Elana Grasheim is the President of the Jewish Center for Early Learning (J-CEL) and partner at WyattUnderwood. She worked at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid under a fellowship and attended The George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C. and received a Bachelor of Arts, Magna Cum Laude, from Our Lady of the Lake University.

What value do we need most in our world today?
I can’t just pick one! Tikkun Olam and Lomed M’kol Adam.

What do you value most in your friends?
Honesty and respect.

Who’s your favorite Jewish hero (living or not/fictional or not) and why?
Of course, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She never made excuses and embodied a favorite quote of mine that I get so much inspiration from— “A Jew is asked to take a leap of action rather than a leap of faith.”

What’s the best thing about being part of our Jewish community?
It is a small community with a rich history. The best thing about our Jewish community is being able to share it with our children. At birthday parties you will hear “Happy Birthday” in English, then in Hebrew, and then sometimes in Spanish! It is so special!

As President of the J Center for Early Learning (J-CEL) what are your hopes and dreams for Jewish life in Greater El Paso?
I hope that El Paso always has options for a Jewish education. We owe so much to those that made sure we would have a Jewish Preschool when the JCC closed. I also hope that the community will continue to grow and support all the young Jewish families that are eager to make a difference.

How does the J-CEL being an open enrollment school foster tolerance and understanding?
The JCEL is often someone’s first introduction to Jewish people and culture. Introducing children to Jewish values from a young age will ideally impact them throughout their life.

What message would you think Martin Luther King would have for our students today?
King addressed the American Jewish Committee convention in 1958 and said “Our unity is born of our common struggle for centuries, not only to rid ourselves of bondage, but to make oppression of any people by others an impossibility.” That message and that value, is one of many that I believe King would continue to impart today.
Lessons from a Tree

Tu B’Shevat, the day we celebrate the New Year for trees, falls on Jan. 17th this year. The Torah states, “ki ha’adam eitz hasadeh” — “Man is like the tree of the field” (Devarim 20:19). In what way is man likened to a tree and what lessons can we learn from this? Here are a few.

1. Tender loving care - Did you ever try to grow a tree? If you did, you know very well the amount of care it requires. Even a slight damage or nick to the seed or tender sapling will cause a gross malformation in the grown tree. Education is no different, every positive influence parents and teachers have on small children will be greatly amplified in the years to come. Never pass off a child’s Jewish education until he/she matures.

2. Be productive - A tree attains fulfillment when it produces good fruit and the beauty of a tree is the fruit it produces. The fulfillment of Mitzvot and good deeds we do are man’s fruits. Furthermore, fruit also contains the seeds to produce new trees and fruits after its kind, to the end of time. Similarly, it is within the ability of every Jew to set a good example for others that they may perform Mitzvot and good deeds. They in turn will influence others in a chain reaction of great magnitude.

3. Keep on growing - A tree never stops growing, every year it adds height and girth. Additionally, the tree isn’t satisfied with the fruit it produced last season because every year it continues to offer the world new fresh produce. We too must always continue to grow in our service of G-d and relationship with our fellow man. The good we produced yesterday doesn’t exempt us from doing the same today. Our past achievements should inspire us to constantly reach yet higher.

4. Always remember your foundation - A tree cannot survive, and certainly won’t produce a quality crop, unless it has strong viable roots that help it withstand the hardest elements and no wind will shake it. The roots of our people are our ancestors, the Torah and our trust in G-d. They lay deep within us, at our very core, where there is no storm, no struggle. Our bond with these roots and their nurture helps us outlive the storm and bring beauty to the world we were planted within.

5. Transforming Life’s Challenges - So, if we’re celebrating trees and their lessons, shouldn’t we do so in the spring? Why now, right in the middle of winter? Yes, it may be the coldest time of the year, but the 15th of Shevat marks a turning point, a time when under all that cold and snow the sap of the trees is rising, readying for spring. The 15th of Shevat signifies that sometimes it is precisely from within the darkest and coldest moments of our lives that the new blossoms burst forth, so happy growing!
Planting the Seeds of Friendship and Education: ORT and the Paso del Norte Region

What better time could there be than Tu Bishvat to plant the seeds of a new relationship? As we celebrate the new year of the trees, we enter with great excitement into a partnership between the ORT global education network and the Cherry Hill School of El Paso.

Thanks to a grant funded by the Jewish Federation of El Paso, the school will be launching a global classroom initiative, that will bring the ORT Global network to El Paso.

The Cherry Hill School Shares ORT’s commitment to providing an outstanding education using best practices from around the world. Through Jewish teachings, students learn about community and respect while building a lifelong love of learning.

The Colegio Israelita de México ORT (CIM-ORT), a cutting-edge school, which is focused on promoting Jewish values and excellence, will partner Cherry Hill. More than 600 students learn in a space dedicated to exploration, discovery, and innovation, where the needs of the student are at the center of everything.

Both schools have been taking part in interactive online sessions since the Spring, working with ORT America to develop an engaging program for our young people.

Orly Picker, CIM-ORT Academic Coordinator, said: “The alliance of CIM-ORT and Cherry Hill School will allow children to share experiences that will cross borders and allow them from a very young age to expand their Jewish world and knowledge of different cultures.”

Representatives of Cherry Hill -- Sandy Garza, Mindy Leanse and Margaret Birk -- joined World ORT’s Global Educators’ Forums, at which teachers and educational leaders from more than 20 countries came together online to discuss the gaps in learning and to talk about supporting the mental health needs of staff and students.

Daniel Tysman, World ORT Head of Education, said: “Participants were able to compare their situation with peers from other countries and to share practical advice on how to handle common challenges.”

Sandy Garza adds “The Cherry Hill School has the incredible opportunity to become part of and participate with CIM ORT and ORT America. This partnership has brought us an alliance with the Colegio Israelite de Mexico School in Mexico City and the Global Educators Forum is helping us bring the world to our door and The Cherry Hill School to the world! We look forward to the continued nurturing of these “seeds” that have been planted.”

One of ORT’s educational pillars is global citizenship and the importance for our young people of developing a global conscience around issues such as poverty and the environment.

Contemporary problems do not begin or end at the city limits or a nation’s borders. ORT schools inspire students to apply their skills on a global scale, for positive change, and this ideal will play a strong part in the developing relationship in Texas.

The ORT network reaches more than 200,000 people a year in schools, universities, and vocational training programs in more than 30 countries. ORT America is a non-profit organization consisting of thousands of people throughout the United States who share a common, binding interest in supporting ORT, Israel and the Jewish people.

“We look forward to a fruitful relationship with Cherry Hill in the coming years,” said Heath Blumstein, ORT America Director of Southwest Region.

For more information, contact Heath Blumstein
Tel 602.999.3833 – email: hblumstein@ortamerica.org

Here are a few photos of Mr. Austin’s first grade class taking care of their recently planted apple tree and avocado tree.

Tributes to Trees at Tu B’Shvat

Tu B’S’hvat is often called the birthday of the trees. At The J our young students will be thinking about the many things trees give us - like all sorts of fruits and nuts. We’ll taste a wide variety and maybe even make some charts to see which are the favorites.

At this time of year, while some trees don’t have their leafy cover, the children love being able to spy the secret nooks where mama birds have built their nests. This often leads to discussions of the many animals who live in the trees.

We also consider big questions like - What would our world look like without trees?

There’ll be notes of thanks written to our trees, books read about trees, and artwork done highlighting their beauty and strength.

After all this the children will surely want to give something back to our trees - like some extra water and TLC - because birthdays should be special for everyone - especially trees.
In October 2021, documentary filmmaker, Isaac Artenstein, returned to the Sun City to continue his journey he began in his most recent documentaries such as Challah Rising in the Desert: The Jews of New Mexico, To the Ends of the Earth: A Portrait of Jewish San Diego, and Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest.

The latter included members from our community such as Rabbi Stephen Leon of Congregation B’nai Zion, Blanca Carrasco, and Bill Carvajal. So far, the new documentary will focus on Jews who moved from Mexico to the El Paso community and will feature Felicia Rubin along with other El Pasoans.

“Isaac had called me sometime back to talk about his new project, asked what I would like to do, and if I would participate,” Felicia said. “I said yes and that I loved to cook!”

Over the course of three days, Felicia opened her home to Isaac and his film crew to display her passion for cooking and talk about her own history. She cooked many colorful dishes (and desserts) for the better part of a day. Dishes included traditional Jewish dishes (brisket, mushroom farfel, fruit and chocolate chip kugel, and more) along with some Mexican dishes (pico de gallo, calabacitas elote, and kosher corn tortillas).

Felicia’s own interview lasted about 2 ½ hours - and was her first camera interview. She wrote about 20 pages of her own personal story going back to her family’s escape from Germany to the US and then to Mexico.

“I wanted to give and leave my family with this testimony something of my family’s life and legacy,” Felicia said. “As a community I believe we should remember family even if they are not with us, give children the message of values, so that they will always remember that family is alive in spirit.”

The release date of the documentary is yet to be determined but watch for details to see Felicia’s story along with many other El Pasoans.

For more information on how you can start your own fund please contact Robert French at 915-842-9554.

Thank You to those who have created a Jewish Legacy to ensure the Future of Our Jewish Community through their gifts to the 2021 Annual Campaign through the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso

Louis Baumwoll*
Max and Bessie Bellman*
Julian and Elayne Bernat*
Sidney Borschow*
Aaron and Millie Brenner*
Robert and Blanche Brown*
Ruth Braun
Sam Ellowitz
Gershon and Barbara Ettinger*
Paul and Dorothy Fabricant*
Milton and Jean Feinberg*
Tony and Robin Furman
Jay and Mimi Gladstein
David and Evelyn Goodman*
Sol and Ronnie Heller*
Josh and Frances Kahn*

Elias and Jetti Kurtz*
Judy Leonard*
Popular Dry Goods
Charles (Bud) and Charlotte Ramenofsky*
Arvin and Beverly Robinson
Bob and Jane Rosen*
Steve Rosenberg*
Jane Elsberg Ryan*
Nornan and Sylvia Samet
Ben and Florence Schoichet*
Ann Schwartz Schaechner*
Albert and Adele Schwartz*
Lee and Gertrude Schweitzer*
David Stolaroff*
Aaron* and Sylvia Wechter
Randy and Janet Wechter

* Indicates donor to the Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso
Whistle, Gotham City’s latest superhero, is Jewish. It’s a full-circle moment for the comics industry.

By Julian Voloj

Superman was a new kind of hero, a noble, all-powerful defender of American ideals who harbored a secret identity and origin story that made him distinctly an outsider. If his origins weren’t specifically Jewish, they were certainly informed by the Jewish experience.

Superman became an unexpected bestseller and, consequently, the blueprint for a whole genre, as the market soon flooded with new superheroes. The vast majority of these comic book pioneers — writers, illustrators and publishers — were Jewish, including Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. However, their characters were a generic form of “all American” without any religious or ethnic affiliation. So while Captain America was allowed to punch Hitler on the cover of the hero’s debut, it took decades for superheroes to have a Jewish identity.

There have been exceptions over the decades, most notably Marvel’s “X-Men” villain Magneto, retconned as a Holocaust survivor following his debut, and popular DC antihero Harley Quinn, a Brooklynite who sprinkles in Yiddish phrases and was voiced in her original 1990s animated TV debut by the Jewish comedienne Arleen Sorkin. (Harley’s current film incarnation, played by Margot Robbie, drops the Jewish signifiers.)

But what makes Whistle unique is that her origin story is centered around her Jewish identity. Willow Zimmerman is a social justice activist who volunteers at a local pet shelter and lives with her single mother, an adjunct Jewish studies professor, in Down River, a Gotham City neighborhood modeled after the Lower East Side. That means it comes with a long Jewish history, making Judaism canonical in Gotham more than eight decades after Bob Kane and Bill Finger, two Bronx Jews, created the Dark Knight.

The setting was informed by Lockhart’s own upbringing. Growing up, she often visited the real Lower East Side with her father, the playwright Len Jenkis, who wrote for “The Incredible Hulk” TV show in the 1970s. “I always had a strong sense of my paternal family’s heritage and the history of New York City as interwined,” she said. “I had done research on the Jewish history of the LES for another book, so when DC invited me to create a new Gotham City hero, it felt natural to use some of that research and my own love of the neighborhood to create a new part of Gotham that’s a lot like the LES of the 1980s.” Willow Zimmerman visits a synagogue. (Courtesy of DC, written by E. Lockhart, with art by Manuel Preitano, colors by Gabby Metzler and letters by ALW’s Troy Peteri)

For Whistle herself, Lockhart drew inspiration from a different trailblazer at DC’s rival: Kamala Khan, the Muslim Ms. Marvel introduced in 2013. “I love Ms. Marvel and was definitely inspired by the way [author] G. Willow Wilson engaged with questions of heroism and the superheroic body through the lens of Kamala’s Muslim identity,” Lockhart said. “I thought about it a lot while I was writing Whistle.”

“Whistle,” which is illustrated magnificently by Manuel Preitano, is Lockhart’s debut as a graphic novelist. “I write novels about young women who are navigating morally complicated situations,” she said. “Very often the stories are about agency and power and self-knowledge, one way or another. So in that sense, ‘Whistle’ is right on brand for me.”

Those familiar with the Batman universe will recognize many side characters, such as the Riddler and Poison Ivy, in the narrative. “It was great fun […] to play in the sandbox of DC Comics’ Gotham City, which has a wonderful rogues gallery of spectacularly deranged supervillains,” Lockhart said.

Another Batman supervillain, Killer Croc, plays a central role in Willow’s transformation into a superhero. Outside her local synagogue, she and her sidekick, a loyal stray Great Dane named Lebowitz (named after Fran, Lockhart confirms), collide with Killer Croc and wake up being able to understand each other. “When she gets superpowers, she becomes Whistle — and no longer feels helpless,” Lockhart explains. “It’s a fantasy of empowerment, but her position is also morally complicated. I didn’t want to shy away from asking questions about what it means to be a hero, emotionally and ethically.”

Like Lockhart herself, Willow is secular. Her visit to Gotham’s synagogue is for meditation purposes. “I knew I would tell the most truthful and nuanced story if I wrote from my own identity and from the community I’m in,” Lockhart said on her decision not to make the character strictly observant. “My heroine engages with her Jewishness in much the same way that I do.”

Rooted in Lockhart’s own past, Willow’s Judaism leans on old-neighborhood nostalgia and Yiddishisms like “bubbeh. It’s a more traditionalist approach to a Jewish superhero identity than other recent efforts, such as Marvel’s relaunch of “White Tiger” in 2002 as a biracial Jew of color struggling with his Black and Jewish identities.

But Lockhart does touch upon many present-day topics animating Willow’s generation, such as gentrification, social justice and environmental issues. With Willow, a hero whose actions are clearly informed by her Jewish identity and the concept of tikkun olam, or repairing the world, Judaism will now be an integral part of Gotham’s mythology.
ElPasoConnect

For those of us in our 20s and 30s

On The List Shabbat Dinners

Are you on the list?

Contact Rebecca Mendez
915-995-0514 or rmendez@jfedelpaso.org
to get updated on bi-monthly
invitation only Shabbat Dinners
and upcoming events.

Visit
www.jewishelpaso.org/elpasoconnect

ElPasoConnect

For those of us in our 20s and 30s

On The List Shabbat Dinners

Are you on the list?

Contact Rebecca Mendez
915-995-0514 or rmendez@jfedelpaso.org
to get updated on bi-monthly
invitation only Shabbat Dinners
and upcoming events.

Visit
www.jewishelpaso.org/elpasoconnect

TEXAS NEURODIAGNOSTIC, HEADACHE & SLEEP DISORDERS CENTER, P.A.

BORIS KAIM, M.D. F.A.A.N., FAASM
Board Certified in Neurology, Psychiatry and Sleep Medicine

PRACTICE LIMITED TO CONSULTATIVE NEUROLOGY,
PSYCHIATRY, ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPHY,
NERVE CONDUCTION, EMG, SLEEP DISORDERS,
AND TESTING FOR DIABETIC NEUROPATHIES.

2311 N. Mesa, Bldg. F • El Paso, Texas 79902
Phone: (915) 544-6400

Robert L. Fenning D.O.
PSYCHIATRY & OSTEOPATHIC MANUAl THERAPY
DOCTOR OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE
5290 McNutt Rd, Suite 106
Santa Teresia, NM 88038
Phone: 915-494-1237 Fax 915-494-1230
Text 915-359-4045 Email: refenning@bhi.com

ROBERTA L FENNIG D.O.

3101 E. Yandell Dr. • El Paso, Texas 79903
(915) 566-2410
JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL 2022

**The Invisible Line**
- **Saturday, January 29:** Alamo Drafthouse @ 7PM
- **Sunday, January 30:** Alamo Drafthouse @ 11AM
- **Monday, January 31:** Fountain Theatre Mesilla Valley @ 6PM
- **Sunday, February 6:** Zoom Q & A @ 2PM

**American Birthright**
- **Monday, February 7 - Sunday, February 13:** Streaming
- **Sunday, February 13:** Director, Becky Tahel Bordo
  - Zoom Q & A @ 2PM

**Ein Nassar Hund**
- **Monday, February 14 - Sunday, February 21:** Streaming

**Persian Lessons**
- **Saturday, February 26:** Alamo Drafthouse @ 7PM
- **Monday, February 28 - Sunday, March 6:** Streaming

Visit jewishelpaso.org/jff or call 915-842-9554 for sponsorship opportunities, in-person tickets and more.