



# THE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH CAROLINA

Volume XXVI Number 1 ~ Spring 2021







THE  
JEWISH  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA

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The magazine is published twice a year. Current and back issues can be found at [jhssc.org](http://jhssc.org)

On the cover, top: A conversation via Zoom with Adam Domby, assistant professor of history at the College of Charleston, about his recent book, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory*, November 10, 2020. Sponsored by the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program. Bottom: JHSSC's first in a series of virtual workshops, led by architectural historian Samuel Gruber, on "How to Document Your Synagogue (and Other Buildings) for Planning, Protection, and Posterity," March 21, 2021.

## In this issue

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**Torah and Geriatrics in a Time of COVID ~ David Greenhouse, M.D.** ~ One expects to confront death in a long-term care facility, and one expects to take precautions against the spread of viruses like the flu, but the pandemic has brought vigilance to new heights and the well-being of residents to new lows. As this geriatrician notes, a visit to a nursing home by one person puts everyone at risk—the staff, his patients, and their family members. .... 10

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**My COVID Bar Mitzvah ~ Max Raynes** ~ Some say timing is everything. The author's May 2020 bar mitzvah was not to be. Postponement to fall 2020 led to disappointment again. With his sights set on May 2021, this young man says he will go forward with the ceremony even if it has to be virtual. In the meanwhile, remembering his "rehearsal" in Israel in December 2019, on a family trip arranged by his grandparents, makes him feel lucky and well-loved. .... 13

**A Memorable Bat Mitzvah ~ Rory Shaina Lipson** ~ Like dominoes falling, this young woman's April 2020 bat mitzvah plans toppled in rapid succession after the global threat of COVID-19 was made public. A ceremony in Israel was rescheduled for a domestic destination—Brunswick, Georgia—then plans shifted again to the family's shul in Atlanta, and finally the event was held "virtually," broadcast via Zoom from the hallway of the Lipson house. As it turned out, Rory was a trend setter, and she was happy she stuck with her Torah portion. .... 14

**Uncharted Territory ~ Rachel G. Barnett** ~ In these unprecedented times, the Society has chosen to devote this issue of the magazine to how the pandemic has affected the lives of several individuals who agreed to share their stories. Thanks to the wonders of technology and the strength of its membership, JHSSC continues to educate, inform, and preserve. .... 15



## Letter from the President

In deciding on the theme of the Spring 2021 magazine, we found ourselves in new territory. In normal years, we focus the upcoming issue on whatever topic we choose for the next biannual meeting. But because of the coronavirus pandemic, we had

no Spring 2021 gathering to plan. Co-editor and layout designer Alyssa Neely came up with a novel idea: to devote the issue to the pandemic, which over the past year has utterly changed the world. We agreed that generations to come would like to hear how this unprecedented public health emergency is affecting our synagogues, hospitals, schools, and life cycle events, including funerals. We hope the end of this plague is in sight. At some point it will be historical, and we will have chronicled it.

As Jews, I think it is in our DNA to be hyper-aware of our surroundings, to measure the temperature of discussions related to Jewish life, achievements, and challenges. What has captured my attention has been the heightened need for security in our synagogues and temples, in our cemeteries and around memorials. This is our new reality.

A pandemic is a stressor on everyone, interfering with daily life and in some cases our livelihood. As stress increases, some members of our society feel compelled to act out, to subscribe to conspiracies and cults and commit acts of violence. Around the globe and in our own back yard, we see a rise in antisemitic incidents, which, according to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), have increased by 42 percent in the last 18 months.

Another sobering aspect of the pandemic is what it has done to the mental health of our most vulnerable citizens—children, the elderly, the poor. Even for those of us who are able to shelter at home, quarantine means isolation and little social interaction; it means children going to school on their iPads; it means those of us who can learn new computer skills and navigate the worldwide web find ourselves spending a lot of time online!

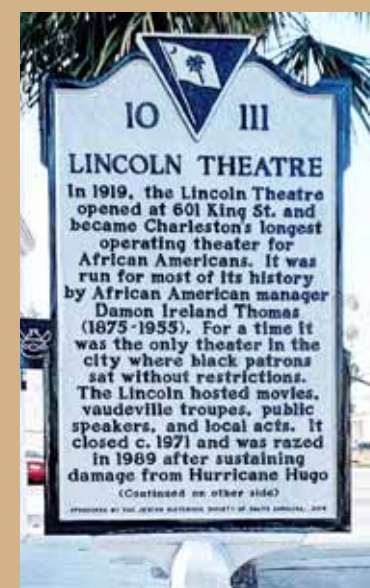
Our monthly "Sunday Conversations" have played an invigorating role by providing insightful discussions on selected aspects of South Carolina's Jewish history. Their popularity has grown, attracting increasing numbers of participants from all over the nation via Zoom. By design we have partnered with like-minded organizations who share our programming with their constituents. The easy-going exchanges between Judge Richard Gergel and attorney Robert Rosen and their guests have filled part of the void left by the absence of in-person meetings and communal events. A huge hurrah for these two past presidents who have made this difficult year easier for us all.

Thanks also to another past president, Jeffrey Rosenblum, for his dogged work on developing an endowment fund for the Society. And thanks to Executive Director Rachel G. Barnett, whose logistical and creative talents, persistence, and wisdom have guided us forward through uncharted territory.

In closing, I look forward to a time when we can come together, learn together, and celebrate the END of COVID-19 together. L'Chaim! To Life!

Sincerely,  
Lilly Stern Filler, M.D.  
JHSSC President

## JHSSC Sponsors New Historic Marker



Spandrel Development Partners and Armada Hoffer Properties, builders of student apartments called Hoffer Place at 595 King Street in downtown Charleston, worked with the city and state to recognize the Lincoln Theatre, an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century theatre for African Americans that once stood on the property and was demolished after Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The company hired BVL Historic Preservation Research to document the history of the theatre as well as the Jewish immigrant neighborhood known to locals as Little Jerusalem in which the theatre was located. The developers asked JHSSC to sponsor the project, and in February 2021, a state historic marker commemorating both the Lincoln Theatre and Little Jerusalem was installed in front of the new building. Photos courtesy of Armada Hoffer Properties.





# The Best Laid Plans Laid to Rest

by Nancy Polinsky Johnson

Tucked among the many manila folders from my parents' filing cabinet is one labeled "Funerals," and inside are a few magazine photos of a beautiful celebrity funeral service and some scribbled notes in my mother's lovely handwriting. Her first notation is, "rose bouquet on casket; shades of peach and pink."

Mummy loved peach and pink flowers. The beautiful tables she used to set for Passover seders were usually highlighted by a centerpiece in those tones, and most of the family photos of Daddy leading the seders over the years have sprigs of those flowers peeking up in the foreground.

Other funeral wishes and instructions were outlined in documents my parents filled out when they pre-arranged for their funerals in 2012 and during conversations they had with me and my sister, Joanna, over the years. Mum wanted to be buried in the white suit she wore to her youngest grandson's bar mitzvah. Daddy thought his navy suit would be most appropriate and wanted as little fuss made as possible. Both wanted the ritual cleansing of *tahara*.

In the end, none of their wishes mattered.

On the day they were buried, there had been no cleansing. There were no special clothes. And there were no roses in shades of peach and pink. Arline and Gerald Polinsky were buried in the hospital gowns they were wearing when they were zipped into body bags after dying four hours apart at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood, Florida. Cause of death: COVID-19.

It was April 2020, the early days of the coronavirus pandemic here in the United States, and gatherings everywhere were limited to ten people. So, when my family arrived at the Columbia Hebrew Benevolent Society Cemetery, the caskets had already been lowered into the ground to eliminate the need for two people to be present to perform that task.

I actually caught my breath when I first looked down into the large grave hole and saw the two caskets sitting side by side, six feet below. Suddenly tears were welling up in my eyes, and I'll confess that, of all the thoughts running through my mind at that moment, the predominant one was that my beautiful mother—a woman who took the utmost care to always look her best—was being laid to rest in a hospital gown, her hair unbrushed, wearing no lipstick. Frankly, the idea of it would have killed her if the coronavirus had not.

But the surroundings offered comfort. Spring breezes were blowing and the sun was shining on the nearly 200-year-old cemetery with its weathered brick walls. It was as if God was saying, "Welcome home."

Mummy and Daddy had lived in Columbia, South Carolina, for 45 years, having moved there in 1968 so Daddy could take a position teaching history at Voorhees College, a historically Black college in the small town of Denmark, about an hour's drive from the Capital City. It was decided early on that Daddy would make the daily commute so he and Mum could live and raise their two girls in a city with a substantial Jewish community. Committed to Reform Judaism, they immediately joined Tree of Life Congregation, led at the time by Rabbi James Apple. They soon became active members of both the Jewish community and the community at large—particularly Mummy, since Daddy was out of town all day and arrived home late because of his commute.

In the 1970s, Mummy co-chaired Columbia's first Symphony Designer Showhouse, and she continued to add to the region's vibrancy in the decades that followed, founding the Tree of Life Jewish Food Festival and serving on the organizing committee and as a charter member of EdVenture Children's Museum.



Arline Furman and Gerald Polinsky's wedding day, Boston, MA, December 26, 1955.



Gerald Polinsky, Voorhees College, 1973.

When she founded the Columbia Jewish Film Festival in 2000, she launched an event that has become a highly regarded annual happening that draws film enthusiasts from the Jewish community and beyond.

Meanwhile, Daddy moved into administration at Voorhees, then began advising other historically Black colleges and universities as a consultant, and eventually capped his career spending more than 35 years working with the top administrators at Morris College in Sumter. But he never thought of it as work. For him, helping to improve the academic, financial, and organizational standing of the small Black schools he served was akin to a calling, and he answered that calling until the day before the moving company crew arrived to pack up his house for the move to Florida. He was 83 on his last day on the job.

With Daddy's background as a history teacher, the commitment to Judaism that he shared with Mummy, and the deep love they both felt for their adopted state, it was only natural that the two of them became founding members—and later, Mummy a board member—of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina when JHSSC was formed in 1994. They attended every meeting and, along with dear friends Susan and Isadore Lourie, Mick Lourie, Gerry Sue Arnold, Fred Fields, Joel Levy, Klyde Robinson, and others, worked hard to build the organization.

My parents made many wonderful friends during their years in Columbia, friends who had been like family to them, sharing life's joys and sorrows over countless bridge games, dinner parties, and life cycle events. Now that Mum and Daddy have returned to the city and are in their final resting place, they lie among many of those friends, which is a great comfort to me and my sister.

Their funeral service was conducted by Rabbi Sanford Marcus, who served as the spiritual leader of Tree of Life for 20 years and is now Rabbi Emeritus there. He and his wife, Ruth, had been very special to Mummy and Daddy, and Joanna and I

were grateful that he was willing to venture beyond the pandemic-safe confines of his home to perform this mitzvah.

In 2020 fashion, the funeral was live-streamed on Dunbar Funeral Home's Facebook page and available for online viewing afterwards (it is still posted today). More than a thousand people watched it—many of them strangers—which I can only attribute to the fact that Mummy and Daddy's deaths had received quite a bit of press coverage, as they were among the first couples in the United States to die together of COVID-19. Their story touched people, particularly because one of the devoted nurses who cared for them recounted their last moments: they had been holding hands in their side-by-side hospital beds and, as

Daddy's body was being wheeled out of the room, Mummy faintly cried out. While her words were mostly unintelligible, the nurse could make out, "Together, Jerry."

Now they lie together, as they lived for 64 years, and Joanna and I have chosen to be grateful that neither had to go on without the other.

After their deaths, Mum and Daddy's apartment was fumigated and sealed, so my sister and I couldn't go inside for a month. When we were finally allowed in to pack up everything, we came across the funeral file with Mummy's notes and lamented with great sadness that nothing had happened as she had wanted.

You can be sure there will be a rose bouquet in shades of peach and pink at the unveiling of our parents' headstone this spring.



Arline Polinsky lighting candles, Passover, 1999.



The Polinsky family's last gathering in Columbia, SC, December 2013. L to r, seated: Gerald and Arline Polinsky, their sons-in-law, David Johnson and Eli Berens. Standing: grandson Samuel Berens, daughter Joanna Berens, grandsons Michael and Eric Johnson, and daughter Nancy Johnson. All photos courtesy of Nancy Polinsky Johnson.



# Reinventing Judaism

by Rabbi Stephanie M. Alexander

I have the honor of serving as rabbi at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina—or as we are more commonly known, KKBE. There was a time when nearly every synagogue in the United States had the letters K. K. affixed to its name. These letters identified the organization as a synagogue, a Kahal Kadosh or K'hilah K'dosha, a holy congregation. Nowadays, most synagogues have dropped the prefix; it might show up on formal stationery every now and then, but very little else. KKBE, however, has proudly retained the two words, not merely as a prefix, but as an integral part of our name and identity: We are a Kahal Kadosh, a holy community, and a Beth Elohim, a house of God.

And yet, on March 17, 2020—four days after our first (and, as of this writing, only) congregational worship service in our newly restored and renovated historic sanctuary—we could no longer use our house, and our community was unable to gather. What did it mean to be KKBE now?

Across the country, every congregation asked its own version of this question. As rabbis scrambled to figure out what to do next—for Shabbat, for Pesach, for Religious School, for (gulp) the High Holy Days—we joked amongst ourselves that “we’re doing fine, just fine, you know, other than having to reinvent Judaism!”

It’s understandable why we felt that way. Very little on our long and growing “To Do Lists” resembled anything we had learned in seminary. Instead of putting heads together over coffee and around tables, synagogue teams were navigating how to share computer files and collaborate remotely with lay leaders and staff. Instead of orchestrating worship in the sanctuary, we were figuring out the mechanics of Zoom and Keynote, drive-in Shabbat services and quickly configured outdoor worship space. Cue sheets now had to guide the advancing of Visual T’filah slides and note which participants to mute/unmute and when. High Holy Day services—already an elaborate and carefully choreographed endeavor under “normal” circumstances—now became a full-on production.

At KKBE, we decided to contract with professional videographers to prerecord our High Holy Day worship services. At no point in my rabbinic training, I assure you, did we cover anything close to “Shot Lists” and on-camera training. Yet here I was outlining liturgical sequences for filming, the transitions required between them, and what needed to be placed where for continuity between shots. (Should ark doors be open? The Torah scroll out? Covered or uncovered? On the right or on the left?) The list went on and on.



*Above: Shula Holtz records a High Holiday Torah Reading on the bimah at Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE) in advance of Rosh Hashanah, September 2020. Below: Jason Gould celebrates his bar mitzvah in KKBE's sanctuary with immediate family in attendance, and many more friends and family on Zoom, November 21, 2020. Photos: Mark Swick.*



Yet at least those things we could “reinvent.” How were we supposed to comfort the sick when we weren’t allowed to go to their bedsides? Console the bereaved when we couldn’t take them in our arms? How could we rejoice with brides and grooms, welcome babies into the Covenant, or celebrate the accomplishments of our b’nai mitzvah when neither family nor friends nor the members of our congregation could do the one thing we have always taught is most important: to just show up?

These difficult questions reflect painful situations, but their answer is straightforward and simple: We do what we have always done. We do the best we can. And while that “best” has come up short in many areas, it has proven to be even better in some.

It has been devastating to gather with but a smattering of loved ones in the cemetery for funerals; to watch as family members of different households refrain from embracing when we know for certain this is one time when we are meant to embrace. Yet technology has enabled more people than would ordinarily be able to gather in person to “participate” in funeral services, and there’s something to be said for being embraced by dozens or hundreds of loved ones, while simultaneously having an intimate and deeply personal graveside experience, as well.

I have enjoyed watching the creative ways in which “chat” and “comment” features on various technology platforms allow participants to offer their congratulations and encouragement, gratitude and support during the course of a shared worship experience without disrupting it. We may

not be able to throw candy at the conclusion of a bar or bat mitzvah or lift a bride or groom up on a chair, but somehow the rapid-fire “Great job!” comments feel just as sweet, and the cacophony of “mazel tovs” once everyone is unmuted even sweeter.

And there have been other silver linings, too: Congregants who have moved away are able to regularly participate in Shabbat and holiday services, even teach in our religious school. Families who live in different states, and normally attend different synagogue services, are able to rotate around and spend Shabbat together. Embracing new technology and formats has afforded Hebrew school teachers and students more opportunities to engage in one-on-one learning. Lifelong learning programs can recruit presenters from around the country and as far away as Israel and bring them into people’s living rooms.

The fact is, at no point during this pandemic have we actually been reinventing Judaism. Judaism has survived innumerable disruptions and destructions; we’ve endured pandemics and plagues before. Judaism has a long history of adapting and adjusting, of reforming to meet the moment. Some of those reforms—like the shift from sacrificial worship to liturgical worship—have proven enduring. Others have been more fleeting, ceasing to be meaningful once the moment necessitating change has passed.

Time will tell how much of this particular moment’s innovation is here to stay. But when this pandemic ends, and our holy congregation is once again able to enter its house of God, I truly believe we will do so as invested and engaged as ever.



*Above: Larry Lipov and Eileen Fried pose with a table full of offerings available during KKBE's Virtual Nosh, November 2020. Below: Mark Swick and Larry Lipov greet congregants, friends, and customers as they pick up their Nosh To-Go orders. Photos: Irene Gilbert.*





## A View from the Trenches: A Teacher's Testimony

by Marla Kranick Palmer

I teach modern European history at a private high school in Greenville, South Carolina. Unlike most of the public schools, we returned to face-to-face classes full time in August, at the very time coronavirus cases were surging here in the Upstate. I am 52 years old, and while I do not have any of the underlying conditions that seem to provide fertile ground for COVID-19 to wreak havoc, I am in an age bracket that puts me at higher risk. And so, needless to say, I was not happy with my school's decision to reopen so soon. Of course, I understood the financial pressures facing private schools. I knew our administration was trying to walk that fine line between accommodating parents, who couldn't justify paying high tuition for their children to be taught over Zoom, and keeping their faculty and students safe. It was not an easy decision, and I do not think our administrators took it lightly. And so, as much as I dreaded it, I had no choice but to return if I wanted to keep my job.

We went back to school in mid-August

with desks roughly six feet apart and everyone masked, and with hand and desk sanitizers and paper towels in every classroom. The students were visibly happy to be there after spending the spring attending class online. As one student remarked, "I never thought I would say this, but I am so happy to be back at school!" It certainly brought some "normalcy" into our lives, if one could call social distancing, mask wearing, and the perpetual application of hand sanitizer "normal."

A few weeks and zero cases of COVID later, students became increasingly lax, especially with regard to social distancing. Besides constantly having to remind a number of them that wearing a mask under one's nose does not protect anyone, the hardest part of my job was the ongoing need to separate students who wanted to be close to their friends. High schoolers are very physical: they want to hug and grip each other's hands, etc. I felt more like a social distancing coach, whose primary job was to keep students apart, than I felt like a teacher.

We didn't have our first wave of cases until November. Only a few students actually got sick, but we had to quarantine large numbers of students because of their proximity in the classrooms. We got through that relatively well, and none of our teachers were affected. In December, just before winter break, another wave passed through. This time, far more people were affected. Several students tested positive and a number of teachers were quarantined when spouses or family members who were considered close contacts were exposed to the virus. About a third of my students were

"in quarantine" during midterm exams, and I had to quickly figure out how to accommodate them in a "virtual" environment. It was not ideal, but we made it through—although I am convinced some students took advantage of these circumstances and cheated. It is really hard to monitor students who are testing in class and virtually at the same time.

It is equally hard to pay attention to the emotional needs

of students, many of whom struggle with anxiety and depression in the best of times. As news sources have noted, there are so many students falling through the cracks now. For some, school is the only safe place, and our students at least have this refuge, but there seems to be more fear and anxiety in their eyes than I can ever remember. And it is all the more difficult to listen to them and really "see" them behind our masks.

On top of the logistics of trying to teach during a global pandemic with different "rules" for teaching content and skills, connecting with students behind masks and plexiglass and six feet apart, and meeting new needs among the student population, there was the added burden of how to manage lunch hour, especially once the weather turned colder. The school first tried dividing students up to eat in classrooms, as well as larger spaces in the school. But when they put 20 students in my classroom for two days in a row for 45-minute



Marla Palmer with her high school history class, Greenville, SC, 2020. Photo courtesy of the author.

periods—maskless, of course, because they were eating (and I had to eat too) and laughing and gathering in groups—I thought that if I did not contract the virus then, it would be a miracle. Thankfully, I did not.

Perhaps the most difficult part is how tired we all feel, all the time. I don't know if it's trying to get enough air through the masks to teach and engage with students or all the extra preparation required to meet so many needs in such a strange environment, but I feel as if I am always working and never able to catch up. To some extent, that is perennially true of

educators who love what they do and strive to be better, but it seems especially true this year.

Finally, although vaccine distribution has begun, it is not clear how or when things will return to "normal." That is something we all are living with, old and young, rich and poor. It is a strange thing to think that there is nowhere in the world we could go right now that is untouched by this public health crisis, but in a sense that is comforting too. We are all in this together. We suffer as a community, and as a community, G-d willing, we can also heal.

## Pediatrics in a Pandemic

by Deborah Greenhouse, M.D.

During the summer of 2019, I treated patients at my pediatric practice in Columbia, South Carolina. Healthy children and sick children sat in our waiting rooms and were treated in our exam rooms by doctors and staff wearing no protective equipment. During the summer of 2020, I treated those same patients both inside and outside of my office. Healthy children waited in their cars and were brought directly to an exam room. Our waiting rooms sat empty. Sick children were seen in the parking lot and tested for COVID-19 if necessary. All staff wore face masks. I wore an N95 respirator mask, goggles, and gloves, adding a face shield for high risk patients. This is still how I practice today, in February 2021. The only major differences are that I now have easier access to essential protective equipment and that, as a frontline health care worker, I have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

As the pandemic took hold, I noticed a major difference in my daily schedule. The number of well child and immunization visits plummeted as parents became too fearful to bring their

children to the office. The number of visits for children and teens with anxiety and depression skyrocketed, as they tried to navigate a world that none of us understood. The number of children dealing with obesity soared as well, as children spent all day in front of a screen attending virtual school because the public schools had closed.

I became accustomed to hearing pleas like "When can we go back to school?" and "When can I see my friends again?" I referred more children to psychologists and psychiatrists than ever before, and I treated many of them myself when their symptoms became severe and our mental health specialists were overwhelmed. Meanwhile, most of the children who became sick with COVID actually did very well, although a few became seriously ill and were hospitalized.

I went home at the end of every long day wondering if I had done enough and also wondering if this was the day that I had been infected by one of my patients or their parents. The stress was overwhelming and continues to this day.

How did we get here? In Leviticus 19:18 we are taught, "Love your neighbor



Dr. Deborah Greenhouse making a "car visit," wearing face shield and mask and carrying supplies, 2020. Photo courtesy of the author.



as yourself.” There is no greater commandment. Yet far too many people deny the existence of the pandemic and refuse to heed the guidance of public health experts. If we are going to turn this crisis around, it will involve truly loving our neighbors as we do ourselves. That will mean wearing a mask in public, maintaining social distance, washing

hands frequently, and staying home when ill. It also means accepting the vaccine as it becomes more widely available. These are the changes that will need to happen in order for our schools to be open, our children to be safe, and our world to return to some semblance of normal. These are the changes that I hope and pray for.

## Torah and Geriatrics in a Time of COVID

by David Greenhouse, M.D.

When Miriam became ill, Moses uttered the briefest of prayers, “Please God, please heal her.” I practice geriatrics and work only in long-term care facilities. I am no stranger to treating progressive illness for which we have no cure and death is certain. While the Torah teaches us to save a life (*pikuach nefesh*), helping families make end of life decisions is part of my job description. Yet I, like all of America, was unprepared for the pandemic of 2020.

By the middle of March, visits to nursing homes were restricted. Our doors that had been open 24/7 were now guarded by temperature checkers. The halls were very quiet. The Torah tells us to honor our mothers and fathers. The news from New York and Seattle was terrifying. Families understood that danger lurked in every breath and that their loved ones were the targets. Saving a life by avoidance was the new paradigm. Families and residents understood the restrictions as the virus crept closer to South Carolina. I found myself responsible for the safety of three populations: my patients, the staff, and families. And they were all a danger to each other.

Soon families were using FaceTime and Alexa to visit with their loved ones and to communicate with the staff. Our residents were pulled into a technological world they

did not understand. Daughters visited at the windows and then called with concerns. There were noticeable changes amongst some of our residents. “The dwindles” soon became a diagnosis, even among residents who never developed COVID infections.

Honor thy parents and saving a life are important precepts for Jews and, for some four to six weeks, families seemed to accept the visitation restrictions. But like many Americans, people soon grew weary and lost their patience.

When the governor refused to issue a mask mandate and opened up the beaches, bars, and restaurants, the virus found the weak links and pounced.

Despite frequent testing and infection control measures, the virus still manages to find new hosts. Like a smoldering ash, one became three became seven became twenty. Any family member who visits puts her

or his loved one, someone else’s loved one, and my staff at risk. Nursing homes are like college dorms, but with older residents who don’t party as much. Colleges should have looked to us for inspiration on how to keep safe.

Vaccines have arrived at nursing facilities and new infections have been cut in half. Vaccine hesitancy among staff is still a barrier. We are so close to getting back to normal that now is not the time to let our guard down.



Left: Dr. David Greenhouse dressed in personal protective equipment (PPE), preparing to see a new patient at one of his nursing facilities. Right: COVID-precautions signs and PPE supplies cover this door to a patient’s room. Photos courtesy of David Greenhouse.



## Wait and See

by Yaron Ayalon, Director of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, College of Charleston

2020 was a challenging year. In March, the College of Charleston, like most colleges and universities, closed. Students were sent home, and all instruction shifted online. For the Jewish Studies Program, this also meant putting student life (Hillel) activities on hold and presenting our public programming via Zoom. While that aspect of our work remains the same—we have not had an in-person event here at Jewish Studies for about a year—we decided early on to move as much of our operations as possible to in-person. In June, our staff returned, and we have been largely working from the Jewish Studies Center on the corner of Glebe and Wentworth uninterruptedly since then.

To make this happen without a rise in COVID-19 cases required significant adjustments and compromises. We wanted to be here for our students, to mentor and teach them in person, but also via Zoom for those who could not attend. We wanted to be the one place on campus where they could have meaningful interactions they could not get elsewhere, as most of the campus was still hunkered down and the majority of classes delivered remotely. This required quite a bit of innovative thought. Those among you familiar with our program and its history know very well that unconventional solutions to common problems have always been what we do here.

And so, we set out to make this work, and make it work we did. We experimented with technological setups to optimize communications in and outside the classroom. We served to-go meals behind plexiglass dividers instead of the traditional sit-down dinners. We spent hours talking (on the phone and Zoom) to prospective students and their parents. We hosted significantly more events than in ordinary times, taking advantage of Zoom’s capability of bringing together people from all over the country and abroad, and engaging hundreds more people than we previously did. And we took time to strategize for when the pandemic subsides.

Our program also went through some changes that would affect us in the long term. In late August, we welcomed Dr.



The pandemic forced College of Charleston Hillel to offer take-out only for all its meals. Masked and socially distanced, these students picked up their food in the lobby of the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center during the 2020 fall and 2021 spring semesters. Photos courtesy of the Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program, College of Charleston.





Ashley Walters, an expert in American Jewish history, who in January replaced Dr. Dale Rosengarten as director of the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. That month, Kim Browdy joined us as our Associate Director for Community Relations. In a few months, our team will grow again, as another faculty member, (soon to be Dr.) Chad Gibbs, joins us as the Director of the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies. Chad will teach courses and position our program as a national leader in the area of the Holocaust.

All this growth and in-person work certainly had a high cost. Our faculty and staff have been laboring under grueling and emotionally demanding conditions for many months. Since August, they have been putting countless hours (without additional compensation or a pay raise in sight) into teaching remotely and in the classroom; meeting students and supporting them emotionally and academically, on Zoom and in person; serving hundreds of meals to students in the Jewish Studies Center and at The Citadel, and delivering them



*Ashley Walters teaching a hybrid class at the Sylvia Vlosky Yaschik Jewish Studies Center, College of Charleston, March 2021. Photo courtesy of Ashley Walters.*

We can therefore proudly say that despite the challenges of the pandemic, our program continued to grow and expand in multiple ways, including with three new hires, in directions that will positively affect the Jewish community in Charleston and South Carolina for years to come. Just wait and see.

On another front, we have improved our academic appeal to students. The Jewish Studies major is the best second major any student can pursue. It is made up largely of electives, makes one stand out in a competitive job market, works with almost any other major/minor combination, and trains our students in unconventional thinking and inventive and innovative approaches to problem solving. We now have more Jewish Studies majors than we have ever had, and we are on track to become the Jewish Studies program with the highest number of majors nationwide. Just wait and see.

to those in quarantine; working with the Office of Admissions on recruiting Jewish students to the College; reshaping our marketing and branding strategies; reaching out to new constituencies; planning and managing events; preparing for a busy spring semester; and handling all the “under the hood” tasks associated with running such a complex operation.

Some of us, used to working 50+ hours a week, have long passed 70 and even 80 hours, wondering when was the last time we did not work. Stretched thin and exhausted, our people’s dedication and commitment has kept the enterprise going at this most challenging time. I can only say that I am fortunate and proud to be associated with such an incredible group of professionals. For most of you staying away from our campus and in-person activities, the changes I have discussed here may not be too obvious. But you will notice them once the pandemic is over. Just wait and see.

## My COVID Bar Mitzvah

*by Max Raynes*

In May 2020, I was to become a bar mitzvah, but six months before that, in December 2019, my maternal grandparents, Lilly and Bruce Filler, took my family and me to Israel for an intergenerational tour and bar mitzvah ceremony with nine other families. Since it was my bar mitzvah year, I was eager to go on this trip.

On the morning of the ceremony, we woke up early to get to Masada to watch the sunrise. The bright blue backdrop with dashes of orange and red across the sky was like a painting, and I’ll never forget it. The bar mitzvah, led by an Israeli rabbi, began shortly after we arrived. I dreaded reciting my Torah verse, even though I had spent a lot of time studying it, but I was also very excited to be bar mitzvah’d in Israel. This was an accomplishment for me because I was finally recognized as an adult in the Jewish faith and I knew it meant a lot to my family.

Throughout that fall and winter, my parents and I had been making plans for my bar mitzvah in May in Redlands, California, where I live. By mid-March we realized we couldn’t hold the ceremony because a deadly virus was spreading across the United States. I was relieved because I knew there were hours and hours of preparation ahead of me, but I was disappointed, too, because my bar mitzvah is very important to me and my family. My parents postponed the date to October 2020, but we had to delay it yet again because COVID-19 was still surging. I began to wonder if it would ever happen, and if my Israeli bar mitzvah would be THE bar mitzvah.

As of now, my long-awaited celebration has been rescheduled for May 2021. My cantor and I have joked multiple times about how I might finally have my bar mitzvah when I am 20! All kidding aside, if it is still too dangerous to have an in-person bar mitzvah in May, we will hold it virtually. I have had different feelings each time my bar mitzvah has been postponed, but this time will be the last, so I know I will have to study before that date, and my Israeli experience will be the foundation.

This year will be memorable because my bar mitzvah was postponed twice due to the pandemic. But I am lucky to have had a bar mitzvah in Israel, and to be free to practice my religion. As a great-grandchild of Holocaust survivors, I know I am fortunate to reach bar mitzvah age and to be recognized and loved by my family.

*Top: Max Raynes leads the introductory prayers prior to the bar mitzvah ceremony held for him and nine others at the ancient and historic fortress Masada, overlooking the Dead Sea in Israel, December 2019. Right: Max is surrounded by family during his recitation from the Torah. L to r: Rabbi Oded Mazor, Max’s grandparents Bruce and Lilly Stern Filler, parents Derek and Rachael L. Raynes, and sister Josephine “Josie” Raynes. Photos courtesy of Lilly Filler.*





## A Memorable Bat Mitzvah

by Rory Shaina Lipson

I planned to celebrate my bat mitzvah on April 6, 2020, in Israel at the Kotel (the Western Wall in Jerusalem) with 18 family members. By mid-March 2020, the dangers of the pandemic became well known and the entire world was affected. The first time I really understood the seriousness of the virus and fully comprehended that my bat mitzvah plan could change was when I visited a friend's house and she asked, "So what's your bat mitzvah going to be like?" In this moment, I felt very unsettled. Could a virus from halfway across the world change my life and my bat mitzvah? Soon after, international travel was said to be unsafe and we canceled our Israel trip.

My family felt domestic travel was still safe, so we quickly pulled together a destination bat mitzvah at Temple Beth Tefilla in Brunswick, Georgia, with my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. As time passed, we realized that it was not safe to spend time with those outside your home, so we canceled again.

Then we decided to have the ceremony at my shul, Congregation Ohr HaTorah in Atlanta, Georgia, with my grandparents. Within a week, the synagogue moved to virtual, and social distancing from even grandparents was recommended. With each cancelation, I felt more and more disappointed. I wanted to experience my bat mitzvah in the Jewish homeland, where Jews are embraced as a culture and religion, and where I believe I am most connected to Judaism.

Although I was truly disappointed that I could not be in Israel or even with my immediate family members, my bat mitzvah was pretty much the kick-off of a new trend—Zoom Mitzvahs. My bat mitzvah was the first virtual religious event that my friends and family attended. My closest friends and relatives were thrilled to be part of a happy occasion. My parents and I sent out virtual invitations and created an online Siddur, a ceremony booklet, and a film location in the hallway of my house!

One challenge was technology, especially since using Zoom was new to so many of us. We had to continuously remind our guests, especially members of the older generation, how to use mute. Zoom was definitely a different experience than I imagined, but it was historic. One positive was I was less nervous because I wasn't standing in front of a large audience. My rabbi, Adam Starr, gave a D'var Torah (a lesson from the Torah) at the end of the service and said, "This is a bat mitzvah I will never forget," and my family feels the same.

I could have canceled or rescheduled, but this was my Torah portion and my date. As I look back, I feel I made the correct decision to keep the date, and although I did feel some disappointment, I had a memorable and wonderful bat mitzvah experience.



*Rory Lipson, accompanied by her parents, Aaron and Leslie Kulbersh Lipson, and her older sibling, Kay Lipson, was a trendsetter, conducting her bat mitzvah over the internet via Zoom videoconferencing software, April 2020, after the coronavirus pandemic made meeting in person unsafe. Photos courtesy of the Lipson family.*

## Uncharted Territory

by Rachel G. Barnett, Executive Director

This issue of the Society's magazine is unlike any other, as it is contemporary and not historical. But 2020 and 2021 have been years unlike any other. Contemplating a raging pandemic that upended every aspect of life and recognizing that we would not be able to meet in person this spring, our publications team decided to try and document the crisis in real time. We invited a few individuals, chosen to represent a range of ages and occupations, to write about their experiences of the pandemic.

In these pages, you will find firsthand accounts from front line doctors who treat patients at both ends of the life cycle; b'nai mitzvah students whose years of preparation did not culminate in their day on the bimah; a daughter who lost both her beloved parents within hours of each other; a high school teacher, a rabbi, and the head of a Jewish Studies program. We thank our contributors for opening their hearts and minds in their writings.

These times have indeed asked a great deal from us.

As I write this in January 2021, it occurs to me that the past 12 months have been both a blur and yet very much in focus. For almost everyone, the pandemic has meant isolation from loved ones and the cancellation of social gatherings. Assuming the executive director's position as we struggled to decide how best to continue communicating with our members, I was thrilled when Judge Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen stepped up and offered their assistance. Their monthly "Conversations" have proven to be a silver lining during a difficult time.

Technology presents both benefits and challenges, but I can say unequivocally, the power of technology has kept us together this year. Zoom has made it possible to connect with people across the country, to make new friends and reunite with old. We plan to continue Zoom events even as we look forward to meeting in person, we hope, in late fall 2021. Please let us know what topics for Sunday programs interest you by emailing me at [jhssc2020@gmail.com](mailto:jhssc2020@gmail.com).

I want to extend a big thank you and welcome to the more than 450 of you who have joined JHSSC as members and especially to those who made the commitment to become Pillars. You are the backbone and the lifeblood of the Society, and we need more of you!

My thanks also go to two-time past president Jeffrey Rosenblum, who has stepped up to lead our Endowment Fund campaign. A funded endowment will allow JHSSC to continue the work of preserving, recording, and remembering South Carolina's Jewish experience, up to and including the present. To learn more about making an endowment gift, please contact Jenny Fowler at [fowlerj@cofc.edu](mailto:fowlerj@cofc.edu).

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