



The Shofar

Congregation Beth Ahavah
at Congregation Rodeph Shalom

December 2007/January 2008

Congregation Beth Ahavah is a GLBT synagogue welcoming people of all gender and sexual identities since 1975.
Member, Union for Reform Judaism / Member, World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'ava

From Ned Hanover A President's Message

Happy Hanukkah and Happy New Year!

I cannot believe how quickly time is flying. Just a couple of months ago I greeted you in this column with "L'shanah tovah!" and here we are already on the cusp of 2008. The last several months have been wonderful for Congregation Beth Ahavah.

We've participated in beautifully arranged Rodeph Shalom High Holy Day services. I thoroughly enjoyed having a choice when it came to the style of service I preferred. There were classical Reform services in the main sanctuary which were expertly sung by cantorial soloist Jody Kidwell. (If you don't already know, Jody is an accomplished opera singer, and she incorporates her training in every service she does. It's quite a treat!)

But many of us longed for something less formal and more participatory (i.e. BA style.) On both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur mornings there was an alternative service. There was plenty of singing and participation in those services held downstairs in the Teller Auditorium. I encouraged Rodeph Shalom to expand on that tradition next year by offering alternative services during the afternoon and evenings of both holidays. The interest to add more alternative services for next year is definitely there. I'm very hopeful that we'll see even more alternative services next year.

Of course Rodeph Shalom services will never be BA services. I still miss the intimacy we were able to create last year with Rabbi Liz Rolle leading us on Letitia Street one last time. Change is always difficult. And I know that some of you are saddened or disappointed with the results. If that's the case I encourage you, no, in fact I *urge* you to voice your feelings about High Holy Day

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Rich Pardys Leads a Guided Tour of the Old Synagogues of North Philadelphia

On Sunday, November 4th, Rich Pardys led a hugely successful guided tour of the old synagogues of North Philadelphia. Rich, a Philadelphia architect and member of Congregation Beth Ahavah, served as tour guide to a packed school bus of 45 people, all interested in learning about the history of the Jews of North Philadelphia.

But to say that Rich led a tour on that particular Sunday, is really only the tip of the iceberg. Rich spent a year researching the Jewish communities that built the synagogues the tour visited. His research was made all the more challenging by the fact that many of these old congregations have moved on to other locations, merged, or simply gone out of existence. Some of the buildings are now churches.

Rich kept up a running commentary during the tour, pointing out features of interest at each location. His detailed research brought a wealth of interesting information to his narration as the tour made its way through the historic old Jewish neighborhoods, such as Logan and Strawberry Mansion. Tour participants were able to follow the route of the bus on the hand-drawn maps that Rich provided.



among the participants and you can read her report at the following link: www.jewishexponent.com/article/14525.

The tour was enjoyed by all who participated and kudos to Rich have been pouring into the synagogue. *Jewish Exponent* reporter, Michelle Mostovoy-Eisenberg, was

Save the Dates:

Saturday, December 8th
B.A. Chanukah Party

Monday, December 24th
Erev Christmas Food Fress

Friday, January 25th
Tu b'Shvat Seder

Birthdays

Jay Segal	December 1	Abbe Forman	December 31
Malcolm Lazin	December 5	M-Linda Thomas	January 10
Janet Weiner	December 5	Scott Gansl	January 15
Howard Rosen	December 11	Jerry Silverman	January 24
Ned Hanover	December 18	Michael Valoris	January 25
Steven Rosenberg	December 25	Carol Fisher	January 31



Anniversaries



Cindy Balzer & Darie Agan:
 December 14 22nd anniversary
 Gloria Becker & Ruth Schachter:
 December 14 10th anniversary
 Abbe Forman & Shelly Komito:
 December 24 11th anniversary
 Phyllis Ehrlich & Chris:
 December 26 3rd anniversary

Yahrzeits

December 17: Lena Friedman remembered by Don Friedman
 December 19: Jay Goodis remembered by Brenda Goodis
 December 22: Ellen Fine remembered by Meredith Jill Fine
 December 25: Louis Finn remembered by Larry Finn
 December 30: Peter Muzzonigro remembered by Scott Gansl
 December 31: Martin A. Miller remembered by Eve Miller
 January 3: Ruth Finn remembered by Larry Finn
 January 3: Robert Friedman remembered by Don Friedman
 January 5: Louis M. Kahn remembered by Eve Miller
 January 5: Esther Lefton remembered by Shelly Komito
 January 7: Bela Hollander remembered by Gloria Becker & Ruth Schachter
 January 8: Samuel Gansl remembered by Scott Gansl
 January 14: Jack Silverman remembered by Jerry Silverman
 January 20: Joyce Forman Feldman remembered by Abbe Forman & Shelly Komito
 January 20: Hannah Gansl remembered by Scott Gansl
 January 26: Beatrice Segal remembered by Jay Segal
 January 29: George R. Wilson remembered by Carol Fisher & Benay Kramer



Donations

To the B.A. Prayer Book Fund, In honor of Joan Levin's "special birthday" — Joan and Martin Kuper

If you would like to add a name to the Beth Ahavah Yahrzeit list, please contact the synagogue office at 215-923-2003 or email the information to bethahavah@rodephshalom.org.

Be a Pillar of Pride for Congregation Beth Ahavah

One sentence in your will ensures the future of BA.

"I give Congregation Beth Ahavah (tax ID# 23-1973525) \$ _____ to be used for its general purposes."

OR

"I give (insert the word "all" or a specified percentage of the rest of my estate] to Congregation Beth Ahavah (tax ID# 23-1973525).

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services, or with the affiliation to RS as a whole. And if you're up to it, join the High Holy Day services committee to make your services *your services* once again.

If you think I'm kidding about what change a few voices can bring about, I offer my kudos to these BA members who are not only making a difference at BA, but making other RS members take notice as well:

- *Abbe Forman, Donald Friedman, Shelly Komito, Jerry Silverman:* What a great job these folks did on October 11 at our National Coming Out Day celebration! Each spoke directly from the heart about his or her coming out story to the audience of about 40 people (many of whom are RS members who are not in BA). Everyone listened intently - including all three rabbis. Rabbis Kuhn and Holzman made sure that Rabbi Maderer (who helped to coordinate) and I knew how vital and important this event was to RS. Rabbi Kuhn even later confessed that he had so much trouble pulling himself away from the stories that he was late getting to his next engagement!
- *Richard Pardys:* What is left to say about the magnificent bus tour of North Philadelphia synagogues he led on November 4? The afternoon began with a bagel brunch where Rich handed out a hand-drawn map illustrated with each of the 14 synagogues we were to visit. Then about 45 of us embarked on a tour of synagogues gone by (except for RS). Rich's knowledge of the synagogues and their

architecture was quite impressive as he had been researching them for about a year. Rich received many accolades throughout the rest of November, including public praise from RS president Susan Klehr and Rabbi Holzman at the Board of Trustees meeting. (If you'd like to read the write-up from the Jewish Exponent you can still check it out at www.jewishexponent.com/article/14525.)

- *Every BA member:* Every new RS member (including every BA member, new or not so new) was honored on the New Member Shabbat on November 9th in the main sanctuary. About 15 BA members joined other new RS members on the pulpit for a special blessing and welcome from Rabbi Kuhn. Each new member was also treated to a challah. Then another treat: a talk by Ambassador Dennis Ross, the point man during Middle East peace negotiations during the Clinton/Bush era.

While I love to *kvell* (can I steal your word, Jocie?) about BA's impact at RS, it's just as important that BA members have our own time and space to be a community. So let's have a blast (it'll be just us and the Arbel Chorale) at the *Hanukkah party* on December 8th. And who else can put on a *Christmas Eve food fress* like BA? Or come to BA services held twice monthly. Our services on December 7 and January 4, as well as BA's *Tu B'shvat Seder* on January 25 will be led by one of our rabbis. Perhaps you prefer lay-led services? We've got that too on December 21.

In any event, we'd love to see you! (Not a bad double-entendre, eh?) Happy Hanukkah and a happy and peaceful 2008 to everyone. See you soon.

B'shalom,
Ned

Beth Ahavah Events

December 8th

B.A. Chanukah Party

Join us Saturday night, 7:00 p.m., for fun, party games, and all the donuts and latkes you can eat! Music by Arbel, Philadelphia's Independent Jewish Choir.

\$10/person.

Please RSVP by December 5th to (215)923-2003 or bethahavah@rodephshalom.org.

December 24th

Erev Christmas Food Fress

The BA Erev Christmas Food Fress returns! Join us on Monday night at 7:00 p.m., at Sang Kee Peking Duck House, 238 N. 9th Street in Philadelphia.

\$25-\$30/person.

Please RSVP to (215)923-2003 or bethahavah@rodephshalom.org.

Save these dates:

January 9th — One Book, One Jewish Community

January 25th — Tu b'Shvat Seder

February 28th — Annual B.A. Congregational Meeting

BA and RS Services



RS Torah Study is held from 9:15 to 10:30 am every Saturday. No previous Torah or Hebrew knowledge is needed. Dress is casual. You're welcome to attend as frequently as fits your schedule.

Please check the RS Bulletin or website for more events. Remember - BA membership is also RS membership. Take advantage of Torah Study and any other services and events listed in the RS bulletin.



Please join us for **traditional B.A. Friday night Services**, starting at 8:00 p.m. on the following dates:

December 7 - Rabbi-led service

December 21 - Lay-led service.

January 4 - Rabbi-led service.

January 25 - Tu b'Shvat Seder

An oneg and socializing will follow all BA services.

An Interview with Rich Pardys, Synagogue Tour Guide By Eve Miller

Eve Miller: How did you first get interested in synagogues in North Philadelphia?

Rich Pardys: I always wanted to investigate a list of synagogues in the 1938 Bulletin Almanac that I own. Since North Philadelphia is in my neighborhood, I looked there first. Both of my parents have roots in North Philadelphia. My mother grew up in Logan and my father in Strawberry Mansion.

Eve: What time period were Jews living in North Philadelphia?

Rich: Primarily from the 1890's to the 1960's. The settlement began with German Jews and then was followed by waves of Jews of different national origins. In general, German Jews settled near other German Jews and Russian Jews stayed together.

Eve: What are some of the things you have learned through your study of this area?

Rich: Preparing for the tour has opened my eyes to neighborhoods that formerly I wouldn't go into. I found important information about my heritage in these neighborhoods.

Eve: What is the most interesting fact you learned?

Rich: There was a settlement in Port Richmond called "Jewtown" which does not exist today.

Eve: What would you like people to take away from the tour experience?

Rich: I would like them to understand how North Philadelphia played a part in the history of the greater Philadelphia area. I would like them to know more about the history of the Jewish community in Philadelphia.

Eve: Have you thought about how your life would have been different if you lived in a different area?

Rich: I think that growing up in the suburbs made me appreciate urban life more.

Eve: Is there anything you would like to add about the experience of preparing for the tour?

Rich: The experience has been a wonderful education and I have enjoyed learning about different communities. I went from knowing nothing to a greater understanding of Jewish history and my personal history.

Outwitting History - The Amazing Adventures of a Man Who Rescued a Million Yiddish Books A review by Eve Miller

I enjoyed this very readable, heartwarming and sometimes heartrending story by Aaron Lansky that describes the creation of the National Yiddish Book Center. Lansky created a home for thousands of Yiddish books that were in danger of being destroyed because their owners were old and dying and the books had no value for a new generation. It is also at times the story of his maturity – finding his own home.

Lansky became interested in Yiddish at Hampshire College because he wanted to learn about Jewish culture. He and his friends couldn't find Yiddish books for their studies so they traveled to the Lower East Side where they obtained their first van-ful of Yiddish books. Lansky writes, "In the years since, I've collected almost 1.5 million Yiddish books; but those first volumes of Sholem Aleichem, now tattered and dog-eared from use, are, for me, still the most precious of all."

Next he collected books in Montreal and in his home town of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Soon he realized how precarious was the situation for Yiddish books and he decided to save as many as possible. On a collecting trip to Atlantic City,

Lansky was implored to sit down and talk and drink tea. He wrote that his donor "was handing me not merely his books, but his world, his yerushe, the inheritance his own children had rejected."

I got to know Lansky's benefactors and co-workers and some history, too. I learned that the flowering of Yiddish culture occurred between 1864 and 1939 when thirty thousand separate Yiddish titles were published. Lansky painted a picture of a Yiddish "salon" in Sea Gate on Coney Island

where New York writers and intellectuals spent their summers. He met the Ostroffs who had hosted these gatherings and they become his dear friends.

While driving outside Amherst, he picked up a hitchhiker, Sharon Kleinbaum, who was a committed activist with the War Resisters League. She was looking for a new cause and joined the Yiddish Book Center staff.

As the Center grew, Lansky and the Board of Directors raised money for a new building, started a project to digitize crumbling books and identified Yiddish books for translation. There

are many stories in this book and Lansky touches and inspires his readers while also teaching them about Yiddish, a vital part of Jewish history.

One Book, One Jewish Community (OBOJC): Connecting People One Book at a Time, is an exciting new initiative supported by the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, designed to bring the Greater Philadelphia Jewish Community together through shared conversations, discussions and events stimulated by a selected book and related themes. Synagogues, agencies and other Jewish institutions will adopt the selected book as a vehicle for conversation, sharing and celebrating not only the book itself, but also the values and issues raised in the story. This year's book is "Outwitting History, the Amazing Adventures of a Man Who Rescued a Million Yiddish Books" by Aaron Lansky.

B.A. will hold its own OBOJC event on Wednesday, January 9th. Watch your e-mail for event details.

For more information about One Book, One Jewish Community (OBOJ) events, see the website: <http://www.jewishphilly.org/page.html?ArticleID=148618>.

Coming Out as a Life Cycle Event: Two Board Members Reflect on Beth Ahavah's National Coming Out Day Program

Jocelyn Block: In the true spirit of National Coming Out Day, BA—well-represented by Abbe Forman, Shelly Komito, Jerry Silverman and Don Friedman—came out to RS. While BA's identity as the GLBT synagogue of the Delaware Valley came as a surprise to absolutely no one, the program presented by the four BA panelists undoubtedly provided some surprises for the mixed BA/RS audience.

Leslie Polss: Partly, I was interested to hear how the stories of the panelists compared with my own experiences. But I was also curious to see if anyone from the larger RS community would attend the program. And, if so, what would their reactions and attitudes be?

Jocie: I had more or less heard the factual circumstances of everyone's coming out. But, like Leslie, I wondered how our fellow RS congregants would respond to this event.

Leslie: Rabbi Maderer's introduction demonstrated that she's well-informed regarding the issues facing GLBT Jews. Abbe presented some facts and figures about GLBT visibility and surprised me by starting with a definition of "coming out." It's a term which we take for granted in our community. But Abbe's explanation and the fact that we were listening to it with a straight audience made me realize just what a nuanced and complex set of actions are entailed by the term.

Jocie: I don't think that the straight members of our audience realized that it's such a continuous process. While there may be a major moment when one "comes out" to

friends and family, there is a continuum of "coming out" moments throughout one's life.

Leslie: I was touched by the panelists' stories. Their presentations were, by turns, poignant, funny, painfully intimate, and, on all counts, intensely honest. The response from participants, both gay and straight, was appreciative.

Jocie: I can't help but relate the coming out stories of our four panelists to the process we, as BA, are now engaged in with RS. We've had several major moments of coming out to RS—my first phone call to Susan Klehr to introduce myself and ask her if we could move in with RS; walking our Torah into the main sanctuary at RS; seeing our name on the signs on the outside of the building—and now we're in the continuum of coming out moments. I think that when we look back at this time in BA's history, our move to RS will have been the most major coming out moment, allowing us to concentrate on strengthening our identity while simultaneously gaining friends, allies and partners in larger RS community.

Leslie: I didn't anticipate much of a turnout for this type of program, especially on a weeknight. I was wrong. The room was packed, and all three rabbis were in attendance. I left the event reflectively, thinking about how my own coming out had unfolded, but I also found myself thinking in terms of my present: what else could or should I be doing to contribute to the creation of safe spaces in which others can come out? It's a challenge for which I feel a renewed sense of responsibility.

Our National Coming Out Day Celebration By Rabbi Jill Maderer

(Reprinted from the Rodeph Shalom *Bulletin*)

At our National Coming Out Day Celebration, our panelists shared their powerful stories of personal discovery. They moved us all with their depth and their honesty. As diverse as their coming-out stories were, a clear theme emerged: life can only be led to the fullest when we are true to ourselves. This great lesson applies to us all—gay or straight—as we each engage in our own journeys and in coming to understanding who we are.

As we learned from organizer Abbe Forman's introduction, the oppression of gays in our culture has led to disproportionately high depression and suicide rates. Each of us can serve as a good, supportive listener to someone who might

come out of the closet to us. And in doing so, we can actually pursue the highest mitzvah in Jewish life: *pekuach nefesh*: saving a life.

Please know that if you, or someone you know, is looking to speak with someone about coming out or about personal issues, your rabbis are here to listen.

Thanks to our organizers, Abbe Forman and Shelly Komito, and to our panelists, Don Friedman, Jerry Silverman, Abbe Forman and Shelly Komito. Congregations Rodeph Shalom and Beth Ahavah shared a wonderful National Coming Out Day celebration.

Deadline for the next issue of the Shofar is

January 13th

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Feel free to email letters and comments
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Congregation Beth Ahavah



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