

On Your Doorposts Winter 2000

And Beyond Your Gates

Once Upon a Time...

Storytelling for the Jewish Family

Twenty-five children snuggled comfortably next to their parents or in their laps listening intently to a story. And though they had all heard the story before, this time it was different.

This time when the animals marched in pairs onto the ark, they did so to a tune that incited even toddlers to sing along. This time “Papa Noah” expressed his exasperation in Yiddish, as voices of various generations joined in a spirited “Oy Vay.” This time when the rain began to fall, the room filled with the sound of snapping and clapping created by dozens of hands – pint-sized and full-grown.

Through their participation, the children, parents and grandparents who filled the auditorium at Brith Sholom Kneseth Israel brought the story of the great flood to life. Their leader, Diann Joy Bank, says that such audience participation is the key to successful storytelling. “The more they



Storyteller Diann Joy Bank incites a spirited “Oy Vay” from Paige, Sallie, Corey and Zoë Wallis.

sing and clap and provide sound effects, the more they internalize the story and its underlying message,” says Bank.

Bank’s performance was part of Matzo Ball Soup for the Soul, BSKI’s twice-monthly professional storytelling series, open to the public and funded in-part by a grant from The Jewish Federation of St. Louis’ Shabbat Celebration Initiative. On this particular

Shabbat, families left the program with a Noah’s ark crafts

project, animal tunes in their heads,

and – perhaps most importantly – an understanding of mitzvot, of what it means to speak nice words and do nice things so God will send a rainbow – God’s smile upon the earth. “While the

Torah is being read upstairs sharing the story and values of our people, our participating families are learning about our heritage and values through story and song,” says Bea Sorkin who coordinates the program for BSKI. “It’s a Jewish experience they can’t get at Borders or Barnes and Noble.”

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Interactions: Programs that Work

For more than 5,000 years, the Jewish family has perpetuated our traditions. And in recent years, area synagogues and temples have made Jewish family education a priority. Each issue of *Doorposts* features family education programs that have successfully promoted intergenerational interactions in the St. Louis Jewish community.

Walk-Through Holiday Museum

From afar, you may have wondered about the children, teens, even parents seen hopping along a path of colored squares last month at United Hebrew Congregation. A closer look would have revealed that they were human game pieces, moving forward with each correct answer about Chanukah so they might – at the finish – rededicate the Temple like Judah Maccabee.

The game was part of United Hebrew's Walk-Through Holiday Museum, a hands-on learning center for families who want to enhance their understanding and home celebration of Jewish holidays. The display changes every few weeks, providing education through crafts, songs, games and family discussion. And visitors don't leave empty handed. Each display provides take-home blessings, celebration tips and recipes, as well as opportunities to participate in a relevant act of tzedakah. Want to set up a Holiday Museum at your congregation? Call Cheryl Whatley, (314) 434-3404.

Shalom Shabbat

Many of the participants at Bais Abraham Congregation's Shalom Shabbat program had never attended a traditional service before.

Nonetheless, nearly all of the 135 worshippers at the Kabbalat Shabbat service knew the words – or at least the tunes – to the psalms and prayers. Parents and children danced together in joyous celebration. And with great fanfare, families welcomed Shabbat into their

week and – more significantly – into their lives.

The comfort and inclusion that permeated the learner's service was no accident. Registered participants were prepared with a Shalom Shabbat kit, complete with information about Shabbat, crafts projects, recipes, family discussion questions, and a compact disc of music by Shlomo Carlebach whose tunes are an integral part of Shabbat worship at Bais Abraham. The service was followed by Shabbat dinner, storytelling and communal singing, all intended to enrich the family Shabbat experience. To learn how you can help your congregants welcome Shabbat into their lives, call David Harris-Gershon, (314) 721-3030.

Connecting to Israel

Once a month, the children at Congregation Kol Am's religious school have an extraordinary set of classmates – their parents. Together, they engage in Torah study, hear distinguished speakers, dance, sing and draw. And in the end both parents and children understand that Jewish education is a life-long journey.

It's all part of a program that began three years ago to provide an unthreatening arena for family education. On the second Sunday of each month, regular religious school classes are replaced by an intergenerational learning experience that each year follows a different theme. This year, participants are exploring their connection with the land and people of Israel, a unit their rabbi hopes will strengthen Jewish identity and – perhaps – culminate with a family trip to Israel. For more information, call Rabbi Estelle Gottman Mills, (636) 227-7574. ●

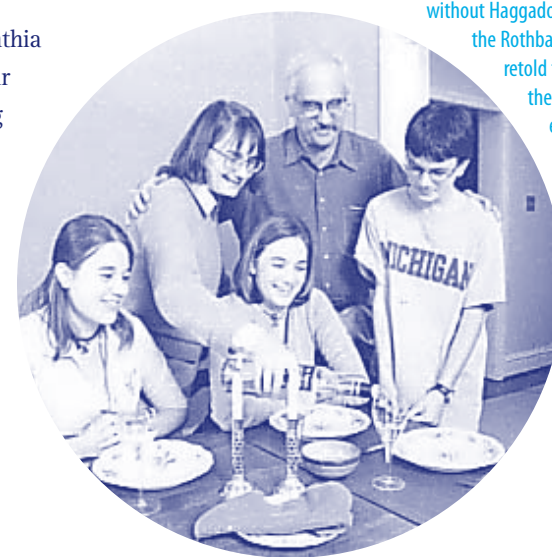
Planning a Family Vacation?

Don't Forget to Pack Your Judaism.

A momentary panic set in when Cynthia and Bob Rothbaum realized that their Haggadot were sitting on their living room bookshelf – 1,000 miles from where they were vacationing with their five children, ages 12-20. And though Orlando merchants sold stuffed Dumbos in 17 sizes, they weren't big on Passover wares. Even the grocery store near their rented condominium lacked a Passover section. Nonetheless, they were determined on that night to celebrate their ancestors' exodus from Egypt – with or without matzo ball soup.

A family brainstorm produced a substitute Haggadah, a collage of recollections in various teenage handwritings. As best they could, they told the Passover story. They named the 10 plagues, answered the four questions, and recited all the blessings they remembered. And over pre-roasted chicken and canned soup, they agreed that it was the most meaningful and memorable Seder they'd ever shared.

Though the Rothbaum's forgot their Haggadot, they had certainly remembered to pack their Judaism – to add a Jewish component to an otherwise secular vacation. And their experience need not be unique. "Families don't need to leave the country to travel Jewishly," says Rabbi Steven Mills, associate rabbi at Congregation Temple Israel. He should know. Three years ago, Rabbi Mills led several families from his congregation on a trip to Chicago – part of a unique family education program, Travel Me Jewish, funded by the Jewish Federation's Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust honoring the memory of Shirlee Green. Together, participating families explored Jewish sites, visited Jewish museums,



In an Orlando condominium without Haggadot, the Rothbaum family retold the story of their ancestors' exodus from Egypt.

participated in congregational worship and learned how to create a Jewishly meaningful family travel experience.

Certainly some cities lend themselves well to Jewish travel. New York, Los Angeles and Chicago all have esteemed Jewish museums and rich Jewish histories. But nearly every city has Jewish treasures. Even some of the themes at Disney World, Rabbi Mills says, offer teachable moments – opportunities to show that our Jewish values have relevance in everything we do.

Infusing Judaism into a family vacation need not be overwhelming. The Brodsky Library has dozens of travel guides highlighting Jewish landmarks, museums and other places of interest. And a phone call to a city's Jewish Federation can answer questions about worship services, kosher restaurants and community events.

What to pack? For weekend travelers, Rabbi Mills suggests bringing Shabbat candles and a kiddush cup. Families planning a vacation over Passover may also want to pack their family Haggadot. Then again, perhaps their Seder will be more memorable without them. ●

Once Upon a Time...

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Judaism is largely based on and communicated through oral tales. The stories of our most sacred text are read aloud three times weekly. Our most observed Jewish holiday, Passover, is designed to tell the story of Jewish redemption. And each time we pass a mezuzah or recite the *Ve'ahavta*, we are reminded to tell our children the stories of our people.

"Many believe that the highest expression of Jewish spiritual life is communicated through story," says Rabbi James Stone Goodman. "Pages of a book separate the hearer from the speaker. Storytelling is like having a conversation with someone. You're brought into each other's space in an intimate way."

Rabbi Goodman has incorporated storytelling into many of the spiritual activities at his congregation, Neve Shalom. Three years ago, Neve Shalom instituted Circle of Jewish Storytelling, a program that teaches parents and children the art of communicating Jewish tradition and family history. Funded during its first year by Jewish Federation's Henry and Gladys Crown Charitable Income Trust honoring the memory of Shirlee Green, the program brought families together for a Melaveh Malkah, a Saturday night ritual to extend Shabbat. Explains Rabbi Goodman, "The Shabbas Bride loves stories and songs. Through our storytelling, we strive to delay her departure."

And for parents who are timid about their storytelling abilities,

storyteller Barbara Raznick says, "Just do it. Don't worry about being perfect. Your kids just want to hear you do it." She should know. Each month, dozens of toddlers and their parents flock to her PJ Story Time and other storytelling events held at the JCC Marilyn Fox Building and at the Brodsky Library where she is the executive director. Her colleague Diann Joy Bank agrees. "People have sacrificed their lives to save our Torah, because it is the story of our people.

Our children need to know these stories, the stories of their own families, and the values taught by both. Then, perhaps, when they see a rainbow, they will think about what might have caused God to smile upon the earth." ●



Have we got a story for you. . . Storytelling events for families in our community

Matzo Ball Soup for the Soul
10:30 a.m.
2nd and 4th Saturdays of each month
BSKI Congregation, 1107 Linden Ave.
For more information, call (314) 725-6230.

Melaveh Malkah at Jacob's Pillow
Six times per year on Saturday evenings
Neve Shalom, 1040 Dautel Rd.
For times, dates or other information, call (314) 863-4366.

PJ Storytime
6:45 p.m.
January 18 and periodically throughout the year
Saul Brodsky Jewish Community Library
12 Millstone Campus Dr.
For more information, call (314) 432-0020.

Pre-School Storytime
1 p.m.
First Wednesday of each month
JCC Marilyn Fox Building, 16801 Baxter Rd.
Co-sponsored by the Saul Brodsky
Jewish Community Library
For more information, call (314) 432-0020.

Pre-School Storytime
1:30 p.m.
Second Wednesday of each month
Saul Brodsky Jewish Community Library
12 Millstone Campus Dr.
For more information, call (314) 432-0020.

Contact your congregation for information about other family storytelling events.

Ideas for Tu B'Shvat:

Bringing the Outdoors In

*"As my ancestors planted for me,
so too shall I plant for my children."*
Taanith 23a

Brisk January temperatures rarely conjure memories of nature walks or gardening. Yet, this January 22 coincides with the 15th day of Shvat – the day, according to our sages, that trees no longer draw nourishment from the rains of the previous year and begin to be fed by the rains of the new year.

Fear not. You don't have to brave sub-zero windchills to celebrate the birthday of the trees. From the warmth of your home, you can add meaning and memories to your family's Tu B'Shvat celebration. Here are a few ideas:

Cover Your Table

The Kabbalists of Safat covered their Tu B'Shvat seder tables with a white cloth decorated with myrtle branches, flowers and greenery, and scented with rose water. Your family can follow in their tradition. Lay sandpaper under a large white cloth or sheet, and use crayons to draw pictures that represent nature and ecology. Press hard with the crayons. Happy with your designs? Now make them permanent and washable by laying a paper towel over them and ironing the wax crayon into the cloth.

A Tu B'Shvat Mitzvah Project

Tu B'Shvat reminds us to fulfill the obligation of planting. And though your back yard may be frozen, the soil in a flower pot is not. Use washable paints, finger paints, glitter, or even stickers to make inexpensive flower pots into works of art. Fill them with philodendron or other low-maintenance plants, and deliver them to residents at a nearby nursing home.

Curl up with a Tall Tale

Use books and videos to teach your children about trees. No doubt, they also will prompt meaningful conversations about ecology and respect for our environment. The following selections are available through CAJE or through the Brodsky Jewish Community Library.

- *Pearl Plants a Tree*, by Jane Breskin Zalben; pre-school - first grade
- *Listen to the Trees*, by Molly Cohen; a collection of poems, stories, cartoons and biblical texts for children of all ages. An accompanying parent's guide offers ideas for projects, outings and further reading.
- *Grandpa's Tree*, video produced by the Jewish National Fund; 24 minutes
- *Trees for Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, video produced by the Jewish National Fund; 13 minutes ●



Looking Ahead:

Jewish Family Education in the 21st Century

Our Torah instructs us to perpetuate our heritage, to faithfully teach our children at home and on our way. But what about those parents who don't know the story of our people or how to teach their children about Jewish customs? Or parents who have a strong Jewish upbringing and are eager to enrich their family's religious practices?

Enter Jewish family education, a bold response to recent challenges to Jewish identity and continuity. Since it began as a new approach to Jewish education in the 1980s, its programs have defied convention, bringing educational instruction to the home, the park or even the zoo. They have empowered parents to become the primary teachers for their children. And they have opened the doors of our congregations and institutions to families looking to learn and grow together. "Our board members used to ask where the young people were," says Rabbi Solomon Agin of Congregation B'nai El. "Now they know. Our family education programs have brought many of them back to synagogue life."

Now a mainstay of congregational and community programming nationally and in St. Louis, family education has

proven itself not to be a fad. In fact, the field is growing at such a rate that its greatest challenge is recruitment, retention and training of quality family educators. "In the 21st century, these educational entrepreneurs will be charged with augmenting proven success stories with programs that meet the needs of families with teens and young adults," says Joan Wolchansky, director of Jewish family education for Central Agency for Jewish Education. "They also will look to incorporate the internet and other technology. And they will reach more and more families with the message that Jewish education is a life-long journey, that parents can be powerful role models when they study with their children."

It's a message that makes sense to Steve Singer, who chairs Jewish Federation's family education Crown Grants program. "Since the days of our patriarchs, Judaism has been about families," he says. "It's inconceivable to think that we can pass on our traditions any other way."

For more information about Jewish family education, contact your congregation's family educator or education director, or Central Agency for Jewish Education, (314) 432-0020, ext. 3760. ●



Central Agency for Jewish Education
12 Millstone Campus Drive
St. Louis, Missouri 63146

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For additional copies of Doorposts, or to add your name to the mailing list, call Joan Wolchansky, (314) 432-0020, or email <jwolchansky@cajestl.org>

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What's New with You?

What innovative family education programs are taking place within your doorposts and beyond your gates? Send us your success stories, and we'll publish as many as possible in future issues of Doorposts.

Fax or email your success story to
Joan Wolchansky: fax (314) 432-6150
e-mail <jwolchansky@cajestl.org>

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