

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF BETH CHAYIM CHADASHIM

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50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

LARRY NATHENSON

KEDOSHIM: UNDERSTANDING HOLINESS IN OUR TIME

DRASH BY RABBI JILLIAN CAMERON

TASK FORCE CONSIDERS FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

JESSICA DONATH

WHY I ADVOCATED FOR DEFAULT VEG FOOD POLICY

BRETT TRUEMAN

THE STORY BEHIND THE RABBI'S OFFICE REMODEL

JAMES SUTHERLAND

REFLECTIONS ON 46 YEARS WITH BCC

LOUIS HIRSCH

ON THIS FIRST NIGHT OF PASSOVER, 2010

MARY AVIYAH FARKAS

POEM: THROUGH THE SKYLINE

CHANA BRYSON

THE STORY OF THE KUGEL QUEEN

ELIZABETH SAVAGE WITH MARIE PEDERSEN

A DAY IN THE LIFE

TODD MOELLENBERG

BOOKS AND BAGELS BOOK REVIEW

LARRY NATHENSON

BCC QUESTIONNAIRE: JESSICA DONATH

BCC RETURNS TO SKIRBALL CENTER FOR 50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA CELEBRATION

BY LARRY NATHENSON



Above: The beautiful Guerin Pavilion at the Skirball Cultural Center. Photo: Vince Bucci
Opposite: Host Adam Kulbersh at the podium. Photo: Vince Bucci

ON SUNDAY, MAY 22, BCC celebrated its 50th anniversary in style with a gala brunch and program of commemoration of our past, anticipation of our future, and musical and magical entertainment. In lieu of our annual awards to individuals whose humanitarian efforts have made a difference at BCC and in the larger community, this year we honored ourselves and all we have accomplished in our first 50 years. Approximately 160 BCC members and friends attended in person, and about 30 more enjoyed the proceedings remotely. The event marked our return for the first time in three years to the beautiful setting of the Skirball Cultural Center.

BCC member Adam Kulbersh, a working character actor and TV and film writer, once again served as host and regaled us with his unique brand of culturally incisive and self-deprecating humor. Along with Mark Farber, he put together a professionally produced and executed show that was thoroughly enjoyable. The recounting of BCC's history was divided into five parts, interspersed with two musical and one

magical interlude.

The first segment was "our beginnings," a recitation of the history of BCC's early years by a group of intrepid storytellers with vintage newspaper articles and other documents from the 1970s scrolling on the big screen. This part of the program also included Adam's interviews with two early BCC members, Gloria Bitting and Jerry Nodiff, who recounted some of their experiences as pioneers in the world's first gay and lesbian Jewish space. Adam also interviewed Rev. Troy Perry, the founder of Metropolitan Community Church, about his pivotal role in encouraging Jews who were meeting in his church to form their own synagogue. Rabbis Sanford Ragins and Rick Jacobs described the Reform movement's role in helping BCC get started and become the first LGBT congregation admitted to a mainstream religious organization.

The second part of the program, "the AIDS years," featured on-screen appearances by Richard Kopelle and Ray Eelsing, both surviving spouses of BCC members who died

of AIDS. Drs. Les Zendle and Mark Katz, Rabbi Emerita Lisa Edwards and Cantorialist Emerita Fran Chalin, Lauren Schlau and Ginger Jacobs, all key activists in shaping BCC's and the Jewish community's response to the epidemic, provided moving testimony about the challenges they faced in their respective roles and as a community. A list of BCC members who passed from HIV/AIDS and photos of some of them scrolled in the background.

Part three, "our families and children," included recorded reminiscences by some of BCC's pioneering gay and lesbian parents about the challenges of becoming parents and raising children in a society that was not yet accommodating or accepting of diverse families. Two of their now adult children, Rebecca Pardess and Elyse Saragossi Hart, spoke about growing up in the BCC community as children in same-sex families. At the end of this segment, several of BCC's current crop of young children rushed the stage and offered their perspectives on what family means to them.

The fourth segment, narrated by Rabbi Emerita Lisa Edwards, featured wedding photos of BCC couples, including some of the more than 40 couples she married during the "summer of love" in 2008, when Californians briefly enjoyed marriage equality before the passage of the infamous Proposition 8. BCC members Hannah Theile and Kenna Love offered a poignant recollection of the challenge of learning to refer to each other as "my wife" after decades of referring to each other as partners.

In the last part of the historical program, "our community," former BCC President Lauren Schlau recalled the changes in women's roles at BCC over the years, especially in ritual participation and lay leadership. Former Executive Director Felicia Park-Rogers spoke about efforts to recognize and include bisexuals in the BCC community. Trans havurah chair Miriam Zimmerman acknowledged the progress made in helping transgender and non-binary individuals feel they belong at BCC. This segment also included memories of the acquisition, design, and remodeling of BCC's spiritual homes at 6000 and 6090 W. Pico, along with the congregant-created works of art that have adorned them (the stained glass windows and story lines copper strips) and the environmentally-friendly features of our current building (solar panels on the roof, recycled carpeting and insulation, and drought-resistant landscaping).

The first musical interlude featured Cantorialist Emerita Fran Chalin and pianist Jeanelle LaMance performing songs from BCC's early years, with memorabilia such as tickets to Hanukkah dances, High Holiday brochures, and letters from politi-

cal dignitaries scrolling in the background. The second, the musical finale, was led by Cantor Juval Porat, accompanied by Tamara Kline on keyboard, Janice Markham on violin, and J.J. Ross on percussion. They performed the Priestly Blessing and the Shehecheyanu from the liturgy and the songs "Here's to Us" (lyrics and music by Tamara Kline) and "House of New Life" (lyrics by Tamara Kline and Juval Porat, music by Juval Porat).

Midway through the show came the "magical interlude" with award-winning magician and mentalist Michael Gutenplan. A self-described "third-generation psychic," he entertained and amazed us with his uncanny ability to guess correctly the numbers, words, and animals that his volunteer subjects were thinking of, even while blindfolded with duct tape!

Rabbi Jillian Cameron's keynote address about BCC's next 50 years concluded this amazing afternoon. The brunch was her first opportunity to meet and talk with so many congregants and friends, despite having been BCC's rabbi for nearly





Above: Sherry Sokoloff z'l and Gloria Bitting in the 1970s. Photo: Vince Bucci

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two years. Rabbi Cameron offered an optimistic outlook on BCC's potential and the steps already being taken to fulfill it. Even as the pandemic continues to limit our ability to meet in person, BCC has inaugurated such innovative programs as the "lunch and learn" study group, the "roundtable on aging" to address concerns of our rapidly aging membership, and "BCC out and about" to increase our involvement in the local community.

Rabbi Cameron then made an exciting announcement: BCC has established an endowment fund with the proceeds of the sale of the home that BCC member Harriet Perl, z'l, bequeathed to the temple. This endowment will be invested to provide a secure and steady stream of income for BCC into the future. In an effort to increase the principal of the endowment fund, Rabbi Cameron and the officers of the congregation solicited pledges from those present, with an offer by three very generous couples to match

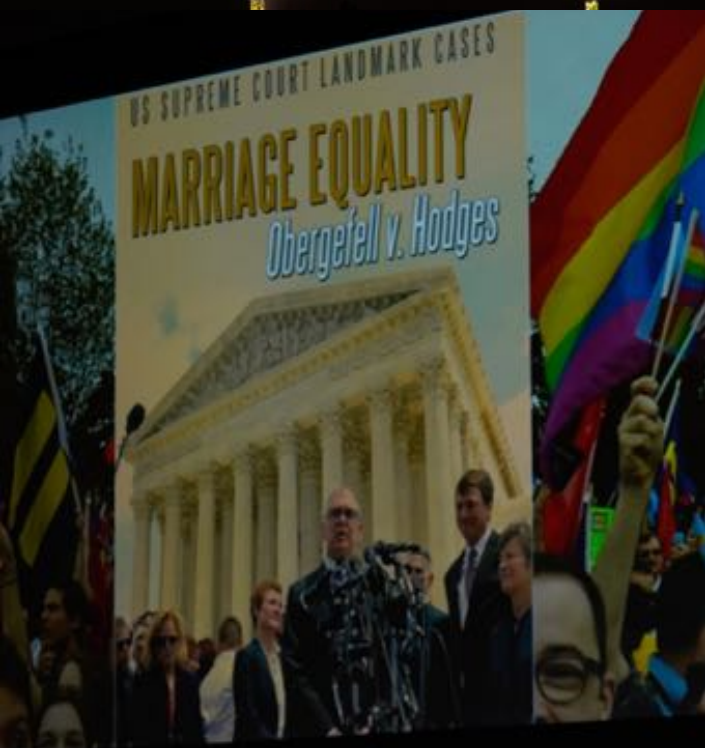
pledges up to \$100,000. As of this writing, about \$29,000 in pledges has been received. When added to the approximately \$160,000 in revenues from sales of tickets and ads before the event, this makes our 50th anniversary brunch a very successful fundraiser as well as a joyous and well-deserved celebration.

In addition to Adam Kulbersh and Mark Farber, the 50th Celebration Committee included Brett Trueman (chair), Jessica Donath, Jonathan Falk, Tracy Moore, Larry Nathenson, Nicolasa Nevarez, Steve Sass, and Lauren Schlau, plus our communications coordinator and administrative assistant Maggie Boyles, event planner Grant Associates, and graphic designer Cristina Padron. Space limitations preclude naming all the other individuals whose tireless efforts helped make this event a success, including our storytellers during the event, our stagehands, numerous interviewees, those who provided images and other materials for the program, our event sponsors, donors, and ticket holders, and many others.



Above: Rev. Troy Perry of Metropolitan Community Church in the 1970s.
Below: An early BCC banner.
Photos: Vince Bucci





Above: Rabbi Emerita Lisa Edwards with a Marriage Equality banner on the big screen.
Right: BCC President Brett Trueman, Rabbi Jillian Cameron, Mark Farber and Adam Kulbersh.
Photos: Vince Bucci.

Above left: A BCC dance in the early years.
Above right: Group photo of BCC parents and children.
Below: Our building at 6090 W. Pico on the big screen with the story lines wall, solar panels on the roof, and drought-resistant plants.
Photos: Vince Bucci.





KEDOSHIM – UNDERSTANDING HOLINESS IN OUR TIME

BY RABBI JILLIAN CAMERON

*Drash delivered for Parashat Kedoshim on 6 Iyar 5782
(May 6, 2022)*

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

GOD SPOKE TO MOSES, SAYING:

דַּבֵּר אֶל-כָּל-עַדְת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי
קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

SPEAK TO THE WHOLE ISRAELITE COMMUNITY AND SAY TO THEM: YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I, YOUR GOD יְהוָה, AM HOLY.

These are the opening words of our parasha this week, named Kedoshim, a Call to Holiness.

This week's Torah portion is often referred to as the Holiness Code. And it is a sought-after portion, especially after the last few, which were rife with skin diseases described in great detail.

My rabbi once told me that she planned her children's births around which Torah portion they would have at their B'nai Mitzvah, and lo and behold, her 2nd son happily read from parashat Kedoshim when he turned 13.

It comes by its appraisal as a "great Torah portion" honestly, which I think you can discern with these first verses.

After so many weeks devoted to the intricate details of the sacrificial system, the painstaking, and often gory minutiae of the practicalities of purity, and again, those pesky skin diseases, this week is packed with deep wisdom, a primer on ethics, kernels of expectations all with the goal of reaching ever closer to k'dushah - holiness, ever closer to God.

You shall be holy, for I, your God יְהוָה, am holy.

It almost seems like a simple statement, but we know it is anything but. Holiness is one of those words we use a lot in a wide variety of contexts,

throughout our prayer service, but is far more elusive to define than we might imagine a word with that kind of mileage on it. Think for a second about how you might define it for yourself.

Holiness is...

connection with God,
distinctiveness,
separation
purity
elevation
specialness
love, justice, consideration, compassion, intention...

However each of us might define it, we sure talk about it a lot, and in our Torah portion this week, we are given this Holiness code that perhaps might help us begin to understand holiness expected of us as we strive to reflect the image of God in which we were all created.

Rabbi David Hartman says, The Jewish people is not just a faith community; it is not merely a collection of individuals, each longing to connect themselves spiritually with God. Rather, Judaism is a way of life of a people chosen by God to be a medium of God's vision of holiness and justice.

Exactly halfway through the gems of wisdom in our Holiness Code, in verse 18, chai, we read this:

וְאַהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

V'ahavta l're-acha kamocho
Ani Adonai

Love your fellow as yourself
I am Adonai.

Once again, simple and profound.
Simple but not easy.
Simple and supremely important.

One of my Torah study students on Tuesday, reminded us of this story, a Jewish classic from the Talmud, tractate Shabbat 31a

There was another incident involving a certain person who came before Rabbi Shammai and said to him:

“Convert me on condition that you will teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot.” Shammai pushed them away with the rule in his hand.

The same person came before Rabbi Hillel.
Hillel converted them.

Hillel said to them:

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn.”

Besides witnessing two very different teaching styles, Rav Hillel reminds us of the essence of what we strive toward as Jews, succinctly and profoundly, a version of our Torah text, the way we treat other people matters and the rest is commentary.

Love your fellow as yourself,
What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow,
...and that's it. That is holiness, that is Judaism.

Our text doesn't say, Love your fellow as yourself...

only if they believe the same things you do,
only if they agree with you,
only if they look like you, love like you, act like you,
believe like you.

There's no “if” or “unless” that follow, it is not conditional, it is aspirational, an answer to the original kedoshim question, what is holiness and how do we reach towards it.

Thousands of years later we are still reaching, still striving towards holiness, amidst the barriers both internal and external in our way, the stumbling blocks we put in front of ourselves, the complications added, the conditions we still set, the divisiveness baked into our humanness.

This week we were dealt a significant blow, as many of our fears about the imbalance of the Supreme Court seemed to be realized, as the overturning of Roe v Wade appears imminent. The necessary guarantee of legal and lifesaving health care, of the right to choose what happens to your body, of terminating a pregnancy, once again may no longer be the law of the land.

This isn't a women's issue; it is a human issue and a very Jewish issue.

One in four people who can become pregnant will have an abortion by age 45. One in four.

The cultural stigma, the political third rail, the imbalance of religious voices surrounding reproductive freedom in this country coupled with the growing divide and growing extremism, has brought us to this moment. This moment where some seem to champion taking rights away, rather than striving to expand them.

Rabbi Allie Klein said: “This is a deeply Jewish issue. Jewish law allows for abortion and teaches that a fetus is not considered to have the status of personhood until birth. To prevent a person from exercising their right to choose is an infringement on Jewish belief and on Jews' ability to freely practice our religion. As a Reform Jew, I have the obligation to speak up and take action to support reproductive rights, offering a loud, coherent, progressive, deeply religious voice that counters the ever-louder right wing often Christian narrative about life beginning at conception. There are a myriad of religious views on this issue – not just those that happen to be the loudest.”

Rabbi David Stern, a rabbi in Texas, said this to

his community after the passing of SB 8, the law which made abortion effectively illegal after about six weeks of pregnancy and empowers any citizen of Texas to sue any other citizen who is in any way connected to an individual's choice to terminate a pregnancy:

“There is plenty of debate in Judaism related to different dimensions of the abortion question, but one thing is crystal clear – the pregnant person's life always takes precedence over that of the fetus, and the fetus, while endowed with a measure of value and dignity, is not equivalent to a living, breathing being in the world.

Therefore,
Your Jewish tradition does not equate abortion with murder. Period.

Your tradition does not equate fetal life with human life outside of the womb. Period.

And again perhaps most important, your tradition keeps its focus on the life, health and agency of the pregnant person, not on the life, health and agency of the fetus.”

If you are looking for more resources about the Jewish view on abortion, the right to choose, reproductive freedom, please don't hesitate to ask. There is so much more, from our sacred texts into modernity.

Don't forget, we have fought this fight before.

At times like these,
Love your fellow as yourself seems a naïve pipe dream, on the battleground of necessary human rights.

And let us remember, as many of us gear up once again, that we can still strive toward holiness, in fact, we must,

We must love our fellow
enough to disagree respectfully,

enough to argue ideas over personal attacks,

enough to champion our values, to lift up those without a voice, those who cannot fight but need fighting for, those without access or resources.

We must love our fellow
enough to remember our own privilege, to look beyond our own self-interest towards human interest

enough to remember it's not about winning but striving to live in a world that is more just, more equal, and more holy.

Holiness, like justice, is not a pie, it isn't finite, there is no last slice. There's more than enough for everyone and it's up to each of us to pursue it and share it.

Mishna Avot reminds us,
“Any love that is dependent on something, when that thing disappears, the love will disappear. A love which is not dependent on anything will never cease.”

Let us love ourselves enough,
let us love our fellow humans enough,
and let us strive toward holiness together.

Shabbat Shalom.

TASK FORCE CONSIDERS FUTURE OF BCC'S RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

BY JESSICA DONATH, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND TASK FORCE CHAIR

EARLY IN BCC's journey toward the congregation's new forever home at 6090 W. Pico Blvd., many members expressed a desire to know that the needs of families with children would be considered in the planning process. The clergy and lay leadership echoed these ideas, and a formal religious school was established based on Ohr Chayim, the existing family education program. The school opened its doors in 2012. After ten years, and with changing circumstances within BCC and the larger community in mind, a task force has formed to consider the future of religious education at BCC.

A few years before the school began, in 2007, then-rabbi Lisa Edwards and then (and current) president Brett Trueman wrote of these "exciting developments" in a letter to members outlining the decision-making process and the school's goals. The school "will prepare the children of BCC for B'nei Mitzvah as we launch them on their lifelong path of Jewish learning," the letter stated. "Our school's curriculum will integrate all of who we are in ways that few other synagogues can. We will actively embrace the diversity of our families and the different shades of Judaism that we represent, as we jointly pursue knowledge of Torah, Tzedakah, and Tefillah."

Research conducted by the family committee at the time showed a significant number of families with children in BCC's orbit looking for precisely that, a place where they could be who they are and not be different.

In the ten years since, the Jewish landscape has changed. Many Reform and Conservative synagogues are, thankfully, welcoming to same-gender parents, Jews of color, and families that form through adoption. This means that parents who want to "launch [their kids] on their lifelong path of Jewish learning," as the letter described one of the goals of Jewish education, can now do so more easily and openly, and geographically closer to where they live.

As an active BCC member, I wholeheartedly embrace and want to live our shared values such as diversity and inclusion and want to pass them on to our children. After consulting with Ohr Chayim education director Rae Antonoff Portnoy and Rabbi Aimee Gerace at Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center (PJTC) in Pasadena, where we live, it became clear that PJTC's religious school would be a better fit for our family.

Attending religious school in the same community where we live and where their secular school is, makes it more likely that my kids (and their parents) will find local Jewish friends to hang out with outside of a Jewish educational setting.

Ohr Chayim's enrollment has dwindled over the past few years. At the moment, the school has only two formally enrolled students. Another family pops in and out as their son prepares to become bar mitzvah, and families like mine attend holiday observances. Membership data and anecdotal evidence show us that there are more families at BCC and in BCC's extended circle with children of religious school age or close to that age. What might be some additional reasons the school is struggling?

Brett Trueman and the Executive Committee formed BCC's religious school task force to get to the bottom of this. Its first goal was to consider whether BCC needs or should have a religious school at all, given the not-insignificant costs involved and the current low enrollment.

After thorough deliberations, task force members Jessica Donath (chair), Rabbi Jillian Cameron, Cantor Juval Porat, Kristin Anayah, Jonathan Falk, Nicolasa Nevarez, Marie Pedersen, and Amy Pomrantz feel that the answer should be "yes." At the same time, we feel that Ohr Chayim in its current incarnation can't continue without significant changes.

While I'm not going to announce any concrete findings and recommendations before we have a chance to more fully gather our thoughts and ideas, I want to assure everyone that we are leaving no proverbial stone unturned and no idea unexamined to find the best, most forward-thinking, and most-BCC solution for our families with children and the congregation as a whole.

In addition to and in connection with the future of the religious school, the task force also seeks to develop creative ideas around family integration in everything BCC does, from holiday observances and Shabbat to celebratory brunches and social activities. Families with children must feel that they are an integral and valued component of the community. This is vital for BCC's next 50 years.

If you have thoughts to share or want to be part of this conversation, please reach out to me at execvp@bcc-la.org.

WHY I ADVOCATED FOR A DEFAULT VEG FOOD POLICY FOR BCC

BY BRETT TRUEMAN, PRESIDENT AND VEGAN HAVURAH CHAIR

THROUGHOUT OUR 50-YEAR HISTORY, BCC has been known as a trailblazing synagogue. We pioneered the use of gender-neutral God language in our siddur in the 1970s, and we were among the first to adopt policies that advance inclusiveness and social justice. 11 years ago we dedicated the first “green” synagogue building in Southern California, qualified for certification under the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program. Now BCC’s Board of Directors has approved another first – a DefaultVeg food policy. I am excited that BCC is the first synagogue in the United States to adopt this policy.

I have written this article to explain what this policy is, why I advocated for its adoption, and what it means for the congregation. I believe that the DefaultVeg food policy is consistent with Jewish and secular ethical values that many of us support, whether or not we are vegan in our personal dietary practice. But I also want to emphasize that this policy does not make BCC a vegan synagogue. Dietary options that were available at BCC events before this policy was adopted will continue to be available, and all congregants remain valued and respected members of our community regardless of dietary practices.

Since its inception a couple of years ago, BCC’s vegan havurah has been an important part of our social justice work. It has also provided an entry point for those in search of a Judaism that invites them to combine their passion for veganism with spirituality in a vibrant and diverse community. Adopting the DefaultVeg food policy takes this work a step further. For events that involve serving a meal with food options, like our annual brunch, BCC is committed to serving plant-based meals by default, while giving members and guests the choice to opt for meals that are not entirely plant-based.

As the DefaultVeg website ([DefaultVeg.org](https://www.defaultveg.org)) explains, “thoughtful defaults can help us make choices that align with our values, without requiring extra time or willpower.... In America, food is usually served in a way that reinforces the idea that meat should be a normal part of every meal. However, when people see deli-

cious plant-based meals presented as the recommended option, ... it reshapes their thinking about what a normal meal can look like.”

DefaultVeg cites three principal reasons to adopt this policy. A plant-based diet promotes human health by reducing the incidence of heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes and early mortality, improving stamina and athletic performance, and avoiding antibiotics and food-borne illnesses that are prevalent in meat products. It improves animal welfare by reducing the suffering inflicted on animals on “factory farms” where they live in crowded and unsanitary conditions. And it contributes to the health of the planet because animal agriculture is one of the largest sources of climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, and other ecological damage. It requires far more land, water, and fossil fuels to produce animal products as compared to an equivalent amount of plant-based foods.

According to the Jewish social justice organization Avodah ([Avodah.net](https://www.avodah.net)), a plant-based food policy also aligns with Jewish values such as *shmirat ha’adamah* (protecting the earth), *tza’ar ba’alei chayim* (preventing cruelty toward animals), *oshek* (labor justice), and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). Adopting a DefaultVeg policy is one way we can help build a healthier, more resilient food system while living our values of compassion, sustainability, and justice. For more about these Jewish values, see the Jewish Initiative for Animals: <https://www.jewishinitiativeforanimals.com/#!/page/default-veg>.

At BCC, we also remain committed to the value of inclusion, one of our community’s founding principles. We continue to reach out and welcome everyone who finds us regardless of financial ability or dietary choices.

If you would like to learn more about the DefaultVeg food policy, or if you would like to obtain some delicious plant-based recipes, please visit [DefaultVeg.org](https://www.defaultveg.org). If you have any questions about the BCC policy, please [contact me](#).

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

We welcome you to contribute to this magazine! Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing. Have you recently attended an amazing (virtual) event or art exhibit? Did you read a book or watch a TV show that everyone should know about? Do you have an idea for a new column? Do you think your bubbe has the best rugelach recipe? Please be in touch, we can't wait to hear from you!

Please follow these submission guidelines:

- Articles should be more than 500 words, letters to the editor can be shorter
- Please do not write about officeholders, candidates, or general international, national, state, or local political issues.
- Be respectful of anyone you reference, directly or indirectly, by name or anonymously.
- Please do not advertise any product or service in an article or letter.
- Submissions should be sent by email to the editorial team at gvanim@bcc-la.org as a Word attachment, in the body of the email, or as a Google doc.
- Include your name and phone number.
- All submissions will be proofread and edited for length, clarity, style, and tone.
- Note: Late submissions may not be considered for publication.
- Deadlines will be published in the BCC Weekly News and Updates.

THE STORY BEHIND THE RABBI'S OFFICE REMODEL

BY JAMES SUTHERLAND, BCC SECRETARY AND HOUSE CHAIR



AS YOU KNOW, our beautiful synagogue building at 6090 W. Pico has been closed for much of the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We reopened the sanctuary for in-person Shabbat services a few months ago, and even more recently we opened the kitchen for one's following services. Most congregants are probably unaware that Rabbi Jillian's office has been remodeled over the past few months. There is a very interesting story behind this renovation, and I would like to share it with you here.

In my role as House Chair, I stopped by BCC occasionally to ensure that the building remained in good repair, and I began to wonder whether any good would come of this lost time. One day last year, I received an email that had been forwarded to me concerning an organization that was looking for a shul to film an Antisemitism Public Service Announcement. Imagine my surprise when I found out it was MTV, my former client. After working for a couple of weeks with their representatives, I thought we had the deal in place when I received a phone call telling me that they had decided to film in New York instead. Downhearted but not out of the game, I called repeatedly, and eventually, because they liked our space, or just wanting me to stop calling them, they decided on a film date at BCC.

As a result, BCC received a large donation, and with this money, I formed a plan to remodel and refurbish the Rabbi's office. Seeking guidance and support from the Board of Directors, I asked for a small budget and work began. We partnered with a local Jewish firm to handle new carpeting and installation. Our facilities staff, Tim Goad, provided a fresh coat of paint. Maggie, our administrative assistant, handled some logistical issues, and I moved furniture. And then the fun began! Rabbi Jillian and I shopped at a local furniture store where she decided on a fantastic loveseat. Rabbi Lisa donated two lovely barrel chairs, Rabbi Rachel Adler donated the large wood L-shaped desk, and the renovations were complete.

As the darkness recedes and the light shines again, I hope that each of you, when the time is right, will have a chance to visit Rabbi Jillian in her newly refreshed office.

Left: Installation of new flooring during the office remodel.

Below: Rabbi Cameron's newly furnished office.
Photos: James Sutherland.



REFLECTIONS ON 46 YEARS WITH BCC

BY LOUIS HIRSCH

I FIRST CAME TO BCC SOME 46 YEARS AGO. Friday night services were being held in Benn Howard's dance studio. I was sent to BCC by my Irish Catholic Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor, who was intent on helping me de-compartmentalize my life. Raised the grandson of an Orthodox rabbi, being gay HAD to be kept secret. I thought so.

What an innovative time it was in the life of the first synagogue with "an outreach to the gay and lesbian community!" Barry Simon wrote our first prayer book. We were proud it referred to God in both the masculine and feminine form in Hebrew. We fought against state proposition 6 (the Briggs Initiative), which wanted to ban gay teachers from teaching in California public schools. We succeeded in getting over 200 rabbis to sign a No on 6 petition that we published in the Los Angeles Times. We marched proudly in the earliest Gay Pride parades. We sent representatives to Reform and Conservative synagogues to help them understand that we, too, were proud Jews, and that our community was part of their community. We purchased a home and furnished it with things needed to make it a temple: an ark, a Torah that had survived the horror of the Holocaust, and a memorial board. A soft wall created by member Naomi Katz became a symbol

of the House of New Life. Later, sadly, we watched as some among us were taken by the "gay disease" (AIDS).

We have had our stars. Harriet Perl, teacher and activist, who moved us in directions some of us were too timid to attempt on our own (including de-genderized God-language in English). Stuart Zinn, our first elected temple president, who, together with our mentor Rabbi Erwin Herman, convinced the national Reform movement to accept BCC as a member of the UAHC (now the URJ).

Over the years, BCC has grown. We have had in Rabbi Lisa and now have in Rabbi Jillian a full-time rabbi to guide our spiritual path. Fundraising events have advanced beyond the dance parties, picnics and holiday parties organized by Carl Esparza, Rick Wasserman, Steven Kassler, and others. Families and children join in our services. We have opened our doors to all. Now, BCC has services for children and many other things we never dreamed of in those early days. We survived a schism. We learned to be active in the gay and straight communities. We have grown, and we have prospered. Mazel tov, BCC. You are doing just fine!



Above: Another shot from BCC's 50th Anniversary Celebration. Photo: Vince Bucci.

ON THIS FIRST NIGHT OF PASSOVER, 2010

BY MARY AVIYAH FARKAS



TODAY, how could I not dream of being in my paternal grandmother's kitchen.

The roasting, cooking, and making would be intense.

My grandmother Janka, as Grand Maestro conducting her daughter Rozsa, assorted sisters and their daughters.

Easily six, maybe more in her kitchen, working to create

a masterpiece meal.

The chopping, slicing, paring, sorting and washing, taking out and putting away, placement, preparation, the small, significant decisions of each step, repeated over a lifetime which happen automatically, precisely, exactly, with such total assurance, conviction, that the act of the decision, the carrying it to completion is so ingrained, repeated thousands of times the knowing how much salt to add, where to make the cut, the slice, knife skill becomes unconscious.

The apples, honey, raisins, the exact blend for Charoset.

The color of the onions, the smell which tells how it tastes,

matzo balls able to float in soup, the stirring to the right consistency,

the mixing, knowing when it's done, exactly ready, timing, timing, hot staying hot, timing,

all becomes part of who we are, what we do, how we make things happen, how we create.

The thousands of unconscious decisions made necessary for creating

the masterpiece meal.

My grandmother Janka orchestrating.

This meal served at the long table, dressed in crisp, clean linen,

with the finest china, crystal and silver, as beautiful buttons and sparkling ornaments

to her pressed linen dress.

Wine, matzo, maror, food telling our story sprung from slavery

leaving captivity knowing again freedom, tasting sweet, bitter, salt.

The familiarity and easiness of family, *Csalad, Mishpacha*, relatives.

Dressed finely as the table. Happy to be together.

Grateful for this yearly time to hear our story, share our story, tell our story,

our family Haggadah.

We taste together, eat and drink together, enjoy and laugh together,

speak and share together.

Eating the masterpiece orchestrated by my grandmother.

This meal made year after year, passed down mother to daughter,

father to son, generation one Jew to the next, each partaking of Tradition.

Knowledge of Liberation, Divine Intervention, Compassion,

Awareness of Misfortune, Gratitude for Freedom.

Gratitude for Life. Sharing Awareness, Happiness, Hope.

My grandmother at this table, before Hitler, before losing husband,

son, sisters, brother, nieces, nephews, before the Ghetto,

before needless death, before mass insanity, mass insanity, war,

before leaving all she knew, before her long, deep depression.

My grandmother vital, alive, passionate, sure, knowing, supremely capable.

My grandmother, who I never knew.

[My paternal grandmother Janka (Sonnenschein) Gutlohn, lived in Budapest, surrounded by her children and large loving family until my father was placed in a forced labor camp in 1941; and my uncle, her oldest son, also in forced labor, never returned from the Russian front. She survived the Ghetto in Budapest and emigrated to Israel with her daughter, my aunt Rozsa. In Israel, she suffered a long, drawn out depression until her death in 1961 at the age of 84.]

First published at <http://eldermuse.blogspot.com/2010/03/on-this-first-night-of-passover-2010.htm>

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POEM: THROUGH THE SKYLINE

By CHANA BRYSON

Through the Skyline

As we pass through the skyline
I see you drifting.
Tell me
What is it you see when you touch God?
That sleepy grin
I smile back though I weep with all my life.
Tell me
What are memories for?
The skyline fades behind us
Beyond the hills to which we will return
This time
Wordlessly watching, the world adores you
Though I weep, I celebrate you with all my life
How is it fair
How is it right
That love becomes grief?
Our task complete
We pass back though the skyline
Toward those hills to which we return
This time
I see you sleep
What can I give that did not come with?
And the skyline rests now behind us
Above our hills
This time
Tell me
What are memories for?

דרך קו הרקיע

כשאנחנו עוברים דרך קו הרקיע
אני רואה אותך נסחפת
תגידי לי
מה את רואה כשאת נוגעת באלוהים?
החיוך המנומנם הזה
אני מחייך בחזרה למרות שאני בוכה עם כל חיי
תגידי לי
בשביל מה יש זכרונות?
קו הרקיע נמוג מאחורינו
מעבר לגבעות אליהן נשוב
הפעם
התבוננות ללא מילים, העולם מעריץ אותך
למרות שאני דומע, אני חוגג אותך עם כל חיי
איך זה הוגן
איך זה צודק
כשאהבה הופכת לאבל?
המשימה שלנו הושלמה
אנחנו עוברים דרך קו הרקיע
לעבר הגבעות האלה שאליהן אנו חוזרים
הפעם
אני רואה אותך ישנה
?מה אני יכול לתת לך שלא הבאת איתך
וקו הרקיע נח עכשיו מאחורינו
מעל הגבעות שלנו
הפעם
תגידי לי
בשביל מה יש זכרונות?

THE STORY OF THE KUGEL QUEEN

BY ELIZABETH SAVAGE, WITH MARIE PEDERSEN

INTRODUCTION: FOODS AND YACHATZ (BROKEN)

BY MARIE PEDERSEN

IN THE UPCOMING FILM *YACHATZ* (currently in development: <https://www.yachatz-the-movie.com/>), a Jewish mother is losing her memory due to Alzheimer's disease. As her daughter sees this progression and longs for connection, she finds it in reconnecting with her Judaism and making matzah together.

This movie will be a Jewish story, but also a story about how connections happen through food and family. The co-producers have asked a few people to share a story about their family and a special food, mostly Jewish, but not always. Here is our first one.

GAIL SUBER EARNS THE TITLE OF "KUGEL QUEEN"

BY ELIZABETH SAVAGE

The road to becoming Kugel Queen is neither a straight line nor a progression of kugel recipes being passed down from family members who cook kugel. Rather, in this story, Gail Suber learned how to cook Jewishly from her close and caring relationships with her mother and grandmother.



Photo credit MarthaStewart.com

Gail is the daughter of Darilyn Suber, who is the daughter of Esther Kanovitz. Esther was born in Pinsk in 1906. She was a triplet with sisters Sonya and Thelma. When she was two years old, her father brought her and her older sister Pearl to New York and eventually to California. Sonya and Thelma reunited with Esther when they were 16. Esther did not cook very well, so her husband Saul did the cooking. As young women, the triplets appeared on Groucho Marx's show and "Queen for a Day." But I digress.

Somehow, Esther and Saul, Gail's maternal grandparents, conveyed cooking to their daughter, Darilyn. Darilyn was born in Los Angeles in 1933. She cooked kugel for Passover, potato or matzah farfel.



Darilyn Suber and Grandmother Esther Kanovitz Photo by Ann Quigley

With her husband and family of five children (Gail, Michael, Alex z"l, David, and Adam). Darilyn cooked Shabbat dinner on Friday nights. She was known for her brisket, which had the secret ingredient of Coca Cola. She liked cooking, enjoyed good food, and enjoyed



Grandmother Esther and granddaughter Gail Suber. Photo by Ann Quigley

making food for the family.

A few years later, Gail moved to Los Angeles in June of 1974. She was active in the Jewish Lesbian Feminist community in the 1970s and 1980s, including attending the ever-frequent potluck meals. Gail's "go-to" dish was noodle kugel. There is no recipe per se because it is just a combination that seems right: egg noodles, ricotta or farmer's cheese, cinnamon, raisins, and peaches. This was similar to her mother's brisket, where she could describe what to do, but there was no recipe. With each potluck or dinner, Gail gained fans of her kugel – and as one of those fans, I thus crowned Gail the "Kugel Queen." It was and is the best in town.

From 1975 to the present, Gail has been a member of a food co-op in Santa Monica. In the summer, she uses the freshest of peaches from the farmer's market in downtown Santa Monica for cooking kugel. She has expanded her culinary skills, eats healthfully, and reads the Food section of the Los Angeles Times and food-related articles online for inspiration. From her start as the Kugel Queen, she has evolved to be a gourmet home chef. Well deserved!

For those of you who need a recipe, I have one for you here. This research included cooking a kugel – it was great to have the smell of home-cooked kugel in the house!

Lukshen Kugel - Noodle Pudding

Serves 4-6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. wide egg noodles
- ½ cup butter
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 2 or 3 teaspoons ground cinnamon (to your liking)
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 cups of milk
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 8 ounces ricotta cheese (if you can find it, pot cheese or farmer's cheese are options)
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup of apricots, peaches, prunes, or other fruit

DIRECTIONS

- Preheat the oven to 350. Grease a 9 x 12-inch casserole baking dish.
- Cook noodles until tender, drain.
- Put noodles in a large bowl, add the butter, and stir until butter is melted.
- Beat together eggs, sugar, and salt. Add 1 tsp of cinnamon. Stir in the ricotta. Stir into the noodles and add the fruit.
- Pour into the prepared baking dish. Sprinkle with the remaining cinnamon.
- Bake until golden brown, about 45 minutes.
- Serve warm.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ...

In this column, BCC members share things they do or love on a typical day in their lives. In this issue, Dr. Todd Moellenberg, pianist and piano teacher, tells us about his average day.

8:15 - I wake up without the alarm. My mornings are often pretty relaxed because I teach most of my piano lessons in the afternoon. I lie in bed for fifteen minutes, scrolling through Twitter and the New York Times app on my phone.



8:32 - I get up, feed my cat Jasper, and pour myself some leftover coffee from the French press I stashed in the fridge. Then I open my laptop and play Wordle, which I solve faster than usual: CRANE > PILOT > TIPSY.



8:47 - I start responding to emails, and continue organizing my summer schedule for piano students. This has proven to be a very difficult task: I have almost thirty students I travel to weekly with constantly shifting schedules due to camps and vacations. My boyfriend Michael, whom I live with, wakes up at some point and we check in on how we both slept (pretty well).

10:13 - I scarf down some green juice that I bought at Trader Joe's, then take a walk around Elysian Park with my friend Stephen, who lives down the street. Topics of discussion include: bad luck, my house concert last week, my love of cantillation, Stephen's summer job plans, and various hardships and reconciliations with friends.

12:08 - I get home and make a favorite lunch snack: Trader Joe's off-brand Frito's with tuna/mayo and sliced avocado, along with the green juice I hadn't finished. Michael, who is a flutist, comes home while I'm eating and shows off a new piccolo he's trying out.



12:27 - I take a shower and brush my teeth.

12:42 - I pour myself another glass of leftover coffee, and get to work on a new piece for solo piano that I've written. I'm currently learning to play the piece alongside proofreading it.



1:50 PM - I practice a movement of a Mozart Sonata that I'm performing as part of a studio recital on Zoom I'm hosting over the weekend. This recital will also include students of mine who are currently taking lessons over Zoom.



2:10 PM - I say goodbye to Michael, who leaves for his teaching job. Then I get dressed for work, and head to La Cañada to teach some lessons.



2:30 PM - I teach my first student, a seven year old boy. We work on his recital pieces as well as his latest method book assignment. He plays it very well, so we put a star on it which means he can move onto the next piece. We finish the lesson with an ear training challenge using all the C's he's learned on the piano.



3:18 PM - I drive to my next students' home which is close by. Marketplace is on NPR and a cagey Biden official is talking about economic policy with Kai Ryssdal.





4:30 – My next students are preteen brothers. The younger brother is up first. We review his pieces for the in-person recital, including a difficult arrangement of *We Don't Talk About Bruno* which he is playing very well, and then look at a piece by Tchaikovsky. For the older brother, we review an arrangement of *Mr. Brightside* by The Killers that he is playing for the recital, then work on *The Entertainer* hands separately, and I give him tips for playing the stride bass with his syncopated right hand. His Mom hands me a bottle of iced tea on my way out – refreshing!

4:51 – I arrive home to teach lessons to two siblings over Zoom – one of them has a cold so we switched to virtual lessons for the week. I prefer teaching in-person, but am grateful for the reprieve from traffic (they live in Beverly Hills). It's pretty hot in the apartment when I get home, and I find Jasper lying on his back under the piano.



5:00 – I log onto Zoom, and teach the younger sister (7), followed by the older brother (9). We review their recital pieces and learn some new pieces. Everyone is sounding prepared for the in-person recital, and we still have two weeks to go. Right before I finish, Jasper comes up to me at the piano bench, which means he wants his dinner.

6:45 – I feed Jasper and start making meatloaf for dinner. It's even hotter than when I started lessons.



7:34 – Michael comes home from work. He makes cocktails with lemon, seltzer, and rum, while he tells me about his day at work. When the meatloaf is almost ready, I prepare a salad with carrot, celery, spinach, and “goddess” dressing.



8:24 – Mikey and I eat dinner, and I share with him how my lessons went. We greet our neighbor when she gets home, and thank her for the orange-ice cakes she gave us the night before.



9:04 – I take out the cat litter and we watch the newest episode of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, followed by an old episode of *The Great British Baking Show*. I record each time the hosts say “Bake!” with my iPhone, as I am planning on making a supercut.



11:01 – Michael and I find Jasper hanging out under the coffee table and give him a “spa treatment,” which entails petting him from all sides. Then I say goodnight to Michael, brush my teeth, floss, and get in bed.



11:10 – In bed, I scroll through Twitter before falling asleep at 11:28pm.



The Adventures of *Augie March* by Saul Bellow

Reviewed by Larry Nathenson

“Nobody reads Saul Bellow anymore” was one reaction when I suggested this book for the BCC book group. “Saul Bellow is not my friend,” said another group member (I didn’t inquire what they meant by that). Those of us who did read and discuss the book had decidedly mixed reactions. The reviews on Amazon are equally ambivalent – this is either a brilliant piece of literature, a classic American novel, or a boring and pretentious tome (nearly 600 pages) that isn’t worth the effort to plow through it. There is a degree of truth in both perspectives.

This is definitely a period piece, both in content and in style. Published in 1953, it traces the title character’s life from childhood in the 1920s to about 1950, when he is in his mid-thirties. It contains a wealth of detail about America (specifically Chicago) during the Depression and World War II, an environment with which Bellow was intimately familiar. The struggles of the immigrant Jews surrounding Augie as he grows up are on full display, as are their interactions and conflicts with other immigrant groups and the WASP establishment they envy. In a time when Jews are usually depicted in literature and on film as upper middle-class and suburban, it is bracing to read about an earlier era in which that status was only an aspiration.

If nobody reads Bellow today, perhaps that is because nobody writes like him either. His style is characteristic of the middle of the 20th century, with long sentences of multiple clauses and even longer paragraphs. When describing a scene or a person, he spares no detail – one reviewer says he gives you 500 words when 50 would suffice. He frequently goes off on tangents that seem irrelevant to the storyline, to which he

returns several pages later as the reader struggles to recall what was happening.

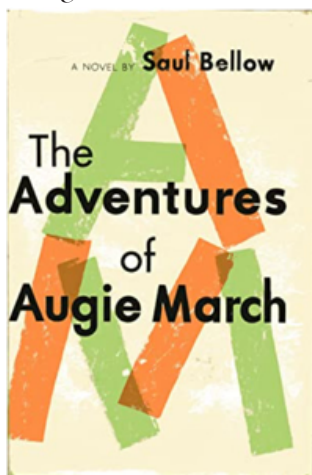
As I read, I thought about why this style is no longer popular and why we are now so impatient with it. We have been trained, or have trained ourselves, to expect stories to be told to us in brief, easily digested packages like television shows or even shorter videos. We don’t want to think too much or immerse ourselves in a different time and place as

we read. Perhaps we have lost something in giving up both the work and the pleasure of reading a lengthy novel such as this.

So, what are Augie’s “adventures”? They are varied and often contrived, a series of entanglements that result from a personality that is full of contradictions. Augie is both self-assured and easily manipulated, unsure of what he wants and morally grounded. He tries on a host of different careers, but none quite fits him. He tries to emulate his successful older brother, who marries into a wealthy family and offers Augie a place in that family’s business and a potential bride. Neither works out because Augie sabotages his own efforts. He takes a position with another wealthy family who introduces him to a lifestyle he can only dream about and even offers to adopt him, but again he can’t accept because it doesn’t feel quite right.

An old friend from the neighborhood talks him into a scheme to smuggle immigrants from Canada, but Augie backs out when the friend admits he is driving a stolen car (saving Augie from being arrested with the friend later). The most implausible of Augie’s adventures involves a trip to Mexico in the company of a wealthy older woman who trains an eagle to hunt lizards near her family’s villa in an old mining town popular with American expats (Leon Trotsky, the exiled Soviet leader, makes an appearance in one scene). Eventually, Augie gets married just before shipping out with the merchant marine, after which he is shipwrecked and ends up in a hospital in Italy.

One of Augie’s adventures seems especially relevant today. He befriends a neighbor who becomes pregnant and wants an abortion, which is illegal and fraught with danger more than 30 years before *Roe v. Wade* (and still was when Bellow wrote this book). Augie assists her in every way he can, accompanying her to doctors’ offices despite the assumption that he is the baby’s father. There is also a scene of clandestine homosexual activity, another taboo subject that Bellow treats without judgment. So maybe there are reasons to read Bellow in the different yet strangely familiar atmosphere in which we now live.



BCC's Books and Bagels discussion group has met continuously since January 1995. The group met monthly in members' homes for a bagel brunch and discussion, although now we are meeting by Zoom until further notice. We read a variety of books: fiction and non-fiction, American and Israeli, historical and contemporary. The only requirement is some Jewish content (LGBT content is a plus, but not required). The group is open to BCC members and non-members, and you are welcome to join us for a particular book that may interest you. RSVP is required. For upcoming books, see the BCC Weekly News and Updates or check the [website calendar](#). To register for the Zoom link, contact Larry Nathenson at larrynath@aol.com.

BCC QUESTIONNAIRE:

JESSICA DONATH, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Asking a set of questions to learn new things about old friends was a popular pastime in 19th century Europe. At 14, future French novelist Marcel Proust became one of the first to fill out a questionnaire in his friend Antoinette Faure's book Confessions; An Album to Record Thoughts, Feelings, & co. In modern times, Inside the Actor's Studio host James Lipton created a set of questions as a fun and not-too-serious way of getting to know his guests better. Vanity Fair published a Proust-inspired questionnaire on the last page of the magazine for more than 20 years that became one of its most successful and popular columns. Since its heyday, [Karl Marx](#), [Terry Gross](#), [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), and [David Bowie](#) have all participated in a version of the classic question-and-answer parlor game. At G'vanim Magazine, we are pleased to introduce the BCC Questionnaire!

1. What is your idea of Perfect Happiness?

When all four of us are healthy, content, and get enough sleep.

2. What is your greatest fear?

Becoming a single parent due to the death of my husband.

3. What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

Being stuck in a confined space with no way out.

4. Where would you most like to live?

Munich or London.

5. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

Messiness. I wish I had an organized and clean home more often, and not just when other people come to clean it.

6. What is the trait you most deplore in others?

Arrogance.

7. What is the quality you most like in a person?

Intelligence and not taking oneself too seriously.

8. What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Diplomacy.

9. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

That I lose patience and yell at my kids.

10. Which living person do you most admire?

Leeav Sofer and his team. (Check out the Urban Voices Project - <https://urbanvoicesproject.org/>)

11. On what occasion do you lie?

When I try to get my kids to do things they don't want to do.

12. Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

We need to go; why are you naked?; we are running late, put on your shoes; you need to wear underwear in public.

13. Which talent would you most like to have?

I would like to be an effortless, engaging, and charismatic public speaker.

14. What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Keeping my children alive for 5.5 and 8.5 years, respectively.

15. What is your most treasured possession?

My mom's engagement ring.

15. What is your most treasured possession?

My mom's engagement ring.

16. What is your greatest extravagance?

I buy German snacks online and have them shipped to Pasadena.

17. What is your favorite TV show?

The West Wing. More recently, Hacks.

18. What is your favorite sound?

Waves crashing.

19. Which book do you wish you had written?

ANY book. I would love to write one and hope I will one day.

20. Who is your hero of fiction or Torah?

Kassandra.

21. Which historical figure would you most like to meet?

Christa Wolf.

22. Who are your heroes in real life?

Members of Doctors Without Borders, Leeav Sofer and his team, T'ruah.

23. What are your favorite names?

Orli and Joshua.

24. What is your favorite age?

34.

25. What is your favorite childhood memory?

My dad was super busy when I was a kid, but once in a while, he dropped me off at preschool on his mokick, a motorized bike even smaller than a Vespa. Because we didn't wear helmets we rode through the forest from our home to the preschool building, avoiding the

police and traffic.

26. What turns you on (creatively, spiritually or emotionally)?

A sense of humor and being able to laugh at oneself.

27. What turns you off?

Entitlement.

28. What is your favorite curse word?

Shit. I try to switch to 'shoot' when my kids are around.

29. What is your favorite language?

French and Russian. My favorite accent is a Hungarian accent.

30. What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

Chef.

31. Who would you like to see on a new banknote?

Pearl S. Buck

32. Which invention do you admire most?

Email.

33. What is the first thing you do in the morning?

Check emails and messages on my phone.

34. What is the last thing you do before going to bed?

Brush my teeth, and put on my PJs.

35. How would you like to die?

Quickly and in bed.

36. If you were to die and come back as a person, an animal or a thing, who or what would it be?

A stuffed animal that provides comfort to a child.

