

News from Remember Us

In this issue:
Remember Us and
Yom Hashoah
Commemorations

Spring
2008



"So long as we live they too shall live, for they are part of us as we remember them"

Remember Us Plans for the Future

Earlier this year the Remember Us staff completed a three-year strategic business plan. The main theme of the plan is securing an enduring future for this concept of Holocaust remembrance. We invite you to read excerpts from the Executive Summary, on page 2.

The plan describes three layers of organization. The first is a national Board of Directors who will be the stewards of the Remember Us

concept into the next generation. The first invitations have been accepted. In our Fall newsletter we will introduce to you the committed people who will guide the future of Remember Us.

The middle layer of the organization is the small core staff that has worked together to establish the concept nationally in more than 250 synagogues and day schools.

The broad base of the plan is our

stakeholders and regional partners. We envision that in each locality, and each country, partners will disseminate the Remember Us concept, work locally with each other on program enhancements, and connect the Project to local funding to sustain it in their region. This process has already begun. Please read about the Wisconsin Remember Us Initiative, below. ■



The Silver Bracelets: "I Will Remember"

Recently Remember Us heard from teacher Keren Azoulay of Temple Emanuel in Worcester, MA. She gives students who participate in the Remember Us Project silver bracelets inscribed with their Bar/Bat Mitzvah date, their name, the name, birthdate, age, place, and date of death of the lost child they've chosen to remember, and the quote "I will remember."

Keren reports: "This has become an amazing addition to their bar/bat mitzvahs and lives. Some of the children haven't taken their bracelets off for months. I am so proud and honored that we have had the privilege to work with you, and teach my students that they can always make a difference. The entire congregation has embraced your vision, and Remember Us has become a source of pride for the Temple Emanuel community." ■

First Regional Partnership Established, Generates New Ideas

The Wisconsin Remember Us Initiative was launched this Spring. It is a partnership of synagogues, agencies, a day school, and a foundation that will ensure involvement of the next generation of Jewish children in Holocaust remembrance in Wisconsin.

This development in Wisconsin is a replicable model for regional partnerships around the country, a key part of the Remember Us plan for the future. It transfers "ownership" of responsibility for the concept to the community level, where synagogues, schools, and funders provide institutional continuity.

Two new features of the program were developed during the site visits. First, each rabbi and educator indicated a desire to build deeper layers of meaning and engagement on the students' participation in Remember Us. The tenor of the ideas was cooperation among synagogues to provide enhancements by working together. Ideas ranged from a facilitated reflective post-bnai mitzvah meeting, to visits to the local Holocaust museum, to undertaking projects collectively in the names of the remembered children. The local agencies will coordinate these efforts.

A solution to a pressing need of the Jewish community also emerged from the conversations. See the sidebar story on Yom Hashoah commemorations.

Gesher Calmenson, Founding Director of Remember Us, was hosted in Milwaukee by two Jewish agencies. The Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations is a stand-alone agency headed by Paula Simon. The Holocaust Education Resource Center is part of the Coalition for Jewish Learning, and is led by Bonnie Shafrin. *Continued on page 3*

Status of the Remember Us Project

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to children who are preparing for bar/bat mitzvah to connect with the memories of children who were lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah.

The Project works with all denominations. Congregations across the country and around the world are participating.

More than 7,750 children in 253 congregations and schools have accepted the invitation to remember individual children as they are being called to the Torah.

Participation grew by 40% again in 2007, in terms of both participating synagogues and number of participating students. ■

From the Remember Us Three-Year Strategic Business Plan

Judaism is approaching a unique threshold, the emergence of the first generation that will not know Holocaust survivors. The Remember Us Project was conceived in 2003 as a response to the inevitable passing of the final survivor generation. The question we set out to answer: how will our children bear this legacy?

In a unique re-framing of the Holocaust encounter, the Remember Us Project makes remembering the Holocaust an opportunity for empowerment and redemption. At the time of bar/bat mitzvah, we invite each Jewish child to remember one child lost in the Holocaust before having the opportunity to be called to the Torah, and to act in his/her name.

To date approximately 18% of all Reform and Conservative congregations in the United States have been recruited to this process. The program has been endorsed by the full spectrum of Jewish denominations.

Holocaust memory had been destined to become institutionalized in museums and books. Remember Us keeps memory active and alive at the community level. The staff recognized the residual traumatic effects of the Holocaust in American Jewish families, and the need to provide children with a realistic yet positive framework as they take up the Holocaust legacy.

Remember Us started as a grassroots project, with one bnai mitzvah class. To date we have recruited 250 synagogues in 24 states and 4 countries. Participation grew by 40% in 2006 and 2007.

The services of Remember Us are provided without charge, as part of the strategy to gain wide acceptance in the Jewish community. The Project has been sustained by a combination of general operating grants, special purpose grants, and unrestricted donations. Approximately 80% of our funding is provided by foundations. All supporting foundations have renewed our grants at least once. Overall costs divided by the number of children served will remain constant at \$36 per child over the three years as the Project expands nationally and globally.

Now we are working to ensure enduring commitment to personal responsibility for Holocaust remembrance at the synagogue level. In order to accomplish our goal, Remember Us will grow into a self-sustaining national organization able to recruit and retain the next generation of qualified staff. This is a three-year strategic business plan to accomplish this overall goal. The key steps in this process are:

- Stewardship of the concept through a tax-exempt corporation governed by a national board of directors
- Strategic partners to carry on the concept at the community level
- Ongoing participation by at least 35% of American congregations, and introduction in six overseas Jewish communities.

During the life of the Project we have developed significant assets:

- A responsive and responsible stakeholder community. Working through participating synagogues and families, we are developing strategic partnerships around the country. They serve three purposes: regional dissemination, linkage to local funding, and Board nominations.
- A resource base in the participating communities. Voluntary donations from families and congregations account for 18% of our income, and the percentage is growing monthly.
- An active web presence, which brings us a steady stream of new families who introduce us to new congregations.
- Operational experience. We are a lean, focused operation with minimal staffing, miniscule overhead, and rock-bottom operating costs. ■



Remember Us Contributes to Community-Wide Commemorations

Jewish communities everywhere are concerned to bring more young people into their Yom Hashoah commemorations. Recent developments show that Remember Us has a role to play in accomplishing this.

In shaping the Wisconsin Remember Us Initiative, it was agreed that children's participation in Yom Hashoah would be a fundamental element of participation. From the outset, children will be primed to add their participation to the community-wide event. The Holocaust Education Resource Center gathers names from the local Jewish community of young relatives who were lost and are being remembered by local families. These names will be distributed to participating children. The Remember Us staff created a special remembrance memorial document for the community. It will be used as the Memorial Page in Wisconsin, and children will bring their individual pages to the community-wide Milwaukee Yom Hashoah commemoration.

In a related development, a participating parent in Los Angeles requested support from Remember Us for a Yom Hashoah commemoration at her daughter's high school. Many of the participating children would not be Jewish. The mission of Remember Us is restricted to providing the names of lost Jewish children to living Jewish children preparing for bar/bat mitzvah. However, a solution was found. We provided them with names from our archives that had already been given to Jewish children elsewhere. This is the report we received:

The day exceeded, really, our greatest hopes. All of the 200 names provided by the Remember Us Project were voluntarily taken on. I was so touched by each child, Jewish, Asian, African-American who approached our table and took this invitation to personally memorialize one child in their heart and in their home. I will never forget their open and softened faces as they approached, and their earnest intention as they gathered materials on actions they could become involved in.

Beginning this Fall, we will be working with participating communities to help develop strategies for bringing more children to community-wide events through their participation in Remember Us. ■

Stories of Remembering

Finding Relatives in Argentina

"I just wanted to give you a brief idea of how the Remember Us Program impacted our family. After being given the name of a Holocaust victim, I immediately began researching her family. I got good information from the Yad Vashem website, and from there I searched for any relatives I was able to locate in the vicinity of where she had lived, in France. I put out several emails, and to my surprise and delight, there was a response from a cousin, who then passed on my emails to the daughter of Regine's sister. From there, we began contact, traded photographs, and got to know each other through our writing. Because their family was in Buenos Aires, it was difficult to imagine getting together. However, we kept them informed as Emma's bat mitzvah date approached. We also sent photos following the occasion.

For the party, we created a board with photos of Regine with copies of the transport information that I obtained from Yad Vashem. For the service itself, we included a chair, a tallit, and a prayer book up on the bimah with Emma as we considered Regine becoming bat mitzvah that day as well. She was certainly acknowledged by the rabbi and by Emma in her speech.

For Regine and for Emma, we gifted them with having their names inscribed in the perpetual book of B'Nai Mitzvah in Israel.

All in all, this was an eye opening experience as to the realization that so many children did not have the opportunity to celebrate this special rite of passage. In some small way, we were able to bring her into our hearts and make a stronger connection to those who perished. Thank you for bringing us this wonderful opportunity." ■

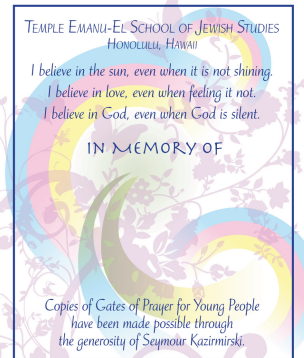
Children Remembered through Bookplates

The community at Temple Emanu-El in Honolulu, Hawaii has been working on a very special project of their own, under the direction Rabbi Peter Schaktman. A very generous member and son of Holocaust survivors, Seymour Kazimirski, donated funds for the purchase of new siddurim for the children and young people in the congregation. The Rabbi thought it would be fitting to put a bookplate with the name of a lost child inside each siddur.

Rabbi Shaktman writes, "The idea was mine, but we could not have done it without Seymour's support. Like most Jewish educators we struggle with how to present the Holocaust to religious school students of tender age. It was my belief that by gently exposing our students to the Shoah in this way, we would both educate them and honor the memory of those who had perished."

Remember Us has provided the names for the bookplates. Each time a child uses the prayer book, he or she will be honoring the lost child inscribed inside.

For more information about the bookplates project, contact Rabbi Schaktman at www.shaloha.com. ■



"I Didn't Want Him to Be Alone"

Gesher Calmenson writes: Last month I visited my cousin Elsi in Venice, California. She's 86 and lives in handsome HUD housing right on the oceanfront. Elsi's participation in Jewish communal life is mainly through her senior center. Her mother, Rose, was featured in the documentary "Number Our Days."

We were sitting at her dining table and "caching up." She asked me about my work. I explained about Remember Us. I asked about her family. She walked across the living room to a side table and brought back a picture frame. There were pictures of her grandchildren, single portraits and a group shot. Up in the right top corner was a different picture, clearly from a different place and time. I said: "Who is this boy? Is he in our family? I don't recognize him." Elsi answered, "Oh, no, his picture was on a mailing from the Museum of Tolerance. I couldn't throw it away. I just wanted him to be with other children." ■



First Regional Partnership *Continued from page 1*

Working together, the two agency heads arranged for meetings with the rabbis, cantors, and educators at each of the Milwaukee area's Conservative and Reform synagogues. They also arranged for a presentation to the leadership at the Milwaukee Hebrew Day School.

The funding for the initiative comes from the Helen Bader Foundation, which made a grant to MJCCR to support the Initiative. Progress was reported in person to the Foundation at the end of a three-day visit.

Finally, Gesher Calmenson was interviewed at the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* for an article that will appear this Spring in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah special edition. ■



Remember Us

The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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NEW Participating Communities

The **Remember Us Project** welcomes the following congregations to the Project. May they go from strength to strength!

Temple Kol Ami, Scottsdale, AZ
B'nai Horin – Children of Freedom, Los Angeles, CA
Beth Jacob Congregation, Oakland, CA
Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA
Temple Aliyah, Woodland Hills, CA
Temple Shalom/Neshama Center, Colorado Springs/Aspen, CO
Congregation Har Hashem, Boulder, CO
Temple Shalom, Colorado Springs, CO
Temple Israel, Lake Mary, FL
Congregation Ahavas Yisrael, Maitland, FL
Hebrew Day School, Maitland, FL
Congregation of Reform Judaism, Malone, FL
Beth David Congregation, Miami, FL
Congregation of Reform Judaism, Orlando, FL
Congregation Ohev Shalom, Orlando, FL
Temple Ohev Shalom, Baltimore, MD

Congregation Kehillath Israel, Brookline, MA
Temple Beth Zion, Brookline, MA
Congregation Mishkan Tefila, Chestnut Hill, MA
Agudat Achim, Leominster, MA
Temple Emanuel, Newton, MA
Temple Shalom of Newton, Newton, MA
Temple Emanuel, Oak Park, MI
Central Reform Congregation, Saint Louis, MO
Temple Judea of Manhasset, Manhasset, NY
Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, New York, NY
Park Synagogue, Cleveland, OH
Congregation Beth Israel, Portland, OR
Tiferet Bet Israel, Blue Bell, PA
Temple Sinai of Sharon, Sharon, PA
Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston, SC
Congregation Tiferet Israel, Austin, TX
Congregation Shearith Israel, Dallas, TX
Anshai Torah, Plano, TX
Temple Beth Shalom, Spokane, WA ■