TIME OF CHANGE, TIME OF POSSIBILITY

The Society for Humanistic Judaism has embarked on a serious journey of self-examination which has the potential to result in great positive change. In early spring, with the then Executive Director, the SHJ Board of Directors decided to contract with a consultant to help clarify the vision and purpose of SHJ and to recommend new directions and structures for the Society.

Sadly, in May the editor of the journal, Humanistic Judaism, for more than 30 years, Ruth Duskin Feldman, died. Change is always difficult; sudden change can be disruptive. It also provides opportunity for growth.

The search for a consultant, chaired by Faith Oremland, is nearing completion. Even as we prepare this edition of Humanorah, the final selection is being made. The consultant will present a mid-project report during the Fall Board Meeting.

Guidance from a consultant, as well as from the membership, will help the Board make further structure and staffing decisions. Larry Lawrence, President of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, says that the SHJ Board, its officers and Rabbi Jerris are completely committed to expanding the base of involvement, as well as creating more transparency in SHJ.

A conversation with Larry Lawrence, Rabbi Miriam Jerris, and Faith Oremland may clarify:

Q: SHJ President Larry Lawrence, please tell us: How do you believe a consultant can help the Society?

LL: A consultant will help us take a fresh view of what we do and what’s possible for us. Our RFP formally stated our objective:

The SHJ is committed to ensuring the future of Humanistic Judaism and growing the Movement. To do that, we must strengthen the organization and become more effective in reaching and engaging potential new members and maintaining our existing member base.

Of course, we want to continue to build on SHJ’s success in organizing Humanistic Jewish communities; providing connections for secular Jews and intercultural families; celebrating Jewish life; speaking up on social justice issues, and working with other secular groups; publishing our Journal, newsletters, website, and our Facebook page and other social media.

Q: What is your vision for this project?

LL: I want the SHJ to find ways to make itself more visible and better known to “Jews of no religion,” and to those interested in Judaism for themselves or their children but unaware that a nontheistic alternative exists or who may have been part of a congregation in the past but temporarily moved on.

We need to create greater ways for people to connect with Humanistic Judaism, recognizing that so many potential members are independent thinkers who seldom commit to structured group activities. SHJ has great potential to keep Jews from being “lost” to assimilation, intermarriage, and other secular groups.

Conversation continues on page 2
A GOOD NEW YEAR TO ALL SHJ AFFILIATES AND AT-LARGE MEMBERS!
L'Shana Tova!

SHJ AFFILIATES

ARIZONA
Or Adam CHJ
Secular Humanist Jewish Circle

CALIFORNIA
Adat Chaverim, Valley CHJ
Kol Hadash CHJ
Pacific Community of Cultural Jews

COLORADO
Beth Ami, Colorado CHJ

CONNECTICUT
CHI, Fairfield County

D.C.
Macar, CSHJ

FLORIDA
CHJ, Sarasota
Congregation Beth Adam

ILLINOIS
Beth Chaverim, HJC
Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation

MARYLAND
Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah

MASSACHUSETTS
Kalah B’’aira, Boston CHJ

MICHIGAN
Ihe Birmingham Temple CHJ

MINNESOTA
Or Emet, CHJ of Minnesota

NEW JERSEY
Kalah Chaverim, NJ CHJ

NEW YORK
Beth Haskalah, Rochester SHJ
Kol Haverim, Finger Lakes CHJ
Ihe City Congregation
Westchester CHJ

NORTH CAROLINA
Kol Haskalah

OHIO
Humanist Jewish Chavurah, Columbus

OREGON
Kol Shalom CHJ

WASHINGTON
Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound

CANADA
Oraynu, Toronto, ON

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President: Larry Lawrence
Rabbi: Miriam Jerris
Editor: Deb Godden

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and other social forces. Sunday Assembly and pop-up gatherings of Jews show how people can be involved with Humanistic Judaism without necessarily being on monthly mailing lists, attending business meetings, or paying annual dues.

**Q: How can the membership help?**

**LL:** I look forward to understanding from an upcoming member survey what our members need from the Society, how they have benefitted from it (or how they feel it has fallen short), where they think the Society is going and where they hope it will go. We want to know about the best practices of our communities.

**Q: You say that your wish is to see SHJ becoming more transparent. What steps are you taking?**

**LL:** We can improve our transparency without a consulting project. At recent SHJ Board meetings, representatives of the communities and at-large Board members have said that they feel the Society has felt less participatory than it should.

So, the Board’s Executive Committee has resolved to share more decision-making with the full Board. The Exec will, whenever possible, analyze pending decisions and leave them to be resolved by the Board.

We are also working to simplify the SHJ’s budget and operating reports. These have become complex over the years, and increasingly baffling. The revised reports should show a more direct relationship between expenses and programs and strategies.

Finally, we are involving the Board in decision-making between its spring and fall regular Board meetings. We held our first-ever Board conference call in July to review proposals and lay the groundwork for the selection of the consultant. I am confident that these between-meeting discussions will improve the involvement of the Board, as well as the communities.

**Q: Rabbi Miriam Jerris, what will be your role in this? What do you expect of a consultant?**

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Conversation, from page 2

MJ: It’s a great time for the SHJ to seek out a consultant. I look forward to fresh eyes seeing the organization and fresh ears hearing the members. I embrace change and am excited by it. We are encouraging collaboration and the empowering of others to engage in work that enhances their abilities, interests and passions. We believe that this will help SHJ to gain the kind of vitality it needs. My role is to enable both the change and the empowerment of others.

Q: How might the restructuring or redirecting the Society affect your role as rabbi and your work with communities?

MJ: I have always loved my involvement with the communities. I enjoy helping communities grow and creating materials to support that growth. But becoming a rabbi is the realization of the dream I’ve had since I was Bat Mitzvah. I particularly enjoy the pastoral/ceremonial aspect of the rabbinate. Additionally, my work with the IISHJ, identifying, nurturing, teaching and supporting leaders and rabbis is the most exhilarating professional work I have ever done.

Q: Faith Oremland, what did the Request For Proposal (RFP) ask of potential consultants?

FO: The RFP asked the responders to provide their program design to achieve the SHJ objectives. Phase I of the project will focus on Organizational Assessment, Environmental Analysis, Evaluation of Comparable Institutions, and Solutions for the SHJ. Development and implementation of a strategic plan, to be priced separately, could come in Phase II.

Q: What is the committee looking for from the consultant?

FO: The consultant will demonstrate a clear understanding of the project; significant experience and skills to deliver successfully the project’s requirements; experience in providing creative and feasible solutions; comprehension of non-profit environment and challenges; consideration of the SHJ budget in terms of hours, schedule, travel, and cost; and also ability to work well with SHJ staff and Board members.

Q: Where did the committee submit the RFP?

FO: The Committee used recommendations from SHJ members who had prior knowledge of consultants who work in the area of non-profit organizational development and strategic planning, as well as the Annotated Resource List of Synagogue Consultants.

Q: What does the Board want a consultant to do?

FO: We want to get analysis and answers in four areas. The consultant will assess our organization through one on one interviews with at least 15 participants and a survey of the entire membership to identify its strengths, current challenges, and how to help us strengthen and become more effective.

The consultant will use the Pew Research data and other resources to help us understand the challenges facing the SHJ and the opportunities available given the current thinking on the future of secular groups, secular and "religious" Jews, and other religious groups facing declining membership.

The consultant will report on best practices of organizations such as the American Ethical Union, the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Sunday Assembly.

Finally, given the analysis and discussion with the Board, we want the consultant’s recommendations for the future of the SHJ:

• Where do we go from here? What should we look like? How should we be structured? Who is our market?

• How do we get there? What staff is needed? What type of leader should SHJ seek out to be its next Executive Director? What should the other staff do? What role should the Board members and committees play?

• What are the SHJ’s priorities? The consultant will create an implementation timetable showing the priorities.

The consultant will present a mid-project report and conduct a “mini-retreat” at the October Board meeting. The final report is due by the end of December, 2015.
Over the weekend of March 20-22, 50 HuJews teens, young adults and chaperones came together at Butzel Conference Center in Ortonville, Michigan to explore the theme of “Identities.” It was a remarkable experience as our young people from across North America renewed old friendships, made new friends. The Conclave opened with some ice-breaker activities meant to introduce the participants to each other, and to set the tone for the theme. Identities can be self-selected or they can be assigned to us; they can be singular or multi-layered; and they can be changeable or fixed.

A central focus was the Identity Wall, which consisted of different colored post-it notes on which a person could write “I am . . . “ filling in the descriptor. These could be filled out at any time over the weekend. By the end of the Conclave, two wall spaces were filled. Many of the participants took pictures of the wall, a sure indication that it resonated.

Rabbi Miriam Jerris led the innovative Shabbat program. Her approach was to provide textual and musical materials to groups of participants. Each group then chose the pieces that they wanted to use for their Shabbat, and ultimately presented to the entire Conclave. The thought and care, as well as creativity and ingenuity, that went into this program was amazing.

Plaster mask making acted as the thread through the three days. On Friday night, each participant made a mask of his/her own face (or they created their hand). Other people applied plaster strips to the third person’s face. These were set aside to dry overnight and painted on Saturday afternoon. They could be used to hide one’s identity; to express one’s identity; or to assume another identity. On Sunday morning, people shared and explained their masks. This art project allowed another means of expression, especially for those participants for whom a discussion might not otherwise work. Participants took their masks home at the end of Conclave.

Saturday morning was for community service. Our 11th and 12th graders and college freshman went to a food pantry in Flint, MI. Others remained at Butzel to make fleece blankets for an organization called Project Linus, and dog toys for an animal shelter.

The afternoon workshop was a text study and art project that explored identity. Using texts from the Torah, Bible, Talmud, Jewish poetry and Yiddish literature, small groups analyzed their relevance to the identity theme. A project of overlaying identities using clear plastic sheet protectors followed.

Rabbi Jeff Falick joined us to lead Havdala. The evening included a screening of a sing-along Wizard of Oz, and a talent show.

At the end, we held the big reveal to announce the site of Conclave 2016 in Chicago. The reveal was a huge success, and should be a part of every Conclave. Participants were excited to know where they would be going, and can start the buzz right away. The HuJews Facebook page already has comments about coming to Chicago, as well as their sense of post-Conclave identity (e.g. sad it’s over). I was privileged to be the Conclave coordinator this year, and have agreed to do so for 2016. The Conclave will be March 4-6, 2016 in Chicago. The young people have a sense of self and understanding of their theology/philosophy that I know I didn’t have at their age. The help and support of SHJ staff was invaluable. It is important that the adults in the room recognize which decisions are theirs to make and which can be delegated to the youth reps. The physical and emotional safety and security of all participants is of the foremost importance. Community service must remain a part of every Conclave to connect with the larger community and to impress on the participants the importance of giving back. The laughter, fun, friendships and enjoyment follow from being together.

By Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld
Photos by Aleya Schwartz
The two April Havdalahs hosted by Sherry Archer and Jane Goldhamer (Kol Shalom, Portland, OR), brought 28 members together, not just to celebrate, to visit, and to feast, but to engage in Social Action Committee-led discussions of current concerns that we might be able to address. These discussions required little leading: Guests were well into substantive, issue-heavy talk mid-meal. In this way, we participated in MACG's (Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good) "Listening Season" to discern members' concerns and where MACG should act.

KS discussions highlighted our concerns over financial inequality and stagnant wages, and the rapid increase of housing costs locally. Members noted local movements to raise the minimum wage statewide and minor local actions on wages, as well as local attempts to include affordable housing in the many building projects.

These concerns were similar to those of other MACG institutions, we noted, when the congregations, unions and civic organizations met to share results. It was decided to study and attempt to address the issue of affordable housing in the metro area, and a working committee was formed. KS is represented on that committee by Sherry Archer and Myra Himmelfarb. Committee members had already researched "inclusionary and exclusionary zoning" in housing, the Urban League's look at housing costs in its "Black Oregon - 2015" report, other local organizations focusing on the issue, and media attention to housing costs. Our recommended actions were taken to the MACG board July 6.

The rising cost of housing affects not only our low-income neighbors (and immigrant and minority neighbors), but our working children and often ourselves. A KS member, an employed woman, was recently notified the rent on her comfortable one-bedroom apartment is going from $745 to $1085! This shocking 50% rise in rent forces the decision: Move (if one can find affordable housing) or cut back on life's other necessities. Many local citizens are paying well over the recommended 30% of their incomes on housing, and many other families are doubled or tripled into one small unit. We hear from the Latino community that evictions are increasing. What to do? At its second meeting MACG's working group was joined by many other members of MACG institutions, including experienced community activists and members of First Congregational Church, now interested in joining MACG. This enlarged and highly energized group cited informed persons to assist us in determining what a citizens' group of MACG's size (25 organizations) can do to have a positive impact on this issue. Volunteers formed groups to interview builders, local leaders, and persons connected to city government and the state legislature.

The committee will soon ask for individual member support in the State Senate of HB 2564, intended to provide another level of protection against soaring housing costs.

By Myra Himmelfarb
Congratulations to the Presidents & Leaders of Our Affiliated Communities:

Arizona
Jeffrey Schesnol, Or Adam
Sandeep Binyon, Secular Humanist Jewish Circle

California
Jonathan Friedmann, Adat Chaverim CHJ
Jane Eisenstark, Kol Hadash of Northern California
Leslie Zwick, The Pacific Community

Colorado
Sheila Malcolm, Beth Ami Colorado CHJ

Connecticut
Steve Ulman, CHJ, Fairfield County

D.C.
Rahel Hanadari, Machar

Florida
Irwin Cohn, Cong. Beth Adam
Alice D’Souza, CHJ, Sarasota
Paula Creed, Humanistic Jewish Havurah of SW Florida

Illinois
Debbie Rusnak, Beth Chaverim
Sheila Sebor, Kol Hadash

Maryland
Elise Saltzberg, Art Starr, Baltimore
Jewish Cultural Chavurah

Massachusetts
Diana Lee, Mora Rothenberg, Kahal B’raira

Michigan
Charles Paul, The Birmingham Temple CHJ

Minnesota
Lisa Gardner-Springer, Janet Mayer, Or Emet

New Jersey
Craig Schlusberg, Kahal Chaverim, NJ CHJ

New York
Robert Goldstein, Beth Haskalah
Ellen C. Weiman, The City Congregation
Jonathan Joseph, Kol Haverim, Finger Lakes CHJ
Dmitry Turovsky, Westchester CHJ

North Carolina
Susan Davis, Jennifer Sessler, Kol Haskalah

Ohio
Ellen Rapkin, Humanist Jewish Chavurah of Columbus

Oregon
Eleanor (Elly) Adelman, Kol Shalom, CHJ

Washington
Erica Jonlin, Secular Jewish Circle of Puget Sound

Canada
Louise Sherman, Oraynu

AT BETH AMI
SPRING IS FESTIVAL TIME!

Spring 2015 provided several opportunities for little Beth Ami to participate in large Colorado events where we set up shop to share our values, programs and projects with the Humanistic and Jewish public.

Beth Ami members stepped up to the SHJ table at the May American Humanist Association national conference in downtown Denver. As the only Jewish organization, we attracted the attention of many Jewish Humanists, as well as SHJ members visiting from around the U.S.

We also participated in two exuberant community events at the Denver Jewish Community Festival (below) and the Boulder Jewish Festival, which each attracted thousands of visitors. To provide an activity while we schmoozed, youth and adults were invited to braid (like a challah!) dog chew toys made from strips of old t-shirts (re-use and recycle!) to either bring home to their pets or donate to the Humane Society as a mitzvah project. This allowed us to focus on our values-driven Jewish Family School activities, and have a great time with the children passing by.

We collected contact info from many festival guests, who are then added to our Friends List, receive the monthly Beth Ami newsletter, and hopefully visit us again!

By Sheila Malcolm, Madrikha
The new year of 5776 is also Kahal B’raira’s 40th anniversary and we plan a yearlong celebration. Our primary goals are fun festivities and while we are at it, increasing awareness of KB, reflecting on our history and planning for our future including our financial future:

- Acknowledgement of Past Presidents and their commitment to ‘making it happen’ for Humanistic Jews in Greater Boston.
- Focused programming on “KB Through the Years”: our values, historical videos, and our video version of “Ayfo Oree” on our KB YouTube channel.
- Create a time capsule (including art work and memorabilia), to be sealed at the end of the year and then opened on our 50th Anniversary.
- Weekend Scholar in Residence Program celebrating Humanistic Judaism, considering who we are, including taking part in Limmud Boston, Greater Boston’s Jewish Learning Festival.
- Music Themed Evening and Fundraiser at member’s home; desserts and music by KB members.
- Focused end of the year program on “the Future,” envisioning KB for the next 40 years.

Speaking of the future, we were thrilled when two of our teens returned from Conclave and wanted to lead our Sunday Morning Service. Jake and Miriam have been part of our Music Committee for some time and were already familiar with how our Sunday Services were organized. Perhaps their experiences creating Shabbat Services at Conclave helped them as well. They brought fresh ideas - new poetry, music and a take away card to help us remember our favorite things: people, places, food(!)

Past, Present and Future: 40 years and counting... Visitors welcome!

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**MACHAR CO-SPONSORS**

**WASHINGTON IMMIGRATION FILM FESTIVAL**

On October 22, Machar will sponsor a showing of two films followed by a discussion as part of the Greater Washington Immigration Film Festival. A group of Macharniks volunteered to preview films to be selected for the festival. Other sponsors of the festival include the Washington Ethical Society and most Unitarian Universalist churches in the area.

The festival will take place in many venues throughout the area from Oct. 22–Oct.25. Our venue is the Silver Spring Civic Center, convenient to parking and many restaurants. Movies include: Culture Clash, about the challenges facing second-generation Caribbean immigrants and No Sanctuary, which follows a mother and young daughter’s difficulties in their passage through the detention system to freedom.

All the films in the festival are of excellent quality and have not been previously shown locally. Details and a complete program can be found on the GWIFF website. Detailed printed programs will be available in the fall. This is a great opportunity both to learn more about the issues surrounding immigration to this country, and also to make Machar better known to the community.

*By Harriet Peck*
At the end of the school year Congregation Beth Adam, Boca Raton, FL, held a picnic to award certificates for student accomplishments. Students had a fun and educational year learning Hebrew, Jewish history, culture, and traditions. They voted on where to send their Tzedakah donations, which they collected during the year. A picnic followed with the parents, students, teachers and congregation members participating in the cooking and talking about the wonderful school year. It is a great time for all the parents, teachers and children to get together and schmooze. Out on the lawn the parents and students had fun with Bocce, horseshoes and football. It was warm and sunny and we all worked up an appetite for the picnic that followed. The highlight of that lunch as usual were the roasted giant marshmallows which were sticky but fun to eat. Hamburgers, hot dogs, steak and assorted veggies made up the main courses. The parents were relieved of the cooking chores as the children delighted in cooking the food and, in fact, also in doing the cleaning up. The students then participated in celebrating Israel’s 67th year as a state with flags and singing. Congregation Beth Adam’s Director of Education BJ Saul, the teachers, parents, and students are looking forward to an exciting new school year beginning on August 23rd, the beginning of the 21st year of our continuing operation.

By Irwin Cohn

Members of the Secular Humanist Jewish Circle of Tucson have met in two home-hosted groups this past June and July. The June meeting, at the home of Peter and Cathleen Becskehazy, was a poetry sharing where members brought poems they considered important and beautiful to read and discuss.

Our July Summer Salon, at the home of Richard and Mary Brodesky, was a round-table discussion on self-reliance. We chose the topic because of its importance in Sherwin Wine’s work and its relevance to the political situation today.

Members received a group of readings to use or not in preparing their reflections. We pledged only to discuss the documents if someone wished to do so. Our discussion dealt with Rabbi Wine’s teachings, the limits of Emerson’s famous essay, “Self Reliance,” the social contract, the web of life, resilience, and the changes in our ability to be independent as we age.

The SHJ Circle of Tucson’s Program Committee, led by co-chairs Susan Rubin and Becky Schulman with the help of Kent Barradee and Richard Brodesky, created this series to complement our larger functions such as our public lecture series and holiday celebrations with smaller, more intimate occasions where members are free to share ideas and feelings and thus become better acquainted. Our well received efforts are part of our evolving contemplation on how independent, creative people may remain autonomous yet give and receive from our local SHJ community.

By Richard Brodesky
Critical thinking is a core component of Adat Chaverim’s cultural school curriculum. This environment of freethinking led two students, twin brothers, to question the predetermined milestones of Jewish life. Specifically, they wondered whether a formal bar mitzvah ceremony in ultra-materialistic Los Angeles was in alignment with their goals and values. Underwhelmed by the social and ritual conventions, the boys created a meaningful alternative in collaboration with their parents and the school director, Cantor Jonathan Friedmann. The result, after a year of preparation and study, was Adat Chaverim’s inaugural B’nei Mitzvah Quest.

The Quest took place during Memorial Day Weekend of 2015 in a remote setting in California’s enchanting and desolate Mohave Desert. Modeled in part on the Native American vision quest, the two-day outing was not only an exercise in “roughing it,” but also a tangible passage from one life stage to the next.

The boys engaged in thirteen challenges, each with a basis in Jewish ethics and wisdom literature. These included guiding the blindfolded brother across a rugged trail, bouldering like ibexes of the Judean desert, shooting sling shots at tin cans containing sayings from Pirkei Avot, a hands-on lesson in permaculture farming, meal preparation, meditation in solitude, stargazing, and others. The weekend culminated with a tallit presentation.

The B’nei Mitzvah Quest was a resounding success for everyone involved. Adat Chaverim will be offering it to future students who desire a rite of passage that does not fit the conventional mold.

By Cantor Jonathan L. Friedmann, Ph.D.

The year-long celebration of the Kol Hadash, IL, Mitzvah Year (our 13th anniversary year) culminated with a gala luncheon enjoyed by more than 120 Kol Hadash members at the Arboretum Club in Buffalo Grove on Sunday, June 7. A delicious brunch buffet was followed by reflections from Rabbi Chalom and several members. Meanwhile, a spectacular raffle and silent auction was ongoing, ending in the exciting announcement of all winners. The event raised more than $10,000 for Kol Hadash.

We extend a tremendous THANK YOU to all who attended and donated goods and services to the raffle, those who bid on raffle and auction items, and to the tireless committee members who organized the day: David Hirsch (chair), Sue Addelson, Betty Gordon, Leora Hatchwell, Alisa Klein, Mike Lippitz, Stacey Max, Marcy Schumaker and Sheila Sebor. Thanks to our wonderful teen volunteers: Jonah Hirsch, Quinn Hirsch, Adam Kaz, Skylar Max, Rylie Max, and Zack Klein. Thanks are also due to our PR consultant Catherine Driscoll for her invaluable assistance. And a big thank you to Jim Jacobs, who donated the time and talents of his jazz band, the Jim Jacobs Trio. Here’s to our next 13 years!

By Mark Friedman
Photos by Bonnie Robertson
Rabbi Miriam Jerris wrote in the journal, Humanistic Judaism, Summer/Autumn 2013, that humanistic rabbinical training includes important principles, as being egalitarian, viewing authority as horizontal, valuing the individual, teaching truth, being committed to gender equality, and valuing the right of all people to marry the ones they love. We would add “seeing the joys in life.” By those standards, Rabbi Nehama Benmosche, Rabbi of Machar since April 2014, has been preparing to be a secular humanistic rabbi for a long time.

Young Nehama Benmosche’s first career interests were in the ethical and legal questions posed by human genetic manipulation. Though she was raised attending a Reform synagogue with one of the first female rabbis in the suburbs of New York City and attending Solomon-Schechter-style Jewish day school, she pleased her atheist grandfather when, in 2nd grade, she came home from school doubting that her decision-making was guided by God rather than by her own conscience.

Rabbi Benmosche graduated from Emory University with both a BA (majoring in Middle East Studies and Women’s Studies with a minor in Hebrew) and an MA in Jewish Studies. She then focused her work on Jewish education, and is finishing her EdD from the Jewish Theological Seminary. She was ordained as a Reconstructionist rabbi from the RRC in the suburbs of Philadelphia in 2010. She has long been interested in interfaith families, and served on the board and wrote a curriculum for The Interfaith Community, an organization for Jewish/Christian families in the New York metropolitan area.

She discovered the Society for Humanistic Judaism when she found a job posting for Machar’s part-time rabbi. She sought a job she wanted to do, not just one she could do, and says that being an SHJ rabbi feels like a good fit for her.

With the number of unaffiliated people on the rise, Rabbi Benmosche wants to explore how to engage some of them in Jewish life. The younger generations of US Jews often did not grow up with many family religious practices to then question or resist in the process of finding connection in Jewish secular culture and community. Rabbi Benmosche wants to work with Machar to determine for herself and for the community the reasons we should stay Jewish and maintain our connections. She believes that the SHJ and Machar stand at a critical place of potential connection for Jews. Her vision for the future of the movement stresses a need to serve members of the larger Jewish community who have left traditional forms of Judaism or never joined them because of a desire to live authentically in their secular beliefs, to educate their children and to celebrate holiday and lifecycle rituals. She brings considerable Jewish knowledge, insights, teaching skills and a fun-loving attitude to the work.

Rabbi Benmosche lives in both Philadelphia and Silver Spring MD. She married Terry Lubin in August 2015; they are raising their blended family of four adopted children, ages 11, 7, 4 and 3. We think the family photo on this page does a splendid job of displaying what Rabbi Benmosche brings to Machar.

By Marlene Cohen

Photo by Romina Hendlin
We wanted to do something unique and memorable to celebrate Rachel’s Bat Mitzvah. We sat down with Rabbi Jodi (Beth Chaverim, Deerfield, IL) and discussed the possibility of having the ceremony in Israel; this idea blossomed to include the Bat Mitzvah of my niece, Eleanor.

Rabbi Jodi connected us with her friend and colleague Rabbi Sivan Maas in Jerusalem; she is the head of T’mura, the counterpart to the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism in Israel. Over the course of the year, we planned, and Rachel skyped with Rabbi Maas. The skype sessions extended beyond reading her Torah portion and speech; they discussed the history of the Bar Mitzvah, Israel, Jewish identity and culture.

The result exceeded all expectations. Our party of 11 met Rabbi Maas at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem on Thursday, June 12. The museum is magnificent. It is a 20 acre campus that houses the most extensive holding of biblical and Holy Land archaeology, an art garden and Jewish Art and Life Wings. The Rabbi led us on a tour focusing on ancient Israel and Jewish art and life. The museum houses a synagogue wing that has four restored interiors of synagogues from Europe, Asia and South America. The girls researched the synagogues and selected which one they would like to hold their service. Rachel chose a beautiful synagogue from Suriname to read her Torah portion. Eleanor selected the synagogue from Italy to discuss her research project about several family members who were Holocaust survivors, telling their story. The setting was intimate and serene. Even though we were in a museum, the other visitors were completely respectful of what we were doing. We continued our tour to a section of the museum that housed menorahs from around the world. We sat in this beautiful room with glistening menorahs and Rachel gave her interpretation of the Torah portion. It did not end there; we left the museum and continued on to the Bat Mitzvah Seder with the Rabbi. We worked with Rabbi Maas to develop a Haggadah for our seder, which we held in a private dining room at the Jerusalem YMCA. The Haggadah contained blessings, lyrics and stories in addition to short speeches written from each of us to the girls. There was not a dry eye. In between the speeches our guitarist Shahar sang Israeli songs along with some Beatles tunes. The meal was traditional Israeli fare and the Seder was very festive.

This experience connected all of us closer to our Jewish roots and culture. I cannot thank Rabbi Jodi enough for making this happen; this life long memory would have not been possible without her and Rabbi Maas.

By Michele Wartell and Family, Beth Chaverim

Hannah Ulman, of the Congregation for Humanistic Judaism of Fairfield County, CT, had a standard Humanistic Bat Mitzvah with songs, readings, candle lighting, and Torah commentary. Her research topic, however, was more unusual. In her paper, Hannah discussed different coming-of-age ceremonies in different cultures and religions, and what these ceremonies meant to each culture. She described in depth the origins and practice of the Amish Rumspringa; the Pagan religion’s coming of age; the Unitarian Universalists’ Coming of Age Ceremony; the Catholic Confirmation and the Spanish Catholic Quinceanera; and the bar and bat mitzvahs of the more traditional Jewish denominations. Hannah touched on the practices of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists in different parts of the world. She then concluded with a description of the meaning of the Humanistic Jewish bar and bat mitzvah and what her own ceremony meant to her. Essentially, Hannah discussed the process of coming of age as she had her own coming of age ceremony. The ceremony was very meaningful, as it combined many important Humanistic Jewish values. She explored and learned from many different cultures. By coming of age herself, Hannah took the responsibility for her future into her own hands. Her research was thoroughly appreciated by those attending, and may be used in the future.

By Abby Ulman, SHJ Young Adult Liaison
In 2014-15, Machar’s newly reinvigorated Social Action Committee, led by Chair Peter Kahn, identified two focus areas: climate change and gun violence prevention. You can read the committee’s proposals, on which Machar members had the opportunity to vote and comment prior to board approval, on Machar’s website.

Our new focus on gun violence prevention was inspired in large part by Talia Appelman’s powerful May 2014 b’nei mitzvah presentation. On December 14, 2014, she and several other Machar members, traveled to Fairfax, Virginia for a protest in front of the National Rifle Association on the second anniversary of the school shooting tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary in Connecticut (see photo). On March 29, Talia and her mother Mimi Brody led Machar members in fun and informative Community Sunday activities (including a compelling PowerPoint and video presentation) following our Jewish Cultural School and Adult Education programs.

Member Michal Freedman was a leading force in the Social Action Committee’s decision to focus on climate change. The committee identified a local course of action for the global problem of climate change by proposing support for various initiatives in Maryland and Montgomery County, where many Machar members live. On February 8, Michal led Community Sunday activities (including a game inspired by NPR’s “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me”) to educate members about climate change issues.

Kudos to the Social Action Committee for focusing our attention on these critical issues. Their efforts have demonstrated that working together to repair the world can be both meaningful and fun!

By Kelly Hand, Machar Administrator

Congregation Beth Adam participated in a discussion group on various denominations of Judaism. Rabbi Silver, of Reform Congregation L’Dor V’Dor, organized the event, with participants from Reform, Reconstructionism, and Humanistic Judaism.

The audience consisted of many from Rabbi Silver’s Reform congregation, a good number of Beth Adam members and some unaffiliated Jews. I feel it was a worthwhile effort even though Conservative and Orthodox representatives chose not to be present. Rabbi Silver, who is well experienced in organizing groups such as this one, suggested that we have other such combined efforts touching on community activities with Jewish objectives. We will explore future endeavors as a way to promote both Beth Adam and Humanistic Judaism.

I made the case for Humanistic Judaism expressing our philosophical base with specificity on the daily lives of our members. I stressed the central theme of Humanistic Judaism that individuals are taking responsibility for themselves and their community, while honoring the culture, traditions and history of Judaism. It is at discussion groups such as this that Beth Adam is gaining exposure and receiving inquiries as to our philosophy and our meeting arrangements.

At the meeting several unaffiliated Jews indicated interest in both Beth Adam and Humanistic Judaism. We will outreach to those unaffiliated Jews by holding seminars and open door Shabbats.

By Irwin Cohn
In this time of new ventures, of turning to the future and a time of growth, I want to share with you how the Society for Humanistic Judaism is meeting rapid change.

The SHJ staff – Lisa Ferrari, the administrative assistant, and Jennifer Grodsky, the data base associate – and I have taken on greater responsibility to do the work of the SHJ during this period of transition. There is a learning curve, to be sure, and the three of us are collaborating well and enjoying the collaboration very much.

We are streamlining various processes within the office, which will enable the staff to spend even more time providing direct member service. We are pleased to be able to serve. I am exceedingly grateful to Lisa and Jen for their excellent work, dedication, and willingness to take on the challenge.

As we have recently announced, we have recruited two stellar individuals to serve as co-editors of *Humanistic Judaism*: Jeremy Kridel, rabbinic candidate, from Indianapolis, IN and Susan Warrow, candidate in the IISHJ leadership training program from Huntington Woods, MI.

Deb Godden, *madrikha*, from Charlottesville, VA, and former long-time secretary of the Society, has agreed to edit and produce this member newsletter, *Humanorah*. Thank you so much, Deb.

Jennifer Grodsky is producing *On the Move*, the SHJ E-news and I will continue producing *Kesher: Community Connections*, the SHJ member E-news.

We are delighted to announce that Carl Sagan is the SHJ 2015-2016 Humanistic Jewish Role Model. Alana Shindler from Kol Hadash Northern California, a member of the SHJ Membership Committee, has compiled resources for programming. If you discover more, please share them with us and we will add them to the role model section of SHJ Resources for Congregations on GroveSite.

Many people are change adverse. It is a reasonable response to change. However, having dedicated myself to Humanistic Judaism and the Society for more than four decades, I find that I am excited about what these next months will discover and uncover. I feel confident that, after this process, we will understand better your needs - the needs of our members - and be able to respond to you more effectively.

We have some nascent development of Humanistic Jewish community occurring in Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Houston. Let us know if you are interested in any of these communities or an organization in a different geographic area.

One of my goals in this article was to demonstrate our sincere efforts to create a broader, stronger team of volunteers and staff to deliver member services. We are aiming to create a larger group of individuals invested in what we have to offer and how to share those offerings with others. We will continue to share what we are doing as openly as possible with you all.

As we approach Rosh Hashana and the New Year, I extend my warmest wishes for a healthy and exciting 5776. I thank you for your support of and involvement in the Society and Humanistic Judaism.

By Rabbi Miriam Jerris

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**GOT EMAIL?**

Send your email address to info@shj.org and begin to receive the SHJ e-newsletters, *“Kesher: Community Connections” and “On the Move,”* with timely news about SHJ communities, the Society’s activities, and links of interest.
To the Pivnick Family
In memory of Ben
From The Society for Humanistic Judaism
Ron & Paul Creed
Jane Goldhamer
Roslyn Howser
Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki
Nancy Lezell
Shirley Lezell
Eleanor Peltz
Betty Steinlauf
Barry Swan

To Tom Weinberger
In memory of Mitzi Damizer
From Faith & Steven Oremland

To Rabbi Adam Chalom
Congratulations on your 10th Anniversary
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

To Susan Averbach
Congratulations on your rabbinic ordination
From The Society for Humanistic Judaism

To Ed Klein
Congratulations on your rabbinic ordination
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From Barry Swan

To Rabbi Steven Cardonick
In memory of your stepfather, Matt Cohen
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

To Dee Jarrah
In memory of your husband, Robert
From Howard & Nina Abrams
Patty & Allan Becker
Lori Berkowitz & Jim Weston
Ron & Paula Creed
Jodi & Rob Goodman & Family
Robin & James Hanks
Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki
Linda & Dennis Kayes
Alma Spickler
To Doug and Karol Ross
In memory of your mother, Alice
From The Society for Humanistic Judaism

Support Humanistic Judaism, Remember a Loved One.
SHJ Tributes for every occasion provide the programs we need.

To Gil Feldman
In memory of your wife, Ruth
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AFSCME Illinois Council No. 31
Eleanor & Lou Altman
American Federation of Teachers, Local #604
Appellate Bureau of the Connecticut of the
Chief State's Attorney
Marlene Cohen
Joan & Ron Fox
William & Joan Frazier
Andra & Mark Friedlander
Lauren Beth Gash
Shari & Richard Gelber
Rabbi Eva Goldfinger
Jane Goldhamer
Graff, Ballower & Blanski, P.C.
Hauser, Bizzo, LLC
Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki
Sara & Richard Kushner
Kai & Delores Coedel
Richard Mesiraw
Dori & Chet Mirman
North Suburban Teachers Union #504
North Suburban Teachers Union #1274
Faith & Steven Oremland
Trina & Tyrome Pickens
Barbara Rosen & Erica Sourian
Marilyn Ravers
Ellen Sheppard
Joan & Mort Silver
Barry Swan
Cameron Sweeney & District 219 Support Staff
Sharon Teefey

Thank You for Thinking of SHJ

To Deborah Rusnak
With deepest thanks for your gift
Of an oboe to Lora
From Lora Lewis

Family of Ann Black
In memory of Ann
From Kelly Hand

To Rebecca & Steve Cole
In memory of your father, Robert
From Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence Cohn
Henry & Sue Frehsee
Jodi & Rob Goodman & Family
Ronna & Harvey Heller
Jayne & Michael Krut
Sandi & Jeff Tammaroff

To Jeanette Katzman
In memory of Barney Katzman
From Gary Vandeputte

To Helen & Saul Jorman & Family
In memory of Pauline
From Miriam Jerris & Stephen Stawicki

To Nehama Benmosche
In memory of your father
From Rabbi Miriam Jerris

To Barry Swan
In honor of your special birthday
From Rob & Cynthia Goldstein

To Judy Wank
In memory of your husband, Monte
From Miriam Jerris

In memory of Len Cherlin
From Stan Friedland

In honor of Barry Swan
From Rennie & David Greenfield

In memory of Doree Samuels
From Gary Samuels

In memory of Marvin Klaman
From Carl & Antonette Carle

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YES! I would like to send:
an SHJ Tribute for a donation of ______ (minimum $5 US) or
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Please allocate tribute to: _________________________________ Fund.
Return to: SHJ, 28611 W. 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills, MI 48334

To: __________________________________________
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**To have a weekend of fun!**

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**Registration Due:**
January 15, 2016

**Late Fee:** $25

Scholarships available.

Questions? Contact Rabbi Jodi Kornfeld at rabbijodi@gmail.com or SHJ at info@shj.org, 248.478.7610