our Residents and clients. We are blessed to have nearly 900 people who choose to work with us, and to bring their unique skills and backgrounds to our “family”.



Flag Wall – representing 94 countries

Chapter I

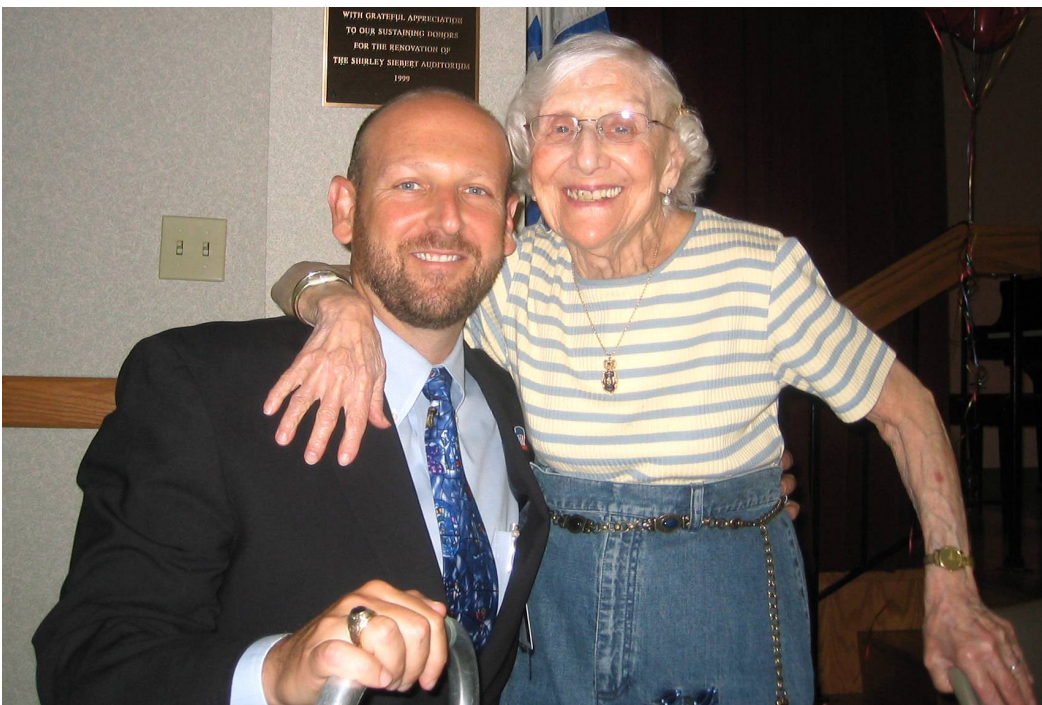
“Dressed to the Nines”

I must start the stories about relationships with that of Sadie. She was the very first employee of The Jewish Home of Fairfield County, Inc. in 1972 – before the building was opened (in 1973) for Residents. Sadie was hired as the secretary, the sage, to work with the Board of Directors and then the new CEO, to record the pledges of fundraising gifts to support the creation of the new organization. Sadie ended up working as the Administrative Assistant to the CEO for 25 years before she retired, and then stayed as a Volunteer for another 5 years before she became a Resident herself in 2002. Sadie was always “dressed to the nines” to quote the former Supervisor of Nursing who knew her for all those years. Sadie embodied the heart and soul of The Jewish Home, and literally knew everyone who worked and lived there!

As soon as I started working at the Home, I met Sadie and built a relationship with her and her family. Sadie taught me what it meant to be a part of the Jewish Home family, as she had been a part of every aspect from its inception. Sadie taught me what it meant to “serve” older people, and to get to know them as individuals. Her favorite sandwich was a BLT on whole wheat toast! She liked to say she had given the employment application to every single person that worked here! Sadie was always positive and upbeat, always had a kind word to say, and lit up a room whenever she walked in. I loved hearing her stories about the organization over the years.

When we found the original “logs” she kept from the donations for the first building, I showed them to her, and she rejoiced in the stories and memories they brought up. She had a lovely way about her, and made you feel good regardless of the subject. When we made a video about her connection to the organization, many people stepped forward to share their favorite Sadie story. We still show that video in every New Employee Orientation and ask them to carry on her tradition. To this day, every single Jewish Home employee knows who Sadie is, and we will keep that tradition forever (certainly as long as I am CEO).

To make the story more incredible, Sadie was one of eight siblings, six of whom ultimately lived at The Jewish Home. She helped take care of all of them, except her youngest brother Sid, who moved in after she passed away. We will always treasure the memories of her role in building The Jewish Home family.



With Sadie Freeman, circa 2003

Chapter II

Super Centenarians

*E*arth's Elders – the Wisdom of the World's Oldest People was published in 2005 as a testament to those individuals who have reached the age of 110 (or more). Interviews and photographs of 50 Supercentenarians were taken by Jerry Friedman, and there are essays by Robert Coles, Lama Surya Das, Dr. M. Joycelyn Elders, and Chief Arvol Looking Horse. Without giving any of the secrets away but having had the privilege of seeing the photos of these 50 incredible human beings, I thought it would be a good introduction to my relationships with Centenarians at The Jewish Home. Please learn more about them when you have a chance.

“The overarching conclusion that I have come to after traveling around the world on this project is that these assumptions (about aging) are false. Vitality and health are not the exclusive domains of youth, nor is relevancy. The old should be venerated. There is so much to learn if we are willing to listen. The inspirational supercentenarians profiled in this book are the poster people for longevity. They have shared their thoughts and life wisdom with me. They comprise one of the rarest and most scientifically fascinating groups in the world. As I explored their stories, I felt inspired to discover more about the common denominators and secrets to longevity that united them. If you connect with the portraits in the book and listen closely to their lives, you may find your own answers to leading a life that is not just long, but fulfilling as well.” — Jerry Friedman

Friedman, Jerry. *Earth's Elders – The Wisdom of the World's Oldest People*. Earth's Elders Foundation, Inc, 2005.

Chapter III

Centenarians

100 Years = 5200 Sundays

The Centenarian Luncheon is a tradition we started in 2005 and continues each spring to celebrate the lives of those who reach this wonderful milestone. There have been as many as 21 Centenarians at the annual Luncheon, and each year their families come together to tell stories, share memories and recognize these special people. Local dignitaries are invited to join in the celebration, and with the four generations of their families present, we tell the “secrets” of longevity or life lessons, from each of their perspectives. A professional photo is presented to each family as a keepsake, as each of these moments is a treasure to be captured.

Usually the stories revolve around patience, wisdom and adaptability, as these Residents have experienced so much during their lifetime. Some of the quotes from recent years have included:

How do you know you're in love?

“It's a deep feeling. You just know you want to be with that person.” John M.

“When your heart beats a little faster.” Hilda S.

“I saw him at a party. I just knew he was the guy for me.” Olga A.

What advice can you share to live a long life?

“Eat healthy, stay active and have a job.” Evelyn B.

“Keep your cool and get along with people.” Sara D.

“Don't drink. Exercise until you're 90.” Edward D.

“It's up to God, but live as nice as you can.” Virginia D.

How do you achieve happiness?

“Surround yourself with good family & friends.” Josephine R.

“Go to the ocean. Travel as much as you can.” Patricia A.

“Take advantage of all opportunities.” Patricia A.

“A good marriage and wonderful children.” Ruth R.

How do you forgive people?

“Listen and try to overlook it in your heart.” Ruth R.

“It's not worth holding a grudge.” Sadie D.

“I used to stay mad, but now I get over it much quicker. Not enough time to stay mad.” Dora L

“If you trust them, you can forgive them.” Christine (Tina) C.

“Sometimes you just have to try really hard.” Mary Ellen K.

What advice would you give a young adult?

“All experiences are very important - the good ones and the bad ones.” Patricia A.

“Understand people for the lives they live and what they teach their children.” Ruth C.

“Always have curiosity. And respect.” Ruth R.

What makes a successful relationship?

“You'll always get along with each other if you have immense love and always tell the truth.” Virginia D.

What is a fond memory?

“I remember the first phone - the hand crank phone!” John M.

All wise words to live by. At each luncheon we would always reference and appreciate the fact that with 20 Centenarians in the room there were 2,000 years of life experience.

We had to pivot (like with everything else) during the COVID-19 pandemic (more about that later), and the Centenarian luncheon had taken on different forms during those 2 years, but this year we were all back together celebrating with family.

This is another tradition I hope continues, as we have a debt of gratitude to pay these special people, and they have so many valuable lessons to share with us.

I think my favorite examples come from my friend Dave, the first Centenarian with whom I formed a relationship.

I met Dave when he moved in at age 100, and he was still “sharp as a tack” mentally. Dave needed help caring for himself, but could easily carry a conversation about any topic, proudly naming his two children, five grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren. I saw Dave most days, and with his raspy voice he liked to tell stories about his family, of whom he was most proud.

Dave was completely “with it” and obviously did not have a lot of peers who could keep up with him. A lovely lady moved into the Home named Rose, who had just turned 100, and liked to complain there were “old” people here. I knew she and Dave would be perfect for each other and how often could you set up two centenarians who were both sharp as tacks?

I asked them both if they were OK with the introduction, and then brought them to the Main Dining Room (as it used to be called) to meet for coffee. I stayed for a little while and then left them to get to know each other. As I learned later, they talked mostly about their families. Subsequently, I arranged two more visits – one to each of their rooms to visit and get to know each other better. Dave lived on Tandet West, and Rose lived on Tandet East – 2 opposite sides of the original building, so it took a bit of coordination to get them together. It seemed things were going along nicely. I felt so proud making my first nursing home “shidach” (match). But then apparently, they stopped “seeing” each other. I did get to ask Rose why, and she very calm and politely told me “he has a grandson who is a lawyer, and I don’t like lawyers”. Who says your family doesn’t impact your love life? They remained separated until Rose died a year or so later, and my career as a matchmaker was over.

Dave and I continued to spend time together. He was a pleasure to be with, and his son-in-law and I liked to take him to the local deli for his favorite - soup and 1/2 of a corned beef sandwich. We tried to do this once a month or so, and it was a treat for all of us. No one at the deli ever believed he was 100 years old.

Dave was told (at 102) he needed a new pacemaker because after 18 years in use, his was no longer going to work. He would need to have a procedure done and was asked if he wanted to proceed further. Obviously, there were risks at this age, and his family was concerned. Dave relayed the story to me that “of course he was going to do it, and that he expected this one to last just as long!” Forever the optimist.

One day I asked him “What is the secret to a long life and what gave him such a positive attitude about everything?” He told me to close my eyes, put my hands on my cheeks, then rub my cheeks, and keep rubbing. Finally I opened my eyes and asked what I was doing. He proudly told me I was “exercising my smile” and don’t ever forget to smile. To this day, to keep his memory alive, I use his story when making presentations to any audience.

Dave also liked attention, and when he was 103, I received a call he was dying. I hadn’t seen him in at least a few days, so I ran over to Tandet West where he lived. Sitting down on his bed and talking to him, I started

to process never seeing him again. After a few moments, he opened his eyes and asked me “Where have you been?” I guess he wanted to see me and thought this was a good way to get my attention. It did! The staff wasn’t very happy with him for scaring all of us, but we got over it.

Finally, as he was about to turn 104, I asked him what I could get him or do for him. I mean, how often do you get to celebrate a 104-year-old birthday with someone like Dave? He thought for a minute and then said, “take me to the casino”. So I called his family, and we arranged the entourage and brought him to the casino for the day! We arranged a private lunch, and he ate and gambled and reveled in the celebration. Many on-lookers asked what we were doing and were amazed he was 104. He gambled with everyone else’s money, so he didn’t lose anything at the casino either.

We all need to have aspirations and goals, regardless of age!

By the way, Dave was not the oldest centenarian who had a great sense of humor. When I first started at The Jewish Home my son Ben was 6 years old. One day I took him to work, and we were near the Candelabra Room, where the Residents lit candles each Friday night for Shabbat and on all the Jewish holidays. A woman approached me and asked how old my son was, and I responded that he was six. She smiled and said to Ben, “I thought so, and I am 100 years OLDER than you are”. In fact, this lovely woman, Ruth was 106 years old in 2003, and had been born in 1897 – even before my grandfather, who had died in 1976. I think all of us in Senior Living have had those “WOW” moments, and I certainly still struggle to digest the enormity of her comment. My son could not possibly have digested it at the time but has certainly come to appreciate the story.



Centenarian Luncheon 2014



With Dave Ehrenberg, circa 2006

Chapter IV

Next Year Jerusalem - A Journey of a Lifetime

So now you have the inspiration for the book (Billy Crystal), the first lady of The Jewish Home (Sadie), and the story of my first relationship with a centenarian (Dave). It's time to meet another group of elders and hear the story of our first trip to Israel and my first (and only) foray as an Executive Producer of an independent film.

In 2010, we had the idea (adapted from the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, credit Dan Reingold) that we could take a group of nursing home Residents to Israel! This would be quite an undertaking, and we had no idea if we could pull it off. We started the planning in the Fall of 2010 with a small team, and a dream of changing forever the way we think about what is possible for Residents in a nursing home. After meeting with staff about which Residents could travel safely, and then inviting everyone to come if they met certain medical criteria, we started fundraising for the trip. We didn't want money to be the reason someone could not go. I don't want to digress now, but more about Roz, later.

Once it seemed we would be "able" to go, we started working on the logistics. Meetings with Residents and staff took place together and separately as there were so many issues to address. Every Resident could request who they would want to be their 1:1 caregiver, and staff could apply for the trip. I wanted it to be a group of dedicated caregivers, but also those who had a reason to want to go to the Holy Land. The essays staff wrote in their applications elevated yet again my understanding of the people with whom I worked.

By the late spring of 2011, the group was identified, and we started to work on the travel details – passports, plane tickets, touring company, medical supplies/wheelchairs in Israel, the bus to and from the airport, etc. How would we bring and manage medicine for everyone? How would we provide 24-hour nursing home level care? Who would have thought how hard it would be to get passports for people, including those without birth certificates? The tour itself came together with Jacky as our Israel representative, and Yaakov as our Guide. By the summer we were doing little trips together as a group (8 Residents and 8 Caregivers – including 2 nurses, 1 Physical Therapist, 4 Certified Nursing Assistants and 1 son) to get know each other better. The Rabbi, Medical Director, Director of Resident Life, a TRD (Therapeutic Recreation Director) and I would also travel for support.

By the fall, all the details were in place, and we were starting to focus on packing, the well-being of the Residents, and the many things that could go wrong. What would happen if someone got sick and had to stay in Israel? What would happen if they needed emergency medical care, or we needed medication we did not bring with us? To be sure, we over thought everything and had back up plans for the back up plans – which fortunately, most all of it was never needed.

Weekly planning meetings brought us closer and closer to the trip, and we captured all this activity with our filmmaker, David, who would be traveling with us. I just wanted to have a record of the experience for us. David always knew he wanted to make an independent film about the journey, and after it was all done, *Next Year Jerusalem*, was produced with 8 Residents as its stars! The film premiered at the Sarasota Film Festival in 2013, and at many other festivals around the world. It was also carried on Netflix for 5 years. If you are curious to see it now you can email me for the link. Residents were able to travel to some of these premieres, including at the LeadingAge National Annual Conference in Dallas that year. Not only did they travel to Israel, but they became movie stars.

Each Resident had their own story about Israel and why they wanted to go. I believe every human being on earth should visit Jerusalem in their lifetime to understand the creation of the three monotheistic religions

and important parts of world history. There is much written, discussed and sadly misunderstood about Israel, but this group was able to learn about it firsthand.

First, Bill and Juna were brother and sister. Bill's son Mitch came as his caregiver, and Juna chose Beverly, a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). Neither of them had been to Israel, but they had family living there, who they had never met. Their meeting took place in the Galilee as the family was united for the first time. This was the first of many special family connections.

Bill also was the oldest of the group (98 years old – the average was 91!). He had never put on tefillin (wrapped around arm and head to pray) before, but when we went to Jerusalem he did. When the Rabbi asked him what he prayed for, he asked to be a better person. We all could use that prayer.

Leslie was a fine gentleman from South Africa, who also had a family connection to the trip, as his 2 granddaughters and their parents traveled to meet us there and invited all of us to celebrate their B'nai Mitzvot with them! We enjoyed their company for several days of the journey, and then shared in their simcha (celebration) on Friday in Jerusalem.

Leslie also was the roommate of the Rabbi and gave us the first good laugh of the adventure. We had worried about the overnight plane travel, the medical conditions of the Residents, and what it would be like to go directly to our first day of touring. We slept the first night at a kibbutz in the Galilee, and then on the first morning Leslie told us he didn't sleep very well because the Rabbi snored! So much for all our worrying about the Residents.

Harry was the 3rd gentleman on the trip, and he enjoyed everything we did – especially the food. When we were enjoying the daily Israeli buffet breakfast, he asked me if I could arrange the same at the Home! He roomed with Sergio, and they were 3 generations apart but both warm, caring, socially engaging men who formed a special friendship on the trip.

Selma and Regine were the only Residents who had been to Israel before. Selma had traveled there when she worked for Jewish Federation decades earlier. She savored all aspects of the trip and talked about how she was too "chicken" when she was younger to go up to Masada. On this trip, everyone supported her, and she made it to the top of Masada (in the cable car) and looked out on the Dead Sea.

Regine, from Belgium, was the only Holocaust survivor in the group, and she became an international immigration attorney when she came to live in the United States after the war. Her son Mark, from Belgium, came to meet us on the trip and spent the time traveling with his mother during this incredible experience. One of the highlights for all of us was when we traveled to the Holocaust Museum, Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem. We were introduced to our Guide, Bert, who as it turned out had the same experience as a survivor as Regine, and they connected and spoke of their experiences in French.

Sandy traveled with her long-term caregiver, Judy, and enjoyed all aspects of the trip. Her dementia was rather advanced, but we said at the time, and truly believed, she would forever remember the journey in her heart.

Helen, the only Catholic Resident in the group, was excited to do many things, including the chance to see the Jordan River. She loved Jerusalem, and swam in the Dead Sea, but I do believe the highlight was getting her to dip her feet in the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized. After being nervous, several of us helped make it happen and I know she took that memory with her when she passed.



*Israel Trip #1 – 2011 at
The Western Wall*



Israel Trip #2 – 2014 at the Knesset



**NEXT YEAR JERUSALEM - Take 3
November 6 - 15, 2022**

*Israel Trip #3 –
2022 at Masada*

Helen was very sick and needed heart surgery when she returned from Israel. She survived and lived another several years at The Jewish Home. She even contemplated the 2nd trip that we took in 2014, but decided not to go. Life lesson about living in the moment, as you never know when you get another opportunity.

While we are learning about Helen, I would like to mention the special relationship The Jewish Home has with the Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport. Since the majority of Residents who are not Jewish are Catholic, we have had a strong connection with the Catholic Church for many years. This started with the very beginning of our organization when (part of) the land was purchased from the local Diocese. Many years later, after the Church sold their local nursing homes, the area priests started to refer to The Jewish Home as the best place in town. I had come from the local Catholic hospital system, so knew Bishop Lori when I started. He arranged for Diocesan priests to come to do weekly mass, visit parishioners, etc. Later, when Bishop Caggiano succeeded him, I reached out to introduce him to The Jewish Home. After settling into the community, he came over and toured our facility, and has been actively connected to us ever since. He has given mass personally to the Residents and makes sure their religious and spiritual needs are met. The overall commitment to the needs of all the Residents is an important driving force in our organization, and I commend everyone involved for making that happen.

While the staff was working incredibly hard throughout the trip, I had arranged for them to have free time on Shabbat (Saturday) so they could have a tour of the Christian sections of Jerusalem with our guide. There are a few priceless moments from that day, including those caught on film by David, and no doubt being in those places as faithful Christians must be awe inspiring. They appreciated the break, but more importantly the experience. Rabbi Shulman, Ellen Ashkins (Director, Resident Life) and I spent the day with the Residents at the hotel, and everyone got a short reprieve before we continued our journey. This is another opportunity to recognize and acknowledge the staff that went on this journey, and how they enabled a group of elders to share an experience of a lifetime.

While there is no sequel to the movie, there was a second journey to Israel for another group of Residents in 2014, which allowed us again to prove the strength and capabilities of our elders. The trip has now been replicated by several communities from around the country, and we always encourage others to expand their comfort zones to help our elders pursue their dreams. Life is a journey, and we are all so grateful to be able to share this together.

After years of “joking” about doing another trip, the pandemic inspired us to try again in 2022, and in November, 2022 we managed to create the third journey to Israel for our beloved Residents, staff, volunteers and other clients. The planning began in the winter of 2021-22 when the pandemic was still very active – in fact there was another surge due to the Omicron variant. Initially, there was a large group of Residents in both skilled nursing and assisted living that expressed interest and by the Summer, 2022 the list settled at about 4 Residents and clients, 4 volunteers and a group of staff to join us (total was 24 at that point). All of the basic logistical planning (dates, flights, hotels) was done by then with the same travel company in Israel we had used on each of the 2 previous trips.

By September, 2022 we had to finalize the list for plane tickets and started to work on the detailed itinerary. We had a number of meetings to work through all of the details – packing lists, weather, equipment, medicines, etc. By the last week of October we were all packed and ready to go. Taking out the “playbooks” from 2011 and 2014 helped of course, and while the details were relatively easy, this seemed to be the hardest trip to plan. More Residents and staff were interested but then for various reasons were not able to go.

The trip itself turned out to be the best of all. The logistics were perfect, the weather was nearly so, and the group was incredible with each other. The range of emotions was evident from the pure entertainment to the religious and spiritual awakening to the mourning together at the Holocaust museum. Israel is filled with diversity in every way – and our group experienced it together for 8 wonderful days and nights.

The relationships on display added other chapters to this book which I will try to capture. First, Paula was the primary caregiver for Betty, who lives with moderate dementia in the Rosenberg House. Betty is Christian, had worked her entire life for the same company as a bookkeeper (like my mom), was everyone's "grandma" on the trip and literally got stronger every day. Similarly, Belinda was the primary caregiver for Steven, who had suffered a severe stroke, and lives in the Feldman House. Steven is Jewish, had worked in the milk delivery business and enjoyed every aspect of the journey. Neither had been to Israel before and went with open eyes.

The rest of the team included 3 other caregivers who were originally each assigned to help with a specific Resident. Suzanne, Jackie and Arlen all worked with Paula and Belinda to make the work more manageable, and enjoyed every aspect of the trip. They had applied and were selected based on their dedication to our organization and their faith. Allison and Kara who are both in Leadership and close friends, and were responsible for the team. Donna and Mary are both nurses who joined the group both as caregivers and participants. Phil, who was coming as a caregiver for a Resident who fell and broke his rib a week before the trip ended up bringing his wife Lisa since we could not cancel that spot. I cannot say enough about this entire caregiver team, as they made the trip not only fun but meaningful, and everyone built relationships beyond what had existed before.

Rabbi Shulman was also with us again for inspiration and insights, but this time his lovely wife Eva and son Yoel joined us as well. Having lived in Israel for a time, they all added another dimension to our experience.

Finally, Erica and Sara, both volunteers, each brought a friend with them, so with Regina and Marsha, added a small group of people who had various connections to our organization. 2 were hidden children in the Holocaust. They were affectionately known as the "Golden Girls" to the group. They were a special part of every aspect of the trip, but I must point out 2 quick highlights. When we were up north, we were invited to participate in a Kristallnacht program (Night of the Broken Glass) in a 1st century (yes, 2,000 year old) synagogue at the hotel we were staying (Magdala) with a group from New York. This was awe-inspiring unto itself, but the fact that our group included 2 survivors, who then spoke during the program added a dimension beyond anything that we could have planned for. The other memory was our visit to the Holocaust Museum (Yad Vashem), which again was enhanced beyond words to be there with survivors. We are forever grateful for their company.

Chapter V

Caregivers

Before we move past *Next Year Jerusalem*, I would be remiss not to talk about a few other caregivers who made the trips possible. I mentioned staff had to apply to come on this journey, but preference was given to applications for staff who were requested by a Resident. So let's start with Donnette, Beverly, Rhoena, and Judy.

Donnette is a Registered Nurse (RN) who was selected for the trip by Helen, who you just met. They were quite the duo, from the early planning to their packing escapades, to their deeply meaningful experience being "baptized" in the Jordan River (make sure you see them trying on sunglasses in *Next Year Jerusalem*). Donnette is from Jamaica and has worked at The Jewish Home for many years. She knew everything about Helen (and her family) and was the perfect person to be with her especially given Helen's frail medical condition. Donnette and Helen were the life of the party, and both came away with an even deeper bond with each other.

Beverly was paired with Juna. They were both tough cookies and balanced each other perfectly. They were not always front and center at all the activities but enjoyed everything we did. Their moment "in the sun" was on the bus towards the end of the trip when asked if they were going to miss each other. Their eyes said it all, and I know their connection was special.

Rhoena and Regine were the last ones to get to breakfast, to the bus, or anywhere we needed to be. We had a running joke about whether it was Regine holding up Rhoena or vice versa, but we will never know for sure. Both were strong willed, and both helped each other at different times on the trip. Regine, as a Holocaust survivor and reunited with her son, had very strong ties to Israel. Rhoena, from Jamaica, and a very religious person, had different but also very strong ties. They were good for each other, and everyone appreciated their unique roles in the group.

Finally, Judy was a longstanding private caregiver for Sandy, who had moderate (advanced) Dementia. Sandy needed Judy and Judy loved Sandy. Theirs was a more traditional caregiver relationship, but they expanded that love on the trip as well.

There were others on the trips who had bonds with the Residents, and I certainly want to acknowledge Tawana, Shelley and Sue - from the first trip in 2011, and Nicky, Laurie, Tanisha, Claudine and Jessica from the second trip in 2014. They all worked tirelessly to make the journey beyond special for these seniors. They all got to experience the Holy Land as part of our family, and they all have special memories for a lifetime.

I do need to tell the story of Nicky, a relatively quiet CNA, who as it turns out is a remarkable singer. One day up north near Tiberias we were outside the Church of the Beatitudes waiting to go inside. Another large group from Ethiopia was doing the same and started to sing church hymns. Nicky joined in with her magnificent voice and brought us all to silence and tears. We will never forget that moment and only wish I was smart enough to record it.

Caregivers is a term I do not love. These individuals are so much more! They certainly take care of the Residents they work with, but they become part of their families. They get to know them intimately and provide in a way that is not properly appreciated in society. We do not have the funding to pay them what they deserve, and we expect so much from them. Caregivers include Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA's), who are the backbone of all skilled nursing facilities in the world, as well as Registered Nurses (RN's), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN's), Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists (PT, OT, ST), Therapeutic Recreation Directors (TRD's), Home Health Aides, Companions, and everyone from support departments (Dining, Laundry, Housekeeping, Finance, etc.) that take the time to be with Residents as well. The list is long, and the demand is endless. The stories in this section could fill several books, as there are so many

“heroes” to use the 2020 vernacular, and their relationships with our Residents and clients.

Let me start with Paula. Paula has worked for Jewish Senior Services for 30+ years. She has had countless relationships with our beloved Residents. She has won most every award there is in our organization and the industry, having been recognized with the Mary Williams Certified Nursing Assistant Award (1999), the Elaine “Laney” Pollack Award (2008) and the LeadingAge CT Caring Hands Award (2018).

Paula (who you met on the 3rd trip to Israel) has become the “adopted” daughter of more families than we will ever know. I tell her story through her relationship with Rose, as they were featured on a podcast in 2022 about caregivers called *“The Shape of Care”*, expertly narrated and produced by Mindy Fried (www.theshapeofcare.org). Paula and Rose shared a special bond which lasted through the end of Rose’s life. It is difficult to explain these relationships because we see only glimpses of what goes on behind closed doors. The 1:1 connection between caregiver and client is precious. We literally trust our loved ones’ lives with the people employed to care for them. Most are wonderful, and some are spectacular, and organization is blessed with many such individuals. We should always celebrate the contributions of the vast majority of wonderful caregivers who do G-d’s work, and strive to improve or remove those who do not have the capacity to care for others.

My next wonderful story is about Sergio, who came to The Jewish Home directly out of high school to work in the kitchen as a dining assistant. He later was promoted to Security, and in both roles demonstrated a care for the elderly. He subsequently became a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and then a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). He has been a part of our organization, culture, and team for 20+ years now, and continues to shine bright as an example of someone with charm, warmth and a heart of gold. There are thousands of lives he has touched, and for everyone that has either lived or had a loved one live on his unit (old building) or household (new building) they know exactly what I mean. There are many great nurses on our campus, and throughout the industry, and he exemplifies what it means to do all that you can to make the quality of care AND the quality of life as meaningful as possible for every Resident!

On occasion, Residents need to be transferred to the local hospital for additional care or treatment. This can be stressful for everyone involved, and certainly for the Residents it forces them to leave their home – at least temporarily. A few years ago a Resident had to go to the hospital and while there she was quote as saying, “I want to get back to Lorna”, the CNA who took care of her at the Home. It was good that she wanted to go home, but it was her relationship with Lorna that was her primary motivation.

One final story of a caregiver to demonstrate that it is not only an amazing place to live but a great place to die (one family member once told me that it is even better). Barbara is a CNA who has taken care of countless Residents over her years of dedicated service, and most of the time is not in the spotlight even though we all know what a great job she does. After one of the Residents she had taken care of passed away, the daughter came back to collect her belongings. The daughter had always been appreciative and supportive of our staff. Her mom had suffered from dementia for many years, and she had “said goodbye” to her long ago. But upon returning to the household and seeing Barbara she started to sob and cry and let out the raw emotions of being grateful to that primary caregiver who took loving care of her mother for the last years of her life. It is that unsung (and unseen) dedication that makes the Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA’s) the true “heroes” of our senior living system.



*Paula Fox with Rose Santilli,
2021*

Chapter VI

Where Everybody Knows Your Name

One of the other videos we created for our website and ongoing education was called “Friends” to document examples of the relationships formed at The Jewish Home. It includes Residents together, staff and Residents, and of course family. It was created to encourage people to develop relationships when they come to live at the Home, as it is the beginning of a new chapter in life. The video ends with a quote from me, “there is no doubt in my mind that life is more meaningful when you share it with someone you care about, someone you love.”

You have already met Sadie and my friend Dave, who are featured in the video. Some of the other stories included represent the importance of forming relationships at every stage of life.

Sadie knew everyone, and everyone knew Sadie. But her relationship with Frida was special. They were best friends. Best friends like you make when you meet freshman year in college. They did everything together, including work in our Work Activity Center. This program, which is a unique sheltered workshop, allows Residents to go to work every day to help prepare mailings for area businesses. The former program director, Frederica said, “Frida and Sadie were pillars of the Work Center, and of The Jewish Home”. They get paid on a production basis to have some “spending money” (again college analogy) adding a normal routine to their days. Frida says in the video “we all have one thing in common, that this is going to be our last home”. “I want to be with people that I am comfortable with, and I want them to be comfortable with me”. Amen.

Harriett and Bernice were also best friends who met at The Jewish Home who did everything together. They often would be seen in the Tandet Pavilion chatting and holding hands, and both had lovely senses of humor. During their interview for the video, they were gushing about each other, and they enjoyed each other’s company. It ends with Harriet saying, “they are going to think we are having an affair!”. Don’t worry Harriet, your secret is safe with us. More about Harriet later.

Elmer and Gisella were both Holocaust survivors who came to the United States and had been together for more than five decades. Both spoke English, but their primary language was Hungarian. When the video of them was being taken, the videographer asked, “Do you have many friends at the Home”? Gisella answered in Hungarian (which we were not supposed to understand), “no, we do not have many friends here”. But ever the socialite, Elmer corrected her in English for the camera, “of course we have many friends here!”. Ah, the loving couple, always in sync!

Eileen and Comet also met at the Home, but Comet was the resident Golden Retriever! Eileen was very shy and did not ever leave her room. She did not have any friends here, but bonded with Comet, who helped bring her out of her shell (and her room). Pet Therapy is an important part of any good nursing home, and can include dogs, cats, birds, fish, etc. If the motivation is to have as much resemblance to life before the nursing home, then pets need to be a part of it if the Residents so desire.

Rabbi Josh and David found each other in the Synagogue. Separated by about 60 chronological years, they shared a very deep connection and appreciation for Jewish activities. David went to the synagogue every day. Rabbi Josh included David in all the spiritual and social activities around the Jewish Holidays. They needed, and helped each other, and were quoted as enjoying “how much we have in common”.

Finally, the story of Hecky and Harold was told in the video, but it is worth adding as these two gentlemen

who lived on Jefferson Street were good friends. Harold had a motorized wheelchair, and Hecky was in a regular wheelchair. The Jewish Home building was large and getting around sometimes was an effort. But Hecky was no fool, so he would grab on to the back of Harold's wheelchair and let him (or the motor) do the work!



Rabbi Josh and David Bixon



Hecky Tanchem and Harold Wolfson, circa 2003

Chapter VII

The Beauty Shop

I found a DVD in my desk when I started at the Home in 2003, called *More Than Skin Deep*. Apparently, this was created by a film student, who at the time had a connection to The Jewish Home because his father worked as a volunteer in the Clinic. David (yes, the same David, who later produced *Next Year Jerusalem*, produced this 20-minute video by interviewing Residents and staff about why the Beauty Shop was such an important part of the routine for them. Many people talked about how few things felt “normal” after moving into a nursing home, but the Beauty Shop allowed them to keep a sense of normal by styling, coloring and cutting their hair. Many went every week and built relationships with the staff who took care of them. These ladies (for the most part) wanted to feel beautiful and see themselves as young as possible. Getting “your hair done” was something giving them pleasure and bringing a sense of normalcy to their week.

Sandy ran the Beauty Shop for 40 years and took care of countless women. She built relationships with so many of them, and got to know them, and their secrets, like no one else. She said she tried to treat them the way she would want to be treated. “When a woman looks nice, she feels so much better”.

Rosalie, Frances, and Myrna all reaffirmed their feelings about the Beauty Shop. They noted, “we are not alone”, and it is “good to be part of the routine of life”. Every woman who went to the Beauty shop had it in their schedule, regardless of their cognitive ability. Myrna was quick to point out who had dementia and felt sorry for “them”.

Jane went regularly, and visited with her daughter Mandy most every day of the week. They were close in a way not everyone enjoyed. Jane was also very close with her husband who had passed, so she was fortunate to have such a loving family.

Lil was one of the last smokers at the Home, and she was often a bit grumpy. The lady who cut her hair, smoked with her, and called her “an old bag of bones”. They had their own special relationship.

Anne got her hair cut every Wednesday morning before her date with Hymie. She had already buried two husbands, but she had a steady date with a sweet man. Anne needed reassurance she looked good and got that from the Beauty Shop and from Hymie.

Gertrude was another beautiful woman who taught valuable lessons of vanity. She lived in a private room and was well-liked by Residents and staff alike. When I met her, she was always dressed nicely, had her hair brushed and make-up on, and liked to “flirt” a little – even though she was in her early 90’s. One day I received a call she had fallen so I went to her room and unfortunately, she was lying on the floor with her head bleeding. She was alert and talking with the nursing staff and I kneeled to say hello. She immediately responded, “You can’t see me like this!” While not quite screaming, it was clear she had an image to uphold. I stayed with her regardless until the paramedic arrived, and when he came in to introduce himself, she said, “oh my, you’re handsome!” We all had a good laugh, and then they took her to the hospital for stitches and she returned later that day. We continued our relationship until she passed away a year or so later. Gertrude gave us all the important reminder women want to be “beautiful” regardless of the circumstances and their age.

In order to reflect on the challenges that staff and other Residents face, I reflect upon the fact that women who live in nursing homes are no different than young women in high school. Some flirted, others were shy, and some were cliquy and mean. Yes, the mean girls still exist in the nursing home. There was a group that of course had a leader and a handful of followers who picked on the other girls (because they weren’t as pretty or

as smart), wouldn't let them play in their card games, caused trouble for the staff, liked to "stir the pot" to create rumors, and overall were just plain mean. Some things never change, and it is our job to care for everyone.

Ruth and her two sisters and their relationship with their mom, Connie, could be described in the Family Day section later, but I think the most touching tribute these 3 women gave to their mom is their personal dedication to cut her hair and do her nails in her room. They ensured sure she was dressed and made up "professionally". They also had a way with decorating her room. Mom was a lovely lady who appreciated the pampering and attention, and her girls were clearly raised right. They visited often and spent quality time with mom up to the very end, and they showed by example what loving daughters can do for their mom.

Molla, another centenarian, also was a regular at the Beauty Shop. It might not have been obvious to those that met her here, but she had been a former beauty queen, "Ms. New Haven". Never judge a book by its cover!

One more story about Sadie, who you met earlier. Sadie, as you know, was always "dressed to the nines", and was a regular at the Beauty Shop. She not only took care of her own beauty needs but made sure every other lady did as well. Her best friend, Frida, was often seen there (and everywhere else) with her, as they were inseparable. Sadie and Frida took care of, and looked out for, each other. They both were shining examples of how looking good (and doing good) at every age can be accomplished together.



Sadie and Frida in the Work Activity Center

Chapter VIII

Going to Work

*T*he Work Activity Center at The Jewish Home is the only licensed sheltered workshop in Connecticut in a nursing home. It is open business hours Monday through Friday and gives Residents a job where they are paid to help do mailings for area businesses. After living productive lives, most people do not have that opportunity in a nursing home. The Work Center at The Jewish Home was founded in 1980 to make sure there were meaningful opportunities for people to continue to contribute to society and make a few dollars to have for spending money.

Through the years the program has been blessed to have a few key staff who built relationships with the Residents in the Center. Most notably I am going to talk about Frederica and Josh, who filled the key role from 2003-2020. These two special people got to know the Residents (their “staff”) sitting side by side and stuffing envelopes and other similar projects every day. They talked with each other and got to know about their families, children, careers, lives and all their personal details. It was not uncommon for their children to mention Frederica or Josh in their obituaries or other final words.

Josh and Carmelina had a particularly special bond. She called him her “boy” and loved him. It was clear to everyone who knew them. The family not only included Josh in her funeral, but gave him the honor of being a pall bearer. Josh had a special connection with her and many others who worked in the work center.

So we like to get our hair done, and to go to work, why not get married?

Chapter IX

Til Death Do Us Part

It was not unusual for married couples to end up in the nursing home together. Usually, one partner needed more care than the other, but they wanted to stay together – often after six or seven decades of marriage! You met our first couple, Elmer and Gisella in the Friends video.

Bill, who you met earlier in the trip to Israel, moved into The Jewish Home because his wife Belle needed nursing home care. Bill really did help to take care of her and was a very attentive husband. One day when we were meeting to work on logistics for the trip to Israel, everyone was there except Bill. When we went to find out where he was, he explained he had to fix the remote control for his wife so she could watch TV while he was at the meeting. Bill always looked out for Belle and put her own needs first until the day she passed away.

Fani and David moved into the Home when he was “actively dying” so her family was secure in knowing she would be surrounded by others after he passed away. That ended up happening five years later when David was 105 years old, and in the interim, they had a beautiful marriage and relationship. They were seen everywhere on the campus. She was his caregiver and made sure he had everything he needed. David was also featured in a national project about centenarians in each of the 50 states.

Another anecdote about Fani and David. When Larry (our Administrator) visited them in their room, he noticed a picture of Miley Cyrus, the singer. Larry inquired why they had a picture of her among all their family pictures. They explained their granddaughter had worked for Miley as her stage manager and provided the context for the connection between 3 generations.

Norman and Adele were married for 64 years and moved into The Jewish Home in 2010. Their daughter worked there, so where else would they go? Unfortunately, having lived only in Brooklyn and Kingston, New York they did not know anyone in Fairfield Connecticut other than their daughter and her family. They did make friends with their tablemates in the Main Dining Room, particularly Jennie and Gene.

Jennie and Adele would visit with each other in their rooms, and they would share stories about the things they enjoyed in their lives. At Jennie’s funeral her niece talked about the warm relationship she had with Adele. Adele also enjoyed doing art with Sara and painted a silk scarf for her daughter Ellen, which she still wears. Adele also loved the musical entertainment, learning/reading Hebrew and going to the JSS casino with her husband.

Norman loved his wife dearly, and also developed new friendships. He and Gene would spend time together as well and would sit at mealtimes and joke about the “things” that men talk about, particularly the female staff and Residents. His daughter Ellen told me he said it a little more crassly.

Gene convinced Norman to move into a private room after Adele passed away, and they enjoyed going to entertainment, fishing, Yankee games, and especially going to the casino.

And for the record, Ellen was the devoted daughter to them both who loved them beyond words, cared for them daily, ensured their every need, and was so grateful their final days were spent with her close by. She grieved for a long time after they both had passed, and while we are focused now on the celebration of relationships, I pause to recognize the importance and impact of grieving too.

Shirley moved into The Jewish Home when her husband Dick could no longer safely care for her. He still visited every day and was another shining example of a devoted husband. They had been married for 60+

years, when COVID-19 impacted their ability to be together every day. Dick still visited as often as he could, given the restrictions in place, but ultimately decided the only way to be the husband he wanted to be was to move into Assisted Living to be closer to Shirley. They could see each other every day, and he could again be a part of her life. Love and devotion at its finest.

Irma and Harold moved into Assisted Living together when it opened in 2016, and never missed a beat together. They had a very strong family, and all their kids and grandkids and great grandkids were in the area. They had been leaders in the community for decades, and their family was part of the fabric of The Jewish Home since its inception. To see them thrive together was a privilege and an honor, and testament to the reasons why this community existed.

Will and Nancy started as volunteers in the old Coffee Shop, and later transitioned to be Residents together. They were featured in the Family Portrait section of an issue of our *Chai Lights* publication in 2016, which delved into their history, relationship, roles in the community and love for each other and their family. “What was and still is very important to Will and Nancy is the love they share with the family. His sense of humor has always kept us laughing. To this day, they both keep each other laughing. They had a large group of friends that would get together once a week and play cards, go to shows, vacation together, spend New Year’s Eve together and celebrate anniversaries and birthdays. There were 10 couples who Will and Nancy spent a good part of their life with.” They celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary in The Jewish Home, and leave a beautiful legacy for their children and their families.

Steve and Sally were another sweet couple who shared a story about their family, which stayed with us. They had two children, a son and a daughter, and they had lived a modest life. When the son became of college age, they scraped together enough money for him to go to college. But when it was their daughters turn, the father explained there just wasn’t enough money (which meant that he didn’t think that girls should go to college). Remember this was around 1970. However, Sally didn’t think that was fair, so she went to a pawn shop and sold her engagement and wedding rings to get the money for her daughter to have the same opportunity as her son! After realizing he made a mistake, Steve went back to the pawn shop and repurchased the rings for his wife, and both kids went to school. The daughter later got married and had children of her own and was able to give her mother’s wedding ring to her daughter to extend the family tradition.

Sam and Rose moved in to be together as well, when Sam was 98 years old, but it was Rose who needed more care. They too were well known, and immediately became a part of The Jewish Home family. Sam was recommended to be the local circus (Barnum) Honorary Ringmaster for the Home, and he participated in several ceremonies when the traveling entourage came to perform. Of note, his son Larry was the Official Ringmaster for the circus and is part of a small group of well-known ringmasters in the hometown of the world-famous Barnum and Bailey Circus! Like father, like son...

So how do we celebrate these incredible couples? A tradition started on the Jefferson Street campus was to have a couple’s lunch to bring them together with each other. This was not easy as usually one of the partners had less cognition and ability to participate, but nonetheless was a nice opportunity to “socialize” with other couples. The routine of “normalcy” was often lost in nursing home settings, so all that could be done to sustain it was a driver in these types of activities.

The other couple story to share is a bit sadder, but also explains the challenge of dementia. One day a volunteer bumped into a man in the Tandet Pavilion looking lost, so she offered to help him. He said that he was looking for his wife. After the volunteer asked and discovered where she lived (another part of the campus for those with dementia), she promptly brought the man to see his wife – thinking she was doing a good thing.

Unfortunately when they arrived, the wife greeted them with a shrieking scream, “Get him away from me”, repeatedly. There was no way to know the wife had extreme reactions to her husband due to her dementia, and there were care plans in place to keep them apart. Everyone was traumatized a bit, and the lesson was not lost on all of us to properly communicate care plans to volunteers as well. Dementia can be a brutal disease.

Another couples’ story came to the surface during the COVID-19 pandemic (more about that later), as Myrta and Martin were able to receive their 1st doses of the COVID-19 vaccine on their 68th wedding anniversary! I had known them only superficially prior to that time, but their daughter contacted me when we announced the vaccine was coming to Jewish Senior Services on that special day. Through my relationship with News 12 Connecticut, I was able to get coverage for their story (and the vaccine in general), and we told the vaccine story through their very personal relationship. Their wedding pictures (and others) were SO beautiful, as was their love story, and here they were living in a nursing home together nearly seven decades later!

With a view toward its never too late to find love, a number of couples have found each other in the nursing home – usually after someone moves in after the death of their spouse. My dad met Joan when she moved in and they connected relatively quickly. Both Joan’s family and mine were very happy that they found each other for companionship, and it was clear that they were good for each other. They kept their separate houses, but spent good parts of their days together including most of the activities – music, bingo, social hours, etc. One day after music in Bennett Hall, my dad convinced Joan to dance with him. After 2 steps, he fell and took them both to the ground. Fortunately, she was fine but dad broke a rib and ended up in a lot of pain for a couple of weeks. This was also the reason he was not able to go on the trip to Israel. He was mostly embarrassed, but everyone around did an amazing job of supporting both of them. As the story gets told ever since then, Joan likes to say, “he thought he was Fred Astaire!”

My final couple’s story is also very loving, as there were spouses, Marty and Joan, who were incredibly devoted to their partners who lived in the nursing home, and visited them each day. Their spouses both suffered from dementia, and over time declined, and eventually died. The two visitors, who obviously shared a bond, eventually realized they had developed a relationship with each other and lived happily ever after!



Jewish Home Resident David Steinberger, 102-years-old, is included in a project by photographer Danny Goldfield. Danny is

photographing 2 people (1 woman and 1 man) in each of the 50 United States. All of these 100 people must be at least 100 years old. The completed series will represent over 10,000 years of living. This is an opportunity for centenarians to share their story and represent the state where they reside as part of a national project. CBS news aired a segment on the project. To view <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/capturing-10000-years-of-life-through-photos/>

David Steinberger 102- years- old with his wife Fani

PHOTO: DANNY GOLDFIELD



Ellen Ashkins with her parents, Norman and Adele Sherry, circa 2011



Richard and Shirley Becker, circa 2021



Irma and Harold Batt – photo used for 73rd wedding anniversary



Will and Nancy Wettenstein, circa 2016

Chapter X

Family Day

Another wonderful tradition started more than 30 years ago (and sponsored by the Men's Club) is called Family Day. Towards the end of summer each year, The Jewish Home invites all the Residents and their families to a huge, themed BBQ to celebrate each other. It is always filled with 600-700 people from 4 generations (yes that means great-grandparents) and lots of food, games, laughter and beautiful weather (we put in a request for that each year). Everyone looks forward to the day, and the staff of Jewish Senior Services manages to find an annual theme, menu and series of activities making it special for everyone who attends. It is because we understand the importance of these relationships that we have continued this tradition.

Family brings many wonderful aspects to Resident Life on the campus, and most everyone has children or other loved ones who visit. This included Bernice, who had 3 daughters who visited dutifully. The daughters (Cindy, Vivian and Beth) also understood they had a role to play in making sure the broader community supported The Jewish Home. As it turns out, the Women's Auxiliary has helped provide support for longer than the Home has even existed. So Cindy and Vivian got involved with the Women's Auxiliary Board and ended up taking on leadership roles in chairing their Gala in 2020 and 2021 and subsequently chairing the Board in 2022. They not only provided wonderful examples of being devoted daughters, but of being community leaders.

The Women's Auxiliary does many things, including running the Gift Shop. When families come to visit, they often stop in the Gift Shop, and there are many Volunteers who staff the store for all to enjoy. For several years they would have been greeted by Harry, who was a salesman at heart, and he liked to sell (and flirt) whatever people needed (or didn't). One day another Resident went into the Gift Shop to buy a candy, which he sold her, and then he offered her a bag to place it in. She declined. He offered again, and said "are you sure you don't need a bag?" She again politely declined. The third time he said, "Do you need an old bag like me?" Then she shrugged and walked away. At least he tried!

There have been many other Women's Auxiliary Board members who had family members at the Home. Some became Board members because of their commitment to the community and later had a parent or sibling or spouse move in, and some got to know us through a loved one and then became a Board member. Either way is a beautiful evolution of these relationships, and I give reference to a few, including Marion and her husband Bob, Karen and her mom Avis, Linda and her mother Betty, Shelley and her mother-in-law Rose, Roz and her husband Izzy, Lydia and her dad Jose and her father-in-law Alan, Barbara and her sister Sheila, Lynne and her mother-in-law, Yetta, and finally Judy and her mother Pearl, whose daughters went on to Chair the Women's Auxiliary Luncheons after their grandmother and mother had passed away. Quick sidebar about former Board member Chuck, who was a very successful businessman, he "melted" and became a young 5-year-old when he saw his mother.

Another special relationship evolving from these connections is with one of our staff. Tracey works as a Therapeutic Recreation Director (TRD) and has built a special relationship with an incredible number of Residents over her 20 years. Her connection with Avis goes beyond the campus, as she takes her out personally on Saturdays to the mall to get her hair and nails done. She is considered part of Avis' family, and it is clear Avis is very respectful and appreciative of all Tracey does for her.

Families don't always agree on what is best for mom (or dad), however, and medical care and end-of-life decisions are not always easy. I share the story (without names) of a family with three siblings and a dad at the Home needing medical care. We have a longstanding policy of identifying a single person as the Medically Responsible Party (for exactly this reason), and one of the sons was the MRP. Unfortunately, he had a dominant older sister and a "doctor" brother, both of whom would not let him make a decision and could never agree on anything. When dad needed a procedure to address a medical issue, the MRP son immediately agreed and then said he needed to discuss with his siblings. They,

of course, did not agree with each other and created a week-long battle over what should be done. The staff was caught in the middle of finger pointing, back room calls and visits, and ultimately dysfunctional family syndrome (DFS - that's not a real thing by the way, but should be). Ultimately, I had to intercede, accept the initial MRP son's decision as there was damage happening to the dad and the procedure went forward successfully. I try to remind staff of this (and related) incidents when they are being nice and trying to get all family members involved. There must be one decision-maker for the benefit of the Resident.

Bronia had a "complicated relationship with her daughter Lori, who was an independent filmmaker. Lori decided to create a DVD about five Residents called *Life Times Five*, which featured Ruth, Jenny, Stella, Jane and Susan (she did not include her mom). The premise through their interviews was to talk about what it was like growing up (in the old days) as a woman. The video also included stories about the relationships they each had with their families. Separately, Lori had written a chapter about her mom in a book about her experiences in World War II, which was also complicated.

Ruth was a big fan of Bronia and cared about her deeply. They shared a special connection with their "Yiddishkeit" and bonded with their shared anxiety about those who were not Jewish – staff and other Residents. Unfortunately, Ruth did not get along with many others and complained about them. She was a bright, talented and politically motivated woman who had made the world a better place by her presence (as a teacher among other things), but sadly she was very bitter at the end.

One of my favorite centenarians, Tina, moved in when she was 100 (no one believed it), and she befriended another Resident, Jo. The two of them bonded and remained close until Tina died at age 105. They benefited from each others' company every day and were a little bit of the local "Thelma and Louise" playing off of each other. Both were a bit sarcastic and silly, and would joke around with staff, visitors and other Residents. Most of all they were "warm" and kind, and made you feel good about who you were. For five years they enjoyed a new, true friendship. When I met Tina, she told me she was alive at the time of the Titanic!! I sincerely did not believe her as she was completely sharp and entertaining and did go and check her records to confirm that she was in fact born in 1914. I don't want to digress to my mother, but they did live in the same house as her, and also befriended my father. The 2 ladies also helped look out for him as he was there every day helping to care for my mother. Relationships.

Regina and her mom Madeline had another close relationship, and Regina was her biggest advocate. We haven't talked much about the role of advocacy in the nursing home, but family members play an important role "speaking" for their loved ones who are unable to communicate effectively. Maddy was adored by many, and very engaged and musically talented, but sadly suffered from advanced dementia so could not speak for herself.

Family isn't always family. Regine, who you met earlier in Next Year Jerusalem, also had a friend who was her closest family in the United States - Victoria, who visited with her at least weekly. They had a special friendship transcending family. Regine also took care of or had a special friendship with another Resident, Pat. They were very close, and Regine would often bring her back fruit or snacks from whatever program she had attended. They "watched out" for each other, and unfortunately Regine's only son lived in Belgium and his visits were limited due to the distance.

Another example of a fabulous "Friendly Visitor" was Nina, who became close friends with both David and John (another Centenarian). Nina is a very attractive, outgoing, warm and kind woman who can light up any room. She also was well known for bringing her dog, Otis on her visits. She has a loving and supportive husband, who also happens to be a longstanding member of the Board of Directors. But Nina built and sustained these friendships with two gentlemen who appreciated her company, the time she spent with them, their conversations, and her presence in their lives truly made a difference. Friendly visitors have long been a part of the Jewish Home culture, as many volunteers fill this crucial role. It is people like Nina who understand the importance of relationships that make it happen.

The son of a Resident, John, wrote to me after his father died to thank me for all we had done for his dad, and for the

“touching” tribute we had done (on Zoom). He then shared the following story with me, about the important lesson his father had taught him.

“When I was a kid, I had to help my dad clean the backyard pool every Saturday. One day, a very small bird fell into the pool and was struggling to get out, but couldn’t. My dad used the pool skimmer to scoop him out and put him on the deck. The bird was cold, shivering, and in pretty bad shape. My dad got some towels and wrapped him up, then went inside and got a hair dryer and extension cord. He used the hair dryer to warm up the bird. After a few minutes, the bird hopped up and flew off.

A week later, we were cleaning the pool again. My dad was kneeling down on the deck, testing the water, when a very small bird flew down and landed on his shoulder. My dad didn’t move. A few seconds later, a much larger bird landed on his other shoulder, and they both started chirping and fluttering wings. After about 20 seconds they both flew off.”

That’s a true story. To this day, I’ll make the bet that the little bird was the same one that fell in the pool, and the bigger bird was the mom or dad saying thank you. It’s the little things he did like helping the bird that I’ll remember the most.”

“Alabama” was a huge UConn women’s basketball fan and loved to watch the games and talk about them with everyone who would be interested. One year we had a Celebrity Breakfast sponsored by the Men’s Club, and the guest speaker had some good connections in college athletics. I asked him for something, anything from UConn Women I could give to Alabama, who “beamed” when I gave it to her. It was a UConn signed program, and she treasured it until she passed a year or so later.

Finally, The Jewish Home formed a relationship with an order of Nuns (yes, Catholic Nuns) such that they could be cared for as they got older in either our assisted living or skilled nursing facility. It was a new and unique relationship for the organization but proved to be fantastic on so many levels. The nuns thrived and did well in our care environment, but they also helped care for others. Other sisters moved into the local neighborhood and became volunteers and not only supported their fellow sisters but other Residents in the Home. It added another layer of spirituality for everyone – Jewish and Catholic – which helped our Pastoral Services department. We are all so much more the same than different, and especially later in life we need to celebrate and enjoy each other.



Family Day in the Tandet Pavilion Courtyard, circa 2015



Bronia, 2014

Chapter XI

Men's Club Lunches

One of the first male Residents that I met was Bill, who at the time was 98 years old. You met Bill in *Next Year Jerusalem*, and again in the married couple's section, as he impacted many areas of The Jewish Home world. He was tall and handsome, and walked the halls of the Jewish Home daily. Each morning I would see him and for the better part of several years he would tell me the (same) following joke. "Hey, I have a problem and I wonder if you could help me? I spend my days chasing after women, but what am I going to do if I catch one? My thing doesn't work anymore!" Then he would walk off and give me a smile and a wave and continue his day.

Each month, we provide an opportunity for the men who live at The Jewish Home to gather (no women allowed) to discuss anything they would like. The Men's Club Lunch is a bit discriminatory but the vast majority of Residents in senior living are women (over 80%), and sometimes guys just need to be with other guys. A similar percentage of the staff are women, so this need can be exacerbated, even when the topics are not that interesting.

The first job of the Men's Club is to pick the meal. Men's food. Nothing dainty. Hearty. Remember these guys are from the Greatest Generation. So every month we have a debate – burgers, hot dogs, brisket, etc. No one ever agrees so the chefs pick whatever they want, and who is going to remember what we decided the month before anyway?

At a lunch in 2004, we discussed the 75th anniversary of the collapse of Wall Street and the Great Depression (1929). Steve, who we knew had worked at Macy's for many years, chimed in and said, "I worked on Wall Street in 1929! Never had I met anyone who experienced the "crash", and its implications. He told the story how people who had worked for a decent wage (not the crazy income they have now), had to go to work each day and stand in the back of the building on Wall Street and wait for the hiring manager to come out. They would offer the crowd, "Who is willing to work for \$1 today?" and everyone would raise their hands. Then they would offer \$0.75, then \$0.50, and so on until they thinned the crowd to the number of people they wanted for that day – at the lowest possible wage. After a period of time doing that, he went to work for Macy's!

Invariably, we talk about women. I've been amazed over the years about how little they *complain* about women – it's mostly fond memories of those they have loved and lost. Another of my favorite stories was Ed, who I met shortly after his wife had died and he was 98 years old. I went to say hello and to offer my condolences on his loss. Ed very politely responded, and without missing a beat said, "She was my trophy wife"! Of note, his second wife died when she was 90+, so most of us would not have seen her that way, but Ed never stopped seeing his wife as the beautiful, younger woman he was fortunate enough to have met.

What's a Men's Club lunch without sports? Men who live at The Jewish Home mostly are from New York and Connecticut, with a few sprinkles of Massachusetts and elsewhere thrown in. Most are Yankee fans, as you will soon learn, but we talk about everything from boxing to football, hockey, tennis and occasionally basketball. There have been a few good rivalries over the years, but mostly just a nice opportunity to talk with someone who knows the scores of the games from that week.

Every few years there is a hot political topic, and the two biggies in recent years were the elections of Presidents Obama and Trump. There was some boiling blood on both accounts, and it stirred some interesting discussion. We do try to avoid politics, but as one of the guys likes to say, "why?".

Bob came to us in 2019, a lovely chap, who at one of the lunches shared he was a photojournalist in Vietnam in the 70's. He told stories and talked about (and showed us) the article that was being written about him in the Westport newspaper. That included the reference to the fact that he was shot in the leg while being evacuated. Another good reminder every one of these individuals has a long, storied, interesting past and we need to take the time to ask about or listen to these wonderful stories.

Some of the guys liked to tell jokes, but usually they would forget the punch lines. One cute one I have remembered for many years is the one about a guy driving along with his wife, when he goes straight through a stop sign without slowing down. She yells at him, "what are you doing? You went through that stop sign!". He calmly responded, "I thought you were driving." Dementia is nothing to joke about, but a common theme in our humor.

I received a request from the son of a resident to show a film about his father Sam to the Men's Club. He told me dad was a war hero, and the guys would appreciate the movie. So at one of our monthly lunches, I arranged to have the movie shown, and it was rather graphic and gruff. The guys didn't like it very much, but it made Sam very proud.

Many of the veterans were from World War II, and one of our Residents always liked to (jokingly) take credit for ending the war. Arnold would tell anyone that would listen that "Germany surrendered when he enlisted and was shipped overseas – they knew he was coming!".

John was a veteran who never liked to talk about his military experience. In fact, I never knew more than he had served in Korea. After he died, his son sent me an article that appeared in the New Canaan Advertiser in 2012 (9 years earlier). It turned out John was a close combat veteran who had kept the Purple Heart and other medals in a small box in his closet. He didn't even tell his son about his experiences until he was the age when John had been wounded. Having never served in the military, I cannot fathom all the emotions that come back home with you, but I do know everyone I know has *enormous* respect and gratitude for vets. I wish we knew more about their experiences, so we could say thank you. John, thank you for your service to your country. And to your son, thank you for sharing the article about your father.

My last story about men and the military is about a sword I was given by a resident's family after he passed. The sword is from World War I, and engraved with a Jewish star, which apparently was done back then. The item is priceless to me, as it helps me tell his story to anyone who comes to my home, and to keep the memory of our brave soldiers alive forever.

By the way, the Men's Club lunches are funded by the Men's Club – a fundraising affiliate of Jewish Senior Services who runs a Golf Tournament and Celebrity Breakfast every year to support our work.



Men's Club Lunch, 2017



Celebrity Breakfast "Waiters" 2017

Chapter XII

Yankee Stadium

The other “highlight” of the year for the Men’s Club is an annual trip to Yankee Stadium. I used to try to get them to go to a Mets game at Shea Stadium, and then the new Citifield, but that was hopeless. The Mets didn’t exist when these gentlemen were younger, and the only baseball team that matters to them is the Yankees.

So every year we take 10-12 Residents with 10-12 staff “buddies” (you need 1:1 care) to a weekday game at Yankee Stadium. The trip down takes an hour or so (after the hour or so to get everyone downstairs and on the bus), and then we can usually find a place to unload near one of the entrances. By the time we unload and wheel everyone up the ramps to our seats, I think it is fair to say we are exhausted. The guys want to watch the game, though, so the adventure had just begun.

Each year we had a ritual of getting food for the guys when we got to the seats. Taking turns or by sharing responsibility, the staff would take their allocated funds and go to whatever vendor the Resident wanted food. Some wanted hot dogs, some burgers, etc. Yes, beer was allowed too! One year, Sheldon, however, wanted the famous *Pat LaFrieda* Steak Sandwich, which of course was twice as expensive and on the opposite side of the stadium. I left the group to get his sandwich and brought it back for him to enjoy, and visited briefly with the nurse (Sergio) who was his buddy. We would usually have the last row of the field level seats in two sections to accommodate the wheelchairs, and Sheldon was in the next section. After a while I realized he was throwing the steak at the crowd in front of him. I asked what was going on, and he explained he enjoyed the flavor and chewing the meat, but he could not chew it through with his “rotten teeth” so after he chewed out the flavor, he would throw out the meat. Even though he explained later that he had “forgotten his dentures”, I never bought him another steak sandwich.

I’m going to avoid any details but please know these trips include bathroom duty for those who need to go during the game. Wheelchairs with those who need assistance is a particular challenge in a baseball stadium, so the next time you go to a game and complain about the bathroom, think about what it would be like to be taking someone else in their wheelchair.

One year when we got to the Stadium, we experienced a rain delay. We went to our seats regardless and carried out our food ritual. While the guys were eating, an old Yankee game was being shown on the TVs near us, and we watched while we ate. The field was covered. After about two hours we decided to leave and bring the Residents home. While we were waiting to board the bus, one of the guys said to me, “that was the best game we have seen”! He thought we were watching the game “live” on the TV and enjoyed the experience as much as had there been action on the field.

Loading the bus to come home was the hardest part of the 10-hour journey, as we had to drive through the traffic to get near an entrance (pre-designated) to load the wheelchairs, which takes a bit of time. Invariably I ended up in a fight with New York City’s finest, who while doing their job didn’t want traffic to build up near the stadium. Some were very kind and understanding, while others didn’t seem to care we were taking care of elders.

One year while waiting outside for the bus, an extremely beautiful woman walked by our group and everyone had their head turned to the side watching her. I wish there was a picture with the caption quoted by one of the Residents, “guys will always be guys”! Eventually, we would get the bus loaded and make our way back to Connecticut armed with stories to tell our colleagues and families about that year’s game. And sometimes we even knew who won!



Men's Club at Yankee Stadium, circa 2010

Chapter XIII

The Casino

Another regular destination was Foxwoods Casino for those Residents who like to gamble. Please recognize that most everyone in the nursing home was living on a very modest amount of money which is allowed after most of your income is given to the State of Connecticut (and every other State) as “applied income” towards your Medicaid benefits. So not only did we provide the staff, the bus, the lunch and the overall experience – we provided a modest amount of gambling money. Staff was always assigned 1:1 so Residents could go wherever they wanted.

Some Residents did have their own gambling pot from family or other resources, and all who went invariably had a good time. I was never a fan of the casinos, but it was good to see people enjoying themselves. It is especially rewarding to “win” when someone else provides the funding, so whatever you do win is truly a net gain!

On one of these trips, a male Resident got to the casino and promptly said to his caregiver (fortunately another male): “I have \$300 in my pocket and I want you to get me a room and a hooker”!! Seriously. The staff member appropriately said that they could not do that, which was responded to by the Resident, “you can’t or you won’t”? Fortunately, the incident ended without any further controversy but could you imagine the headlines, “Jewish Home Resident arrested for solicitation at Foxwoods”!?!?!?

Finally, I want to mention Ancil, our long-term bus driver (and maintenance mechanic) who took many Residents over the years to the casino and most everywhere else. On one of the trips, the Residents were all supposed to meet at 3pm at the main entrance of the casino where Ancil would pick them up. Ancil did not arrive until much later, and the Residents were a bit anxious, tired and concerned about him. As it turned out he was on a winning streak at the tables and wasn’t quite able to extract himself! Oh well, it added a good story to the trip home and Ancil carried that fortune forward for many years.

Chapter XIV

Male Chauvinist Pigs

While we are picking on men and the unfortunate behavior they sometimes display to other Residents or staff, it is worth noting that older men sometimes lose their filters of what they can and cannot say. Maybe these men never had any filters. Maybe it is part of a disease process that impacts us as we get older.

It happens with some regularity (maybe 1 in 100?) that a male Resident or client in home care will ask their female caregiver to “take care” of their private parts. Staff is trained on how to respond and for the most parts these incidents are handled professionally without further involvement from supervisors or management. Sometimes however, men don’t know when enough is enough and others do need to get involved. Usually a good lecture from the Nurse or Nursing Supervisor is enough to put an end to the behavior. Sometimes it gets escalated to a manager, and depending on the severity to Employee Relations or Administration. I have been involved personally with maybe a half-dozen of these investigations over the 20 years and in all cases had to speak with the individual to put an end to the behavior. Only once did we have to discontinue service to a home care client who just refused to change his behavior. I point it out to offer apologies to all of the female staff who have had to endure this behavior over the years. Needless to say it should never happen.

On a verbal level, female staff has to deal with comments on a regular basis. These are all documented quotes from male Residents/clients which are included to remind us all that ongoing education and awareness is still needed:

“you have nice boobs, did you get a boob job?”
“did you get laid last night, you’re glowing”
“is your husband satisfying you? ‘Cause I will.
“what your address so I can visit you and take care of you?”
“I’ll kiss both cheeks of your hiney”
“come lay down next to me, I’ll let you spank me”
“do the carpet matches the curtain”
“can I slap your ass?”
“what kind of bra do you wear?”
“do you shave down there?”
“I don’t like when women shake it looks like a baby bird”

I left the grammar/wording exactly as it was in the records. There are no excuses. Some “experts” say that it is part of the disease process (dementia), but we must continue to do all that we can to be respectful and protective of our staff who work tirelessly to care for our loved ones. Hopefully the next generation will be better.

Chapter XV

Is It Really Kosher?

By now you realize that food is an important part of life in Senior Living. Of course it is, as we spend a significant amount of our waking hours focused on breakfast, lunch and dinner (snacks too). I have tried to maintain a tradition to invite Residents to have lunch with me in my conference room, although on the new campus this tends to happen in their households.

In the old building, the food was strictly Kosher, so we were limited to what could be done in the dining rooms. In my conference room we could bring in food (to eat on paper plates) from anywhere. I received requests for various things over the years, including Red Lobster and a BLT from the diner, but my classic story is with Gerry.

Gerry liked pizza. I mean the big, cheesy, drippy, oozy, and oily, get yourself dirty pizza. So when we had lunch, I would get him two slices, and he would savor every bite. And we had lots of napkins. Gerry knew if he “bumped” into me I would invite him for pizza, so at least once a week he would be waiting for me outside my office before I even came in to work so that he could see me. I still smile thinking about it and loved having lunch with him.

Our organization was strictly Kosher for the first 43 years, and we always tried to keep Kosher (or have a Kosher option) when we took trips to other locations. One of my oldest friends in the world, Brent, is known as The Cheese Guy, and he runs a large, organic, Kosher, artisanal cheese company in New York. He offered to host a group of Residents at his home “factory” to taste his cheeses. A group of us took the trip, which included Sarah, who was very excited because she had grown up on a farm in Greece growing cheese. Her family was impacted by the Holocaust, she ended up in America, and much later at The Jewish Home. Our trip to The Cheese Guy was special for everyone, but especially for Sarah, who brought up stories of her childhood and talked with Brent with such energy and excitement.

My other favorite Kosher food story involves Sam, who called me out at one of our weekly BBQs at the old campus. He started with “I’ve got a bone to pick with you”. What’s wrong? I responded. He went on to explain the hamburger he was eating could not possibly be Kosher. When I asked why, he said it was because “it was too good!”. I assured him we only buy Kosher meat, but he was relentless and did not believe me, and finally concluded I didn’t know anything because I was a young “whippersnapper”! Now I was 50 years old at the time, but I asked him, “How old do you think I am?”. He looked me up and down and confidently said, “Probably about 75!”. I had a good laugh (or was I really offended?), but I guess when you are in your mid-90’s, 75 is a young whippersnapper!

Chapter XVI

Resident's Council

Before we leave the old campus and transition to our construction project, a few more lessons from our official Resident governing body, the Resident's Council. This is not an official governing authority, per se, but rather a vehicle for Management and Residents to address issues and communicate together as a community. Sometimes this is very effective, and sometimes not.

A recent past President of the Resident's Council, Roz, did a great job managing the task at hand. She had to manage the "fighting" that went on each month, as not everyone could agree on even the agenda for the meetings.

Fights about food, food, food temperatures, other Residents, activities, etc. were routine, and oh, did I mention food?

Roz also had a special affinity for taking care of other Residents personally. She would check on Ruth (100 years old) daily, and make sure she was ok. She was also very close with Gert, a fellow Council officer and yet another centenarian. If everyone was as smart and kind and loving as Roz, our jobs would be very easy.

One of Roz' predecessors was another story. Let's call her "Karen" which (according to Wikipedia) is a pejorative term for a white woman perceived as entitled or demanding beyond the scope of what is normal. The term is often portrayed in memes depicting white women who use their white privilege to demand their own way. Our "Karen" was mean and divisive, negative and controversial, on every issue. She liked to "stir the pot" and get people in trouble. The more people the better. It was sad and frustrating for most everyone who had to deal with her, as she had her own alternate reality. She was mean and belittling to other Residents and condescending and arrogant to staff. She knew everything better than everyone else. I would imagine there is a Karen (or 2) in most senior living communities in the world, but this one was enough to last a lifetime. As with most Queen Bees she had a group of followers who would regurgitate whatever lie or rumor she had created. A perfect example is the story of the closets for the new building which she told everyone before the move were so small there would be no room for their clothes. A riot nearly ensued from her minion to the point one lady threatened me if her clothes didn't fit, she would walk around naked! That grief went on for a year without any basis in fact. Fortunately for all of us, there was plenty of closet space and we never had to see the impact of her threat.

Another Resident's Council President Gert was very popular and well regarded in my tenure. She was inclusive, engaging and made the meetings as fun as could be. Overall, most of the officers of the Resident's Council over most of the years enjoyed their roles, wanted to be helpful, and enjoyed working with management to solve issues.

This includes our most recent President, David, who has elevated the position by adding a weekly "travel log" event every Friday that he hosts by taking fellow Residents all around the world (through video). It is very popular and a great event pre-Shabbat. David runs a tight meeting and is well regarded by Residents and staff alike. Thank you David!

Chapter XVII

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus

In the original building of The Jewish Home (1973-2016), the majority of the rooms were double rooms, and like most nursing homes in the United States, you got to “meet your roommate” when you moved into your room. Not unlike college, you didn’t choose your roommate and very often these “matches” were not ideal. Our society placed so little value on the lives of most frail elders they were forced to give up their privacy when they perhaps needed it most- to live the twilight of their lives.

Two brief examples of how this played out. Henry had moved into the old Jewish Home in his late 80’s and by all accounts was a fairly “grumpy old man”. He had been a widower for some time and had a son who lived in the area who “took care of him”. Shortly after Henry moved in (to a semi-private room), he met a woman and they immediately liked each other. According to the Residents’ Bill of Rights, “...you have the right to privacy for visits with your spouse or with any other person that you designate...”. More importantly we had an information system (like in college) where Residents would put a symbol of their choosing on the door when they wanted privacy. Henry and his new friend enjoyed their time alone.

One afternoon I received an angry visitor (his son) at my office who demanded to know *what we were doing* to his father. I asked what was wrong, and his son complained that his father was HAPPY! I tried to calm the adult child (probably in his late 60’s) and explain this was a good thing, and he should be supportive of his father and his newfound happiness. We did not discuss “the girlfriend”. A few weeks later the son came back to me again irate and apparently having found out his father was being intimate with her, complained I had to “put an end to it”! Naturally, I explained it was perfectly healthy and good for Residents to continue to express their needs and desires as consenting adults. The son left miserable, and I never heard from him again.

The second story ties back to *Next Year Jerusalem*, and our first trip to Israel. When Helen was planning for the trip, and packing and getting excited, her roommate was left to watch and “be jealous”. Her roommate did not “qualify” for the trip because of her medical condition, and while she may have wanted to go, she could not make the trip. Roommates share everything – good and bad - and have no choice but to hear when the other is in pain, or going to the bathroom, or receiving a treatment, or talking on the phone to a loved one or a friend, as their lives have become inseparable.

The point of these stories is we need to do a better job for our beloved elders than to allow semi-private rooms to be the “norm” in nursing homes. This may take a generation (or more) to change, but it is clear we have failed as an industry to provide the privacy and dignity all residents deserve.

The Jewish Senior Services’ Board of Directors had recognized this fact in the early 2010’s and started to search for solutions. There was a nascent movement in the industry to build “small house” nursing homes, which focused on the privacy, dignity and needs of the Residents at the center of a new care model. This became the nucleus of a design to build a new Jewish Home with the addition of more community services, Assisted Living and Memory Care, and a deeper connection to the community.

The Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Campus opened in 2016 with all these objectives in mind and has since served as a model for senior living communities across the country. The “nursing home” is the only small house model in Connecticut, with 294 private rooms in 21 “houses” – all interconnected to the entire building. These houses each include 14 private rooms with private bathrooms and showers (vs. the normal “tub room” in nursing homes), and the 14 individuals then share a common kitchen, dining room, living room, den and balcony. Staffing ratios ensure the highest level of care, and the only visitors to the houses are those belonging there. Meals are served at the Residents’ schedule including breakfast made to order

whenever the Residents awake, and there is a full-time homemaker in each house.

One of these houses is dedicated to Sadie, the first lady of The Jewish Home, so we have found a few ways to keep her memory, stories and her legacy alive on the new campus. All who work, live and visit the Sadie House learn about her and the important role she played in our history. Similarly, we brought over much of the legacy of the three buildings from Jefferson Street with the Tandet House, Bennett House and Kuriansky Houses. There is much history with each of these families, and our organization would not exist without their foresight, vision and generosity to make the dreams of our founders a reality.

The final piece of history is the land on which the campus is built. As the former home to the Jewish Community Center, 4200 Park Avenue had been the central address of the community for 50 years. After a difficult decision to “close” the Center, its Board of Directors ultimately voted to sell the land to Jewish Senior Services, so not only would we be able to build a senior living campus for the future but maintain a Jewish identity on the property to reflect its past. We did manage to keep the “foot stone” from their building, and proudly display it in the building at the entrance to our “J” Fitness Center.

That is why, beyond the nursing home, there are 32 apartments in the Goldstein Assisted Living Residences, and a truly inter-generational campus bringing the entire community together. Jewish Senior Services programs include licensed Medical Home Care and Hospice, non-medical home care, Adult Day Program, Outpatient Rehabilitation, physician services, Geriatric Assessment and Care Management, a Continuing Care Retirement Community “at home” program, and Adult Family Living Homes. There is the “J” Fitness Center open to the community at-large, staff and of course those who live on the campus, and a Child Development Program for those ages birth through pre-school bringing our youngest and oldest together for their mutual benefit.

We are blessed to be a true community resource, and continue to encourage, nurture and enjoy the countless inter-generational relationships that have evolved over now 50 years of service.



The “topping off” ceremony, 2015



Jewish Senior Services, 2016

Chapter XVIII

Art, Sculpture and Their Stories

Aside from all of the steel, concrete, sheetrock, plumbing, lighting, windows, etc. that make up the physical building, and all of the beautiful color selections related to paint, carpet, furniture, etc. we had to make many interesting decisions about what the community would “feel like” and represent as part of our culture. The first set of decisions revolved around what artwork would come from the old campus and what would be new. This was an important balance to reflect our traditions and history, while creating a more modern environment.

Some of the decisions were easy. Jewish Senior Services is blessed with custom stained glass that was created 30 years ago (1987-1990, 1992, 1993) by P. David Holleman (Boston, Massachusetts) when the Kuriansky Pavilion was built. Thirty-nine stained glass windows were designed for a serpentine corridor that connected two buildings (the Tandet and Kuriansky Pavilions). These were then designed into the plans for the new campus in Bennett Hall and the Community Services entrance, and allowed us to both keep the history and create a new beautiful home for this work. I share the story not because of the architectural design but because of the relationships that these pieces of art represent- with the artists themselves, the donors that made their existence possible, the Residents and families and staff that enjoyed them on both campuses, and finally historical significance of their stories.

Stained Glass Series 1 - To understand the windows and the stories they depict, one has to go back in time to when these tales were being lived out by very proud people who were striving to break out of bondage from the many stronger nations around them. As you read them and look at them, you will see how our Rabbis wove interpretation to give hope to our people from the legends of the distant past.

In Genesis 12:1 The L-rd said to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. Abraham is already seventy-five years old, when he departs from Haran and went to Canaan and G-d gave Abraham the land. Also the land was prone to having famines which necessitated the family of Abraham to visit Egypt many times to purchase food and goods.

These windows weave a tale of history and the multi-fantasy of one’s interpretation of dreams and visions.

Stained Glass Series 2 – These windows have two prominent themes. The first is the religious reflections of nature laid down in the myths of the people, the fairy tales which have the sole object of pleasing and the legends which are the people’s verdict upon history...all these are welded into the first three large windows.

The second theme is the Alphabet of Creation. Twenty-six generations before the creation of the world, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet descended from the Crown of G-d, whereon they were engraved with a pen of flaming fire. It is said that they gathered around G-d and one after another spoke and hoped that the world be created through him.

The Hebrew alphabet exists independently of ink and paper, or even words. Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon was wrapped in a scroll of the Torah and burned at the stake. Moments before his death, his students cried out, “Master! What do you see?” He answered, “The parchment is burning, but the letters are flying toward the heavens!” The letters are themselves holy. They are vessels carrying within them the light of the Boundless One.

Similarly, the inspiration for our logo, the “Atz Chayim” or Tree of Life, was brought from the old Bennett Pavilion Lobby to our new Main Entrance to proudly display the history which helps explain our Mission. The new lobby is then adorned with beautiful stained glass that was created by another artist to display photographs from Southern Israel (where David Ben Gurion – the first Prime Minister of Israel lived) overlaid with the names of our *Journey to Home* Capital Campaign donors. By bringing together our Jewish history (Israel), our Jewish Home history (Tree of Life) and our local community we have captured how and why Jewish Senior Services exists. The same can be added for the magnificent Jerusalem stone, which was brought from a quarry just south of Jerusalem to adorn the entrance to our campus, the building, the lobby, and a small piece on every room sign to bind us all together.

On a more personal level, we have received a number of donations from Board members and others who wanted their personal stories to part of our campus.

First is the beautiful family sculpture that sits outside between the Child Development Center and Community Services Entrances. This sculpture was created for a former Board member, Rick and his family, and when he sold his home he asked if we would find a place to share it with the community. This very large outdoor sculpture (12 feet tall) first resided near the entrance of the old campus, and then moved with us (see Moving Day, below). It is a reflection of his family (him, wife and child) but tells a broader story of the importance of family for all of us.

Another former Board member, Alan, donated a magnificent glass sculpture (think Chihuly chandelier) that hangs in the center of our Board Room. After the new campus was built, he and his wife were selling their home and moving, and wanted this piece to be available for those in our home to enjoy. It is a daily topic of conversation and has brought smiles to countless individuals. Alan’s relationship with our organization gave us another gift – after his many years of dedicated service to the Board.

Our third piece of art that was donated had resided on the campus of the old JCC and was created by a local artist, Sara Aldouby. The piece, also of a family, reflected a young child with her parents before they were taken from her in the Holocaust. Prior to demolition of the old building, Sara had asked me if we would find a home for her sculpture when we finished the new Jewish Home, and then it was placed in storage for the 2 years we were in construction. Toward the end of construction (but it was still very much a construction site), she walked the site with me to find a proper home for her work. She selected the Meditation Courtyard on the first floor, where it resides now. The plaque placed in front the piece reads “Commissioned by the Greater Bridgeport Jewish Community Center and UJA/Federation Bridgeport CT in 1990 and dedicated to the Jewish Community. Refurbished and Rededicated to the Meditation Courtyard of Jewish Senior Services in 2017 for all to enjoy”. Finally, Sara told me after the location was selected that the piece was her family, and the little girl was her, just before the last time she saw her parents who were killed. My heart ached when she told me, but I cherish her story each day that I walk past her sculpture.

There are 3 pieces created by artist, Ricky Bernstein that were installed in 2021-22 because of the artist’s relationship with a former Jewish Home employee, Eric. Ricky was getting closer to retirement, and wanted to find a Jewish home for his works to live. The pieces, known as *Dog Dreams* and *Balance and Poise* live near the elevator lobby areas on the 3rd and 4th floors of the building, and are constant sources of conversation. The third piece, called *Fat Dogs* is now in our Adult Day Program. Whimsical and entertaining, they depict life from a much simpler period of life that Residents can relate to.

Congregation Agudas Achim is a local Orthodox synagogue that sold its building in 2017 and wanted to find permanent homes for some of its Judaica. Their membership now comes to our campus to pray and

observe the holidays. The piece that they asked us to display is a large hand that is named, Yad L'Achim – Holocaust Memorial to the Six Million. The sculpture is made of Black Petroleum Shalestone from the Judean Desert in Israel and symbolizes the fuel that was used to move the Holocaust victims to their final destination. The Barbed Wire wrapped around the arm as tefillin straps are a symbol of the Holocaust victim's faith that caused them to be exterminated. The tattooed concentration camp number on the arm belonged to Sender Ogradowski #111819, and represents all those who were in the camps. The artist, Sara Aldouby, created this work in 1987 for Congregation Agudas Achim.

These 2 pieces related to the Holocaust tell another important part of the story of the Jewish people, which unfortunately impacted all of our lives. Approximately 6 million Jewish lives were taken in the Holocaust (World War 2), including most of my family, and the world was changed forever. We can never forget this tragedy, especially during an era when the last of the survivors will pass from this Earth.

In the summer 2015 during construction I spent a long weekend with our closest family friends, Dan and Andrea, in Maine. In the town of Kennebunkport, we found an art dealer who made and sold wind sculptures that were incredibly pleasing and relaxing. I decided at the time (and later purchased) 3 of these for the campus which now sit at the main entrances and in the Celebration Courtyard for all to enjoy. It is a daily reminder for me of the importance of friendship, the balance of work and family, and the reminder to breathe and enjoy calmer moments each day. I have had countless people comment on these structures and how relaxing and enjoyable they are, which gives me tremendous pleasure.

Finally, I mention the Memorial (“Yahrzeit”) plaques that adorn the hallway on the first floor, which allow us to remember and reflect on those from our community who have passed away – not only in The Jewish Home, but in the local area synagogues (Shaare Torah and Adath Israel) who have honored us by asking us to keep their Memorial plaques in perpetuity.



Serpentine Corridor, 2015

*The Tree of Life,
Main Lobby, 2016
(relocated from the
Bennett Pavilion)*



*Holocaust Statue, Meditatio
Courtyard, 2018*



Eric Stein with Artist Ricky Bernstein, 2021

Chapter XIX

Moving Day(s)

Once the physical building was built, we needed to MOVE 300 elders (average age 92) into the new campus. It was less than one mile away, but packing up 43 years of history, everyone's personal belongings, furniture, fixtures and equipment was no small feat. Oh, and we needed to move in as few days as possible in order to minimize the period which we operated two nursing homes in two locations with essentially one staff!

About six months before the move we had purchased T-shirts for all the staff proudly bearing the name of the new campus, and on the back stating "We are the Future". We asked everyone to wear their T-shirts on moving days so we could add a little team spirit. I also had warned everyone there would be lots of problems, and while it would be frustrating, they are to blame only me for everything that goes wrong. Thank everyone else for the things that go right and celebrate what we are doing – but focus the negative energy on me so you don't get mad at anyone else. That turned out to help a lot through the stressful first days (and weeks).

It turned out we received our Certificate of Occupancy from the City of Bridgeport and our Certificate of Need and licensure from the State of Connecticut in the middle of June 2016. We had planned and rehearsed and lost a lot of sleep getting ready for moving day(s). The old campus had three buildings, so the plan was to move one building (approximately 100 people) each day. As they were moving onto a floor in the new building, it seemed to make sense.

By 7:00am on the first day, June 28, 2016, the day shift had arrived, Residents were up and starting to get ready, and the moving trucks were lined up outside the building. We had, of course, brought in extra staff to help with the logistics and prayed for a bit of luck this would all somehow work out.

Hour by hour, things were going generally in the right direction, and busload by busload (approximately 10 Residents at a time), we brought everyone to their new "home". Somehow the furniture wasn't arriving in the same order as the people, so not everyone had a bed or a chair or a place to relax when they got there, but by dinner time – everyone made it! Families and volunteers were there to greet us, and everyone pitched in to help. We even managed to cook lunch and dinner in the new building on the first day! There is a great video on our website of the entire moving experience if you want to see more, www.jseniors.org.

Roger, our Chief Financial Officer (more about him later), oversaw the loading dock and all the "stuff" coming in to make sure it went where it was supposed to go. He still complains about how disorganized the whole day was (he is a bit OCD), but somehow it all worked out. Most everything was "done" by 11pm and everyone was in their new rooms (or a temporary one) for Day 1. We called it a night (after 16 hours), and went home, only to do it all again the next day – and the day after.

Day 2 was a little bit smoother, but there were still plenty of logistical challenges. The team was awesome, and the Residents were great. I ran throughout the building taking stock of what was needed and taking responsibility for everything that was wrong. "It's Your Fault" was the rally cry to deflect frustration from each other to me. The excitement and adrenaline got us through the second day, and now 200 people were living on Park Avenue. By 10pm we called the day a success, and it seemed like we were getting better.

Day 3 brought everything and everyone else to the new campus, and as things were settling in and I was walking around checking on everyone my "joke" became since we had gotten so good at moving people, we would be moving back to the old campus the next day! No one thought that was funny. By 9:30pm I locked

the doors on Jefferson Street for the first time with no one living there in more than four decades. It was a bit eerie, but it was an awesome accomplishment by so many people. I wish I could list the names of everyone who played a part, but I did include a picture of the staff that signed the framed photo of the new campus to capture their spirit.

The old campus was sold to Sacred Heart University, and there was still much to be done with the “old stuff” that needed to be sold, given away, or discarded. I spent part of the next month cleaning out the old buildings, and by the end of July, we closed on the sale and the first chapter of The Jewish Home history officially concluded.

Please also note and acknowledge all the Board members, donors, leaders, volunteers and other community members who played a role in the development of The Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Campus. Their contributions are forever etched in the success of this wonderful organization, and in beautiful artwork in the lobby on the new campus.



Donor Recognition Wall, 2016

Chapter XX

Roz

Over the many years of the organization, we have relied on a very generous community to support the creation and expansion of our buildings, programs and services. Countless families, individuals, corporations, foundations, and others have been generous and contributed tens of millions of dollars to our organization. I am not certain, but I think the total is now over \$100 Million in total philanthropy!

Before coming to The Jewish Home, I had worked with a generous donor at a local hospital, Roz and her now late husband Les. Roz and Les are good people who support many charitable causes, and fortunately decided to include The Jewish Home in their targeted giving. When we first had lunch together, I asked why they gave to us, and she said simply, “we are fortunate enough to not need The Jewish Home because we have the resources to care for ourselves at home, but we want to be sure that everyone has access to the best possible care for their parents and loved ones”. That turned out to be a conversation I relayed to many others over the years as I asked them for their donations.

In 2010, she called me and asked me for help. Both her husband and her brother needed care, and she asked if we could take care of her brother, Gerald. You met him with our pizza lunch in the food section earlier. We, of course did, and for the next several years we got to know him as well. Every family has a story and a plan, but life (and G-d) often has a different plan for us. You never know when care will be needed, and it is important to support local non-profit organizations to help them meet the needs of your community.

Roz would visit me, and later my parents, at the Home, and invariably people would ask who she was. Roz not only dressed impeccably, but she always wore a hat. Not just any hat mind you, but a hat that in all likelihood she had made. Imagine that collection! One day Roz and I were walking through the hall of the Tandet Pavilion, and we saw Ruth, who was a Resident (and the mother of a nurse, Jan) who also prided herself on dressing properly. She and Roz chatted for a bit, and then she complimented Roz’s hat and said that she used to love wearing hats. Well, without missing a beat, Roz took it off her head and handed it to her, and said, “it’s yours now”. That was Roz.

Back to Next Year Jerusalem, and our journey to Israel. I told Roz about the trip and my goal to fundraise the costs so everyone who could go would be able to make the trip. She asked me how much I needed to raise, which was \$100,000. She said, “I will send you the check”. Now, we don’t know a lot of people with a personal foundation with the means to be able to do that, but we are incredibly grateful she understands the impact she has on families’ lives – not just the people who traveled, but all their families, their caregivers, and all of us in the Jewish Home family. We talk about that trip (and the subsequent trips in 2014 and 2022) to this day, and it will always be part of our legacy.

Roz has also taught me countless lessons of life through her stories about love, friendship, racism, charity, board leadership and kindness. She is a true *mensch* (good person), who has made the world a better place because she lives a good life by example. I think I could start another book with “Roz stories”, so I will only share my favorite which tells the story of the love between her and her husband. Les developed Alzheimer’s disease, and sadly spent the last chapter of his life declining due to this devastating illness. He was lovingly

cared for by Roz, their children and other compassionate caregivers, but Alzheimer's stole a fairy tale ending from a beautiful marriage. After Les died, Roz told me that she still spoke to him. In fact, she said she still "yelled" at him for leaving her alone. I asked once if she was worried she still talked with him, and she said "no, I will worry when he talks back". Roz had everything in the world anyone could ever ask for – except the lifelong love of her life, who was taken prematurely from her. Her gift to all of us, and her story reminds us, of the preciousness of life and the need to enjoy it and embrace it every single day with the person you love.

As it turned out, Roz is the largest living donor to Jewish Senior Services and continues to support our efforts. We thank her for a lifetime of generosity, leadership, wisdom and kindness. I thank her for her friendship.



With Roz Goldstein, 2016 (Dad peeking in)

Chapter XXI

The Secret Sauce

I mentioned earlier about having been recruited by a six-member Board Search Committee comprised of Chuck, Carl, Dick, Dood, Rick and Suzanne. They all had different reasons for being involved. Chuck chaired the Committee, Carl chaired the Board of Directors, Rick was from the affiliated JHE Foundation, Dood's family had been involved since the founding of the Home, and Dick and Suzanne were newer Directors. They brought a diverse perspective to the Search process and were truly reflective of the Board and leadership of the organization. All Mission-driven, they wanted a CEO who would lead the organization and the staff through a period of business development and financial hardship so the long-term commitment to the community would be secured. I have sustained relationships with all of them, and all seven Board Chairpersons since that time. I believe each of these individuals is worthy of their own chapters. I will try to condense their impact and our relationships.

The Board Chairperson and CEO have critical roles to play in the organization as the bridge between the governing body and the entire staff. Carl, my first Board Chair was the most hands-on, engaged, informed and connected in my tenure. He had been the Acting CEO (essentially) before I started so that made sense. We used to talk about everything, from family and his professional life (he was retired by the time I met him), and of course all aspects of The Jewish Home operations. He was a very young 70 at that time, and the son of one of our Residents, Gertrude. He was a doting and loving son as well, so our relationship grew as a family member, Board member, donor, and my boss. It was the first time I had ever formed such a close relationship with someone at work – other than a colleague – and since he was my father's age, also a nice generational gap. I built (and sustained) the utmost respect for him, and am so grateful for his wisdom, support and counsel in those early years.

Dick was a marketing executive who was the (unofficial) source of the TV hit series *Mad Men*. He worked for many years on Madison Avenue for marketing and advertising agencies representing international companies in all sectors of the economy. At The Jewish Home, he was my unofficial marketing consultant, brand manager, content expert, design reviewer, etc. He also gave me regular clippings from his various reading material and wrote beautifully. To this day, I read his personal account of Pearl Harbor each year on December 7th both to share his perspective and to give tribute to those who were impacted by the start of World War II.

Alan was not on the search committee, but one of the most influential Board members ever. He was a retired Federal Judge whose family was also among the founders of the Home. As the EF Hutton commercial used to say, "When Alan spoke, everyone listened"! He had the best stories of all, dating back to his work in the early days of the Civil Rights movement. My favorite though was the way he handled two brothers in his courtroom who were fighting over their business and essentially lost sight of their relationship. He took them into his chambers, without their counsel, and helped them to resolve their differences as family. He saw them not just as litigants in a case, but as family members who needed to be treated as people. There are too many things in this world to fight over, but way more important reasons to embrace each other. That has stayed with me whenever I try to reconcile disputes, which is most of what I do every day.

Bill was another invaluable resource to the organization, as he not only cared and gave of his time, energy and resources, but he was a leader in the Senior Living investment banking industry. He knew more about Senior Living and had access to the best and brightest in every aspect of our industry. While many Board members were retired, Bill was still working tirelessly running his own company, and yet always had time to be a helpful resource to me and our organization. I could not possibly calculate how much money (and wasted effort) he has saved us over these 20 years, so suffice to say he has been worth his weight in gold.

Milt was another one of my favorite Board Chairpersons, who was a retired corporate attorney. He never had family at the Home, but worked as a Volunteer playing his trumpet for the Residents, albeit not very well. He was the person who everyone loved and admired, although unfortunately he got ill and passed away before the end of his tenure. He and I used to meet at his house, and I got to know his lovely wife and daughter, and we shared an appreciation for family. Another valuable lesson of what matters most, and how precious it is. Milt unfortunately was the only Board Chair who died while in office, and he is sorely missed.

Speaking of what matters most, former Board member Bill, was a local businessman who gave generously and was involved with many charities. He got to know us as a family member when we took care of his father, Ed. Bill was not Jewish, and when his dad moved in, he called me with a very delicate problem. You see, his dad and he had breakfast every Friday morning at IHOP, and they ate bacon and eggs. But the Jewish Home was Kosher, so Bill didn't know what to do? This was easily solved, as Residents were allowed to eat whatever they wanted in their rooms (on paper plates), I encouraged Bill to bring breakfast for his dad without any reservations. So on the first Friday this was happening, who walks in but Bishop Lori, who proceeds to chastise them that they cannot eat bacon in a Kosher facility! Bill reassured him they were ok, and they all had a good laugh – the Catholic Bishop yelling at the Christian Resident and his son at The Jewish Home!

Bill also played another important role in our community, as he knows virtually everyone. Since he was affiliated with the Home, people assumed he could be helpful in getting their loved one in for Rehab or Long-Term Care. So Bill became our #1 referral source, and had a direct line established with our Admissions Team. Bill called me at the beginning, but quickly learned Liz was the person who totally got things done, so his relationship with Liz was solidified.

His brother Jack also got to become part of The Jewish Home family, and when he wrote a book about relationships called *Hug Your People*. Jack included an anecdote about how we helped take care of the loved one of one his staff members. They wrote to me about their experience knowing I would share that positive feedback with the caregivers involved. We always do that and try to remember and acknowledge all the people involved in the team. It takes a village is an expression that is remarkably true in senior living communities, as no one does this work alone.

Another Board member story is about Ken, who got involved as a devoted and loving son-in-law to one of our Residents, Ulryk. He came regularly and got to know the staff who cared for Ulrich. Later he joined a Board Committee, and then the Board of Directors. Over several years, he learned who we are, what we do, and how we do it – all with the intent of how he could help us make it even better. Ken was a federal

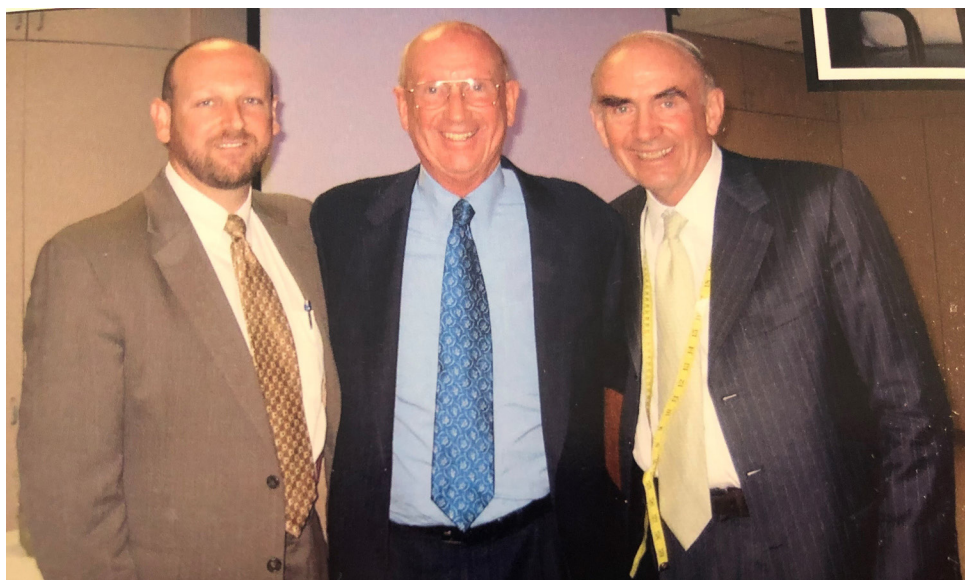
prosecutor and litigator, who knew more about the legal system than most lawyers ever will. He had tremendous insight and perceptions of people. He was a “contrarian,” and often made us look at things through a different lens to make sure we understood all the implications of our decisions. He brought value and leadership at a time when it was needed and will always be held in the highest regard by his peers.

During the same period of time as we have been dealing with the pandemic, our Board of Directors has also developed a long-range strategic planning effort, known as *Vision 2031*. This may have seemed like an awkward time but it was the most critical time to be working on our future. The year was selected because that is the year that the Baby Boomers (1946-64) start to turn 85 years of age – our primary service demographic. Over the 20 years that follow, the Baby Boomers will not only dramatically increase the demand for our services, but we believe they will radically alter the expectations of our clients. The work being done is to ensure that we have a financially viable business model to support this radical shift in the marketplace.

Vision 2031 has been chaired by another Board member, Jim, who first got to know our organization as a Rehab client. He is a retired businessman that has brought an entrepreneurial spirit and energy to our Board, our committee and all of the deliberations to our work. Jim gets excited about what we are doing, and by example has helped all of us stay inspired about the future. We have lots of work to accomplish our goals, and it is people like Jim and the others that I have mentioned who will make that all possible.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank our current chairperson, Jon August, who got to know us growing up in the community and then as a family member. Both his mom, Gertrude, and aunt Olga were Residents and Jon came to know us through the loving care that they were provided. He carries on the tradition of the long line of dedicated volunteers who lead the Board of Directors.

There are many more Board members to write about, and I hope by omission I have not offended anyone. All their efforts, contributions and talents have helped shaped my career and these two decades of service to our community.



With Bill and Jack Mitchell, 2014

Chapter XXII

It Takes A Village

I cannot discuss the Board of Directors without including a few stories about the management team I have been privileged to work with. They are my eyes and ears 24 hours per day 365 days per year, are my counsel and my support for all that we do. I have always said everything that goes wrong is my fault, and all that is good is thanks to these individuals.

One of the very first people I met when I started was Linda, who oversaw Employee Relations. We met briefly when I was interviewing, but I knew I liked her when she introduced me at the Staff Holiday Party two weeks *before* I started working and then handed me the microphone to address the staff. Not planned or expected, she knew I would appreciate the opportunity and didn't worry at all I would either decline or freeze. We have had countless opportunities to work together in these 20 years and address so many diverse and difficult issues. I have the ultimate professional respect for her, but my first (and perhaps greatest) lesson from Linda was through her relationship with Harriett.

Harriett lived at The Jewish Home and was a striking woman in her early 90's who dressed impeccably well. She always looked like she was going out for a nice dinner and was personable and sweet. I didn't know much about her, other than staff liked her and she "raised the bar" for all around her. One day I walked into Linda's office and saw clean, pressed clothes on her door. I asked what they were doing here, as it just seemed odd. She explained they were Harriet's as she took them home to clean and press them on a regular basis to make sure they were "just right". I had no idea. Here was a Vice President in the organization who built a relationship with a Resident and wanted her to look her best. I so admired that personal connection as it opened my eyes to a deeper relationship than I had previously imagined. As it turned out, Harriett had a wealthy sister who greatly appreciated all we did for her sister, and she gave generously to support our work. That can never be the reason to treat someone well, but rather a reason to treat EVERYONE well.

Roger is the other Vice President that has been with me throughout my tenure, and he is known as the "CFO (Chief Financial Officer) with a heart". Roger did all the obvious parts of his job well, and we managed through all sorts of financial challenges during these past 20 years. I have always known I could trust him to do the right things at the right time, and our relationship has helped our organization remain stable when so many others have struggled. Roger has also built many relationships with Residents (and staff), so I tell his story with Michael – a Resident who he is usually assigned 1:1 when we go to the Yankee games, the Casino, our Men's Club lunches and other activities. Michael and he have shared more meals and stories than most any administrative officer and resident in any nursing home in the country, and Roger has always shown him respect and patience and kindness. I applaud his efforts as our CFO, but I will always respect him most as a mensch (good person).

Larry joined our team nearly a decade ago and has been the Chief Realist of our organization. By contrast, I am the Chief Optimist and Roger is the Chief Pessimist! He is really the Administrator of the Nursing Home, and the backbone of the team who day in and day out does all of the hard work to ensure that we provide the best possible care for our Residents. He has a long, successful, solid career in the industry and knows all that it takes to be successful with Residents, families, staff and regulators. He manages the Federal and State

survey process, the quality measures, the inspections, the investigations, the complaints, the spills and falls, and all of the other details that no one really wants to think about. We could not possibly be the organization we are without his dedication, leadership and fortitude.

Elizabeth and Kara are the newer members of our Senior Management team, and they too have made indelible marks through their efforts and relationships with Residents, clients and staff. Others have been in those positions in my tenure, and I am eternally grateful for what we have accomplished together.



Roger Sliby, Elizabeth Zicari, Andrew, Kara Rodriguez and Larry Condon – VP Group, 2022

Chapter XXIII

Center for Elder Abuse Prevention

*I*n 2010, Jewish Senior Services started the 1st shelter for elders in Connecticut (the 2nd in the United States) to help address the issue of Elder Abuse. Again, kudos to my friend and colleague, Dan Reingold, from the Hebrew Home at Riverdale for starting the first and encouraging me to do the same. The Center for Elder Abuse Prevention (CEAP) was designed to offer shelter or other resources for victims, when needed, but equally important to provide education to the business and professional community (banks, lawyers, supermarkets, etc.) about the signs and symptoms of elder abuse. We also established and organized CAPE (Coalition for Advocacy and Protection of the Elderly), a peer network of interested and related organizations and individuals who are all working together to address this important subject.

After starting the program, one of the first calls for shelter was from a man being abused by his son. The call started with a referral from Protective Services but as we got to know the man, we learned he had four children – three were oblivious or out of touch or out of town, and a son who had a drug problem who was emotionally, financially and physically abusing his father. The shelter was able to provide him respite physically and resources to help him separate from his son legally and financially. When the Board of Directors authorized the creation of the Center, we discussed who might the clientele be, and given our Mission we wondered whether there would be any Jewish clients. Our very first client was Jewish. Unfortunately, we have learned that elder abuse affects all members of society in every socio and economic group. We need everyone in our society to address this tragedy, in the same way we addressed child abuse a generation ago.

To find out more, please contact the Center for Elder Abuse Prevention, at www.jseniors.org/ceap

Chapter XXIV

COVID-19

2020 began as any other year, but quickly turned into a year like no other. There were only a few Centenarians born in 1918 (or earlier) who were alive when the Spanish Flu ravaged the globe, but this pandemic would end up causing incredible damage to our world, country, and local community.

Much has been written about the impact of this novel coronavirus, so I will skip the subject other than to say we did feel the impact in very heartfelt and emotional ways. The pandemic was truly unprecedented and caught the world “by surprise” – if that is a fair way to summarize it. The initial U.S. case in Seattle, Washington in February was the tip of the iceberg, and COVID-19 was soon felt throughout the country. For us it started right at the beginning, as we are located just outside of New York City – one of the early epicenters.

In the first wave (March – May, 2020), 92 Residents tested positive and 22 passed away from COVID-19. Equally devastating, 72 staff members contracted the virus and 2 passed away as well. We experienced a relatively quiet summer and Fall, 2020 as the virus subsided. In the second wave, (November, 2020 – February, 2021), another 39 Residents tested positive and 9 passed away. Another 45 staff members contracted the virus, and fortunately all survived. The first doses of the vaccine were administered on December 21, 2020, and most of 2021 was dedicated to vaccinations, and dealing with the repercussions of the pandemic. The “Omicron” wave in late 2021-early 2022 was a difficult dose of reality as most people were sick and tired of COVID-19 by then. We did have another 85 staff and 30 Residents/clients contract the virus, and again all survived – mostly with minimal symptoms. This variant did seem less dangerous but spread greatly throughout our community (and the world), as hospitalizations returned to the original Spring, 2020 peak. There also continued to be many deaths, and the impact of COVID-19 is far from over – even if the “health emergency” may be. This was an emotional “roller coaster” with so many challenging implications they are the subject of another (or someone else’s) writing.

I will point out that Larry and many others worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic, and their efforts cannot be forgotten. Everyone in senior living leadership works hard and is paid less than others in many other industries. We do it because of the love of the work we do, and the people we are privileged to serve. However, I must give a shout out to the clinical team for the endless hours they put in during the pandemic, dealing with PCR testing, staffing related issues, the heartache of families and most importantly the personal touch with Residents and clients.

The hardest part of the pandemic for those living through it was the physical separation of Residents from their loved ones. Indoor visiting was essentially prohibited to protect the Residents, and we all did our best to keep connections through video discussions and outdoor (and then tent) visits. End-of-life and compassionate care visits took place in Resident rooms to provide some closure for those individuals, but they were very limited. It was heartbreaking to have family members separated from their loved ones, and while most everyone *understood* the reasons, it did not make it any easier. It will take years before we all fully digest the implications.

The New York Times wrote many stories about COVID-19 and the impact on families, but did an interesting piece on May 13, 2020, regarding the impact of small house nursing homes on pandemics and infection control. The piece featured Jewish Senior Services and some of the ways in which small houses helped contain the virus to smaller groups of Residents, and how we were working to sustain family connections throughout the pandemic. The cover picture featured a resident, Sylvia, in the window talking with her family and said,

“Private rooms have made a “huge” difference in the ability to control the virus at Jewish Senior Services, a four-story building for skilled nursing and assisted living in Bridgeport, Conn.”

Sylvia is also another example of how unfair this virus can be. After being protected and cared for so diligently, and receiving both doses of the Pfizer vaccine, Sylvia contracted COVID-19 several days after her second dose. She was treated in the hospital with the so-called Remdesivir “cocktail” (antiviral, steroid and anti-coagulant), and returned to her home after one week. My last memory with Sylvia was when I was able to dance with her (fully covered in PPE) in her room. She never recovered from COVID-19. The family had shared with me when she went out to the hospital, they were worried they would never see her again, and never have a chance to say goodbye. Fortunately, that turned out not to be the case, as they did get to see her again several more times during “compassionate visits” before her passing.

Many families struggled with the visitation restrictions, but most all found ways to connect with their loved ones. We worked hard to make that possible. Unfortunately, one son decided he was more important than everyone else and was going to visit regardless of the rules. He called from the car with his young son present and said “if we didn’t let him in to see his mom, he was going to kill me and he had a gun with him”. Not taking any chances we notified the police who appropriately came over and helped me welcome him to the campus. He was arrested for threatening our community with an armed weapon, and he was arrested and obviously not able to visit with his mom. Sadly, mom died several months later, and instead of finding peace with her son she died with that misery as her last memory.

Nursing and Resident Life staff did all they could to maintain socialization with Residents throughout the pandemic, but it was a significant challenge. There were several special activities, including weekly BBQs in each household served with appropriate social distancing. Residents gathered outside their room doors, and staff served their meals. On one of these BBQs, I went up to help and ended up talking with Ruth. She was 102 at the time, and had a difficult time hearing me, so I kneeled next to her wheelchair while she was eating. She promptly asked me if I was going to propose to her! I told her I was spoken for but appreciated the thought. Again, my day was made by her humor and ability to make the best of the situation.

I applaud all the Residents and the staff for their resiliency through this incredibly difficult period, and always.

To capture the experiences of those directly involved we filmed a series of interviews in the Fall, 2022 which were edited and added to our website, www.jseniors.org so that everyone can learn more about the impact of COVID-19 on our community. Again, thanks to David Gaynes for all of his work to support our community. Learn more about him at <https://dofilmworks.com/>

Please also note the article (at the end of the book) that I wrote at the time about the “rollercoaster” we all were on during this period.

Chapter XXV

Silver Linings

People have written about many “good things” coming out of the pandemic, and I believe that is true. Families spent more time together, people learned to appreciate each other and the things they have more, and countless individuals worked together to address the issues associated with COVID-19. It was fabulous to see healthcare workers (and many others) rise and be recognized as “heroes” for the first time as they truly risked their own lives to care for others. Staff chose to come to work every day, and to take care of people who were vulnerable, and yet always had to balance the needs of their own families.

There was lots of discussion about the COVID-19 vaccine when it was created (in record time), and kudos to everyone involved. The implementation of the vaccine in 2021 saved millions of lives and helped us all get back to a new “normal”. While there was much resistance to the vaccine, we were among the first nursing homes in the United States to mandate the vaccine for our staff. We have a Mission to care for the elders entrusted to us, and given this powerful tool I felt that it was critical to do all that we can to protect our clients – and each other.

The corollary or prelude to the COVID-19 vaccine though is the Flu Vaccine. Healthcare organizations had struggled for years to get staff to get the flu vaccine. For the first 17 years of my career, we averaged about 50% compliance with the vaccine – in spite our best efforts, which included education, rewards, incentives, etc. to get more people to take the shot. There are cultural, religious, medical, ethical and other reasons why people didn't but in the end we all suffered because more people ended up with the Flu than was necessary. It was always one of the biggest frustrations in my career.

During COVID-19 flu season, Fall 2020, the pandemic was a game changer. We were already all wearing masks and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to protect ourselves and the Residents and clients we served, so what would we do if people didn't get the Flu Vaccine? The answer was simple. Healthcare organizations for the first time MANDATED everyone get it, and we achieved nearly 100% compliance! A few retired, resigned or managed to get physicians to write medical exception letters for them, but it was truly incredible what a pandemic can get people to do. Staff was healthier that winter, as there was less flu, and our Residents were protected better than ever before. Another silver lining.

Nursing homes have faced a funding crisis for many years, and the primary funding source (Medicaid/Title XIX) pays only a fraction of the cost of care. As a result the resources needed to pay staff (especially the Certified Nursing Assistants) what they are worth are not available. As a result of the pandemic, nursing home staff finally received some appropriate recognition of their efforts and started being called HEROES in the media! These people literally put their lives on the line to come to work to care for others. They worked extra shifts because their colleagues got sick from the virus. They sat with Residents who couldn't see their families and made sure people were as safe and comfortable as possible. This was long overdue by the people that know how hard these individuals work, but certainly greatly appreciated. There were news stories, celebrity events, etc. that brought recognition to the field. Now the Federal and State reimbursement systems need to “catch up” and provide the funding to allow them to be paid appropriately, but the silver lining was the recognition that was so appropriate and needed.



COVID-19 “Heroes Work Here” T-shirts given to staff, 2020

There are always silver linings.

Chapter XXVI

Ending

Sadly, most all the people referenced in this book are no longer with us, and I share their stories to keep their memories alive.

Every six weeks or so we hold a Memorial Service for those we have lost, and Rabbi Steve Shulman does a lovely job bringing closure for their loved ones. He reminds us that we are all connected forever through this Jewish Senior Services family, even though our loved ones have passed.

Each time I attend to say a few words to offer my condolences, to reflect on the shared experience, and to read a poem called *We Remember Them*, which concludes with:

*For as long as we live, they too will live
For they are now a part of us as, We remember them.*

We try to help give closure to families who have lost a loved one. The best complement I think we ever received, was that “The Jewish Home is an incredible place to live, and an even better place to die”.

The full text of the poem is at the end of the book.

I have written countless documents over the years of my tenure, and have signed each of them with the same closing to express my appreciation for those I am privileged to serve and serve with.

As always, thank you for all that you do!

Andrew

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Ageism is an issue that must be addressed in society.
2. We are all immigrants and need to respect and appreciate our differences.
3. Every person has a story to tell, and we will benefit if we take the time to listen.
4. All forms of Dementia (including Alzheimer's Disease) impact the person and their families over many years.
5. Embrace each and every day of our lives ("it's not a dress rehearsal")
6. Genetics control most of our destiny, but how we live matters.
7. Laugh, love and embrace each other.
8. Rub your cheeks and exercise your smile! (Dave)
9. Treat everyone you know as you would want your family to be treated.
10. Relationships are everything!

"WE REMEMBER THEM"

by Sylvan Kamens & Rabbi Jack Riemer

At the rising sun and at its going down

We remember them.

At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter

We remember them.

At the opening of the buds and in the rebirth of spring

We remember them.

At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of summer

We remember them.

At the rustling of the leaves and in the beauty of the autumn

We remember them.

At the beginning of the year and when it ends

We remember them.

As long as we live, they too will live

For they are now a part of us as We remember them.

When we are weary and in need of strength

We remember them.

When we are lost and sick at heart

We remember them.

When we have decisions that are difficult to make

We remember them.

When we have joy we crave to share

We remember them.

When we have achievements that are based on theirs

We remember them.

For as long as we live, they too will live

For they are now a part of us as, We remember them.

A VIEW FROM THE ROLLERCOASTER

by Andrew Banoff, President & CEO, Jewish Senior Services

Many people have heard me refer to the experience of dealing with COVID-19 as a rollercoaster ride – way too many highs and lows, with twists and turns that you just don't see coming. When the train left the platform in early March, none of us knew what the ride would be like. We knew who got into the cars with us – both at home and at work – and generally, we were with people we wanted to take the ride with. We did not know how long the ride would last, or how hard we would have to hold on, or how loud we would scream, or how much it would hurt on some of the curves.

The first two months of the pandemic were generally horrific – throughout the region. New York was the epicenter in the country, and Fairfield County the epicenter in Connecticut. Hospitals were filled with patients with COVID-19 and receiving much of the media attention, supplies, and accolades for their efforts in responding to the crisis. Nursing homes were a “concern” in that we would flood the hospitals with more patients if they became infected and we could not care for them. The broader community was shut down, with countless Executive Orders about what could and couldn't be done in society, and nursing homes were told to fend for themselves – without families, visitors, volunteers, or much support.

Testing of residents, clients, and/or staff was only available if someone was symptomatic, and results took two to seven days. The capacity for testing had to be built up quickly, as testing kits were nearly impossible to obtain. We scrambled to find the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – literally, from all over the world. Staff were great, showing up every day in spite of the risks, to provide care and services.

Our ancillary businesses closed including The J Fitness Center, Adult Day Program, Child Development Center, and Outpatient Therapy. Only “essential workers” were allowed to leave home. By late March, positive cases were being reported throughout the area, with five at JSS.

April was indeed “the cruelest month.” Hospitals were over-crowded. Twenty-nine JSS residents tested positive, as did numerous staff and clients in the community. We experienced a number of deaths, and tried to try to comfort families when they could not be with loved ones at the end of life. The impact on our community was getting worse each day and testing was still mostly inaccessible. On the rollercoaster, it felt like being taken up to the precipice with no tracks on the other side. We reached the “peak” of the ride on April 22nd.

At that point, it was determined most people dying from COVID-19 were residents of nursing homes and assisted-living communities. Focus shifted from acute-care hospitals to senior-living facilities and the battle cry became, “What happened in the nursing homes?” In mid-May, the State announced Point Prevalence Study testing for residents in Connecticut's 215 nursing homes. At JSS, 45 residents tested positive in the study, after having no new cases for two weeks. While many were asymptomatic, never developing symptoms, some did, and we delivered proper care and protected those around them by providing the necessary PPE through our Infection Control Guidelines. That was a wild turn that no one had seen coming.

In total, of the 300 residents of 4200 Park Ave., 92 ended up with COVID-19; sadly 22 passed away. 62 staff members tested positive and sadly, one lost a long battle in the hospital. We remembered them all at a virtual memorial service on July 31. Rabbi Shulman and many others offered support to Residents, families, staff

and others throughout the pandemic.

As we slowly managed to return to a new “normal” for those living and working at the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Campus, we established electronic and outdoor, in-person visits for residents and families, and accommodate family requests for celebrations. Weekly rotating BBQ lunches take place in households, funded by our Women’s Auxiliary, and we continue to provide Therapeutic Recreation activities for all Residents. Our clinical team has been extraordinary and now have been through seven unannounced Infection Control Surveys from the State Department of Public Health and the National Guard. For staff, we granted incentive pay and a General Wage increase, provided three free meals weekly (thanks to generous donors), and mailed \$100 Target gift cards as a thank-you. We recognize the efforts of these Healthcare Heroes as often as possible.

We have received an outpouring of love and support – locally and nationally – and are touched by the incredible engagement from Merkaz Community High School for Judaic Studies, donations from community- and family-members, COVID-19 grants, and support from Federation for Jewish Philanthropy of Upper Fairfield County.

May we all enjoy continued health and safety as the rollercoaster ride continues.

EPILOGUE – MOM

I decided not to include the stories of my mom in the main section of the book, but rather to share them separately. Mom was living in Florida when she started to have medical issues and to display signs of dementia. She and my dad started to have more difficulties, and I had to fly down there to help whenever she ended up in the hospital for medical reasons. There were too many trips between 2010-2014 to count.

Towards the end of 2014, things were deteriorating and when I flew down in November, I decided they needed to move them back to Connecticut so I could better help care for them. They did not fight me. I made all the arrangements and flew down and back with them in early January and moved them into an Independent Living/Assisted Living community nearby. That lasted only a few months, and after a short stay in the hospital I moved her into The Jewish Home in April 2015. Mom “objected” but didn’t have a choice, as my dad was truly falling apart by that point.

She lived for about a year in the old building, and moved with everyone on June 28, 2016, into the new campus, where she lived for the remaining 2 years of her life. Once she was in the nursing home, Dad moved into an apartment nearby so he could visit and help care for her every day. Dad quickly became, and remained even after she died, a very active and engaged Volunteer for the community. Most everyone called him “Mr. B”, or “the Mayor”. He was the quintessential definition of the devoted spouse who helped care for her every day.

Mom had Vascular Dementia. She had horrible vascular disease and related complications plus several rounds of Breast Cancer. She had smoked heavily for 50 years before she had to quit to start her first rounds of chemotherapy. By the time she moved into The Jewish Home, she had good days and bad days, but overall she could “fake it” for a brief conversation. Most of her short-term memory was gone, and older memories came and went.

Dementia is a horrible disease that eats away at a person’s brain, and gradually diminishes every aspect of their human function and destroys their relationships with those they love.

In the first year of her living at The Jewish Home, she got to be friendly with much of the staff and a few Residents, but also got more paranoid and anxious. A special friendship began with Bruna, and the 2 of them would sit in the hallway of Tandet East and (not so nicely) critique everyone that went by. Some things never change.

I had been working there for 12 years at that point and knew the staff was incredible, but then got to see firsthand as a family member how truly extraordinary they were at dealing with all the many issues of caring for our frail elderly. To this day I tell that story at every new hire orientation to let new staff know that I appreciate not only the work that they do as a professional, but as a family member.

Right before we moved to the new campus, I gave countless tours to Residents, families, donors, government officials, regulators, press, etc. to explain how this was going to work. Remember this was the first household model nursing home in the State of Connecticut. Being a good son, I took my mom (and dad) on a private tour of the building and showed her the Kaufman House (where she would live), her room, the common areas, Bennett Hall (for bingo and entertainment and other activities), the Courtyard Café, etc. and included the childcare area I designed near the Café for family members to bring small children to play while they visit

with their loved ones. Mom said “wow, they really did think of everything!”. I said thank you, and she then said, “You had something to do with this?!?”, and I of course proudly said, yes! Then she said, “Well, it’s not so nice then.” Mom had a tough time giving me a compliment, and even in her demented state that didn’t recognize this was my project, she still took away the credit. I know that she always loved me and was proud of me, but as Billy Crystal would say, “would it have killed her to give me a compliment?”

On the new campus, she settled into her new room and new routine, and did well there. The Homemaker in her house, Kenny, was her favorite, as he would make her breakfast, or a smoothie in the afternoon, and always did so with a gentle touch, his Jamaican accent, and a smile. In fact when we asked every Resident what was most important to them before the move – their nurse, their CNA, other Residents, the house, etc.? Mom said Kenny!

One year after we moved in, I visited Mom on Mother’s Day 2017, and it was the last coherent conversation we had. She and I sat on her bed, and she held my hand and asked me what was wrong with her. I explained the dementia and we talked about it for a few minutes. It was a steady decline from that point on.

Dad was with her every day (until she usually kicked him out in the afternoon), as he remained the role model for a devoted husband, and I visited 2-3 times per week, at least for a few minutes. We celebrated the holidays together and I brought in a special meal to share with her and her grandchildren once a month or so. She was always well cared for and received Hospice care for the last few months of her life to support her and my dad. I am eternally grateful to The Jewish Home and all of the incredible caregivers who played a part in her last chapter of life.

She passed away peacefully on July 14, 2018, at the age of 83.

May her memory be for a blessing.



With Mom, 2017

EPILOGUE – MITZIE

This book is dedicated to centenarians (and all of the elders) that I have worked with in the past 20 years. It is all about relationships – and the people that have made the Journey with me. This story didn't fit in the book per se, but I wanted to include another relationship that was of great importance throughout most of my tenure.

One more centenarian I would like to reference is my dog, Mitzie. She was born in September, 2006 and took her last breath in December, 2020 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Named in honor of my daughter Rebecca's Bat *Mitzvah*, she was the family dog, and my kids grew up playing with and loving her. She was a goldendoodle, among the early mix of breeds bringing golden retrievers together with poodles to help those with allergies as they shed less than other breeds. Mitzie was smart, fast, playful, silly, and sometimes schizophrenic. As a golden retriever she went to get the ball when I threw it, and then realized when she got there that as a poodle she didn't have to retrieve it. She also ate EVERYTHING she could get her mouth on, including all the obvious stuff, but also many of the things that should have killed her - including full chocolate bars, medicine, a bottle of Tylenol, sticks of butter, etc. She had more than her share of trips to the emergency vet, but none of that stopped her from reaching 14+ years in human years (just a few days short of 100 in dog years).

At the end, she was living in my “nursing home” and needed much of the same care as the Residents. She wore a diaper, had frequent accidents, had difficulty walking, was deaf and blind (at least selectively), and developed bed sores needing care and attention. She was always quick to get to her food (especially if we made her chicken and rice), and occasionally had flashbacks to her youth, chasing after me or one of the kids or our other dog. She always gave love, and was loved deeply, and without reservation.



Mitzie, 2019

EPILOGUE – ME

I celebrated my 20th anniversary at Jewish Senior Services on January 6, 2023. I have been blessed to share the majority of my professional career at this wonderful, Mission-driven organization. I have learned so much from the people I am privileged to serve with and for. I am grateful to the Board of Directors, and all our donors, the incredible staff, volunteers and family members, who over all these years have supported my efforts to lead the organization into what we are today. People say “it takes a village” and in this case that is so remarkably true.

I have also served for many years on the Board of Directors of the national Association of Jewish Aging Services (AJAS), and as their Chairperson from 2019-21. This network of professionals has been a tremendous source of camaraderie, friendship and inspiration throughout my tenure at Jewish Senior Services, and I owe a debt of gratitude to so many people that have generously given of their time and talent to help me and each other succeed. It is rare to find such a wonderful group of colleagues and friends that are all committed to “Tikkun Olam” – to make the world a better place.

To my dad, you have always been my “rock”, my inspiration and my center of gravity. You gave me the tools and motivation to be successful and have always supported my decisions and life – personally and professionally. Everything good I have done is a tribute to you, and for all my strengths I thank you. Each day we have is a gift, and I hope we have many more to share. When you moved into the Home in 2021 (post-COVID) it gave us an opportunity to be even closer, and I love having you as the “Mayor” of our community. Thank you for everything, as I am eternally grateful.

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With Adriana, 2022

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With big hugs, love and gratitude.

Andrew

Andrew H. Banoff

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PHOTO CREDIT

Regina Madwed, Capitol PhotoInteractive

REFLECTIONS ON LIFE FROM MAYA ANGELOU

On courage: “Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can’t practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.”

On making an impression: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

On caring for others: “If you find it in your heart to care for somebody else, you will have succeeded.”

On persistence: “We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated.”

On working: “I’ve learned that making a living is not the same thing as making a life.”

On our influences: “You are the sum total of everything you’ve ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot — it’s all there. Everything influences each of us, and because of that I try to make sure that my experiences are positive.”

On her life mission: “My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”

SHEHECHEYANU

The *Shehecheyanu* blessing (Hebrew: ברכת שהחיינו, “Who has given us life”) is a common Jewish prayer said to celebrate special occasions. It is said to express gratitude to God for new and unusual experiences or possessions.^[1] The blessing is recorded in the Talmud,^[2] indicating that it has been recited for over 1500 years.

The blessing of *Shehecheyanu* is recited in thanks or commemoration of:

- Generally, when doing or experiencing something that occurs infrequently from which one derives pleasure or benefit.
- The beginning of a holiday, including Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah and Hanukkah, but not holidays commemorating sad events, such as Tisha B'av.
- The first performance of certain mitzvot in a year, including sitting in a sukkah, eating matzah at the Passover Seder, reading the megillah, or lighting the candles on Hanukkah.
- Eating a new fruit for the first time since Rosh Hashanah. Normally said before the blessing over the fruit, but some customarily say it afterwards.^[3] The fruit must be fresh, not dried.^[3]
- Seeing a friend who has not been seen in thirty days.
- Acquiring a new home or other significant possessions.
- The birth of a child (but not at the circumcision).
- A pidyon haben ceremony.
- During a ritual immersion in a mikveh as part of a conversion.
- On arrival in Israel.

Some have the custom of saying it at the ceremony of the Birkat Hachama, which is recited once every 28 years in the month of Nisan/Adar II.

When several reasons apply (such as the beginning of Passover, together with the mitzvot of matzah, marror, etc.), the blessing is only said once.

It is not recited at a circumcision, since that involves pain, nor at the Counting of the Omer, since that is a task that does not give pleasure and causes sadness at the thought that the actual Omer ceremony cannot be performed because of the destruction of the Temple.^{[4][5]}

Hebrew	English	Transliteration
ברוך אתה יי	Blessed are You, Lord,	Baruch Atah, Adonai,
אלהינו מלך העולם	our God, King of the universe,	Elohenu, Melekh ha-olam,
שהחיינו וקימנו	Who has granted us life, and sustained us,	shehecheyanu, ve-kiy'manu,
והגיענו לזמן הזה	and brought us to this time.	ve-higi'anu la-zman hazeh.

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