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B’nai B’rith International 2017 Leadership Forum and B’nai B’rith Europe Convention

Prague, Czech Republic
Sunday, October 29 – Wednesday, November 1

The B’nai B’rith International Leadership Forum will convene, along with the B’nai B’rith Europe Convention, in the Diplomatic District near the historic city center, the Prague Castle and the famous Charles Bridge. Prague’s historic center is listed in the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Register.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE
- Cruise on the Vltava River for the opening session and reception dinner
- Boutique hotel close to Prague Castle and historic city center attractions
- Pre and post tours are available!
- Details to come!

Questions? Email us at: leadershipforum@bnaibrith.org

For more information, visit: http://www.bnaibrith.org/leadershipforum2017.html
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Editor’s Note

From the ashes of the Holocaust, there arise very few events worth celebrating. In this issue of B’nai B’rith Magazine, we offer two: Journalist and author Dina Gold recounts her successful efforts at restitution for the commercial building the Nazis seized from her family in prewar Berlin, resulting in a monetary award, a memorial plaque and a continuing effort to hold accountable the German insurance company complicit in the theft. Meanwhile, in the Dutch city of Tilburg, academic Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld began researching the history of the home he bought in 2000, only to learn it had been built and inhabited by a Jewish family until 1940, when the Nazis overran the Netherlands. He and the family have reconnected. As writer Rita Rubin recounts, he has written a deeply detailed book about this astonishing reconnection, and Bijsterveld and family members have met on both sides of the Atlantic.

Elsewhere in this issue, we explore heavily subsidized niche tourism in Israel, especially for visitors far beyond the age for Birthright. Mark D. Olshan, B’nai B’rith associate executive vice president, looks at the complexities and future of healthcare and the Affordable Care Act under the current administration and suggests ways to improve rather than replace the system.

—Eugene L. Meyer

The Other Schindler, Aided by B’nai B’rith

By Cheryl Kempler

N early 30 years before Steven Spielberg’s cinematic masterpiece “Schindler’s List” shined a light on Oskar Schindler’s heroism, B’nai B’rith’s Traducion Lodge in Buenos Aires rescued his wife, Emilie, from certain death.

A former spy and a Nazi, Oskar Schindler engaged in bribery and deception in order to save the 1,200 Jewish men and women working in his munitions and enamelware factory close to several concentration camps in Poland. Near the end of the war, as even more Jews were murdered before the camps were liberated, he was even able to persuade those in power to move both the factory and the laborers to Czechoslovakia. Assisting her husband, Emilie Schindler played her own part, negotiating with dangerous black market criminals to obtain massive amounts of food, medical supplies and clothes, and tending to the needs of more than 1,000 individuals in her care.

Miraculously, the couple saved many Jews and survived themselves but used all their money and possessions to do so. Supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a relief organization, and those they had kept alive in the postwar years, the couple ran a farm in Argentina, but, when it failed, Oskar left Emilie to return to Germany in 1957. In 1962, as Oskar was being honored in Israel, Emilie was alone, homeless and starving in San Vicente, near Buenos Aires.

Learning of Emilie’s situation, the German immigrants who had formed the Traducion Lodge committed to her lifelong care. The men began to provide a small monthly stipend and set up a foundation that paid for a house built for Emilie in San Vicente on land donated by a Traducion member. In 1975, further assistance came through the fundraising efforts of New York’s Joseph Popper Lodge, made of men and women who lived in Czechoslovakia before the war. Eventually, both the German and Argentine governments also granted stipends to Emilie.

Enjoying a quiet existence with her many cats and dogs, Emilie was looked after by B’nai B’rith’s volunteers, who paid her visits, cultivated her garden, fetched her groceries and took her to doctors’ appointments. The house continued to be her residence until she moved to a care facility in 2000, a year before her death at age 93, in Strausberg, Germany. Her husband died in 1974, also in Germany, and is buried in Jerusalem.
**Stolen Legacy**

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Dina Gold was a BBC staff producer, assigned to cover post-unification elections in Germany. But while there, she couldn’t help but investigate a property stolen from her family by the Nazis—a building that once housed a fur company founded by her great-great-grandfather.

*By Dina Gold*

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**House of Memories**

In 2000, Dutch historian Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld and his spouse bought a house in Tilburg, in the Netherlands. After learning that it had been built and lived in by a Jewish family named Polak, he had questions and sought answers about the fate of his home’s prewar owners. This led him on a journey across nations and generations, reconnecting him and the family.

*By Rita Rubin*

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**Beyond Birthright**

While Birthright Israel’s free trips for youths to the Jewish state are well known, a few organizations, like Jewish Women’s Renaissance Project and Honeymoon Israel, are subsidizing visits by older adults who also wish to have the experience.

*By Jen Lovy*
Sometimes progress can be measured only incrementally, and views of success have to be adjusted. This is especially true on the international stage, where global politics and policy can seem to be moving so slothlike that you question if they are moving at all.


Both organizations have a reliably anti-Israel record.

The Human Rights Council has only one standing item when it meets three times a year: to consider Israel’s human rights record. Under the general agenda “Item 7,” the council, made up of such human rights luminaries as China, Iraq and Venezuela, routinely castigates Israel.

And so, B’nai B’rith attends the council’s spring session as a matter of routine. We meet with representatives of dozens of nations, asserting the bias and unfairness of this two-tiered system and offering solutions on how to even the deck that is so currently stacked against Israel.

Since voting blocs are endemic to the Human Rights Council system, we rec-
ognize that success is going to come one country at a time so, we make our case one country at a time. Our delegation met with senior diplomats from the United States, Brazil, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and dozens more.

We are particularly encouraged by the opportunity to develop relationships with several African nations. We had quite a few positive meetings. And Israel is making it a priority now to have economic and agricultural outreach to many nations. These first-hand connections, the face-to-face meetings and diplomacy, are vital to increasing fairness.

Two recent developments in the U.N. universe give us a renewed sense of purpose. The new United Nations secretary-general, António Guterres, seems particularly attuned to anti-Israel bias. In March, Guterres adamantly and forcefully rejected a U.N. committee report that called Israel an “apartheid regime that dominates the Palestinian people as a whole.” At the same time, the ambassador to the United Nations from the United States, Nikki Haley, also unequivocally condemned the same report and demanded its withdrawal. It seems that the message we have been delivering to the world body for decades—that Israel is systematically singled out, usually at the expense of vital human rights issues facing many in the world—may finally be resonating in important halls and offices.

UNESCO also presents itself as anti-Israel. And we have long challenged the organization’s twisting of history into a political tool wielded with venom against the Jewish state. UNESCO has been quick to adopt the Palestinian narrative that outright erases documented historic connections of Jews to Judaism’s holiest sites: the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.

The rewriting of history is not just a problem for Jews. Christians and Muslims also lose when history is viewed as malleable.

In March, at meetings with staff liaisons and with UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, B’nai B’rith leaders provided expert analysis and guidance, demonstrating the irrefutable, thousands-year-old ties of Jews to the land as well as suggesting ways for UNESCO to publicly recognize Israel’s history.

As we reiterate the unfair treatment of Israel at the Human Rights Council, UNESCO, the General Assembly and basically all U.N. affiliates, we are seeing slow but possibly measurable progress in eliminating unfairness. We are not complacent. Often, one step forward finds two steps back someplace else. But each time we whittle away at bias, it’s a success.

B’nai B’rith is honored to be part of the solution. Though it might be slow in coming, we see our efforts can pay a dividend. ©
This is a year of anniversaries for Israel and the Jewish people. Among them are the 120th, marking the First Zionist Congress; the centenary of the Balfour Declaration; Israel’s 69th anniversary, and the 50th anniversary of both the Six-Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem.

We are accustomed to round-number anniversaries, or those that end in 5. But Israel’s 69th should not be lost in the shuffle of activity this year. We need to pause and remember the difficult days between the Holocaust, the end of World War II, David Ben-Gurion’s reading of Israel’s Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948, and the war that followed against Israel’s invading Arab neighbors.

On V-E (Victory in Europe) Day 1945, European Jewry had been nearly exterminated. Survivors struggled to re-establish their lives where they had lived, or in displaced person camps. Many had lost their families, their homes, their livelihoods. Mandatory Palestine, ruled by the British, was indeed hatikvah, the hope, with its Jewish-majority cities, its self-defense organizations, its farms and factories, its growing cultural vitality.

But getting there was the problem. Notwithstanding the horrendous devastation of Jewish communities and the horrors of the concentration camps—all of which were known to the British authorities, the doors were closed. Instead of being treated as the victims they were, they were prevented from setting foot on their sought-after haven.

Hard-hearted and politically motivated would be charitable terms for what the British did, but much harsher descriptions would be far more apt. Tramp steamers and old cargo ships crammed with survivors bearing concentration camp tattoos on their arms were stopped, some within sight of Israel’s coastal towns and cities and turned away, their passengers were then interned in detention camps on the island of Cyprus, which the British also controlled. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee provided assistance to the internees, but day-to-day life was difficult.

There were nine such camps. Among the 54,000 Jews who populated them from 1945 to early 1949 were my cousins and my wife’s uncle. The motion picture “Exodus” depicts life on Cyprus, with detainees living in corrugated tin huts and tents, their sole protection from the harsh Mediterranean sun. And there they waited, uncertain and undeniably anxious about their future.

Earlier this year, when B’nai B’rith International President Gary P. Saltzman and I participated in the annual Conference of Presidents leadership mission, we spent a day in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. Israel enjoys excellent relations with the island nation, and we heard remarks from its president, Nicos Anastasiades, and other high ranking officials. From the presidential palace, we proceeded to the site of the old British Military Hospital, where one of the most heartwarming ceremonies I have ever witnessed took place.

We learned that, in that hospital, many of the 2,200 babies were born to Holocaust survivors on Cyprus between 1946 and early 1949. A monument to those births, a project initiated by a survivor-detainee, has been erected on the site. Speaking to us that day were the Israeli ambassador to Cyprus, Yael Ravia-Zadok, and the Cypriot defense minister, Christoforos Fokaides.

In his remarks, Fokaides noted “that hope can be found even in dark times. It is for this reason that Cyprus is, as depicted by Yad Vashem, a corner of hope, marking the start of a new beginning.” He said that local residents shared food and clothing with the detainees, and as some of those interned have noted, “the grace exhibited by local leaders was moving.”
Cypriot communities toward them contributed to the start of the restoration of their shattered belief in what is good in humanity."

During the ceremony, the Cypriot and Israeli flags fluttered in a late winter breeze, blowing under a cloudless sky. Since then, I have thought often about the births of those babies to parents who only months before had experienced the worst possible horror known to mankind. Despite their detention, they would not be denied their future. Nor would their fellow Jews in pre-state Israel, who would declare a sovereign Jewish state a short time later.

In this year, when we celebrate the realization of the Zionist dream, let’s think of all those who made it happen, and flourish, including those detained—and born—in Cyprus, on their way to the Jewish homeland.
RECLAIMING A STOLEN LEGACY:

PROVING PROVENANCE OF A BERLIN BUILDING

BY DINA GOLD
In the early 1990s, Dina Gold began to seek restitution for her family’s stolen building.

Courtesy of Dina Gold
That’s what East German protesters were shouting as they used hammers to chip away at the Berlin Wall in late 1989. I remember it clearly. At home, in London, I watched these momentous events on television—the end of Soviet Union’s control of Eastern Europe and the collapse of Communism.

As East Berliners streamed toward the bright lights of West Berlin, childhood memories flooded back to my grandmother Nellie and the stories she had told. She was long dead, but I vividly recalled trips to art galleries and museums in London with her—usually ending our day in a patisserie opposite Harrods department store. Over coffee and cream cakes, she reminisced about her glamorous life in prewar Berlin, telling me, “When the Wall comes down, and we get back our building in Berlin, we’ll be rich.”

The building she longed to reclaim had been the commercial headquarters of the H. Wolff fur company, founded by my great-great-grandfather Heimann Wolff in 1850. By the early 1900s, it had become one of the largest fur companies in Germany. As a child, my mother was allowed to bounce up and down on the piles of pelts stored in the basement. “You can jump on the rabbit, but you mustn’t jump on the ermine and you mustn’t jump on the mink!” her father warned.

My mother’s childhood had been opulent. The family had lived in a grand villa, at Conradstrasse 1, in the upscale Berlin suburb of Wannsee. Their home was a 10-minute walk from the mansion where, in January 1942, Nazi bureaucrats had held what is now known as the “Wannsee Conference” to coordinate plans for the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.”

In summer 1933, not long after Hitler came to power, Nellie fled with her husband, Herbert Wolff, and three children—my mother being the eldest—to the British Mandate of Palestine. From a life of luxury in prewar Berlin to near penury thereafter, she never gave up hope of one day reclaiming “the building” and being able to live in comfort again. In 1936, aged 14, my mother had been sent alone to high school in England. When war broke out, needing a roof over her head, she became a nurse and worked through the Blitz, the German bombing in 1940 and 1941. Later she went to university, got married, had two children and made a new life for herself.

**Moving Forward and Looking Back**

The stunning events of 1989 captivated the world. Who would have thought the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe would collapse so fast? Nellie died in 1977, leaving no documents, photos or even an address of the building she had longed for. I asked my mother what she knew. “Forget it,” she’d say. A firm believer in living in the here and now, she had no time for Nellie’s stories—which she viewed as mere fairy tales.
The Wolff Building as it looks today.

But who was I to “forget” my family history? Had Nellie been a fantasist, or did the building really exist? Was Nellie right saying it had belonged to the family and had the Nazis stolen it? I needed to find out.

It helped that I was a BBC investigative journalist. Finding information was second nature. I talked about it with my husband, Simon, a foreign correspondent with the Financial Times, and we both agreed as journalists, this was a great story.

As luck would have it, in 1990 I was assigned to a small BBC team covering the first post-reunification German elections. A young German researcher was hired to help. Within days, he found a 1920s equivalent of the Yellow Pages with an entry for the H. Wolff fur company and an address—Krausenstrasse 17/18, Berlin.

In early December 1990, I was in Bonn for the BBC’s live broadcast of the election. Following Helmut Kohl’s Christian Democratic Union party’s win, I took a few days leave and flew to Berlin.

After a night in a small hotel, I hailed a cab and gave the address to the driver. Two blocks beyond Checkpoint Charlie, the former main crossing point between the American and Soviet sectors, we stopped in front of a huge building with the German flag fluttering in the wind. Large plaques on the wall declared it was the Berlin office of the Federal Ministry of Transport. It was six stories high and stretched back to Schützenstrasse, the parallel street behind it. Despite its grubby exterior, it was impressive with its distinctive architectural design, including delicate little carvings around the archway at the back.

It was starting to snow, but my red duffel coat and black woollen hat kept me warm. I marched in and asked to speak to whoever was in charge. A senior manager was summoned and asked me what I wanted. “I’ve come to claim my family’s building,” I declared. The man laughed at me! But then I showed him the page from the business directory with the entry “H. Wolff,” who, I explained, was my great-great grandfather. He told me to come inside and wait while he phoned the head office in Bonn.

Twenty minutes later, he returned a changed man. An official at the Transport Ministry in Bonn had told him it was known the building at Krausenstrasse 17/18 had once belonged to Jews, but no one knew if anyone had survived the war. Those who worked there still called it the “Wolff Building” but claimed they didn’t know why. So I told him my story. When I finished, he said: “You must get this building back for your mother; you must.” I then confessed to him that I had no documents to prove ownership, but he replied: “Oh, these documents exist. You have to find them, but they exist.” It was the impetus I needed to get started.

The Battle Begins

And that’s how my six-year legal fight for restitution began. I worked on many stories during my career at the BBC, but this one was personal. The way I saw it, this was my heritage. I was about to make some startling discoveries.

I was fortunate that my husband supported me wholeheartedly in my quest; the rest of my family was far from enthusiastic. My father asked who I thought I was to think I could take on the German government and win.

We had some lucky breaks. Most significant was that the building survived the war intact. Many in central Berlin were flattened by Allied bombing or so badly damaged they had to be knocked down. (The next-door neighbor, Krausenstrasse 16, had taken a direct hit and, in December 1990, was a mere pile of rubble. Today it is a parking lot.)

There were three key legal issues in mounting a claim for restitution:

Had the building been owned by the Wolff family—as Nellie had always claimed—or had it been rented? Secondly, was the building, in legal terms, forcibly sold during the Nazi era? Thirdly, was my mother an inheritor?

I found a 1910 edition of a German architectural magazine with photos and an article about how, in 1908 my great grandfather Victor Wolff (Nellie’s father-in-law) bought land in central Berlin, in the heart of the once-thriving Jewish fashion district, and built the new headquarters of the H. Wolff fur business.

There were plenty of adventures in the course of digging up evidence. One of the most exciting was speeding across East Berlin in a taxi to track down a young...
lawyer living in a dirty tenement block who, acting on behalf of a New York property developer interested in bidding for the building, had a copy of the land registry document charting ownership of Krausenstrasse 17/18. In those days, ordinary members of the public could not access records in the Grundbuch (Land Registry)—only lawyers could. Spotting a chance to make some easy money, he demanded $200 to part with the precious notarized papers. Simon handed him the cash and we made a swift exit from his apartment. The money had bought us decisive evidence. We were elated. Nellie had been right.

The documents revealed that the Wolff family had indeed owned the property and that in 1937 the Victoria Insurance Co., claiming incorrectly that mortgage payments weren’t being made, foreclosed on the mortgage and handed the building straight to the Reichsbahn (German Railways) without putting it up for auction to the highest bidder. This was all too common and yet perfectly legal given Nazi anti-Semitic laws. That this was blatant persecution became crystal clear when I discovered that the owners of Krausenstrasse 19/20 (immediately next door) had received over 40 percent more per square meter after defaulting on their mortgage. These people had been Prussians—not Jews.

Following the Paper Trail

In November 1948, the Communist Soviet authorities had put an addendum to the Land Registry document stating unequivocally that the building had been taken from Jews and should not be sold until its ownership was clarified. Indeed, in 1948, the Soviet occupation government actually classified the Victoria insurance company as “Nazi and war-criminals” (Nazi und Kriegsverbrecher). From the end of the 1940s until 1990, this had been the headquarters of the East German Railways.

The British National Archives held a 1944 War Office booklet, marked “Confidential” and entitled “Who’s Who in Nazi Germany,” listing the Victoria’s chairman, Kurt Hamann, as one of the key personalities in Hitler’s regime.

The political gymnastics of Hamann were extraordinary. Under his leadership, the Victoria had deprived the Wolff family of the building so that the Railways needed somewhere to house the architects enacting his plans to make Berlin the Führer’s grand capital. Other parts of the Reichsbahn later transported millions of Jews to the death camps.

I discovered much more about Hamann and the Victoria Insurance Company. During the Nazi era, the Victoria had been complicit in Nazi crimes, foreclosing on multiple Jewish-owned properties across Berlin. Even worse, it was part of a consortium insuring SS-owned slave labor workshops at Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Stutthof concentration camps. The Victoria omits any mention of such unsavory details from its published histories. Hamann continued as chairman of the company until 1968, and, we discovered, in 1953, he was awarded West Germany’s highest civilian honor—the Federal Cross of Merit.

Hamann was such a respectable figure that, in 1979, the Victoria established a foundation in his name at the University of Mannheim in southern Germany. The Victoria is now a wholly owned subsidiary of the ERGO Insurance Group, itself owned by Munich Re, one of the world’s premier reinsurers.

Proving whether my mother was a legal inheritor meant finding birth, marriage and death certificates and, crucially, wills. The German reputation for punctilious record keeping proved correct. Although it took time and effort, all the necessary documents could be found in various local courts, proving, yet again, that Nellie had been right all along. She was a named inheritor, as was my mother in her own right.
The German Concession
In 1996, the German government conceded that the 1937 so-called “sale” would not have occurred had the Nazis not come to power. Legally, it was ours again. By then, it housed the new German Ministry of Transport, and the government wanted to retain ownership. My mother and her siblings accepted payment of the full market value, $14 million.

After reading “Stolen Legacy” and learning of my discoveries, Mannheim University President Ernst-Ludwig von Thadden told me in June 2016 that he was considering shutting down the foundation. That hasn’t happened, yet. But in February this year, he informed me he had commissioned an historian—at a cost of $21,000—to investigate Hamann’s life. That report, due in August, will inform the university’s decision on the future of the foundation.

Today the building is home to the German Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety. Last July I achieved a long-held ambition—to have a plaque affixed to the front entrance. The back archway to the building on Schützenstrasse is still adorned with the original carvings, dating to 1910.

In July 2016, this plaque was placed on the Wolff Building, recognizing its previous ownership.
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House of Memories: From Generation to Generation

By Rita Rubin
To use an overworked real estate term, the house at 77 Prof. Dondersstraat, a tree-lined thoroughfare in the Dutch city of Tilburg, had “good bones.”

Built in 1927, the spacious home was designed in the “Hague Style,” a restrained interpretation of Art Deco characterized by strong lines. It had oak and mahogany parquet floors and oak shutters. Its leaded glass windows resembled the work of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian in the 1920s—geometric designs composed of straight vertical and horizontal lines with only a few spots of color. The dining room opened onto a terrace and garden.

But the house was more than 70 years old and in disrepair when historian Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld and his spouse, anesthesiologist Hans Harbers, bought it in 2000. As they prepared to update their home, the couple obtained a copy of the original building plans from the municipality of Tilburg. Bijsterveld couldn’t help but notice the name of the original owner in one corner: M.H. Polak.

For Bijsterveld, the name was the starting point of a quest. He knew that Polak was one of the most common Jewish family names in the Netherlands. He wondered what had been the fate of the Jews who had eaten in his dining room and enjoyed a view of the garden from his terrace? Did they perish in the Holocaust, as did more than two-thirds of the 140,000 Jews living in the Netherlands in 1940? If the house had been seized by the Nazis, had the Polak family been fully compensated after the war?

As a historian born and raised in the Netherlands, he had to find out. His research culminated in the publication last December of the aptly titled book “House of Memories: Uncovering the Past of a Dutch Jewish Family.” He might have added a subtitle—“and the Present”—as he has also reached out to surviving family members and their descendants.
“What’s unusual is that this man wrote a book,” says Judith Gerson, a Holocaust scholar at Rutgers University. “There are many published memoirs of the Holocaust that are family histories. But the fact that the author is able to place the story in the house and use the house as a vehicle to tell the story, that strikes me as exceptional.”

Explains Bijsterveld, 55: “The history of the Dutch Jews has been part of my upbringing. My grandparents spoke a lot about their war experience.” His late mother talked about a kindergarten classmate in her convent-run school—a Jewish girl who, to evade the Nazis, assumed a new name and identity. “This is not just the Anne Frank story. It’s wider.”

Bijsterveld is a medievalist, not a Holocaust scholar, so he turned to his colleagues for help in tracking down information about the family. One, Jan Bader, was writing a book about the history of Jewish cemeteries in the region. It turns out that Bader had studied the life of Alfred Polak, a Zionist in Tilburg who was the brother of Max Henri “Hans” Polak, the man whose name Bijsterveld had noticed on the house plans. The men were partners in a leather hides company.

Bader told him that the Polak families had escaped to New York in 1940 and suggested he talk with Ernst Elzas, one of the few Jews still living in Tilburg after the war, which he survived by going into hiding.

It turned out that Elzas had gone to school with Bertram Polak, the popular only son and eldest child of Hans Polak and his wife Bertha. From Elzas, Bijsterveld learned that Bertram had been killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1942. He was 24. He had been separated from his family because of his military service, and, when he returned home in May 1940, he found a vacant house. He tried to escape with three friends, but they were all betrayed and murdered.

Bijsterveld met Elzas in 2003. He found more information about Bertram in the central database of Shoah victims at Yad Vashem, but his attempts to locate and connect with surviving family members were unsuccessful. In 2005, he put aside his search.

His interest was rekindled in 2010—the year Elzas died—when the first “stumbling stones” were laid in Tilburg. The bronze stumbling stones, embedded in front of homes formerly occupied by Jews, serve as individual memorials to Holocaust victims.

“When I embarked on my search for the Polak family... I feared that not much would be left in the sense of...
living memories and material documents and objects,” 70 years after the Polaks had left the Netherlands, he writes in the prologue of his book. “What and who could be left to know who these people had been, what had happened to them, and how their lives had been before, during, and after the Holocaust?”

Medievalist Meets Genealogist
Enter Steve Jaron, 38, who lives in his native Pittsburgh. He became interested in family history at age 13 on his first trip to Israel, where he met relatives of his maternal grandmother, Judith Rothstein-Polak. An assignment for a college class to make a family tree led him to explore his ancestry.

In September 2010, he noticed that someone named Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld had recently posted information on an online profile of Bertram Polak, his grandmother’s first cousin. The profile was part of a website called the Joods (Jewish) Monument, maintained by Amsterdam’s Jewish Cultural Quarter, which includes the Jewish Historical Museum and the National Holocaust Museum.

The Joods Monument is a digital tribute to the more than 104,000 Dutch Jews who were persecuted and died during the Holocaust.

Jaron wondered whether this Bijsterveld fellow might be a long-lost relative. They exchanged emails, and the genealogist introduced the historian to the rest of his family. That included his grandmother Judith and her two older sisters, Adah Cohn-Polak and Edith Spitz-Polak, who had made aliyah after fleeing the Netherlands with their parents, Alfred and Fien. The sisters had lived with their parents two doors down from Bertram’s family and immigrated to Israel. “I was very close to my uncle’s family,” recalls Judith, a sharp 93-year-old widow who lives in Pittsburgh. “They were like sisters and a brother. We were in and out of each other’s houses.”

Jaron also put Bijsterveld in touch with his great aunt Constance “Connie” Victor-Polak, Bertram’s half-sister, the only child of Hans Polak and his second wife, Charlotte Elias, more than 20 years his junior. Connie, who now lives in Philadelphia, was born in New York in 1941, when her father was 53.

“From very early on, I knew that they had escaped. I knew there had to be relatives somewhere,” Bijsterveld says of Bertram’s family. “It was only after Steve Jaron contacted me that I found out there were so many relatives. It was very overwhelming. As a medievalist, you never experience the people you research. From the very first moment, they allowed me to ask everything.”

Of course, as Judith’s sister Adah told him, “We first checked you out on the Internet.”

Bertram’s relatives were full of questions. “Sometimes it’s easier if an outsider starts to do the research,” Bijsterveld says. “I’m really grateful to this family. They allowed me to do that, and they shared anything they knew.”

Connie Victor-Polak calls Bijsterveld “a blessing.” “This is his field, history, so he knows how to research. We’ve been very fortunate in that the cousins who lived through this all have very sharp minds with great memories of details.”

Hans died at age 54 in 1942, when Connie was only a year old. “My supposition is that he died of a broken heart. Obviously, father must have been very close to Bertram. He was the prince of the family. My father apparently sent [Bertram] money and a ticket for a ship from London to America, and that ticket was returned.” That must have been when her father’s worst fears about his son were realized, she said. Connie’s mother never remarried. She died in 1991 at the age of 80.

No one talked about Bertram when Connie was growing up. She didn’t learn about him until she was
a teenager and one of her sisters mentioned him. He would have been more than 20 years older than she was. The next-born, Connie’s sister Florentine, was three years younger than Bertram, and their twin sisters, Louise and Leonie, were two years younger than Florentine. Louise and Leonie died of heart disease at age 45 and 32, respectively.

Beri Kravitz, the youngest of Judith’s three daughters, was always surprised by her mother’s and aunts’ lack of bitterness about their war experiences. “She would talk more about, oh, this is what it was like in school, or this is how we celebrated the holidays. Kind of the fond memories. A little bit melancholy, but never bitter. I don’t understand how they could be like that.”

But then the 52-year-old Kravitz, a mother of four who lives in suburban Washington, D.C., answers her own question. “The story that we always grew up with, the narrative of our family, is we were so fortunate. We have this huge family in Israel. We really survived this largely intact.”

After the war, ownership of the houses of the late Hans Polak and his brother, Alfred Polak, was rapidly restored to their families. Both houses had been rented out to help solve the severe housing shortage. In 1947, Alfred and his wife, Fien, moved back into their home at 73 Prof. Dondersstraat. They remained there until Alfred’s death in 1956, at 72, after which Fien joined Adah and Edith and their families in Israel.

A Mezuzah and a Stumbling Stone

As soon as he realized that a Jewish family had built his home, Bijsterveld bought a mezuzah to attach near the front door. Given that the family’s name was Polak, he selected a replica of a 19th-century Polish mezuzah from New York’s Jewish Museum. “There is no scroll in it, to symbolize that the Jewish identity was no longer there,” Bijsterveld says.

A mezuzah wasn’t enough, though. Even before he found Bertram’s family, he began investigating what it would take to get a stumbling stone installed in the brick sidewalk in front of his house to memorialize the young man.
Stumbling stones, or “Stolpersteine,” were conceived by a non-Jewish German artist named Gunter Demnig to honor anyone, Jewish or not, who was persecuted or murdered by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. The name of the mini-monuments reportedly refers to an anti-Semitic German saying that predates the Holocaust. When a non-Jew stumbled on a protruding stone, he or she would say, “a Jew was probably buried here.”

Each 4-inch-square stone bears a brass plate with the heading “Here Lived” and an individual’s name; birth year; date of arrest, if applicable; the name of the camp in which they were detained; the year in which they were deported to a concentration camp; and the date of their murder. The stones are usually placed in the sidewalk in front of the last place the individual lived by choice. More than 60,000 stumbling stones have been laid in more than 1,800 places in 21 countries.

Florentine Piel-Polak, the oldest of Hans Polak’s daughters, died eight days before the April 2011 ceremony marking the installation of Bertram’s stumbling stone in front of 77 Prof. Dondersstraat. Florentine was nearly 90 and suffered from Alzheimer’s, so she did not know about the Dutch historian who worked so hard to help preserve the memory of her older brother.

Bertram’s stumbling stone was laid by his nephew, Alfred “Fred” Piel, Florentine’s only child, assisted by two of his Aunt Connie’s grandchildren. The ceremony marked the first time the 62-year-old Fred, an internist in Springfield, Mass., had ever met his mother’s cousins or any of their children or grandchildren. And before that trip to Tilburg, he had met Judith only once, when he was a child.

“Both my wife and I were just totally entranced with these three women,” Fred recalls, noting that he felt “an instant connection” with them and their families, as he did with Bijsterveld and Harbers, his spouse. Bijsterveld’s research into the Polak family, leading up to the stumbling stone ceremony for Bertram, was documented in a 2012 short Dutch film called “Here Was Bertram,” which can be viewed on YouTube.

Florentine had fallen out of touch with her cousins after marrying Fred’s father, Kurt Piel, a non-Jewish native of Germany who immigrated to the United States in 1929 and worked as a barkeeper. “Although she always identified as a Jew culturally, she stopped identifying as a Jew religiously,” says Fred, who was baptized as a baby and confirmed in the Congregational Church when he was 13. While Florentine was their only Jewish grandparent, two of Fred’s three sons have taken Birthright trips to Israel.

Fred’s father served in the U.S. Army during the war, while his paternal grandfather was a German soldier. “In some ways, I’m obsessed by the war in Europe. Half of my family was doing these horrible things to the other half of my family. It was always very much in my mind that I had this uncle who was killed.”

As the years pass, fewer remember the flesh-and-blood Bertram, the young man who preferred sports to books and named his dog “Tarzan.” His cousin Edith suffered a stroke in December 2015 and died two days later. Adah’s husband, Alfred Cohn, had survived the Monowitz concentration camp; he died last November at 95.

To make sure that Polak descendants will be able to read about their ancestors, Bijsterveld wrote “House of Memories” in English, although he plans to write an abridged version in Dutch.

The original English version is more than 600 heavily footnoted pages long and filled with photos. “At some point, you really have to say stop, and I reached that point about a year and a half ago,” Bijsterveld says. “This will be the book that will end up on all the relatives’ bookshelves. This has to include everything.”
Author Jen Lovy (left) with some of the 40 Detroit participants on an Israel trip last summer.

All photos by Jen Lovy
In 1978, Carol Moss wrote to her daughter Marsha Moss Linehan right after a visit to the Western Wall in Jerusalem. She described the beauty of the land, the strength of the Israeli people and the powerful connection she felt to the country. She concluded the note with: “My dream is for you to one day see the land of Israel.”

Linehan, who lives in San Diego, speculated that her mother knew she was dying when she penned the note. She passed away the following year. Linehan held on to the letter and clung to her mother’s dream for 35 years. Then, for her 60th birthday, she planned a trip to Israel.

“I was able to fulfill the dream on the most meaningful trip I’ve ever taken,” said Linehan. In 2013, she and her husband, Bob, went on a highly subsidized trip for travelers 55 and older who had never been to Israel. Like many older adults, Linehan had several reasons she’d never gone. Safety, distance and expense topped that list.

Last year, in its annual survey of American Jewish opinion, the American Jewish Committee found that 51 percent of U.S. adults ages 30 to 49 had never been to Israel. The statistics were the same for those 65 and older. Fifty-seven percent of adults 50 to 64 said they had never been there. For those in the 18 to 29 age range, 48 percent reported not visiting Israel.

Yet, trip organizers hear from many who would like to go. This seems to be especially true among those with children who have been to Israel with organizations like Birthright Israel. Since 1999, Birthright has brought more than 500,000 travelers the ages 18 to 26 to Israel—at no cost to the participant.

While Birthright is the largest organization of its kind, there are other free or heavily subsidized travel opportunities for those in their late teens, 20s and even for travelers in their early 30s. For those in their mid-30s and beyond, opportunities are scarce. Yet, in recent years, organizations have emerged with the resources and desire to take a wider age range of adults on subsidized trips.
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Funding for these subsidized trips comes from individual donors and foundations that see value in sending older adults to Israel.

**After the Honeymoon**

“It’s a very significant investment, and donors may be less willing to invest in older people, where the return on investment might be over a shorter time span,” said Michael Wise, co-founder of Honeymoon Israel, a relatively new organization that brings couples to Israel.

“Maybe there is the feeling that it’s too late for adults and that our young adults are the ones making major choices,” said Lori Palatnik, founding director of the Jewish Women’s Renaissance Project (JWRP), an organization that has brought more than 10,000 mothers to Israel since 2009. “I think they have forgotten that older people are still making choices about where we put our time and resources. Don’t write us off. We still hold the purse strings and influence choices.”

Palatnik feels that her organization “hit the bull’s eye” by targeting mothers of children 18 and younger. “If you can inspire the mother, she will inspire the whole family and that’s a tremendous investment in the Jewish family and the Jewish community.”

Naomi Derner, a divorced mother of two from Portland, said Judaism was clearly missing from her family. Aside from knowing they were Jewish, her children, ages 10 and 12, had almost no involvement with religion. When the last of her grandparents (all Holocaust survivors) died, she realized she needed to change that.

Shortly after embarking on her spiritual journey, Derner learned about JWRP and applied for the trip through Portland Kollel, the local sponsoring organization. Each participating city has at least one sponsoring organization that selects and brings members from its community as well as contributes 15 percent of the cost for each participant.

Since returning last December, Derner and her children make a point of having a Shabbat dinner, often with friends she met on the trip, and they have become more involved in the Portland Jewish community.

Derner said the subsidy—$3,000 per participant—was a factor in her decision to go. “A lot of us with school-age kids don’t have that kind of disposable cash, and what a trip like this would have cost could very easily be a vacation budget for an entire family,” she said.

“Taking away the financial burden gives a woman the incentive she needs to leave her children and take time off from work [for the eight-day trip]. We needed to take away any objection they’d have to going,” says Palatnik. “Financially, some of these women can afford the trip but they wouldn’t have otherwise prioritized going to Israel.”

**Too Old for Birthright**

The JWRP and Honeymoon Israel are the two largest organizations bringing visitors who are too old for Birthright (and programs like it) to Israel. While JWRP participants are responsible for airfare and a $99 registration fee, Honeymoon Israel costs a couple $1,800 and includes the flight.

A number of local Jewish Federations are taking groups to Israel by reaching out to young and emerging leaders, business professionals and, in
some cases, intermarried couples. These trips generally target those typically in their late 20s and 30s who are beyond Birthright.

Israel Next Dor, another Federation program, is a young leadership program of Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley Federation, and Israel 360 is a program serving the Philadelphia community. Both offer intensive Israel experiences for those of 27 to 35 (although Philadelphia’s has taken individuals as old as 40). The trips cost participants approximately $360, includes airfare, and they must attend several pre- and post-trip meetings.

“As a Jewish community, we worry about our future and we need the commitment of professional volunteers. Visiting Israel helps inspire people to become more connected to the community,” said Aaron Gorodzinsky, director of outreach and community relations for the Lehigh Valley Federation. “In the post-Birthright world we live in, most people between the ages of 27 and 35 have been to Israel but are hungry and curious to go back again.”

“We’ve learned that Birthright is wonderful, amazing and can be a life-changing experience, but it’s not going to solve all our problems,” said Wise, who is based in Buffalo. He co-founded Honeymoon Israel as a way to welcome interfaith couples into Judaism by targeting those who haven’t necessarily discussed the role religion will play in their family.

Participants on the trips experience Israel’s culture, including perusing the shuks (markets), filled with Havla made from sugar or honey and tahini.

Jennifer Shaeffer Fraiman, 35, isn’t Jewish. Her husband Joe, 38, is and has, what his wife describes as, a “pretty deep connection to Israel.” Fraiman said almost everything she knew about Israel came from him. When they returned from their Honeymoon Israel experience in February, Fraiman felt more informed about Israeli culture and politics and a deeper connection to Judaism.

“Before, Israel was his,” she said. “Now it’s mine, too, and that has united us.”

In 2014, Honeymoon Israel got the financial push it needed when the Boston-based One8 Foundation (formerly the Jacobson Family Foundation) provided more than $1 million in seed money.

While JWRP is heavily funded by private donors and foundations, it has received support from the Israeli government. During its first year, the JWRP sent three groups of 100 women each to Israel and, with each passing year, increased its numbers. The Israeli Ministry of Diaspora Affairs noticed and offered to provide substantial funding if the JWRP could double its numbers and also bring groups from Eastern Europe. The JWRP met those goals, and $5.1 million (22 percent of its budget) now comes from the Israeli government.
Challenges Remain

Not all subsidized trips for older adults succeed. For example, Stacy Wasserman of Thousand Oaks, Calif., took $500,000 she inherited from her father and created L’Dor V’Dor (From Generation to Generation), a nonprofit organization designed to give those 55 and older their first Israeli experience.

From 2011 and 2016, Wasserman took seven groups to Israel, with more than 300 participants. But her efforts to find support among individual donors and foundations proved unsuccessful. When funding ran out, she ended the program.

During its short existence, L’Dor V’Dor participants, including Marsha Moss Linehan, spent 12 days visiting popular sites, such as Masada, the Western Wall, the Dead Sea and the Knesset. Travelers were asked to cover the cost of their airfare. L’Dor V’Dor paid the rest.

“There is a whole generation of people out there who never had the opportunity, because there was no Birthright. Now they have children and grandchildren who have been there,” Wasserman added. “Giving them the opportunity to go allows them the chance to connect with the younger generations though Israel.”

While the trips’ goals can vary, their format and purpose are similar. Groups travel from the same city so they can participate in pre and post-trip meetings, develop cohesion and return inspired to become more involved in their communities and forge a stronger connection to Israel and Judaism.

Honeymoon Israel, for those ages 25 to 40, reaches out to couples with at least one Jewish partner trying to figure out what role religion is going to play in their lives, how they plan to raise a family and who they are as a family, according to Wise.

One of the goals of Honeymoon Israel is to change the Israeli perception on intermarriage. “We’re trying to show others that intermarriage isn’t the end of the Jewish people,” said Wise. “We have to stop defining intermarriage as a problem and face it as a reality of what America is about and say to the Jewish world intermarriage does not equal assimilation.”

The JWRP, on the other hand, targets women because of the strong effect mothers have on their families. Over half the women who travel to Israel with JWRP had never been there before. The other half, jokes Palatnik, went when they were 17 and talked about how “cute the soldiers were. When they go back as mothers, they have a whole different mindset.”

If the mothers envied their children’s opportunities in Israel, the husbands felt the same about their wives. Four years ago the JWRP sent its first men’s trip. Since then, more than 3,000 dads have had a JWRP Israel experience. Unlike the women, who get a $3,000 subsidy, the men receive $1,850. The trips also boost the Israeli economy.

Last year, the JWRP alone spent $8.3 million on expenses such as hotels, buses, food and tour operators. “That’s not counting the economic impact created by the families who go back to Israel with their children, those who celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah there or the 12 families who made aliyah after a JWRP experience,” said Palatnik.

“Any time you bring people to Israel there is going to be a positive economic impact,” said Jill Daly, director of the Midwest Region of the Israel Ministry of Tourism. “Travelers who are older generally have more disposable income than those in college or just out of school.”
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B’nai B’rith Bowlers Score Strikes, Win Friends

By Sam Seifman

Last March, 41 teams from the United States and Canada traveled to a bowling alley in suburban Detroit for the 76th annual B’nai B’rith Bowling Association Sectional Tournament. For three days, 164 B’nai B’rith bowlers descended on 300 Bowl, in Waterford, Mich., to compete for high honors in a sport that dates to ancient Egypt.

Archie’s Army, from Detroit, emerged as the winning team. Steve Lotzloff, Ryan Columbus, Jeff Berlin and Eric Goldberg made up the “army.” But the event featured many other impressive players and scores, including a perfect 300 rolled by David Shanbaum and a 299 by Noah Cohen, both also from Detroit.

Howard Waxer, the tournament co-chair and president of the Detroit B’nai B’rith Bowling Association, pronounced it “the best tournament Detroit’s ever held.”

And while the scores certainly count, the number of attendees—the largest in six years—also impressed. Bowlers came from Hamilton, Ontario; Pittsburgh; Rochester, N.Y.; Columbus, Ohio; Kansas City, Mo.; Chicago, New Orleans and Denver.

“It’s cool when you see all these people come from all over,” said Gary Klinger, athletic director of the Great Lakes Region.

Klinger has B’nai B’rith bowling in his blood; his father was not only a bowler himself but the tournament director and league secretary for the bowling association. The B’nai B’rith Bowling Association, host of the tournament, formed in 1939, became an umbrella organization for leagues across the country.

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Young B’nai B’rith Leaders Trek to Japan: The View from Behind the Lens

By Taylor Schwink

For a week in 2016, I’d wake up, check my email and find it loaded with pictures from the other side of the world. The Japanese government had invited the B’nai B’rith Young Leadership Network to participate in the Kakehashi Project – “Japan’s Friendship Ties.” A group of B’nai B’rith volunteers would be going to build bridges between Japan and the United States. Back at B’nai B’rith International headquarters, I was tasked with posting these marvelous pictures, but not without a smidge of jealousy.

A year later, I was the one taking the pictures. B’nai B’rith was again invited to participate in the Kakehashi Project, and I had the privilege of joining the 12-member delegation from Chicago, Denver, Detroit, New York City, South Florida and Washington D.C., documenting the trip that started in Tokyo, continued on to Hiroshima and Kobe, and returned to Tokyo over the span of a week.

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored the trip, and on the first day gave us a crash course in Japanese history and foreign policy. We discussed the famed “Article Nine” of their constitution that renounces “war as a sovereign right of the nation,” troubles with North Korea and views on China.

On the second day, we left behind the boardrooms of the foreign ministry to fly to Hiroshima. The bus from the airport dropped us off in front of the Atomic Bomb Dome, the twisted, surviving structure from America’s bombing of the city on Aug. 6, 1945, hastening the end of World War II.

The entire afternoon was a humbling experience, touring the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park grounds, visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and even speaking with an atomic bomb survivor. The woman we met was a child living on the edge of town and attending school when three B-29 Superfortress bombers flew overhead.

Continued on page 36
The Holocaust is remembered at B’nai B’rith International throughout the year. But annually on Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), B’nai B’rith holds a program across the country. It’s called “Unto Every Person There is a Name.”

Since 1989, B’nai B’rith has been the North American sponsor of the Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority) program that honors and remembers the victims of the Shoah. A Yad Vashem database provides a list of Holocaust victims, and participants honor them by reading their names aloud and stating where they were born and died.

Every year, the program has a theme decided by an international committee, and this year’s theme was “Restoring Their Identities: The Fate of the Individual during the Holocaust.” B’nai B’rith World Center Director Alan Schneider represents B’nai B’rith on this committee.

B’nai B’rith regions and lodges coordinate with synagogues and Jewish community centers across the nation to make “Unto Every Person There is a Name” a part of their Holocaust commemorations. The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Greater Washington held a remembrance event at Washington Hebrew Congregation in Potomac, Md., where survivor Marsha Tishler told of living in a displaced persons camp. The JCRC of Greater Washington asked those attending to send in additional names they wanted read aloud.

“You look at these lists of names and you see that a whole family has been wiped out. If it weren’t for this program these names wouldn’t be mentioned; there is no family.
one carrying the atomic payload. She described scenes of death and chaos, as no one had any idea what was happening. She thought the sun had fallen out of the sky.

Before leaving on the trip, many people jokingly asked, “Are there Jews in Japan?” When you think of countries with Jewish communities, Japan is certainly not at the top of that list. But there is a small Jewish presence, with two communities located in Tokyo and Kobe. Kobe is a city of immigrants, and the Jews from all parts of the world tie seamlessly into the fabric of a town that comprises every group, from Chinese, Americans and Western Europeans to Indians and Muslims.

In Tokyo, we attended Shabbat services and dinner with a congregation that consisted mostly of American and Canadian expatriates. In a world marred with anti-Semitism, it was fascinating to learn that the Japanese people have no real concept of such discrimination. Throughout the trip, our guides would explain the idea in Japanese for people unfamiliar with the term.

While our Young Leadership delegation toured Japan, the Israeli baseball team was making a run of its own there through the World Baseball Classic. The team won all of its first-round games, setting up a second round date at the Tokyo Dome against Cuba—the same day we were slated to return to America.

Following a friendly and illuminating meeting at the Israeli embassy, we were given tickets to the game, and some delegation members persuaded our guides to rearrange the schedule and reroute the bus. With only hours remaining in the trip, our last stop was to cheer on the Israeli national team—in a game they’d go on to win 4-1. It was an appropriate and exciting end to our trip—one that yielded invaluable knowledge, cultural understanding, friendships, memories—and pictures—to last a lifetime.

Trek to Japan
(continued from page 34)

The trip included a stop for Shabbat services and dinner at the Ohel Shelomo Synagogue.

left to remember them—they’re gone, [and this is a way] to remember the victims,” said Rhonda Love, B’nai B’rith International vice president of programming and director of the Center of Community Action and Center of Jewish Identity.

Names are often read in conjunction with other remembrance programs—with some events lasting overnight.

B’nai B’rith and Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi), a Jewish fraternity, collaborate to bring “Unto Every Person There is a Name” to university campuses as part of AEPi’s own Holocaust Remembrance Day program, called “We Walk to Remember.”

That program began in 2006 at New York University, and, since then, more than 100 campuses across North America, Israel and Europe have participated in this event. AEPi brothers and other volunteers walk silently across their campuses wearing a “Never Forget” sticker provided by B’nai B’rith.

B’nai B’rith also supplies pamphlets to AEPi to distribute, on the importance of Yom Hashoah and how this year’s theme relates to the Holocaust.

“Watching young people take on the responsibility is really very important, because it is getting harder for the survivors. The next generations need to bear witness, to make sure to never forget,” Love said. “They are stepping up.”

The number of Holocaust survivors is dwindling. These programs ensure society remembers the Shoah and the horrors its victims faced.
B’nai B’rith’s Bowling Association was formed in 1936, the country. Its first tournament, in 1941, was also in Detroit. Over the years, the association kept growing. At its peak, in the 1960s and 1970s, it had 20,000 bowlers. League dues from across the country have raised thousands of dollars for B’nai B’rith programs, events and even for the organization’s original Washington, D.C., headquarters. Today, the association has 25 leagues in the United States and Canada.

“It all started with a group of guys, bowling in mostly Midwest cities,” said Mark Sperling, executive secretary of the B’nai B’rith Bowling Association since 1979. “They came together for fellowship.”

That fellowship continues, as members come out not only to bowl but also to participate in the annual banquet, where they hear about the state of their association and B’nai B’rith in general.

During the recent banquet, Steve Zorn, co-chair of B’nai B’rith’s Participation Committee, spoke to attendees about better integrating B’nai B’rith bowling with the rest of the organization. Zorn was a league member for 10 years.

“It was a very good experience,” Zorn said. “I bowled on a team with my son and three sons-in-law.”

The location of the next tournament has yet to be decided, but the smart money is on Las Vegas, where it has been held about every four years. If you’d like to find out more about joining a league, please email Howard Waxer at howard@partieswithclass.com.

Bowlers Score Strikes
(continued from page 33)

The tournament’s co-chairs Howard Waxer (left) and David Little.
“It’s Important to Care for One Another,”
A Photographer’s Journey

By Sam Seifman

T
oday, if you see Helene Sender walking around her hometown of Flushing, Queens, chances are you’ll see her with her camera, taking photos of the people in her neighborhood. But she hasn’t always been as passionate about photography as she is today. Her professional career had a very different start.

Her story actually begins in the Bronx, and, although she has traveled around the world, she has lived in New York City her entire life. After receiving her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in psychology from Hunter College, CUNY, she worked as a research assistant in an adult education program for the unemployed and underemployed and then in therapeutic drug rehabilitation in Manhattan. She decided not to pursue research, and transitioned to the garment industry, where she worked in customer service and management for 15 years.

Her career took another turn when she began working in the medical field. She ultimately secured a position with the New York Blood Center (NYBC) as an executive assistant. Within a few years, she became the program coordinator in the education department. Helene was also a voluntary bone marrow and stem cell courier for NYBC’s Special Donors Program during those 10 years.

Upon retirement from NYBC, Helene continued transporting lifesaving bone marrow and stem cells throughout the United States and around the world for the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) until age 70, when she was retired as a courier. She loved sharing her stories with friends and staff at NMDP, but they wanted more.

“My friends] kept pushing me to show them photos of my travels,” Helene says. So, she bought herself a camera.

Originally she used a big digital single-lens reflex camera, but it was too cumbersome to carry a large camera and lenses, so she moved to a smaller “point and shoot” camera. Today, Helene is an active member of the Flushing Camera Club, which allows her to share her photos and see the work of others. One day, she hopes to display her work publicly.

“I’ve always been drawn to the
Helene said. She often attends jazz concerts at Flushing Town Hall, where she is a member; she is also a long-standing member of the Museum of Modern Art, in Manhattan.

Just because Helene has retired doesn’t mean that she’s staying at home. She has traveled to and has taken photographs throughout Europe and the Middle East, including Israel, Cyprus, Germany and Poland.

Helene’s father, a house painter who shared her artistic eye, immigrated to the United States from Poland in 1925 at 23. Traveling to Poland for the first time was daunting for her since so many of her father’s family were victims of the Holocaust. She has thus far been to Krakow, Warsaw and Poznán, where she visited the ghetto areas and memorials. She spoke with many young Poles and found that they were open to discussing occupied Poland’s collaboration with the Nazis. They also spoke about Poland’s largely unsuccessful efforts to get Jews to return; a very small Jewish population presently resides in what used to be the old Jewish quarter of Krakow.

Although her father and her American-born mother raised her in a secular household, Helene feels deeply connected to her Jewish identity. During the Persian Gulf War in 1991, she served as a volunteer in Israel where she was assigned to an army camp in the Negev desert. She describes this as a “transforming experience.” There, she peeled potatoes and painted offices to keep the soldiers free to deal with security risks.

“I wanted the Israeli people to know that there were people that cared and were willing to risk their lives for them,” she said. Helene visits Israel often and will visit this year. Helene believes that in Israel and around the world, “It’s important that we care about and reach out to all people in need.”

One of the ways she has put these words into action is by naming B’nai B’rith International as a beneficiary in her will. Specifically, Helene is establishing an endowment fund with the interest going to whichever program B’nai B’rith determines is the most in need at the time.

“I’ve always been supportive of the work that B’nai B’rith does. To take a stand against persecution of all people is what ‘never again’ means to me,” Helene said. “Your work is incredibly important in these times as we witness the increase of genocide, fear, discrimination and anti-Semitism around the world.”

“Helene has been a longtime friend and supporter of B’nai B’rith,” says Marna Schoen, director of Planned Giving. “But when she called to discuss a way to create a legacy through a planned gift, I got to know her much better. I loved the stories of her travels, and when she described herself as a ‘street photographer,’ I asked to see her photos. I was floored. She is able to capture a very special moment in time and the personality of her subject. That same appreciation for the subjects of her art is apparent in her giving. By establishing an endowment fund, she will, in perpetuity, be helping those in need, whoever they are or wherever they may live. She’s leaving quite a legacy, and B’nai B’rith is honored to be a part of it.”

For more information about supporting B’nai B’rith through an endowment fund, bequest, charitable gift annuity or other planned gift, please contact the Planned Giving Department by mail at 1120 20th St., NW, Suite 300 North, Washington, DC 20036; by phone at 800-656-5561; or by e-mail at plannedgiving@bnaibrith.org.
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Note: Older ages available, call for rates

*Annual premiums shown are for preferred plus nonsmoker class. Equivalent premiums are available for other underwriting classes, ages, face amounts and payment modes.

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You may have heard the story of the dog playing in the front yard of his master’s home who always ran barking after the bus that passed by until he got tired and stopped running. The next day, the same thing happened. The bus would drive by and the dog would bark and run trying to catch it. And this would go on, day after day, after day…

Well, guess what? One day, he finally caught it.

Now, what in heaven’s name will he actually do with it?

During the seven years since the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Republicans on Capitol Hill stood united in their resolute opposition to what they relabeled, derogatorily, as “Obamacare.”

Rather than accept the fact that the program could help many Americans and try to modify and improve this admittedly massive attempt to overhaul health care, making it even more affordable and workable for the American people, the goal was to deride the ACA as singlehandedly destroying health care in America.

From the moment it was enacted more than seven years ago, congressional Republicans vowed to “repeal and replace” the ACA with something “cheaper, less bureaucratic and offer far more choices.” Yet, it was only just recently that an alternative plan was finally introduced. After the plan failed to pass, House Republicans mustered a slim majority in early May, sending the measure to the U.S. Senate where it faced an uncertain outcome.

Repeal and Replace?
Yes, Mr. President, It’s Complicated.

With a Republican president and his party controlling both houses of Congress, the goal of “repeal and replace” seemed within reach. But, it has been proven more difficult, especially after the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated up to 24 million Americans would lose health coverage under the Republican proposal.

Now, I don’t presume to suggest that the ACA as rolled out was perfect. There were areas that needed to be tested empirically and potentially improved. Many of us would agree that keeping our kids on our health care plans until they are 26 and better able to purchase insurance on their own are good ideas. Also, any of us with pre-existing conditions would like to have continued coverage should we move to a different insurance carrier or plan. Additionally, subsidies for persons of a certain income or facing higher age-related insurance costs are intended to guarantee acceptance into a quality insurance plan, covering an estimated 15 million to 20 million persons who would otherwise be uninsured.

But how do we pay for all this?
Well, the idea was to make certain that younger, “more healthy” individuals would be enrolling, bringing in a massive infusion of dollars that would balance those older and probably more likely to require expensive health care. In essence, spread the risk around, thus keeping rates more affordable for all.

Unfortunately, many younger folks don’t think like that. I guess if you’re young and healthy, you don’t think you need to be insured because you feel that you will never need coverage. So much for that infusion of cash and young people needed to balance out the risk pool.

Obviously, this was a major sticking point in the “repeal and replace” debate. Representatives of the congressional Freedom Caucus opined that people should be responsible only for purchasing the amount and specific type of insurance they wanted. However, the suggestion that people who buy lower cost or high-deductible insurance do so because they want to, rather than because it is all they can afford, strains credulity. So much for the collective “risk pool” and understanding of how insurance actually works.

But, what about us “older” persons?
Generally, I don’t believe most people thought that seniors would be part of the discussion on “repeal and replace” because they are already covered by Medicare. While the vast majority of Americans 65 years and older have Medicare, many older persons and people concerned about aging in America have plenty at stake
in any replacement system that comes to fruition.

First, for aging to look the way it does in the best brochures—with happy retirees enjoying travel, volunteer work, long walks on the beach—we need to be healthy and still have some savings to afford this lifestyle. So, from the perspective of the long game, health care coverage is essential for making “healthy aging” a reality.

When we talk about older adults, however, we aren’t magically targeting people the day they turn 65. From 50 through 64, there is a greater likelihood of becoming disabled or developing conditions like diabetes, manageable with appropriate treatment but devastating if left untreated. Health insurance for this group has always cost more—and the loss of employer coverage many suffered during the Great Recession has only heightened the problem.

For this group, the Affordable Care Act dramatically reduced the “age tax” that insurers could impose for just being older, and it eliminated exclusions from insurance for those with pre-existing conditions. Further, the law reduced or eliminated out-of-pocket charges for preventive care. The ACA also expanded Medicaid to cover lower income older adults too poor to afford insurance—even with subsidies—but not poor enough for traditional Medicaid. Many covered by the Medicaid expansion are ages of 50 to 64.

Finally, there is a great deal in the ACA for Medicare enrollees. The replacement bill eliminated cost sharing on a whole host of preventive services that help keep older adults healthy—services some skipped in the past because of cost, with expensive results both in terms of future Medicare spending, and length and quality of life. The ACA also established a timetable for closing the “doughnut hole” that makes the cost of prescriptions through Medicare prohibitive. While the “repeal and replace” measures that were floated did not specifically repeal this fix to the coverage gap, they would have eliminated the fee on manufacturers and importers of branded prescription drugs that helps pay for the benefit.

**So, What Now?**

As we go forward, a word of caution: The devil is always in the details. Advocates for healthy aging, as well as older adults and people who love them, should be looking very carefully not at what alternative plans claim to do but what they actually would do.

Recently, we’ve heard of proposals that claim to save the Medicaid expansion but would, in reality, limit it to a grandfathered group that would shrink every year as people cycle on and off Medicaid (because of fluctuating income) and fail to get alternative coverage, thereby disqualifying them from rejoining the expansion if their income drops.

In addition, we hear about sweeping changes to Medicaid. Millions of Americans are eligible for Medicare at age 65 and for Medicaid, because they have very low incomes and few assets. Currently, states get matching money based on how much they spend on Medicaid. Under various proposals, the federal government would cap its contributions to states, no longer responding to changing circumstances that affect actual state spending on the program. Thus, the federal government would save money by giving the states less, leaving the states to bear the burden. But the resulting reduction in the federal deficit is merely a shifting of the expense to the states, which can then reduce benefits, raise taxes or incur their own deficits to make up the difference. Even now, states struggle to fund their share of Medicaid.

And finally, as it stands today, if the ACA were to be eventually repealed, those in their fifties and sixties could see premiums rise by $2,000 to $3,000 a year or more, with increases of 20 percent to 25 percent, or higher. Under the ACA, insurers cannot charge more than three times what they charge younger persons for the same coverage. This ratio was proposed to increase to five to one—or even more.

So, does the concept of “bipartisanship” still mean anything in Washington?

Perhaps it may be time to actually see where it makes sense to work “cooperatively” and “fix” certain issues of the ACA rather than continuing to tackle “repeal and replace” without any reasonable replacement. Those on the hard right clearly want to see anything from Washington just go away. However, there are more moderates on both sides of the aisle who disagree.

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