From Darkness – Light!
Up Close: Cindy Graff Cohen

As you read this, Cindy Graff Cohen is starting a new life in Tucson, an adventure sure to include new opportunities for writing and editing. She has been editor of The Jewish Voice since 2014, with a brief break in 2016. This is her last issue.

Of course, boxes of her 55 or so past issues were on the moving van to Arizona. When she flips through the newspapers, vivid memories come back with each one.

"Every issue brings happy thoughts about all the different people I have gotten to know through this job," she says. "While it’s fun to plan and write for a newspaper, it is those people who made the years meaningful."

Promoting through publications

Cohen moved from Alexandria, Virginia, to El Paso in 1996, after marrying local attorney Burton Cohen, a long-time member of Temple Mount Sinai. She fell in love with the city and got to know it better in quick order as the sole staff writer at a new newspaper called El Paso Inc. Her goal: to share the best things about the community and encourage involvement.

Her role as a local cheerleader was put to work again later when she promoted activities and shared stories about people for The Jewish Voice. Cohen’s work in journalism began in 1981 after she earned a Master’s in English from the University of Alabama; she attended University of Virginia for her undergraduate English degree and a Master’s in Counseling. As a journalist, she served as the editor of Antiques Monthly; a ghostwriter for “Megaentreps” author John Naithitt; and the associate editor/writer/designer/photographer/delivery girl for a weekly paper on the coast of Maine.

When she met Burton, she was publications director at Close Up Foundation, which brought students to the nation’s capital. In El Paso, she became senior marketing manager of the college English list for Houghton Mifflin’s textbook division and commuted to Boston regularly. For the last seven years, she was El Paso Inc.’s weekly arts and culture columnist. The Jewish Voice has been a special assignment that brought together her passions for promoting the Jewish community and telling a good story. Her work has taken her to countless wonderful events, such as the January 2020 Pacescutters outing at the Globo Rojo classic car museum and a lunch with the Romney Retired Old Men Eating Out bunch.

"Being editor gives you an excuse to reach out to people you wouldn’t ordinarily call,” she adds. “I also had the inside track on all the great programs taking place!”

Gratitude to friends

While it is exciting to start a new chapter in a new city, Cohen finds it very difficult to leave dear friends in El Paso. She has so many cherished memories here with Burton, his children and grandchildren, and so many good friends. She is grateful to all of them and especially her Mah Jongg group for their support after Burton died unexpectedly. In a difficult time, those friends, along with friends like Susie and Bob May, Laura Tate Goldman, and Rabbi Ben Zeidman, were there for her.

At the Federation, she is especially thankful to Leslie Beckoff for her wealth of ideas, Janet Wechter for her creative vision for The Jewish Voice, Sue Bendalin for her help and knowledge, and Robert French for his guidance, strategic thinking and inspiration. She hopes that El Paso friends will stop by her new house on their way to Phoenix or Coronado or wherever you travel on I-10 west! Her personal email address is cindygraffcohen@gmail.com.

What do you value most in your friends?
A good sense of humor and forgiveness for my shortcomings.

Who’s your favorite Jewish hero (living or not/fictional or not) and why?
Before I converted to Judaism in 2007, I learned about the religion and culture through literature. Since I was a kid, I was drawn to books about Jewish people and Jewish life. I have many favorite Jewish authors, but Bernard Malamud holds a special place in my heart for his stories of courageous characters.

What value do we need most in our world today?
Education. The world needs universal training in critical thinking skills to separate lies (including hateful lies about Jews and other minorities) and propaganda from fact.

Describe your favorite Chanukah memory.
I loved going to Chanukah dinners prepared by Temple Mount Sinai’s Sisterhood and to friends’ homes and enjoying their homemade latkes. No matter what I do, my own latkes taste almost as bad as they look.

You have spent six years writing and editing for The Jewish Voice. What would you say to encourage others to get involved with Jewish life in Greater El Paso?
Time and time again, I have seen how people of all ages have been surprised and delighted when they attended communal experiences here. Whether they were helping build the world’s largest Lego menorah at a Federation event, enjoying international cuisine at a local congregation, or sharing a meditative moment during an online yoga class, people have loved taking part. If you’re not involved with our community’s rich Jewish life, you are really missing out on opportunities for meaningful connections and fun.

What’s the best thing about being part of our Jewish community?
The joy of knowing so many wonderful people and the happy serendipity of running into them out in the “real world.” These encounters never fail to brighten my day and touch my heart on a deep level.

You have been a member of our community for a long time — what changes have you seen and what do you hope for our Jewish future?
Compared to, let’s say, a decade ago, I’m seeing more creativity in programming, more cooperation and partnerships, and more unity among Jews of different faiths. People are getting it: we are “better together.” I think strong leadership at the Federation has been part of this improved environment. My wish list for the future would include growing our community, with more Jews of all ages joining congregations and supporting our organizations.
All together now: Happy Chanukah!

Join your Jewish Federation and nine Jewish organizations for eight surprising days of Chanukah programs! For the first time ever, while you light each night's candles, you can tune into eight very different celebrations from December 10 through 17.

Sessions will involve participants ranging from toddlers to military retirees as each night takes a different approach to Chanukah stories and traditions. No Chanukah would be complete without the customary treats – watch your emails and visit www.jewishelpaso.org/eightdays for details on ordering your free snacks for pick-up or delivery.

The Communal Chanukah Candle-Lighting brings together friends, music, and even a bit of magic. When the Federation reached out to organizations at its regular Community Leadership meeting on Zoom in El Paso and Las Cruces last month, leaders responded enthusiastically and began to plan special programs for their community to enjoy.

The result: a unique series that will remind all of us that we are not alone in these unprecedented times. We are stronger together – and we also have more fun!

These We Honor With Tributes

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To: The Family of Lillian (Sis) Druxman in her Memory
From: Becky and Keith Myers
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To: Robert Kimball with Thanks for your help
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To: John Eger in Honor of Your Birthday
From: Rochelle Saks

To: Carlos and Sofia Kaplan in Memory of David Kaplan
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To: Thank you to the Federation and all of those who make Café Europa so special and enjoyable for so many
From: Rochelle Saks

Café Europa Speakers
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For Those We Love Caregivers Support Group
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A publication of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso

The Jewish Voice of El Paso, published ten times a year, is dedicated to informing, educating, and uniting the Jewish community by providing news items of local, national, Israeli and international concern.

The Jewish Voice will consider for publication any materials submitted that support the mission of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso and have relevance and appeal to the El Paso Jewish community. Articles are subject to editing at the editor’s discretion and are subject to space limitations. Letters cannot be longer than 150 words and articles must be kept to a maximum of 300 words. Please email to thevoice@jfedelpaso.org

Opinions are those of individual writers and not necessarily those of the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso. The Jewish Voice is not responsible for the leastest of any product or establishment advertised herein.

Executive Director: Robert French
Campaign Director: Sue Bendalin
President: Monika Kimball
Office: 915-842-9554
7110 North Mesa, El Paso, TX 79912

Editor: Cindy Graf Cohen
Layout and Design: Beatriz Garcia
Advertising Rep: Robert Pitkin
Printing: PDX Printing

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JFNA goes to Washington

During a time of great focus on the nation’s capital, the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) office in Washington is working to represent the concerns of 146 Jewish Federations and more than 300 network communities to members of Congress and the administration. They advocate for key legislation that helps further Federations’ work domestically and abroad and impacts the safety and security of Jewish institutions.

JFNA leaders are passionate about creating lasting change for our entire country because they believe that our Jewish communities will only be as strong as the civic societies in which they exist. As Congress has worked to aid the country in battling the social, political and economic impact of COVID-19, JFNA helped ensure that thousands of Jewish institutions and synagogues were able to access more than $500 million in forgivable loans.

For information about JFNA’s work and a complete coverage of JFNA’s public policy priorities, visit jewishfederations.org/about-jfna/washington-dc.

JFNA Policy Priorities
• Uphold the social safety net.
• Secure the future for charitable organizations.
• Empower older adults to age with dignity.
• Strengthen the critical U.S.-Israel relationship.
• Ensure the safety of Jews worldwide.
• Help communities recover from natural disasters.
• Support a full range of possibilities for people with disabilities.
• Ensure that the most vulnerable receive the services they need.
• Help educate the next generation.

A special exhibit at the Branigan Cultural Center in Las Cruces spotlights Frances F. Williams, one of the founders of Temple Beth-El. “Through a Different Lens: One Woman’s Experience in Vietnam” describes the six months that Frances, a civilian logistician, spent there in 1967-68.

The exhibit covers a memorable Passover seder attended by the head of American Jewish War Veterans and held in a mess hall in Saigon. “Amazingly Jewish troops came in from the field, their uniforms and shoes muddy, their rifles slung over their shoulders which they had to leave at the door, their faces tired and worn,” she recalls. “As they entered the mess hall I felt like I was participating in a gathering not unlike the exodus. We said our prayers, sang the Passover songs, and then said our farewells.”

Frances also volunteered at an evacuation hospital and earned the name the “Cookie Lady” for distributing countless cookies to patients, thanks to the Temple Beth-El sisterhood. Sisterhood members, including Sis Druxman, Eve Holzman, Bea Klein, and Rose Wechter, baked and shipped dozens of individually wrapped cookies.

A resident of Las Cruces since 1952, Frances has been honored with the Governor’s Award for Outstanding New Mexico Woman, the Governor’s New Mexico Distinguished Public Service Award, and the Las Cruces Sun News 2018 Distinguished Resident. The exhibit will run at the Branigan Cultural Center at 501 North Main Street through February 6, 2021. To learn more and see photos featured in the show, visit www.las-cruces.org/2380/Through-a-Different-Lens.

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First semester at The Cherry Hill School

We are off to a great start at The Cherry Hill School! Founded less than a year ago, the community’s new primary school serving first- and second-grade children has exceeded expectations with its strong focus on educational excellence within the framework of Jewish values. Here are a few highlights from a very rewarding first semester.

Learning from leaders

Wendy and Dr. Steve Lanski, President of our Board, introduced The Cherry Hill School staff and teachers to Liz Paige, director of ethics and culture at the McGillis School, an open-enrollment Jewish School in Salt Lake City. Liz helped our school build our six core values and Jewish calendar and integrate and weave all of this through daily instruction and studies.

We were able to invite her to speak to the teachers and staff again at The Cherry Hill School and the J Center for Early Learning at the beginning of the school year. She will be joining us again soon.

Special guests

Two special guests have visited and will continue to visit every month. Rabbi Levi Greenberg visited with Musia and Menachem Greenberg, told stories and taught the students about the purpose of the Lulav and Etrog used during the holiday of Sukkot.

Rabbi Ben Zeidman was our guest for our Judaics and Hebrew classes. He told and explained the story of Noah and the Torah. We are looking forward to many more visits from the Rabbis, including Rabbi Rosenberg.

More special treats

Every week, Dina Hamicha delivers fresh Challah for our Shabbat services for the students and staff. This past month, Dina and her daughter Shirley came to explain the meaning of Challah and each student got to make his/her own from scratch to take and bake at home with his/her family. Gratitude and kindness were commemorated by giving tzedakah and sharing Challah and grape juice.

Core values

The students learned more in depth about “Kindness” with “Ms. Mindy” Leanse, one of our fabulous teachers. They were able to be involved in a performance encouraging one of the characters to understand what it means to be kind to one another and the importance of treating each other in such a manner. Stay tuned for our upcoming Chanukah program scheduled for December 11 through the JFed Eight Days of Chanukah celebration and social media.

Gratitude for your support

Many thanks for grants from both the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso and the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso as well as support from our generous donors, parents and students, who all together make The Cherry Hill School special and possible.

Suzie Gibson
Head of School
Administration
The Cherry Hill School
One single spark in one Jewish heart…

Jewish law indicates that each Jewish home is to light the Chanukah menorah over the course of the holiday. Early legal codes reference the tradition of some to light a menorah for every member of the household.

In his book “What is Hanukkah?” Rabbi Judah L. Magnes reflected on this tradition: “Just as the Chanukah candles are lighted one by one from a single flame, so the tale of the miracle is passed from one [person] to another, from one house to another, and to the whole House of Israel throughout the generations. The miracle of Chanukah is thus turned inward, into the soul of each individual. For at Chanukah the injunction is that there be a candle for every household, and for greater piety a candle for every member of each household.”

Time of trouble

What do we know about the period leading up to the rebellion of Judah Maccabee and his brothers? There were differences of opinion about where the Jewish people should place their loyalty (between Egypt and the Seleucid Empire). It was a time of arguments over the role and politics of Hellenism as well as destructive actions of selfish people in power who would do anything for more wealth or more power.

The situation in the lead-up to Antiochus IV’s desecration of the Jerusalem Temple makes for fascinating reading. We like to recall that this small band of rebels was fighting against the great empire led by Antiochus IV. But the reality points not only to external forces, but also to the internal strife between the people of Israel.

The Maccabees arose to rebel against the Hellenists. So they fought against the Seleucids and the Israelites who had sided with them.

Israelite against Israelite

In some ways the story of Chanukah was not only the defeat of a large army by a small one (the Maccabees succeeded not only through military prowess, but also because Antiochus IV was pulled away by a war with Parthia). It was also a civil war. Israelite pitted against Israelite for the sanctity of Israel. A war between those who had been cowed, bought, or turned by the Seleucids against those led by Maccabee who were committed to the spirit of Israel.

We often forget that the Maccabean revolt was not only against the Seleucids. It was a battle against Jews who had brushed aside their commitment to Israel.

Chanukah is not only about our efforts to overcome evil from the outside, nor just about the miraculous story of the oil. Chanukah celebrates the ability of a few to keep the spark of Judaism alive and to rekindle the soul of Judaism for all of us. As we take the shamash to light each candle, we are reminded that Judah Maccabee was a shamash in his day. So it may be our turn in the days ahead.

Keeping spark of Judaism alive

As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote in “Judaism Eternal: Selected Essays,” “One single spark, loyally treasured in but one single Jewish heart, is sufficient for God to set a flame once more the whole spirit of Judaism.”

He continues that if even one small cruse of oil, one single soul, were to remain untouched, it is “sufficient to become the salvation of the entire sanctuary when the right time and hour has come.” He teaches of the importance of every single soul, that we each are valuable and incredibly significant.

On Chanukah we are reminded that we cannot rely on others to keep the spark of Judaism alive. We are reminded to kindle the spark within ourselves, and to pass it on to another. To pass our light on as we light the candles and find ways to celebrate together our shared commitment to Judaism despite differences of opinion and practice. May this festival of lights inspire us each to be a light.

Rabbi Ben Zeidman
Temple Mount Sinai

Rabbi Ben Zeidman

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Hamukkah, “The Festival of Light,” is nearly upon us. The children at The J Center for Early Learning will be learning all about how the Maccabees overcame a tyrannical rule, and the miracle of oil that should have lasted for just one night lasting for eight.

It’s a story of courage, teaching children the importance of standing up for oneself, and of having faith that things will get better, especially if you help make that happen.

We celebrate Hanukkah with latkes, sufganiyot, candle lighting, songs, playing dreidel and, of course, our annual Hanukkah program. This performance is always planned and practiced with great enthusiasm and this year is no exception.

The theme this year is “Twinkle Twinkle Hanukkah Lights” and our children will be singing and dancing with great delight as they do love celebrating. I can hear the song “Don’t Let the Light Go Out” already!

Since we won’t be able to safely gather all our families together, we will be recording our program. This also enables us to keep each class safely in their own pods. You’ll be able to watch the program in the comfort of your home and can share it with friends and family far and wide.

We hope this will help spread the joy and light that is at The J always, but especially at this special time of year. This year we will participate in the Jewish Federation’s “Eight Days of Chanukah” program by sharing the joy our children bring into the homes of our community. The J’s presentation has been scheduled on Wednesday, December 16, at 6:30 p.m. Join us for a fun and meaningful celebration!

Meg Birk
Head of School
The J Center for Early Learning

Harvesting Our Wisdom Workshop: Legacy letter writing with Joanne Turnbull

The “legacy letter” is a way to let future generations know who we really are and what really matters to us. Participants in this four-session course will learn about the Jewish context of the legacy letter, how to transmit values and important lessons, how to connect the generations, and how to convey love and blessing to those who come after us. No previous writing experience is necessary.

Four online sessions on Wednesdays, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
January 20, January 27, February 3 and February 10
Course requires computer access to join online Zoom sessions. Advance registration is $18 for the complete course benefiting Sage-ing International and is required by Friday, January 15. Space is limited; links will be emailed upon registration.
Joanne Turnbull, PhD, is a licensed clinical social worker, certified Legacy Facilitator, certified Sage-ing Leader, and published, award-winning writer. She was honored with an award from Maine’s Jewish Community Alliance to develop the material for this course and has taught it several times.

To buy signed copies, call Congregation B’nai Zion at 915-833-2222 no later than Tuesday, December 8. Authors will sign bookplates for everyone who purchases a book.
Royalty, fashion, fun, and delicious scones were on the menu for a virtual afternoon tea in November for the Lions of Judah, women who donate $5,000 or more each year to the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso (JFED) to enable it to do its important work for our community and beyond.

Thanks to JFED Executive Director Robert French’s hometown connections in London, the women had a transatlantic teatime with Royal Couturier Stewart Parvin, who has designed clothes for Queen Elizabeth II since 2007. While wearing a purple day dress designed by him, the Queen appointed Parvin a Member of the Royal Victorian Order in 2016.

The unique event was hosted by Gary Bull and his son Coby, owners of Joel & Son Fabrics, which supplies fabrics by Royal Appointment to Her Majesty The Queen. With their lively dog, Alfie, in tow – the English do love their dogs, they gave El Pasoans a walkthrough of their London studios, stopping to unfold bolts of stunning beaded and appliqued cloth and fine silks in rainbows of colorful designer prints.

The Federation sent out “By Royal Appointment” gift bags with English tea, scones, strawberry jam, face masks with the Lion of Judah logo, and beautiful scarves that featured the Queen’s crest, which includes two crowned lions.

“You poured your tea and listened – it made us feel like this was really something special for us,” says Rose Schecter, a long-time member of Lions of Judah. “It was lot of fun and informative. If I ever get back to London, I definitely want to go and feel those fabrics!”

Under the guidance of Campaign co-chairs, Robin Furman and Wendy Lanski, Cindy Metrikin and Janet Wechter co-chaired the hit event, with many thanks to Sue Bendalin for her hard work. The afternoon recognized the contributions of these donors, who are among 18,000 women around the world who commit to give generously to support the local, national, and international Jewish community. For information on becoming a Lion of Judah, contact Sue Bendalin, Director of Philanthropy, at sbendalin@jfedelpaso.org or at 915-842-9554.
8 Days of Chanukah

Communal Chanukah Candle-Lighting
6:30 PM each night
Followed by fun, creative programs for all ages
on Zoom and Facebook Live!
(4:15 PM on Friday, December 11)

Thursday, December 10:
Interactive Magic Show - Chabad Las Cruces

Friday, December 11:
Ice, Ice Chanukah - The Cherry Hill School

Saturday, December 12:
Light the Latke Cocktail - Temple Beth El

Sunday, December 13:
Sharing the Light - A Hopeful Chanukah from Hadera to El Paso
(from San Jacinto Plaza) Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)

Monday, December 14:
Light Up with Latkes! - Congregation B’nai Zion

Tuesday, December 15:
Sip & Paint – Chanukah Painting - Temple Mount Sinai

Wednesday, December 16:
Twinkle, Twinkle Chanukah Lights - The J Center for Early Learning

Thursday, December 17:
A Chanukah Celebration - Jewish War Veterans & Hadassah

Don't forget to order your complimentary Chanukah donuts – sufganiot – and treats by Friday, December 4

www.jewishelpaso.org/eighthdays