Shanah Tovah - Happy New Year
Family, friends and community service have been central to Janet Kent Wechter’s life. Although her move to El Paso in 1989 from Louisiana was originally a temporary one to help her sister, Mona Goldberg, she found a gem of a Jewish community and a sisterhood of women in the National Council of Jewish Women and her future husband, Randy Wechter. They have two teenage children, Ryan (29) & Jenny (27), who grew up surrounded by the Jewish Community Center, the El Paso Jewish Academy and family Shabbat dinners with grandparents Sylvia and Aaron Wechter. Randy and Janet love traveling and follow The Grateful Dead, now Dead and Co. The music is magical. Aside from her family commitments, the symphony, garden club, Jewish non-profits and interior design work have occupied much of Janet’s time. She enjoys practicing yoga and meditation, hanging out with her five dogs, reading and watching the latest series on Netflix.

What value(s) do we need most in the world today?

Our world needs so many things right now, but if I have to choose just one value, then I choose one that incorporates so many others and that value is INTEGRITY. Our world needs to know and do the right thing. Good and honest principles with strong moral character could do wonders for the world.

Who is your favorite Jewish hero and why?

My favorite Jewish hero is my dad, Sidney Kent; he taught me to live with integrity, how to love, give and forgive. A Jewish hero who inspired me is Ruth Dayan, an Israeli social activist who founded the Maskit Fashion & Decorative Arts House in 1954. It was a way of making Aliyah and Arab refugees having our two values, give and forgive. A Jewish hero and why?

Why is it important to be involved in the Jewish community?

It is important to be involved in the Jewish community because we need one another and when we engage and get involved, the quality of our lives improve greatly. As Elie Wiesel once said, “Jews alone are vulnerable, Jews must not be alone.”

What made you decide to start your own non-profit?

At my tenure on the boards of the Jewish Federation, The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso, and The El Paso Symphony Orchestra were coming to a close, I realized I needed a break from board meetings and commitments. Randy and I traveled in our RV to beautiful places throughout our amazing country and continued our 34 year journey following our favorite band, Dead & Co (once The Grateful Dead.). My daughter, Jenny, had asked, “What do you want to do now, Mom?” She mentioned I might integrate my passion for creating beautiful spaces with community service. That got the wheels moving in my head and after telling others my ideas, they wanted to be involved. So with our support, I founded Harmonious Home which just launched a great website, www.harmonioushometx.org.

Describe your non-profit and its goals?

Harmonious Home is a new non-profit which helps people transition from shelters and transitional living centers to independent living. We work with the Center Against Sexual and Family Violence to identify clients. We furnish and decorate the apartments, giving people a nice home and hope for a better life. It’s a privilege to live in a safe home, but interior designs can significantly evoke happiness, inspire confidence, empathy, pride, creativity, security and energy. We offer this to our clients.

What changes have you seen in our community and what are your hopes for the future?

Our Jewish community, like so many others, is getting smaller. Jewish education has been through ups and downs, but now we have The J Center for Early Learning and The Cherry Hill School to offer our youngest generations. I was sad to see UTEP’s Inter-University Global Education Service (IUGES) end, but interior design can significantly help with community service. That got the wheels moving in my head and after telling others my ideas, they wanted to be involved. So with our support, I founded Harmonious Home which just launched a great website, www.harmonioushometx.org.

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Pro-Choice and Pro-Life and So Glad for Them Both

By Robert French, Executive Director
Jewish El Paso
The Jewish Community Foundation of El Paso

To me, the message is clear. Our actions can change the outcome. In other words – we have a choice. And, if we make the choice correctly, we get to enjoy a better life for yet another year, until the cycle repeats itself. Our behavior determines community.

As the world endures many challenges and stands on the precipice of so many more, we have a collective and individual responsibility to choose how we interact as a community, between organizations, between friends and family. How many times have I heard community members comment, as they watch the current market conditions, that they wish they had given more to Tzedakah when it was riding high? How quickly did we take the cohesiveness of the early days of the pandemic and turn it into discord? When was the last time we called our neighbor to check in now that we are no longer under a lockdown? Why is it that we discarded organizations that we once supported, that still do so much good for the community and the Jewish world, just because we disagreed with a statement they issued? Have our priorities shifted back to work and materialism over family and relationships? We are not perfect nor will never be. But we have choices on how we behave, whether we react or we respond, whether and how we dialogue or disengage.

On a recent trip I was flabbergasted by the blatant lack of responsibility and the rewriting of history shown today by some of Europe’s biggest culprits during the Holocaust. It was like their role had been whitewashed from history. August’s CNN special on Anti-Semitism in America showed the frightening reality of what our nation is facing today. It’s on our doorstep like never before. Jewish history has taught us that only when we are united and cohesive as a people, we are strong and able to face the challenges before us. We can agree to disagree on some issues, but in the end, history shows we must be united by our heritage and faith.

Let us reflect on the positive steps we can take individually and collectively and the choices we can make for a better life – on the students we help get a Jewish education, the seniors we program for, those we help with mental health issues and food insecurity and to those for whom we secure financial assistance in times of need, the campaigns we send to camp, the funds we endorse for the Jewish future, how we support Jewish life here in El Paso and Las Cruces and the way we might best engage one another to do so. This New Year, my hope is that we are all Pro Choice and Pro Life.

Shanah Tovah – Happy New Year
The Jewish nation is compared to a Torah scroll and every Jew is another letter. Even one “faded” letter impacts the entire nation. “I am like a traveling scribe,” concluded the rabbi. “My goal today is to ensure your ‘letter’ is intact through strengthening your connection to Torah study and Mizvah observance.”

Upon hearing this analogy the Previous Rebbe made one correction. Letters in the Torah scroll are ink on parchment and when a letter goes missing it ceases to exist. Jews are better compared to letters engraved in the Two Tablets. Engraved letters may fade due to accumulated dust that hides them from view, but they are never truly lost. You just need to clear away the dust and the letter will be revealed in all its beauty.

While Rosh Hashanah is called the Day of Judgment, confession is absent from the Rosh Hashanah liturgy. The Yom Kippur liturgy, on the other hand, is all about confession, repentance and seeking forgiveness and yet the day is considered even holier than Rosh Hashanah!

On Rosh Hashanah we access a level of our Jewishness that transcends the details of our behavior. On Yom Kippur we reach a level of unity that emphasizes how even while dealing with the muck of ignorance, apathy and assimilation, every single Jew remains essential. Our nation is incomplete if even one letter is “faded.” And the incomparable holiness of Yom Kippur gives us the power to clean away all the “accumulated dust” and ensure that every Jew is connected in a revealed way.
The Anniversary of the First Day

It is said (Vayikra Rabbah 29:1) that the anniversary of the first day of creation takes place a few days before Rosh Hashanah, the New Year. By this counting Rosh Hashanah itself is the anniversary of humanity’s creation (the sixth day of creation). A happy moment! But within hours Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge and had to begin a process of teshuvah, repentance.

Can you imagine giving birth only to be forced into passing judgment over your child a few hours later? Rosh Hashanah is therefore a day for both celebration and reflection. In the liturgy of the shofar service on Rosh Hashanah, we read these words multiple times: HaYom harat Olam - Today the world is born anew. This day, the whole of creation stands before You. Shabbat or coming to shul every Saturday night – keep that one mitzvah every week. Start putting on Tefilin every weekday – that one important step in the process of teshuvah.

The point is: you should not apologize for a wrong if deep down we do believe we committed the wrong. This step is not about rationalizing or seeking excuses. It is about coming to accept that we were wrong. We didn’t need to do what we did, yet we did it.

The next step is confession. Openly and honestly letting those who were impacted by our misdeeds know that we are aware of what we did and that it was wrong. We stand before the afflicted and accept our responsibility.

Making amends, seeing things right – as best we can – is the next step in the process of teshuvah. Doing what we are able to do to heal the pain and help those victimized by our misdeeds restore their wholeness is essential to repentance.

Life Doesn’t Have to be Perfect to be Wonderful

The point is: you should not be bigger, better, or yesterday’s failures, nor should you be frozen by your anxieties about tomorrow. Just get up and do whatever you can do today – even if it’s less than perfect.

One author put it this way: “The imperfect book that gets published is better than the perfect book that never leaves my computer.” A saying that I do is better than a 4-mile run that I don’t do.

These are the lessons for us to internalize in our imperfect lives and our imperfect world as we find ourselves in highly imperfect times. Let us do what we can – to strengthen our relationships, to learn, to grow, to become more spiritual and more Jewsly involved in this upcoming New Year.

You can’t commit to keeping Shabbat or coming to shul every week? Make it one Shabbat a month. You don’t see yourself becoming strictly observant? Ok - make it one Tefilin put-on each week. Start putting on Tefilin every weekday – that one important step. Make sure to light the Shabbat candles every Friday night – keep that one mitzvah consistently.

Does that mean you’re doing things “perfectly” – and that there’s no need or room for further growth? No! But hey, that’s what we are perfect. We are all aspiring Jews, so let’s do whatever we can do today – and just a little more.

Teshuvah is about the process, not the product. It’s about your effort, not your success. It’s about the journey, not the destination. To be a Jew is to be “Yisrael” which means “One who struggles with God.”. Aspiring and striving is what authentic spirituality is all about. It is not incumbent upon you to finish the job, but that doesn’t free you from starting and doing the best you can.

And it is this philosophy of not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good, of doing the best you can today, of always getting back up and continuing to walk; that enables us to rise to the heights of our potential and achieve true greatness.

Perfect lives? It’s a myth. It’s not part of the bargain. It doesn’t exist.

This month, as we hear the Shofar, listen closely and you will hear different sounds: Broken sounds, sobbing sounds, stilted and frustrated sounds – all of which are symbolic of so many of the experiences of our imperfect, often difficult, lives. But at the end, in the final analysis, it’s an uplifting, invigorating, emboldening and triumphant sound – let not the crescendo of a message, you can meditate on these words while listening to the blast of the Shofar: “LIFE DOESN’T HAVE TO BE PERFECT TO BE WONDERFUL.”

Shana Tova.
Let the Games Begin

By Madeleine Bendalin & the Schecter Family

I’m certain that the Schecter family could have fun anywhere, but being in Israel, the Jewish homeland, made our family trip more meaningful and memorable. This past July, members of my family traveled to Israel for a family trip coinciding with the opening ceremonies of the Maccabiah Games. While it was our first time in Israel during Maccabiah, this was a special competition time for all participants, because the event was postponed several times due to the pandemic.

The Maccabiah Games hosts over 10,000 athletes from 80 countries around the world, with two commonalities: Judaism, and a love for sports. Opening ceremonies at Teddy Stadium was an experience like no other. Athletes were of all ages, and many families had multiple generations participating in the games. This year the opening ceremonies were also attended by President Biden, cheering on the United States delegation of 1,400 athletes.

My uncle, Marc Schecter, an El Paso native, participated in men’s singles and doubles tennis for the United States, alongside thousands of other Americans, and coming in second in his age division. Seeing him walk on the stage representing the U.S. and the El Paso community was a very special moment, especially for my grandmother, Rose Schecter, who put a lot of funding and time towards tennis lessons and tournaments over the past 40 or so years.

In Judaism, we are heavily focused on the generational impact of storytelling and keeping traditions and Jewish values alive. L’dor v’dor means ‘from generation to generation’ and is all about the connections that family members make and pass down to future generations. Going to Israel was a multi-generational trip for our family that included my grandmother, uncle, aunt, and two brothers. For myself, a highlight was praying at the Western Wall alongside my grandmother. This was a moment I had anticipated the entire trip and knowing that other families were also able to engage in similar experiences with their families and loved ones demonstrates the impact of these traditions. While we each have a deep connection to Israel, in our family we also have a huge connection to the sport of tennis.

Growing up, my brothers became great tennis players, taking after their parents, their uncle and their grandfather, David Schecter. Tennis has been a part of our family for at least three generations, and something that brings us together to watch and to play. Ironically, I might be the only family member that doesn’t play, but I appreciate the bonding impact it has in our family. We’ve been spectators at tennis tournaments around the world, but seeing my uncle play was a highlight for us all.

Thinking back on the experience in Israel, I can’t imagine that there is another opportunity other than Maccabiah that would bring us all together to cheer on our family members as they compete on the other side of the world.

I hope we make the Maccabiah Games a new Schecter family tradition, and travel to Jewish communities across the world to cheer each other on.

International Lion of Judah Conference
Biltmore Hotel, Phoenix Arizona

The International Lion of Judah Conference is the premier gathering of dynamic, philanthropic Jewish women from across the globe. At this year’s ILOJC, we will celebrate 50 years of building flourishing Jewish communities worldwide and begin to shape how our Jewish communities can flourish for the next 50.
Comfort Food – Remembrances & Nostalgia

By Ruth Tabor

Comfort food – remembrances and nostalgia of goodies we enjoyed in our childhood - obviously means different flavors/textures to different people. Jewish comfort food conjures up a mixed bag of memories depending on your background – especially where your parents/grandparents/great-grandparents came from. The main feature of Jewish cooking through the ages has always been adapting and “assimilating” local foods (often improving) of their new locales.

Shannon Sarna, author of a new book: Modern Jewish Comfort Food (Countryman Press) grew up in upstate New York and was brought up by a Sicilian American mother and a Polish Jewish father - a delicious sounding culinary combination to me!

In her collection of 100 recipes, Sarna serves up contemporary variations of old favorites - showcasing the diversity of worldwide Jewish cuisine brought here by Jewish immigrants from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond.

In the introduction she notes her personal “ultimate” comfort food is a “steaming bowl of egg noodles, lightly buttered with a big dollop of cottage cheese on top and ton ton black pepper.” She writes that her father prepared that for her Sunday lunch because that’s what his father prepared for him. (In Poland, she notes, the noodles were homemade and the cheese was “pot cheese”.) I smiled because my mother never bought noodles; she always made them from scratch and pot cheese was easily available in New York City’s “appetizing stores”.

Chicken stock and soup are important basics in the book; stock is made from bones, while broth is made mostly from meat or vegetables. The bones create a thicker liquid. Along with legs, or vegetables. The bones create broth is made mostly from meat stock is made from bones, while important basics in the book;

New York City’s “appetizing stores”. In Poland, she notes, the noodles she had on hand.” Try her Smoky Vegan Shakshuka, Mexican Inspired Shakshuka or a Shakshuka Pizza - the “American-comfort food-meets Ashkenazi casserole”: Mac and Cheese Kugel!

Shakshuka rates its own chapter. This North African dish made from tomatoes, hot pepper or hot sauce and eggs arrived in Israel with Libyan and other North African Jewish immigrants. Sarna writes this dish is one of the most popular in the world. Shakshuka is an Arabic word meaning “all mixed up” and the world. Shakshuka is an Arabic word meaning “all mixed up” and

for classic Jewish chicken soup, Yemenite chicken soup (which includes minced ginger) and the Sephardic Jewish Greek Lemon and Orzo soup.

Kugel, a Triple Veggie Kugel, a Cakey Crunch Sweet Potato Kugel - and - the “American-comfort food-meets Ashkenazi casserole”: Mac and Cheese Kugel!

Stuffed vegetables have been staples of all cultures around the world and Sarna serves up some interesting combos; in addition to familiar stuffed cabbage rolls she includes stuffed eggplant, Syrian stuffed zucchini, stuffed onions (with pomegranate sauce) and two Israeli stuffed pepper recipes – one with meat and a vegetarian one from her friend who calls it “garbage peppers” because she uses up odds and ends of veggies in the fridge!

“Kugel”, which Sarna notes is predominantly an Ashkenazi dish, is a Yiddish word from High German. Early kugels were like baked bread dumplings; by mid-18th century they had moved on to noodle or potato kugels. Her “Modern” kugels include Pineapple-Upside Down Kugel, a Triple Veggie Kugel, a Cakey Crunch Sweet Potato Kugel – and the “American-comfort food-meets Ashkenazi casserole”: Mac and Cheese Kugel!

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6. Chowk and cabbage! Briskets, Wine Chuck Roasts, Flanken or make your own easy Gravlax (smoked salmon) and of course sweets. Lots of mouthwatering color photographs including “how to” techniques enhance the recipes and best of all - there are no long tedious lists of ingredients!

I’ve included a recipe from Sarna’s chapter on latkes; some people only enjoy them at Hanukkah – too bad. They’re easy to make and offer a resting place for all sorts of food combos in addition to the standard potato/onion versions. Enjoy this tri-veggie latke for new color and taste. I made the entire recipe and froze the excess in several portions since I only cook for one person.

Beet, Carrot and Potato Latkes - adapted from Modern Jewish Comfort Food by Shannon Sarna. Recipe makes 16-24 latkes

2 medium fresh beets, peeled 1 large carrot, peeled 1 medium russet potato peeled 2 large eggs 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour 1 teaspoon fresh thyme* 1 to 2 teaspoons fine sea salt** Vegetable oil for frying***

* I didn’t have fresh thyme – left it out. ** I’m not a salt fan and substituted a teaspoon of Bragg’s “Sprinkle” – 24 herb/spice” combo without salt. ***I used olive oil.

1. Cut peeled beets, carrots, potatoes in pieces for food processor grater. Grate coarsely in three or four batches. (I grated my veggies with a hand grater.)

2. Place grated veggies in bowl, add lightly beaten eggs, flour, thyme, and about 1 teaspoon of the salt (or substitute); mix all together.

3. Heat about one-quarter cup oil in large frypan on stove top - Medium-High

4. Fry 2-3 inch mounds of veggies until brown and crispy. I made the excess in several portions since I only cook for one person.

5. Serve warm – plain or topped with bit of sour cream and fruit; try applesauce/ sliced peaches etc.

Ruth Tabor, food writer for the El Paso Times for more than twenty-five years; wrote for Travestas, a Mexico City Travel/ Food magazine, Sabros, New Mexico magazine and numerous other publications.
Bruce Gordon was inducted into the El Paso Athletic Hall of Fame Class of 2022 at a ceremony at the Radisson Hotel on Wednesday, June 22. He was inducted as the posthumous candidate and was one of eight inductees. His wife, Erline Gordon, accepted his award.

“Coach” Bruce Gordon passed away August 28, 2016. He grew up in El Paso, and sports was a major focus in his life. He was involved in sports as early as elementary school. He played football at Sul Ross State University in Alpine but finished his education with a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in education from UTEP.

Bruce began his 33-year teaching and coaching career at Canutillo High School. He also was coached at Ross Junior High, Coronado High School, and Austin High School. In addition to coaching, Bruce taught biology, integrated physics and chemistry, and anatomy. Among his career highlights, Bruce coached over 30 all-district football players and over 185 district track champions.

Bruce’s Hall of Fame plaque will be permanently displayed at the Don Haskins Center at the University of Texas at El Paso...
The week of August 1st through 5th The Cherry Hill School teachers had the opportunity to participate in professional development offered by several professors from The Department of Education at UTEP. Dr. Jessica Slade has been instrumental in helping The Cherry Hill School move toward the implementation of Project-Based Learning. Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects and this happens in every class for two hours each day! The Texas State Standards are addressed through meaningful projects which provide opportunities for students to use critical thinking and problemsolving to explore all content areas. The teachers were also treated to presentations given by Dr. Denise Golding who modeled how to read aloud books with attention to the standards and Dr. An Song, whose active presentation, “We are Composers & Choreographers; Let's explore MATH in Music and Dance”, got the teachers up and moving!

In the beginning... the first words of Genesis have been on my mind a lot lately. It's the beginning of a new school year, soon we'll have the beginning of a new Jewish year and we also have a new Judaics teacher beginning at The J Center for Early Learning - Ms. Rachel Kimmelman. Ms. Rachel was born and raised in El Paso and is truly passionate about creating joyful Jewish experiences for her students. After all the creating G-d rested and blessed Shabbat so that’s where we’ll begin - with all our students helping to create the tablecloth we will use for Shabbat each week. We hope this will be a meaningful beginning to a year filled with laughter and learning.

With the Russian invasion intensifying and multiple locations under fire, support for the Jewish community is needed urgently. Jewish Federations have allocated some $40 million of the over $64 million we have raised to 35 NGOs operating on the ground in Ukraine and neighboring countries to support refugees and Jewish communities in their time of need. We are continuing to allocate funds based on the changing needs in the field.

Immediate and short-term needs that are being addressed include:

- Helping people make Aliyah to Israel
- Securing the local community and its institutions
- Maintaining critical welfare services
- Assisting internally displaced people in multiple locations.
- Providing medical equipment to the Ukraine Health system
- Securing temporary housing for people in transit
- Providing food, medicine, and cash for those sheltering in Ukraine
- Maintaining hotlines for Jews in the regions and their families in Israel

To donate and learn more visit: https://www.jewishfederations.org/crisis-in-ukraine2022#give
Borderland’s Cafe Europa - Shabbat Dinner at Congregation B’nai Zion.

El Paso Holocaust Museum - Tour de Tolerance

ElPasoConnect – Havdallah Dinner

Hadassah - Dine and Discussion
FACES & PLACES
AROUND OUR COMMUNITY

Congregation B’nai Zion & Temple Mount Sinai

Temple Mount Sinai – Food Festival

Jewish El Paso Call Session
Shofar Across Borders

Sunday, September 18 | 2 – 2:30pm

The sound of the Shofar breaks the quiet of a desert afternoon where two nations meet to bring in the New Year.

Join us – Live and In Person

Cesar Carrasco, Shane Wagman Romero – Co-Chairs

Registration required by Wednesday, September 14 to receive location

Jewish El Paso | www.jewishelpaso.org | 915-842-9554 | 7110 N Mesa St. El Paso, TX 79912