Happy Shavuot

Jewish & Proud
I was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri and as a child attended a Method-ist Church. Throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, I attended several other churches and celebrated what I call, “Santa Claus” and the “Easter Bunny”. My mother grew up Lutheran and my father Catholic/Methodist; my maternal grandmother, Lutheran — she was raised in a Lutheran Orphanage. In 2002, my mother, aunt and I started researching our family genealogy. My grandmother (Louisa) was placed in the care of the only German-speaking orphanage in St. Louis. The first Jewish Orphanage didn’t open in St. Louis till the early 1900’s. We found a letter at the orphanage archives that read (paraphrase from German Script, a keepsake forever),

\textbf{BH} 

Forgive me “the name” for what I am about to do as they will have a better life here and still know you.

My ancestor’s last names were Meyer, Fink, Merr, Hender, Brown. There is so much more to the story that there is time to tell. My family, from Louisa forward, believed that we were Christian until 2002. Never questioning it. For me personally, my whole way of life, looking at things, religion, etc., suddenly changed. I wanted to know more, felt different, and I wasn’t sure how to process this information. What did this all mean? About half year into my research, and because of all the questions I had, I was introduced by a friend to Rabbi Chaim Mentz (Chabad Rabbi in Bel Air, CA). Interestingly enough, and most likely through divine intervention, Rabbi Mentz was quite intrigued with my story. He asked lots of questions, I asked lots of questions, we debated, we studied. His entire family embraced me, helped me bake my first challah, light candles and celebrate Shabbat. I believed from the beginning. I suspected, but then I KNEW...

Fast-forward, we hired Gary Mokotoff, a Jewish genealogist to help review and verify all my information and he and I personally spoke on my behalf at an orthodox Beis Din (Jewish Court) in Los Angeles. The evidence was strong, but without a ketubah or any Jewish documents, only state and local documents, they referred the ruling to a Beis Din in Monsey, New York. Over a year after we first set out to find information about our maternal family, the ruling came we were 100% Jewish along strict maternal lines.

I remember that day like it was yesterday. That instant, I felt it, the flooding happy tears of my relatives, so many generations past. Nine years later, my marriage to Steve, with Rabbi Mentz, Rabbi Lew, and Rabbi Silverman by our side under the chuppah, we received our ketubah, followed by our beautiful Jewish children, a baby naming, a bris, an upsherin – LiLei Chaya, and Liam Hanan. I share my story with the community, my past and my love of being Jewish. I am truly HOME.

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**Shavuot Tofu Cheesecake Recipe**

Submitted by Lauren Davis

- 2 packages tofu (total 28 oz) preferably soft tofu but any firmness will work, drained
- ⅓ cup natural liquid sweetener (e.g. honey, maple syrup, etc. or combination)
- ½ cup sunflower seed oil (refined), or any oil with a mild flavor
- 2 tsp ground vanilla or vanilla extract
- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice
- Zest of one medium lemon
- ½ - ⅓ cup non-dairy beverage (e.g. coconut, almond or soy “milk” drink)
- Cookie/crumb crust (e.g. graham cracker, chocolate chip, etc) in a lightly greased 10-inch springform pan (crust should be around ⅛ inch thick)

Preheat oven to 400 F. Combine drained tofu, sweetener, oil, vanilla, lemon juice and zest in food processor and process until blended. With machine running, gradually pour in beverage, adding only enough for a creamy consistency. Blend until smooth. Pour into prepared crust. Bake 10 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350 F and bake until center is firm, 25 minutes or longer (depending on type of tofu and how much beverage was added). When center is firm, turn off oven and leave cake inside with door ajar for 20-30 minutes (to keep cake from cracking and pulling away from crust). Remove from oven and let cool completely. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Nice with fresh berries or fruit on top.


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**ElPasoConnect**

(for those of us in our 20s and 30s)

**Tour De El Paso Scavenger Hunt**

Put your knowledge of our fair city to the test to solve clues and find fun at locations around the city by car.

**Join us**

**Sunday, July 11 from 4-6 pm**

**Clues | Food | Drinks included**

www.jewishelpaso.org/elpasoconnect

ElPasoConnect is funded by a grant from The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso
Otherisms
Adapted from a D’var Torah given at a JFED Board meeting by Cesar Carrasco, JFED Board Member

Tazria-Metzora is a double Torah portion considered by many Rabbis their least favorite and by some the most dreaded. Some of the reasons given are that it deals with topics that in modern times we find difficult to connect with. Others find the sex and sexuality topics it deals with difficult to discuss in the context of a sermon. For this reason, many of the Divrei Torah that you have listened to and those published found the sex and sexuality topics it deals with difficult to discuss in the context of a sermon. For this reason, the pandemic has allowed us to connect with the issue of leprosy. We can, to some extent, identify because we have now experienced how it feels to be isolated and those that have fallen ill can now feel the pain of being seen as somebody to stay away from, to be seen in the community as the “other”, the one that is sick, and to be seen as someone different. And so, to not break with tradition I found a tangent that can take us in a slightly different direction, although not necessarily to an easier topic.

The pandemic has allowed us to connect with the issue of leprosy. We can, to some extent, identify because we have now experienced how it feels to be isolated and those that have fallen ill can now feel the pain of being seen as somebody to stay away from, to be seen in the community as the “other”, the one that is sick, and to be seen as someone different. For this reason, the pandemic has been a shock, but I strongly believe it should also give us an opportunity to realize that we need to think differently as a community of “different”. I hope that we can as a community learn to embrace our differences and stop seeing those with different backgrounds as the “others” and instead seek to engage and learn about and from them. I hope that we can stop seeing ourselves as members of this or that group and instead see ourselves as who we really are.

It is my personal opinion that our Jewish community has an “otherism” issue. An issue that we need to urgently address, and the Federation is strategically positioned to help us tackle. Indeed, it has already begun to tackle it and we need to continue investing significantly of our time and resources to make their effort — our effort — a success. We need to reach a point where we see each other as “us”. Not just because it makes sense in such a small community as ours but mainly because it is the Jewish thing to do.

These We Honor
With Tributes
Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso

Thank you to the Federation & Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso (JCF El Paso) for all the wonderful things you do.
From: John and Lourdes Eger
Thank you to the Federation & (JCF El Paso) for Passover Meals.
From: Mrs. Rochelle Saks

Todah Rabah
Thank you to our volunteers

Borderland’s Café Europa Guest Speakers
Talia Lerner and David Senk
Borderland’s Café Europa Support
Noel Hollowell-Small
Passover Seder Meal Deliveries
Michael Cherno, Marcia Dahlberg, Margie Hauptman, Rose Jacobs, Lindsay Jaffee, Beth Lipson, Alison Mann, David Sabal, Shari Schwartz, Brian and Noel Small, Jerry Silverman

A Blessing for Kindness on Shavuot
By Devon Spier

Between those who have much and those who have little, let us sprinkle kindness like grain seeds. And let our kindness burst forth like a bountiful harvest.

Growing, life-giving, and available to every single one who seeks nourishment from the field.

And if we should find ourself standing across from a stranger, or if we should happen to be a stranger in the company of one who is not, may we rise to meet the other with love in our hearts and the wholesomeness of good deeds.

And may our kindness sustain our selves and each other through this and every season of life.

Of Note
Larry Lesser’s 2020 album, Sparks, is a finalist in the 34th New Mexico Music Awards. Sparks is a finalist in four categories: best bluegrass song, best novelty/humorous song, best religious/gospel song, and best album of the year.
Shavuot celebrates the time when the Jewish people received the Torah at Mt. Sinai. In that moment, our people decided who they would be. They chose to follow the laws handed down by God, and that, more than anything, more than blood or family name, is what makes us Jewish.

“All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking.” (Exodus 20:15)

Though we identify as Jewish, belong to this community, how we relate to that is not a universal experience. The journey to our Jewish identities is different for everyone. For those who are Jewish by choice, like my mother, the journey is a longer one.

Being Jewish by choice has a history dating back to Biblical days. And as we celebrate Shavuot, we also remember the story of Naomi and Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite and is considered to be one of the first converts. She married Mahlon, an Israelite, and Naomi’s son. After Mahlon’s death she could have returned to her family, but instead chose to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem.

"Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me if anything but death parts me from you.” (Ruth 1:16–17 NJPS).

Choice is a powerful thing. We do not choose who we are born to, but we can choose who we are, we can choose to make our own families. In that moment, Ruth chose Judaism as her religion, and the Israelites as her people. She chose Naomi as her mother. By choosing to be Jewish, Ruth chose to leave her old life behind and start new one.

My mother has now been Jewish longer than she was not, but this was not a decision that was easily accepted by her family. She was born to an observant Catholic family, but never felt connected to her parents’ faith.

Her journey to Judaism began in college, with one of her Sorority sisters, who introduced her to Judaism. She chose to convert after becoming engaged to my father, who was born Jewish. Her Jewish name is Naomi.

The Book of Ruth tells a story of inclusion and of a welcoming community. Ruth chooses to be part of the Israelite community. And, after Ruth journeys with Naomi back to Bethlehem, she is accepted into the community. Much as my mother was accepted into my father’s family. In the Jewish faith we do not consider those who convert as being different than those who are born Jewish, we are to accept all members of our community.

My mother chose her faith, she chose her family, and her community, and they, in turn, accepted her as if she had always been there. We are all #Jewish&Proud.
As a professional at JDC Entwine — the young adult initiative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) known for its global service and purposeful Jewish travel experiences — people assume I’m a lifelong traveler. But as a queer person, that hasn’t always been possible given concerns for my safety when traveling abroad. Nonetheless, in 2017 I got the travel bug on my first encounter with Entwine.

I’d seen Entwine trips advertised, but never felt like they were a fit. But this trip for LGBTQ+ leaders to Argentina and Uruguay was different. It was crafted to introduce us to JDC’s work with the Jewish community in Latin America and to gather queer people to travel through the lens of our complex, layered identities.

We learned about these countries, broke bread with local Jewish community members, and listened to their stories. Most rewarding, I felt seen and welcomed in Jewish spaces as a queer Jewish person and the sense of safety I craved was fully present. There are many in the queer community, though, who don’t have that same access, especially trans and genderqueer folks who face travel challenges, including discrimination at airports.

When the pandemic hit last March, Entwine suspended in-person activities. We were simultaneously faced with two important questions: How do we ensure that the tens of thousands of people we work with have access to global issues and experiences without travel? and How do we fulfill our mission of providing people opportunities for global exchange?

Our answer was to transform crisis into opportunity, to innovate and push boundaries. This included creating a series of virtual trip experiences ensuring people could engage globally in ways that weren’t previously possible from home. The nature of these virtual experiences ultimately created greater access for queer individuals in the global travel space, and as a result, greater numbers of gender nonconforming individuals joined us because virtual travel removed barriers to entry.

In fall 2020, in partnership with JQ International, we traveled to Argentina online. We met trans and nonbinary activists and leaders creating change. We learned about the first ever trans high school in Latin America and heard from the first lesbian Jewish couple married in Argentina. Our group of twenty represented four different countries and spanned a variety of colorful LGBTQ+ genders and orientations.

As Pride approaches, I’m feeling the power of global communities, global connections, and the impact of making them more inclusive and accessible. My gratification is increased knowing I now have more people than ever with whom to face the fears that occasionally surface. As we look to a world where travel is possible, let’s take those learnings, and those who are now part of our journey, and build a Jewish future more reflective of the diverse community of which we are a part.

The Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso is a proud supporter of the JDC and JDC Entwine. For more information and to get involved call us at 915-842-9554 or contact www.jdcentwine.org

**Pride is a Global Jewish Value**

by Andrew Belinfante, Director of Engagement at JDC Entwine

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*915-842-2954 | www.jewishelpaso.org*
Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso welcomes new members to its Board of Directors

**Eddie Trevizo**
Speech Professor at El Paso Community College  
Birthplace: El Paso, Texas  
Spouse/Partner: Robert R. Trevizo  
Child: Molly Brown (Chocolate Lab)

*Why have you chosen to serve on our JFED board?*
As a Jew, I can work with other individuals who share the same passion and commitment to serving our Jewish community—both locally and abroad. I bring dedication and commitment to the JFED board. As a Jew, I can work with other individuals who share the same passion and commitment to serving our Jewish community—both locally and abroad. As I am well aware that being a board member requires a high level of enthusiasm and obligation to responsibilities that extend beyond attending board meetings regularly. I am also an individual who has always honored being straightforward and impartial. My career work as an advocate for individuals who live with a disability and a college educator for over 27 years has taught me to be mindful of how individuals should be treated: with honor and respect.

*For all these reasons, I have chosen to serve on the JFED board, as I can share my wealth of knowledge and my life-time experience.*

**Shane Wagman Romero**
Attorney  
Birthplace: Philadelphia, PA  
Spouse/Partner: David Romero  
Child: Noah Romero

*Why have you chosen to serve on our JFED board?*
I want to help create a community where myself and others can cultivate and connect with their Jewish identity. Exploring our heritage together leads us to deeper meaning in our own lives, and allows us to continue the work of tikkun olam.

**Michael Blau**
Construction Project Engineer  
Birthplace: France  
Spouse/Partner: Sandra Blau  
Children: Inaya & Dwayne Blau

*Why have you chosen to serve on our JFED board?*
To contribute and assist efforts being made to support the Jewish Community.

**Joanne Turnbull**
Writer, Clinical Social Worker, Professor (ret.), Administrator (ret.)  
Birthplace Pittsburgh, PA  
Spouse Name NA  
Children: Jennifer Pringle, Amanda Malo, Megan Cavan, Andrew Hesselbart

*Why have you chosen to serve on our JFED board?*
I am committed to our community and hope to use my skills to strengthen and move it forward.

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**84th Annual Meeting**
Monday, May 24, 2021  
6:00 - 7:00 PM

Join Us Virtually as we Celebrate Our Jewish Community

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81350621510

- Enjoy our year in review  
- Vote for the incoming slate of nominees of Officers and Directors to our Board  
- Thank outgoing Board members Leslie Beckoff, Stephanie Calvo, and Bill Stein

- Schoitchet Young Leadership Award Presentation to Noel Hollowell-Small  
- Opening Song by J-Cel students  
- Closing Song by The Cherry Hill students

www.jewishelpaso.org
A New Torah For New Times at Fort Bliss

By Blanca Carrasco

In 2008, my husband and I officially converted. I embraced my conversion to Judaism and became very involved with the Jewish community in El Paso by volunteering with the El Paso Jewish Federation and playing an active role supporting the B’nai Zion’s Sisterhood. At the Ansiim Center, where Rabbi Leon is founder, I developed the Nashuva Newsletter, and have been actively supported him in his outreach in Mexico.

In 2017, I went on a trip to find out more about my biological father. To my amazement I found that he was a descendant of Marcos Alonso de La Garza y del Arcon, co-founder of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, an important center for conversos and crypto-Jews in Mexico since the time of Luis Carvajal and Diego de Montemayor. In his lineage, I found farmers, Captains, Colonizers, Governors and even Dukes, and someone who struck a chord in me as crypto-Jew: Constanza de la Garza, who was tried by the Spanish Inquisition and died under house arrest, may be my 9th great-grandmother. Her bones and effigy were burned in an “Acto de Fe” in Las Palmas de Gran Canarias alongside her brother Alonso, who was burned alive with three other people. All of them atoned for their religious crimes in a bonfire in 1624.

From the time I initiated this journey it took me over twenty years to find out that, indeed, I had Jewish ancestors. This information didn’t change the fact that I chose Judaism, this information has only strengthened my spiritual journey. #Jewish&Proud
What a crazy year it has been! When we accepted the position of campaign co-chairs, who knew what a roller coaster it would be for our community? We asked ourselves, how are we going to do this? Raise money in this environment, when we have no idea what tomorrow brings...the stock market, the job market and family concerns! Do we put our campaign on hold? Do we cancel all our yearly events? Thanks to Robert French’s urging, we decided it was a time to do even more, when our community needed it the most. We maintained constant community contact, kept our events by Zoom, initiated many new programs and meals, especially for seniors, who were feeling isolated.

Guess what? Our community responded in kind. Our campaign grew, even during a pandemic. The community saw what the Jewish Federation is all about. We are further assisting our community partners and have emergency funds for those that fell on hard times. Our local programming, film series, and national programs have furthered our mission and connected us all during this period. Thank you ALL, each and every one for a wonderful campaign year.

Now, we move into year 2. We are riding out the pandemic, getting vaccinated and our hearts and minds can be a little lighter. We are starting to see more possibilities for in-person events, just in time as the new vocabulary word “zoomed out” starts to ring true. Again, we are increasing our goals for campaign. We have had so many new gifts and step-up increases. We are humbled and so proud of everyone’s generosity. As you think of this year’s campaign, making your pledge or writing the check to help continue supporting our community, please consider making a 2-3 year gift (pledge), so you don’t have to go thru the phone call “tag” by one of us or our wonderful volunteers. Please consider raising your annual gift this year. Take another look at the weekly eblasts you receive, the website, or the Voice and you’ll notice we haven’t paused, but have actually increased programming, campership awards, senior activities, support for Jewish education, our partners and so much MORE! Thank you to our fellow El Pasoans and Las Cruces Supporters. WE are such an amazing Jewish community, and the future is bright thanks to your continued support!

“I am a huge believer in giving back and helping out the community and the world. Think globally, act locally. I believe that the measure of a person’s life is the effect they have on others”. Anonymous

Robin Furman, Campaign Co-Chair and Wendy Lanski, Campaign Co-Chair

Funds for Our Future

Jewish Heritage Dinner Series
Persian Dinner Community-wide event
May 13, 2021
Gourmet kosher dinner prepared by Chef Mario Ochoa-Gurany & team.

Pick-up your “to-go” meal at Congregation B’nai Zion, 805 Cherry Hill Lane, between 11:30 am - 6 pm

We’ll meet at 7:15 pm on Zoom with Joan Nathan, multiple James Beard Award winner who the Jerusalem Post has called the “Matriarch of Jewish cooking.” Zoom link will be sent prior to event via email.

As a food historian, Joan Nathan will guide us through the ties to Jews and Persian cooking & will stay to answer questions from the community after her presentation.

Additionally, we will be offering a discounted purchase of Ms. Nathan’s latest cookbook, King Solomon’s Table, including a signed bookplate for $30.00.

$10 adults, $5 children
RSVP by Monday, May 3rd
www.congregationbnaizion.org or (915) 833-2222

MENU

Lavash Bread

Joan Nathan’s Fesenjan, Walnut & Pomegranate Chicken Stew

Bademjan Kabab- Eggplant Stuffed with Walnuts & Zereshk (Barberries) (Vegan dolmah bursting with sweet & sour flavor)

Khoresh Karafs- Beef & Celery Stew (Richly flavored with herbs & dried lime)

Leviah Bread (Traditional Persian Pullman)

Abgoosht Soup with Gundi (Vegetarian version of the classic Persian soup with fresh vegetable dumplings)

Khoreh Karafs Beef & Celery Stew (Richly flavored with herbs & dried lime)

Joan Nathan’s Fesenjan, Walnut & Pomegranate Chicken Stew (Tender pieces of boneless chicken stewed with dried apricots and dates)

Quark – Eshgh Persian Love Cake (Rahat polothe cake with layers of softness, wine & cardamom)

Leviah Bread (Traditional Persian Pullman)

This program is funded by a generous grant from The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso
My father, z”l, was always skeptical of organized religion. He was never a big shul-goer, and Judaism wasn’t a huge part of our home life when I was growing up. And yet, with a huge smile on his face, my dad often told me how proud he was to be Jewish. While my Jewish journey took a very different turn (hello, Rabbinical school!), I am grateful that I have carried this piece of my father’s Torah, proud he was to be Jewish. While my face, my dad often told me how Judaism wasn’t a huge part of our home life when I was growing up.

And yet, with a huge smile on his face, my dad often told me how proud he was to be Jewish. While my Jewish journey took a very different turn (hello, Rabbinical school!), I am grateful that I have carried this small piece of my father’s Torah, proud he was to be Jewish. While my face, my dad often told me how Judaism wasn’t a huge part of our home life when I was growing up.

This month, as we celebrate Pride, we also celebrate the holiday beginning.

As we enter this month of Pride, I invite us to open our hearts to all 70 faces, and more, of the Torah. How might each of us participate in this holy act of revelation?

Maurice Kubby Post 749 of El Paso, Texas
A Jewish Voice for Veterans, a Veteran’s Voice for Jews

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. is proud to be the oldest veterans service organization in the country, founded in 1896 by a group of American Jewry in the veteran community.

Post 749 is your local JWV chapter, proudly serving the El Paso veteran community! Our meetings are the 3rd Sunday of every month at 10am, guests are welcome! Due to COVID virtually and by phone.

We have membership options for everyone!

- If you are Jewish, serving in the US Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard, Active Guard Reserve) your membership with the JWV is FREE, while you are on active duty AND for the first year upon exiting from military service!
- Active Members must be an honorably discharged American Jewish veteran who has served in the US Armed Forces during a US War or conflict.
- Associate Members must be a Jewish veteran who was honorably discharged from the military without serving during a war or conflict, the veteran of an ally force, a member of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS), or the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Associate Members enjoy nearly the same benefits and privileges as Active Members.
- Any supporter of the JWV may become a Patron! We welcome family members, community leaders, and veterans of other faiths.

125th Anniversary Pin Fundraiser
The JWV is celebrating its 125th Anniversary this year! To commemorate this milestone, our National Headquarters has minted JWV 125th Anniversary pins.

We are asking for donations of $18, for which you will receive two anniversary pins delivered directly to you! If you would like to order pins and/or make a donation to Post 749, please email your order to JWVEPT@gmail.com

Payments can be made by check or credit card.

Thank you in advance for your support! For more information on membership, events, and meetings please visit our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/JWVEPT or email us at JWVEPT@gmail.com
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Visit our online community calendar.
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May the coming New Year bring blessings for peace, respect and harmony.

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