

News from *Remember Us*

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NYBR Partnership
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Fall/Winter
2009

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



Remember Us
The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

About Remember Us

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to each child preparing for bar/bat mitzvah: *remember* one specific child who was lost in the Holocaust, and *act* for the good in memory of that child. We provide the names, and suggest ways for young people and their families to express their commitment to memory: dedicating their Torah reading, doing *mitzvot* and *tikkun olam* in the name of the child, lighting *yahrzeit* candles, etc.

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Current Status

11,485 children have received names from Remember Us, in more than 400 congregations in 34 states and 6 countries. Participation is voluntary. There is no charge. The concept has been endorsed by all Jewish denominations.

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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Memory and Inspiration

Each of us has the opportunity to write a new chapter for the life of a lost loved one, a chapter about the good that is done *b'shem*—in his or her name. Through this active engagement with our past we who remember create for ourselves lives of value and meaning, and for our loved ones a legacy of inspiration.

This can be true in any relationship, and at Remember Us we help our children remember, one at a time, the one-and-a-half-million children who were murdered in the Holocaust.

These brief lives are inspiring a new generation to take up the torch of memory and empowerment. Completing this process of remembering all the children will take a century. In this issue of *Remember Us News* we share new forms of remembering that inspire action. They span from embellishments of the most ancient rites, to use of the newest technology. They each transmute past sorrow into present meaning and future hope. We offer them for the inspiration you may find in them. ■

Pilot Project with March of the Living International

Teens who pass through the gates of concentration camps on the 2010 March of the Living International trip will be carrying with them the names and biographies of individual children who were lost in the Holocaust, obtained through Remember Us. Selected March of the Living International cohorts from cities around the U.S. are partnering with Remember Us to add this personalized dimension of memorial to their experience. The names will be on cards behind the living children's ID badges, hanging over their hearts. The Remember Us concept that memory is fulfilled by action is being incorporated into the March of the Living curriculum. Depending on results of the pilot project, all future March of the Living International participants may be taking names of lost children back to the camps, in an affirmation of the resilience of life. ■

Students Create Memorial Web Sites

Two students preparing for bar/bat mitzvah created web sites dedicated to remembering individual children who were lost in the Holocaust. A young man in Florida, Adam Berliner, created a web site to tell friends and family about plans for his *Continued on page 2*

Adam's Bar Mitzvah About Adam On location got mitzvah? remember us project

remember us project

Shimon Rekhnitzer

A NAME we shall never forget

Remember Us the Holocaust B'nai Mitzvah Project invites every child who is preparing for a bar/bat mitzvah to remember a child who was lost in the Holocaust.

I remember: Shimon Rekhnitzer

Shimon was born in 1931. He lived in Frankenkirchen, in the Burgenland district of Austria. His mother's name was Nekhama; his father's name was Aharon. Shimon died in the Shoah at Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943. He was 12 years old. (May he rest in Peace) As I prepare to become a Bar-Mitzvah I think of

Shimon
as well as other Jewish children who could not become B'nai Mitzvah.

Shoah Victims Find Place of Rest, At Last

(A note from a friend of Remember Us may inspire a new tradition in the Jewish community —Editor.)



“As my family carefully selected words for my Grandpa’s gravestone, we suddenly realized that none of his family had a grave.

My grandfather, Israel Lisenker, was an orphan and a widower at 30. His parents, brother, first wife and baby son were brutally murdered in the Shoah. After surviving a severe gunshot wound, he joined the army and fought the Nazis—with major scars to prove it. Luckily for me, he remarried and raised a beautiful family.

The night he died there was a half-city blackout, as if all of San Francisco were in mourning. Staring out into the sea of darkness in a room with a breathless man, I imagined what Olam Haba—the world to come—might look like. I envisioned a large feast where everyone you loved, who has died before you, welcomes you. I saw a beautiful table, set by my Grandpa’s mother and surrounded by his father, brothers, family, and friends.

I tried to hold onto that image as we picked out the coffin, as we buried him, and when it came time to choose the gravestone. My grandmother comforted us, reminding us that, at least, we would have a grave to visit. Just like my Grandpa’s family fate, her parents and grandmother didn’t have a burial plot. How could they? No one knows exactly when or where the Nazis killed them.

And so a new tradition was born in our family. Engraved on the back side of Grandpa’s tombstone are the names of our family’s Holocaust victims. Each time we visit his grave, we remember them.” ■

—Mariana Roytman-Schiffner

Web Memorials Continued from page 1

upcoming bar mitzvah. As part of the site, Adam included a page about his participation in the Remember Us Project, including information on the child he is remembering, Shimon Rekhnitzer z”l. Other pages give information about Adam and his family, his mitzvah project, and details of the bar mitzvah, all presented through lively design and graphics assembled from various sources. To connect with Adam’s page on line, go to www.remember-us.org/ideas.shtml and click on Adam’s link.

In Los Angeles, Emma Peretz chose three aspects of Holocaust remembrance for her mitzvah project at Temple Beth Am. All her activities generated content for the web site she created. Emma made a web page in memory of a child lost in the Holocaust, Ruti Hakel z”l. In the course of her research into the short life of Ruti she was able to find and contact living relatives in Israel and she includes her correspondence with them. She also interviewed a survivor in Los Angeles, and learned the story of how Sonya Sobol was able to help save the life of her friend Betty. This story is also told on a web page. And, finally, Emma did a fund raising campaign in support of two Holocaust-related organizations, the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project. She requested that all gifts be given to these two recipient agencies, and created the very ambitious goal of a total of \$18,000, which she was able to exceed. Here is what she wrote:

I have chosen the Star of David (“Magen David”) to represent your generosity. The Star of David is composed of 6 triangles completely surrounding the core. Each of the 6 triangles will represent 1,000,000 of the Jews killed in the Shoah. Every time \$1,000 is raised, one triangle of the Star of David will be “lit” on the website. Once \$6,000 is raised, all of the triangles surrounding the core will be bright with light. We can then start filling the core. While my goal is that the core be filled with \$12,000 (for a total of \$18,000), please know that the core has unlimited room for your gifts. ■

From the Board President

Samara Hutman’s Welcome to the Board

“Remember Us programs ask us and guide us to use the work of remembrance as a transformational act that strengthens, fortifies, and spiritually nourishes the living—our children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews—as we pay tribute and deep profound respect to each individual life that was taken.

“This horrific, endlessly tragic, endlessly potent, and outrageously unfathomable piece of not-so-far-away history draws me like an electrified moth to a magnetized flame. The question I ask, and the reason I am here today is: who would I have been in that time and that place. Given the opportunity, would I have had the courage and the righteous

guts to risk my own small nucleus of loved ones in the service of righteousness. So many did. Too many did not. Who would I have been?

“Righteous work requires side-stepping everyday demands. Stepping out of the persistent current of the lovely and the mundane, holding your breath longer than you think you can, longer than is comfortable, risking the loveliness of the moment for the larger greater good, for the unknown and indeterminate long run. Doing more than you think you ought or can. More than would even seem sensible simply because you must. Who would I have been? Who am I now?

“My hope and prayer for all of us is that this year manifests our collective goodwill and spiritual support for this blessed work and this blessed organization.” ■

Generations of Memory Help Shape the Future

Last year Rochel Blachman, an interested parent in Los Angeles, brought the Remember Us concept to several Los Angeles synagogues. Earlier this year, her mother, Ester, passed away. Ester was a survivor of the Holocaust who had lost her entire family. In honor of her mother's passing, Rochel asked for donations to be made to Remember Us. Now she is preparing for her own daughter's bat mitzvah.

At her bat mitzvah Rochel's daughter, Cayla, will be remembering her grandmother's younger sister, Brandel Altman, who died in the Holocaust. The Remember Us staff researched the family and located Brandel and additional family members in the Yad Vashem records. Rochel sent us this poignant letter:

Thank you for the lovely letter you sent regarding the donations made to Remember Us in my mother's honor and memory. I felt that Remember Us was a perfect organization to direct donations to in memory of my mom, and I am amazed and so pleased with the generosity of some of my friends!

Cayla's Bat Mitzvah is only months away, so it is time for us to request her partner and start some research. I want to talk to you a little about our choice first. Since my mother passed, Cayla and I have decided that we want to select my mom's little sister Brandel as her Remember Us partner. There is a special memory we all have about my mom and Brandel because every time we heard my mom talk about her Holocaust experience, she told the same story:

Brandel was with her, the only two family members still together, when they arrived at Auschwitz. My mom was sent into one line and survived, and her little sister Brandel was sent into another line and went to the gas chambers. My mom always said, "If only I could have pulled her into my line, she would have survived." Of course, we know her guilt was not rational nor should she have felt any guilt at all for the Nazis murdering her innocent sister. Nonetheless, that was my mom's story—which she told repeatedly for many, many years. Honoring Brandel's memory as part of Cayla's Bat Mitzvah will be a "mitzvah" for our family.

My mom was born in 1920 in Belchatov,



Ester Blachman, survivor of the Lodz Ghetto and Auschwitz, with her four daughters. Pictured (from left) Rochel, Marsha, Ester, Terri, and Blanche, whose Hebrew name is Brandel, named for Ester's sister. (Left) Cayla Blachman, the next generation, who will remember Brandel at her bat mitzvah.

Poland, one of three daughters to Peretz and Trana Altman. Her older sister was Sara, she (Ester) was next, then Brandel, and then a younger brother—the only boy—Shaya. I think Brandel was two or three years younger than my mom.

Belchatov was not that far from Lodz, the ghetto where my mom's family went to before being dispersed to different camps and/or death sentences. My mom was the only survivor of the entire family. Two of her cousins survived—Azriel Altman and Jack Altman. Azriel now lives in Israel (again) after living in the United States for many years. Jack, who is 80 or so, lives in Dallas. Jack celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at age 75. He was studying for it when the war broke out but was never able to actually have it—until he was a senior.

Even though I do not know exactly at what age Brandel died, I do know that Brandel was a child who lost her young adulthood and her future at a very young age. She was most likely about 12 or 13 in 1935 when Jews started to lose their identity and hope of a future. Giving her memory some life again, as part of Cayla's Bat Mitzvah, will honor my mother and her family.

Thanks so much – Rochel Blachman

All donations made to any organization in someone's memory are a way to add meaning and value beyond someone's passing. Remaining mindful of these connections adds to the culture of memory. We are grateful to Rochel and Cayla for making Remember Us another instance of this memorial process. ■



A Tallit for Remembrance

This lovely tallit is the handiwork of Rebecca Simon, a fabric artist whose daughters, Mollie and Jessica, wanted to do something special to commemorate the two girls they remembered at their Bnai Mitzvah in June of last year.

The two girls lost in Shoah were Miriam Veitzenberg z"l and Josette Arrovaz z"l. In honor of Mollie and Jessica's Bnai Mitzvah and to fulfill the commandment of *hiddur mitzvah*, beautification of the mitzvah, Rebecca created this prayer shawl worn for her daughters' ceremony. Mollie and Jessica participated in the remembrance by making fabric squares that were sewn onto the garment.

But the story does not end there. Mollie and Jessica have invited other students at their temple who are remembering lost children to make fabric squares that can be sewn onto the tallit. The first student to take up their invitation was Sarah Fridovich-Keil at her Bat Mitzvah last year. She remembered Rochel Levy and has added a square of her own.

The Simon family would love to see more future Bar and Bat Mitzvahs at their shul take part in the Tallit and add a square to remember a child. ■

Meet the Growing Remember Us Staff

In seven years the Remember Us Project has reached over 11,000 children, and continues to operate with a small staff working the equivalent of 2.5 full-time employees. We take this opportunity to introduce you to the team whose hard work and dedication keep the concept growing and vital.

Gesher Calmenson



Gesher Calmenson, Executive Director, founded the Remember Us Project in 2003, as a response to the inevitable passing of the survivors of the Holocaust. He writes, "A young person's encounter with the Holocaust can be an opportunity for empowerment and increased Jewish commitment." He is Education Director Emeritus of a synagogue school and completed a Fellowship in Jewish Family Education. He served as Chairman of the Regional Educators Council, Bureau of Jewish Education, San Francisco. In addition to his work with the Remember Us Project, he also mentors bar/bat mitzvah classes, tutors special needs and gifted students, and consults with religious schools.

Eleanor Cohen



Eleanor Cohen has been the Project Administrator of Remember Us for three years. "Other than raising my children and grandchildren, this is the most spiritually rewarding work I have ever done in my life," she says. Long active in the Jewish community, she has served as a soloist and music coordinator for her congregation, volunteered on the board of directors of several Jewish organizations, and taught religious school and adult education classes. Before coming to Remember Us, she worked in management positions in the savings and loan industry, construction, and legal fields.

Emma Fredgant



Emma Fredgant, a resident of Oregon, is an active participant in planning the Remember Us Project. She remembered a child, Sonia Gordon z"l, at her bat mitzvah last year. "The Project really helped me feel connected to my ancestors who died in the Shoah," she says, "and continuing that feeling through working with Remember Us is wonderful."

Marcy Pluznick-Marrin



Marcy Pluznick-Marrin is Coordinator for Remember Us, responsible for fulfilling the name requests by B'nai Mitzvah students and their families. She also works in the areas of outreach and donor recognition. President of the Board of Directors of Congregation Shomrei Torah in Santa Rosa, California, she has helped create and oversee development of Chaverim, a county-wide Jewish teen program, and has served on steering committees for community organizing projects as well as for a synagogue Torah-writing project. "As Jews, we need to find some way to move forward, having suffered the horrific experience of the Holocaust," says Marcy, whose children participated in Remember Us for their B'not Mitzvah. "This project offers a way to heal one person at a time."

Paula Simon



Paula Simon recently retired as the executive director of the Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations. She is now using her expertise in Jewish community service, systems and structures to develop relationships with national organizations, denominations and affiliate groups for Remember Us. Among her many accomplishments, she created a community part-

Barbara Tobin



Barbara Tobin, MPA, is Treasurer of the Board of Directors of Remember Us and a consultant for projects and strategic planning who has been active with the organization since its founding. She has a personal connection to the Holocaust: her grandfather's sister, Cora Berliner, worked in Berlin on the Kindertransport. Despite invitations from family in America, she stayed in Germany and died (it is believed) at Bergen-Belsen. Barbara has always felt connected to this great aunt she never met, and feels her work for Remember Us is a way of continuing Cora's work.

Cora Tobin



Cora Tobin began her involvement with Remember Us as a participant; she remembered the name of a lost child for her Bat Mitzvah. Now, she works on the project itself as an administrative assistant. "I am honored and thrilled that I can continue to support Remember Us, helping other children have the same meaningful experience during their B'nai Mitzvah as I had for mine," she says.

nership between the Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations, the Holocaust Education Resource Center, and Remember Us. She also initiated a wide range of Jewish education programs in Milwaukee schools, including an ongoing program to bring teachers from Wisconsin to Washington D.C. to learn about the Holocaust at the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Paula received an honorary doctorate from Hebrew Union College in 2004, recognizing her 25 years of service to the Jewish community.

New York Board of Rabbis Partners with Remember Us

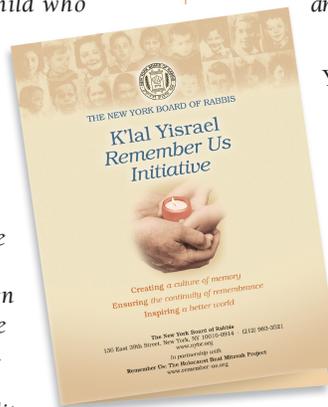
Remember Us is proud to announce a new partnership with the New York Board of Rabbis, the Klal Yisrael Remember Us Initiative. NYBR is the largest interdenominational rabbinical group in the world.

In a letter supporting the introduction of the Remember Us Project in the New York area, Rabbi Irving Greenberg wrote:

As long as Jewry is alive and Judaism is vital, we continue to create a culture of memory. The New York Board of Rabbis partners another program, another ritual of life and memory – the Klal Yisrael

Remember Us Initiative. Each young person preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah is invited to remember one specific child who was lost in the Holocaust. They were cut off before they could grow up to become doctors, Rabbis, artists, entrepreneurs, workers, healers for the world. In recovering their names and stories, we make these martyrs part of the ongoing lives of our children and grandchildren. Thus we turn cruelty and oppression into a source of energy for compassion and responsibility. We show that love and memory can over-

come hatred and evil, amnesia and apathy. We prove that the covenant of liberation and dignity goes on.



Karen Dubrow of the New York Board of Rabbis, writes “Remember Us is a wonderful example of how we can continue to honor those we have lost and bring together our community in a most meaningful and lasting way. We applaud your project’s ability to turn what begins for many as an educational experience into so much more—committed Jewish action.” Seventeen

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New Participating Communities

Remember Us welcomes the following communities at which the Remember Us Project is made available to bar/bat mitzvah students. May they go from strength to strength.

Canada

Ontario

Thornhill
Westmount Community Shul & Learning Centre

United Kingdom

Surrey
Long Ditton
Kingston Liberal Synagogue

United States of America

Arizona

Scottsdale
Congregation Beth Israel

California

Encino
Nachshon Minyan
Torrance
Congregation Beth Torah
West Hills
Shomrei Torah Synagogue

Colorado

Centennial
Congregation Beth Shalom

Connecticut

Stamford
Temple Beth El

Florida

Jacksonville
Congregation Ahavath Chesed

Pompano Beach
Temple Sholom

Illinois

Glencoe
Congregation Am Shalom

Long Grove
Congregation Beth Judea

Iowa

Des Moines
Temple B'nai Jeshurun

Maryland

Bethesda
Kehila Chadasha
Greenbelt
Mishkan Torah Synagogue

Massachusetts

Newton
Sunday School for Jewish Studies

Taunton

Congregation Agudath Achim*

Somerville
Havurat Shalom

Minnesota

Rochester
B'nai Israel Synagogue

Nevada

Las Vegas
Temple Beth Sholom*

New Jersey

Closter
Temple Emanu El*
Freehold
Freehold Jewish Center*

Livingston
Temple B'nai Abraham

Westfield
Temple Emanu-El

New York

Dix Hills
Dix Hills Jewish Center*
Dobbs Ferry
Greenburgh Hebrew Center

East Hampton
The Jewish Center of the Hamptons*

Ellenville

Ezrath Israel*

Flushing
Temple Gates of Prayer*

Hollis Hills
Hollis Hills Jewish Center*

Middletown
Temple Sinai*

New York
Adereth El*
Fifth Avenue Synagogue*
Temple Shaaray Tefila

The Actors' Temple
Orangeburg
Orangetown Jewish Center

Port Washington
The Community Synagogue

Westbury
Community Reform Temple

White Plains
Woodlands Community Temple

Ohio

Beachwood
Congregation Shaarey Tikvah

Pennsylvania

Gladwyne
Beth David Reform Synagogue

Warrington
Tiferes B'nai Israel

Texas

Houston
Congregation Beth Yeshurun
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

Humble
Temple Beth Torah

Plano
Chabad of Plano

Virginia

Hampton
Rodef Shalom Temple

* K'lal Yisrael – New York Board of Rabbis

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New York Board of Rabbis

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new synagogues in the New York area are bringing the Remember Us concept to their congregants and bar/bat mitzvah families through the Klal Yisrael Initiative.”

More than a century old, the New York Board of Rabbis consists of approximately 700 rabbis serving the greater New York area as well as representatives throughout the world. It recently appointed a liaison for an office in Israel.

Clergy in the New York area interested in learning more, please contact Karen Dubrow at 212-983-3521 or kdubrow@nybr.org. Families are invited to go to www.nybr-remember.org to receive the name of a child to remember. The name will be sent directly to your family. ■