

Being Jewish in the Time of COVID

Reflections from Congregants of Temple Sinai Reno



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Introduction

Life as we knew it was normal.

March 5, 2020:

The community-wide event “Breaking the Stained-Glass Ceiling” was hosted at Temple Sinai.

March 8, 2020:

The Sinai School celebrated at the annual Purim Carnival.

Then life as we knew it changed.

“It took just 13 days after the first case of the novel coronavirus to hit Nevada on March 5, 2020 for Gov. Steve Sisolak to order a sweeping shutdown of “nonessential” businesses. Casinos shut down. Bars, restaurants, malls, beauty salons all went dark.” (*Reno Gazette Journal, Feb. 28, 2021*)

March 11, 2020:

The decision was made to shut down the Temple Sinai building.

March 13, 2020:

The first virtual Kabbalat Shabbat service was held.

What did change look like?

July 22, 2020:

The synagogue’s Library Committee held a Zoom meeting and members discussed virtual programming options to offer stimulating and meaningful activities while the congregants socially distanced.

October 7th, 2020:

The Library Committee’s virtual book club, “Beyond Words” held the first virtual meeting. Up to fifteen Sinai members joined Season One’s quarterly sessions. As a result of the positive participation and feedback plans for Season Two would expand to six meetings.

August, 2020:

The congregation was informed of another Library Committee project that welcomed their participation. The committee requested members’ personal stories, memoirs, or poetry pertaining to Jewish life experiences while living through the pandemic. “Being Jewish in the Time of COVID” is a collection of those reflections*.

**The authors words have been published as written.*

About Temple Sinai Reno

Prologue:

The mid-1940s to mid-1960s were formative years for the Jewish community of Reno, Nevada. Temple Emanuel-El was the predominant Shul housing both Reform and Conservative Jews. During the two plus decades of their amalgamation, both movements pursued their separate practices under the same roof and name.

Birth:

In the spring of 1962 five families from Temple Emanu-El opted to form a Reformed Congregation. Their determination sprang from the Reformed Jewish Community's need for a synagogue that offered Jewish practices, rituals and religious school programs that were relevant and meaningful to their movement and complemented family life. The goals of the Cantor, Dickens, Brown, Fielding, and Garfinkle families were met with the assistance of Rabbi Joseph Glaser, Northern Pacific Regional Director of the UAAC. Temple Sinai was chartered as a Reform Temple in April, 1962.

Growth, Development, and Expansion:

In the fall of 1962 for the first High Holy Days, a Torah, which was later donated to the new congregation, was borrowed from San Francisco. The first Shabbat service took place September 7, 1962 and Louis Dickens was elected president. Following that, space was rented at the YMCA and congregants began work to establish a religious school. Rabbi Julius Liebert was hired as a visiting rabbi on a part time basis and Rabbi Abraham Feinberg (then retired and living in Reno) performed official duties. The new synagogue became the hub of Reformed Jewish culture and social activity.



Temple Sinai Reno, 1970

In March of 1970, Dickens purchased the land located at 3405 Gulling for a permanent place of worship. By that September the building was completed and ready for the High Holy Days which were led by Rabbi J. Aaron Levy of San Francisco. The dedication of the building was a physical manifestation of the hard work and dedication of many congregants. It was a time of joy and celebration for the Jewish community.

From 1982-1984, Rabbi Paul Tuckman was the full-time religious leader. From 1984-2009 Rabbi Myra Soifer was the full-time rabbi and also served as interim rabbi during the search for her replacement. From 2009-2012 Rabbi Teri Appleby led the congregation. From 2013 through 2018, Rabbi Ethan Bair was the full-time religious and spiritual leader of Temple Sinai. The current spiritual leaders, Rabbis Sara and Benjamin Zober have lead the congregation since 2018.

By 1991 Temple Sinai's congregation continued to grow. This necessitated the addition of six classrooms and a library. In 1997, Harry Weinberg completed a 3 year project of renovating the sanctuary, adding the Tree of Life, new Ark doors, a lectern and chairs. In 2007-2008, expansion continued with a large social hall, 2 classrooms, a kitchen, office space and the renovation of the library and lobby. In 2010, stained glass windows were installed in the sanctuary. Today if you enter the building you will find people of all ages learning, praying, and socializing, as they gather together.



Temple Sinai Reno, 2021

Outlook:

Through continued dedication, hard work, and community efforts, Temple Sinai has grown along with the Reno-Sparks community from its original five founding families to its' current membership. Temple Sinai continues carrying on the legacy of its beginnings by implementing its vision and mission, and thereby ensuring a vibrant and lasting future for the Reformed Jewish community.

Temple Sinai Vision:

Temple Sinai is an inclusive Jewish community that encourages members to fulfill their unique purpose in the world.

Mission:

Temple Sinai is a community that learns, cares for one and other, and promotes Jewish practice, culture and Tikkun Olam (healing the world).

A PANDEMIC PROJECT

Gary Schumer

Many of us spent much of the pandemic, especially the early months, binge-watching TV and getting subscriptions to various streaming services which we had no interest in before. Last spring, Judy and I watched all 3 seasons of *The Marvelous Mrs. Mazel* and I particularly enjoyed the episodes that took place in a Catskill Mountain resort.

Those of us who were raised in the Northeast will remember the various Catskill Mountain resorts that were popular for Jews in the 1940's, 50's, and 60's. That upstate New York area was referred to as the Borscht Belt or the Jewish Alps. The famous resorts were hotels such as The Concord and Grossinger's, which featured well-known entertainers such as Mel Brooks, Jerry Lewis, and Joan Rivers.

Resorts like the one shown on *The Marvelous Mrs. Mazel* relied on the guests to provide the entertainment. On the lower end were places known as Bungalow Colonies which had no dining rooms because each bungalow had a small kitchen and guests cooked their own food. These places were nicknamed "Koch-a-leins" – "cook yourself" in Yiddish, and for many years in the late 40's and early 50's my Brooklyn family went to Makowski's Bungalows in White Lake, NY. There, too, guests entertained one another.



One of our long-delayed projects, which the pandemic gave us ample time to do, was organizing all the old photographs from my family. Many of the photos were from the summers we spent at Makowski's. My mother, brother, and I spent 2 months there and my father came up on weekends.

My mother loved planning and performing in shows and one of my favorite photos was of her and 2 friends who were part of a singing group – imitating The Andrews Sisters – which they called The Tach Sisters. Instead of Patty, LaVerne, and Maxene they were Tishtach, Handtach, and Fartach – Yiddish for tablecloth, towel, and apron. My mom Fran is on the left. The pandemic gave me a great opportunity to go through old photos and recall those good times.

Gary Schumer has been a Reno resident for 16 years. As a Temple Sinai member, he volunteers and belongs to the Men's Club.

A TIME WHEN BEING POSITIVE CAN BE A NEGATIVE

Barbara Weinberg

Those who know me well, know that I am an eternal optimist. Regardless of the current situation I face life as a glass half full. I am unwilling to waste my energy dwelling on and distressing about things I have no control over.

Sheltering in place has given me a lot of time to remember, reflect and rejoice in my family's years of connection to the Temple Sinai community and its importance to our lives.

In 1975 when the Weinberg family joined Temple Sinai, Rabbinic students came twice a month to lead Shabbat Services. For our daughter Caren's Bat Mitzvah in 1980, as there was no permanent Rabbi, our good friend and Cantor from San Mateo, California was welcomed to conduct the Service at Temple Sinai and add the music and traditions she had grown up with.

In 1982, Temple Sinai hired its first full time Rabbi. Two years later, Rabbi Emeritus Myra Soifer joined Sinai and began her 25 plus years as our Rabbi.

Those years are filled with Weinberg family participation with the Sinai community. My husband, Harry, was a founding member of the Wednesday noon Talmud Study which continues to this day and Harry and I were members of the Sinai Jewish Science Fiction Book Group.

After retiring, woodworking became Harry's full time pleasure. The Synagogue had been built in the early 1970's. By 1994, the sanctuary was due for remodel. Harry began what became a three year renovation project. Our son Dan and dog Beau were his partners in the project. He designed and installed the Tree of Life, the Ark, lecturn, candle stand and candle holder and the Torah Mantle holder. He made the Bima chairs which I upholstered and designed and installed the Synagogue front doors which are now the inner doors to the lobby entrance.



Continuing the fond memories, Rabbi Soifer joined us for a Lake Tahoe sleigh ride to officiate at Dan and Christy's wedding. Minimal snow that year so the sleigh had wheels not runners. Our daughter Julie was Principal of the Religious School. I served on the Sinai Board as Education Committee Chair and as President. I Chaired the Caring Committee, made birthday and anniversary good wishes calls and initiated the Chicken Soup for Healing Project. In preparation for her conversion a congregant decided to spend a year reading the Torah from Genesis through Deuteronomy. She and I plus a congregant living in an assisted living facility met there weekly to read and discuss Torah. I even did a bit of hospital visiting when Rabbi received a call that a Jewish out-of-towner was in the hospital in Reno and would appreciate a visit.

The Weinberg connection continues into the 21st Century. Saturday morning Torah Study, Neighborhood Havurahs, Beyond Words Book Group have been added to my Sinai activity list. I continue my participation on TSSAC, the Temple Sinai Social Action Committee and the Caring Committee. In solidarity with Israel's Women of the Wall, I and other Sinai women were photographed wearing a tallit and holding a Torah. At a WOW Shabbat early last year the framed photos were hung on the wall of the small Social Hall.

March 2020, I flew to Seaside, Oregon to be with my daughter Julie for her birthday. As I write this in March 2021, I am still in Seaside with Julie and her two Golden Retrievers. The months here include daily beach walks and weekly on-line Sinai Shabbat Services. Through FaceTime, ZOOM and other visual communication systems, I have maintained contact with my Reno friends and activities. As a peculiar and positive side effect of Covid Time, I have attended a wedding in Israel and other events I might not have traveled to. Although Covid has kept me here, it has been a wonderful year. Spending this time living with my adult daughter and being a help to her has been very special.

Temple Sinai is now blessed with the Rabbinic duo, the Zoberers. They and the Board have made sure we are together virtually since we cannot safely be together physically.

All of this has kept my glass half full.

Barbara Weinberg has lived in Reno for 46 years, since 1974. She has been an active member of Temple Sinai for 45 years having served as synagogue president on numerous committees, including Social Action, Education and Caring.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARILYN ROBERTS

Rabbi Benjamin Zober

During the pandemic, Marilyn Roberts has been crocheting. Her house is overflowing with crocheted creations, and each week before Torah study, she shares her latest work with everyone in attendance. Her works have varied from clothing and afghans to personalized animals, dolls, and a few things that defy description. She answered a few questions from Temple Sinai.

Rabbi Zober: How did you get started in crochet?

Marilyn: *I started crocheting in college, mainly because I didn't want to knit like my mother did.*

Rabbi Zober: What made you decide to start crocheting during the pandemic?

Marilyn: *Being confined to my house, I needed something to keep myself busy, something I could do sitting down. (I'm the original couch potato). And I happen to have lots of yarn, left over parts of skeins in many colors.*

Rabbi Zober: You have made some "Jewish" things (the ark, the cheesecake, the rabbis, kippot, Bernie Sanders). What made you think of those particular projects?

Marilyn: *Many because someone mentioned something. Rabbi Benjamin mentioned the cheesecake, Rabbi Sara and her collection of arks, Steve Weidman mentioned a kippah. Others struck me as I browsed craft pages, like Bernie. I saw many dolls on Ravelry, and thought it wouldn't be hard to create a rabbi. Other animals that I made were mentioned in the Torah.*

Rabbi Zober: What has been the hardest project you have done?

Marilyn: *A lace tablecloth. Not that the stitches were that hard, but it was taking a very long time as the cloth grew.*

Rabbi Zober: What has been your favorite/most proud of project?

Marilyn: *My Afghans. I have a whole album with most of them. (One is pictured).*

Rabbi Zober: How many things have you made?

Marilyn: *Just this past year? Between animals, afghans, clothing, and tote bags, probably more than 200.*

Rabbi Zober: Who gets the finished products?

Marilyn: *Friends, family, me, donations to needy veteran families at X-mas.*





Rabbi Zober: Are there any projects you are looking forward to?

Marilyn: *Anything that someone wants. I love being asked to make something special.*

Rabbi Zober: How do you decide what to make?

Marilyn: *There is no special way, just what strikes my fancy. Or whatever someone asks for. Fr example, when Carol said she loves frogs, I made a frog.*

Rabbi Zober: (A special thanks to Marilyn for her work) Congregant Carol Pevney shared a few thoughts on Marilyn's project, which many of us share,

and are included here:

Our Torah study group has been one of the mainstays of my life, especially during this dreadful pandemic with its isolation and anxiety. There are those days, however, when starting with enough hope or energy is difficult and then there is Marilyn. The weekly offering of her talented hands that have created a menagerie of critters, human and otherwise, never fails to lift my spirits, help me forget the latest worry and grief for a time and engage with Torah once more. Thank you Marilyn. Your gift is indeed a blessing.



Marilyn Roberts. Has lived in Reno for 13 years. Besides being a member of TS for 12 years, I've served on the board as member at large and treasurer, as well as the chair of the Jewish Practice Committee.

Rabbi Benjamin Zober has been a Reno resident for 3 years and is a rabbi at Temple Sinai.

AS A RABBI, I'M USED TO OFFICIATING FUNERALS, BUT NOT LIKE THIS

Rabbi Sara Zober

As a congregational rabbi and member of the chevra kadisha, or Jewish burial society, funerals are part of what I do for the community. While the customs of death and dying are familiar to me, my most recent funeral was completely different.

We knew this death was coming, had time to prepare, and (baruch Hashem) COVID-19 didn't touch her or her family. But the virus touched everything about the way we mourned her. When she died, unable to go to her house to talk to her husband in person, we discussed matters over the phone. This conversation is difficult under the best circumstances, but not being able to give him my full presence nor include all her loved ones in the conversation made it harder on all of us.

Because of social distancing and COVID-19, our chevra kadisha suspended tahara, the purification rituals before burial. Normally I, along with a few others, would wash the body, dress it in shrouds, and stay with the body until burial. Instead, I went alone to offer prayers for the deceased. Normally during tahara, my gloves and mask protect me from water and occasional bodily fluids, but this time they protected me from the living, the funeral home staff, and the mourners themselves.

Our community's custom is to have a funeral service in the synagogue and, afterwards, meet the deceased at the cemetery. Our governor restricted groups to 10 people max, forcing me to tell this grieving husband that we could not do that funeral and could only bring nine people to the cemetery. Their immediate family alone had more than nine. My stomach clenched as he did the math.

As it was, two nephews sat in the car outside the cemetery gates, watching their parents attend their aunt's funeral. We were 10 mourners plus the rabbi, the cemetery president, and two people from the funeral home, scattered over an area in the cemetery large enough that I almost had to shout to be heard. Two gravediggers stood well away from the rest of us.

At the cemetery, it became clear how difficult it would be to maintain social distancing. Without thinking, I passed the husband the kria ribbon, instructing him to tear it to symbolize the rending of his heart. As our hands touched, I realized that this was the first time I had touched an acquaintance in almost a month. He tore the ribbon, passed it back, and I broke social

distancing again to pin it over his heart. I stepped away six feet, feeling an awkwardness I'd never felt at a funeral before.

Carrying the casket, everyone bumped shoulders as we escorted this woman to her final resting place. I realized that if one person here had the virus, likely we would all get sick. Though this was one family, united by marriage years ago, mourners drifted apart once the casket was in place — an aunt standing alone, father and mother clutching each other, brothers standing six feet apart. We agreed not to pass a shovel from one to another, so instead I invited mourners to take a handful of earth and place it gently on the casket one by one. I missed the normalcy of the hollow thud of the clumps of earth on the casket, the murmurs as people help elders lift the shovel to scoop bits of soil into the grave.

At the end of the funeral, I stopped, suddenly at a loss for words. Normally, I would invite everyone to escort the mourners home for a meal of consolation. I realized in these circumstances I had no idea how to give the family closure, no warm embrace of community to usher them into. I had told family members to prepare something to eat, but they would eat it alone.

The cemetery president and I waited as the grave was filled. Our conversation turned to how many plots were left in our small cemetery — less than a dozen. “We normally expect three to four deaths a year here,” he told me. “I’ve done the math with coronavirus rates...” he trailed off. I nodded.

We said goodbye and I went to my car. Ready to punch in the address for the meal of consolation, I realized that I had nothing to attend, nowhere to go but home. It wasn't until that moment that I understood how much I needed that meal, how important it is to watch our community comfort the mourners. I thought, I can't just go home. It's not finished.

I drove towards home, turning the radio off, the silence emphasizing my grief. I knew what I was supposed to do; I was supposed to eat something, to get and give a few hugs, to murmur “Hamakom yinachem etchem...” May God comfort you... over and over. I passed my exit on the highway. I, a professional funeral officiant, felt completely unmoored without our normal rituals. Desperate, I pulled into a park, found a picnic table, and pulled out my phone. I tweeted into the ether: “It feels so wrong to do a funeral and just go home to my house. There's no meal of consolation, no stories and plates held on your knees on folding chairs in the living room.” “I feel lost, to be honest. I feel like I don't know how to mourn like this.” “I'm sitting in a park now because I can't figure out what to do next.” That was when my heart finally broke. I took in huge gulps of air, pulled out my handkerchief, and filled it with tears. This virus has cheated us out of so much: the simple comforts of touch, of tradition, of meals together. Now we mourn our dead alone, or across a screen. This is not how it is supposed to be. How do we mourn without each other, without our communities?

We will observe shiva over Zoom, and I expect a “full house,” a pale substitute for a packed living room, but it will have to do. So that we ourselves do not join the ranks of the dead, I urge you to be cautious with your health and stay at home. Your clergy do not want to be doing your funerals at this time. We want you to die in old age, well after we have solved coronavirus, surrounded by family and friends, as we are all meant to be. We want to hold your loved ones’ hands, to enjoy stories about you over a good meal together in your living room. This is the way we have always done it, and I hope to do it again soon.



Until that time, please stay home, wash your hands, and despite our physical isolation, reach out to those who mourn.

Rabbi Sara Zober has lived in Reno 3 years and is one of Temple Sinai's rabbis.

BAR MITZVAH EXPERIENCE IN THE AGE OF A PANDEMIC

Adam, Beth and Russell Slamowitz

Generations from now, Hebrew school students will be learning about life (and B'nai Mitzvahs) during the time of COVID. I remember getting Russell's bar mitzvah date in 2019 and being so excited for him, and to finally be able to see all the hard work and planning come together in an amazing celebration of his accomplishments and entry into adulthood. We had surprises planned for Russell and honors planned for friends and family. Little did we know that the surprise would be on us, when COVID entered our lives and the whole world changed.

Deciding when or if to print invitations, or how many center pieces would be needed, and finalizing aliyahs and seating charts all of a sudden seemed like the most difficult tasks. We were faced with so many questions and little or no answers, so we did our best to hold it together and try to charge forward with faith that Russell's bar mitzvah and celebration would happen on November 14, 2020, even if it looked different from what we as his parents, or Russell had hoped for.

We had friends who flipped their plans and decided on "Zoom Mitzvahs", Facebook live, or other live stream alternatives. Technology has come a long way, but from our family's perspective, a live stream only celebration lacked the intimacy and acknowledgement of Russell's accomplishment and entry into Jewish adulthood. Ultimately it did not matter how much research we did about what others were doing, or what options were available, because it was not anyone else's day but Russell's. And, though we needed to be logical and reasonable, we also wanted Russell to have a say in the matter.

The same week we received Russell's bar mitzvah date; the planning began. The DJ, the photographer and venue were quickly booked. Russell started his bar mitzvah lessons in December of 2019, and three short months later, in-person lessons stopped as the world went into lockdown. With a family full of healthcare and public health professionals, as we neared November of 2020, we knew there was going to have to be a plan B. Now here we were in July, with an invitation print date looming, weighing our options. Should we move the whole bar mitzvah, or just the party? Should we move it a few months, or a full year? Will our older family members live to see the bar mitzvah if we move it a full year to keep the parsha the same? We agonized over all of the decisions. Many families chose to move the date of their Bnai Mitzvahs, but we came to the decision as a family to keep the date and maintain an in person as well as live stream option if at all possible.

Facing multiple decisions, the most pressing for us as a family and for Russell, was what elements of the bar mitzvah mattered most? We had already eliminated the Friday night service participation and Shabbat dinner for guests, candy throwing and the Saturday oneg following the morning service and changed locations for the party to allow for extra space and

to accommodate social distancing. Cancelling the Saturday morning service or postponing the date was not an option. It was important to Russell to not prolong the date, and to experience having friends and family present as well as the tangible items of reading from the actual Torah at the Bimah, in his synagogue. The Torah reading was the culmination of months of study and the high point of his bar mitzvah service.



We pressed forward with a combination of an in-person service adhering to capacity limits, as well as a live streamed option for those family and friends that could not travel or were more comfortable joining the service from their couch. Up until a few days before, we were adjusting numbers and seating charts to meet the synagogues requirements. Days before the service we reminded our dwindling guest list that the day was not about the inconveniences of masks, capacity numbers, pods, and social distancing, but about Russell and his achievement and passage into Jewish adulthood. Thanks to a lot of helping hands (sanitized of course), and a lot of planning and at times difficult conversations, we planned a service with a limited guest list of immediate family and close friends. Adam and I got to present Russell with his tallit, Russell read from the Torah and delivered a sermon about putting differences aside, that seemed especially poignant given the current political climate and events of the past four years. We got to celebrate Russell in the most meaningful way we could given the circumstances. Reading Torah in an almost empty sanctuary was far from ideal but despite all the COVID craziness and social distancing, we checked all of the usual bar mitzvah boxes. Russell was adamant about having his bar mitzvah on November 14, 2020, and he did what the Jewish people have been doing for centuries. Despite obstacles and less than ideal circumstances, he soldiered on and did an amazing job leading a meaningful, warm, and intimate service.

Would it have been nice to have the rest of our friends and family there in person with us? Sure. Would it have felt good to be able to wrap our arms around them and give them hugs after the service? No doubt. Could we have postponed Russell's bar mitzvah service until, say the Spring or Summer, like so many others did? Absolutely. But Russell and our family had zero interest in doing that. Russell did not want to read a different parsha or read his parsha in the middle of a different month. So much of Jewish life and tradition is rooted in the Hebrew calendar. Russell worked so hard to have his moment and he was not about to let a pesky little

pandemic get in his way. We made the decision that more than ever, we needed reasons to rejoice. We needed reasons to come together (albeit virtually and in accordance with current CDC and governmental guidelines) and recognize that there is good in this world. That there is community in this world. That goes for good times as well as bad.

It was not how we planned it, and not how Russell had envisioned, but Adam and I could not have been prouder of the resolve and resilience that Russell showed in the face of so much constant change and uncertainty. Crushed expectations, coupled with the willingness to pivot and persevere, births grit. Kids that are becoming a bar/bat mitzvah during this pandemic are gaining



something far greater than the typical route could ever deliver. They are being challenged with an adult situation and adult choices. If this experience was a glimpse into how Russell would handle the responsibilities of adulthood, then as parents, we were reassured that he was on the right path. To persevere in the face of hardship. Grit is what we want our children to have as they mature. Grit is how our children will stand strong in the face of anti-Semitism. Grit is how people choose joy over sadness or hope over defeat. Grit breeds responsibility and grit breeds trust.

There is not one single memory from November 14, 2020 that stands out above all others. To be honest, the day was a flurry of rules and protocols, stress, and last-minute decisions, but it was also a day about family, community, and the resolve of the Jewish people to hold fast to traditions even in the face of adversity. I am reasonably certain that Russell will never forget his bar mitzvah, and neither will we.

Adam, Beth, and Russell Slamowitz have lived in Reno for eight years. The Slamowitz family has been a member of Temple Sinai since 2013. Adam and Beth have both served on the Board, as well as volunteered on several committees.

BEING JEWISH AND “BEING JEWISH”

Deborah Achtenberg

My being Jewish during COVID involves—humorously enough—writing an article on an essay entitled “Being Jewish”! In the essay and related works, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas critiques existentialists for thinking solitude is freedom. Levinas thinks, instead, that solitude is heavy responsibility. During COVID, we get a taste of what he means. By yourself (and I have been at home by myself), time flows differently. In fact, one minute or day seems to flow into another with no clear distinction. Every day is Blursday, people say.

I have worked against the blur by giving myself a schedule. It helps give some definition to my being. Every morning, I go into a special place in the front part of my house and say morning prayers while doing standing yoga—something I have done for years.

On Mondays, weather permitting, I garden all day. On Tuesdays through Thursdays, I work on research—for example, on my interpretation of “Being Jewish.” On Thursday mornings, in addition, I take a derbouka class on Facebook Live (derbouka is the drum I play on High Holidays) and, in the evening, meet with one of our congregants to teach her Torah trope for her adult Bat Mitzvah. We have finished now and soon I’ll be teaching trope to a younger Bat Mitzvah student. Before these Tuesdays-through-Thursdays, I do an hour of exercise classes online.

On Fridays, I get ready for Shabbat, cooking, straightening up and basically doing whatever I feel like to get ready for the weekend. Friday night, I attend Sinai services on Facebook Live and Saturday mornings, I attend Sinai’s virtual Torah Study on Zoom. Led by our three rabbis, we’re doing a close reading of Genesis guided by commentators, especially contemporary and medieval ones. After Torah Study, I call and chat with someone from Torah Study and then take a walk. On Sundays, I Zoom with a philosophy colleague in Haifa, and then do whatever: meet, masked, with a friend or colleague in my back yard, catch up on the news, eat a nice meal, read a book, watch a movie, play derbouka, etc.

Along the way, once a week, I send an email to Torah Study participants with a summary of the last week’s discussion along with photos of two artworks by Jewish artists that relate to our discussion. I have learned a lot about Jewish art this year! Also, I make sure regularly to take a look online at what the local far-right is up to. If anything worrisome is going on, I tell our rabbis about it so they can keep themselves and the rest of us safe in these unstable times. In addition, once a month, I meet online with the Religious Practice committee. Finally, in the Fall, I taught a High Holiday Sinai study course on Forgiveness from Jewish Sources.

What Levinas says about solitude is that at first it is a kind of freedom because, in it, I can decide what comes in and what comes out. In solitude, in a sense, I produce a self! Who am I? *I’m* the one who prays, reads and writes philosophy, studies Torah, plays derbouka, sits in my yard drinking a strong coffee before the start of my day. I’m the one who focuses on those things among all the things I could focus on. In prayer, I focus on God, my soul, my body, my

house, my neighbor and my thanks. Every day. In research, I focus on an idea. Every week. In Torah study, I focus on the text or on what the commentators say about it. In my yard, with my coffee, I let my mind wander a bit and focus on whatever. Glorious freedom—to determine who I am by what, in all the blur of existence, I focus on and make into my self.

But, though it is liberating to determine myself, instead—as everyone living alone during COVID knows—it's difficult! It's difficult not just to wander around the house and around your mind not quite knowing what you're doing or thinking or what is what. It's hard to keep doing those things and not just blur out. What at first seems like the freedom of self-determination—of making yourself what you are—quickly seems like a job. It's not something you just do once and it's over. You have to keep doing it if you are to keep being what you are.

Except that there are moments when you do not have to do that work. There are moments when constant preoccupation with yourself is broken open by something—someone—that comes in from outside. A call with Torah Study friends who have surprising things to say. A discussion about Torah in which others open up new horizons. A conversation in the yard with a friend about something that hadn't occurred to me. It's only in relation to an other—to another person—that I am really free, Levinas says, free from the laborious preoccupation with my self.



Even more, there is no time without the other, Levinas says! Without another person, there's only me, me, me. There's no outside. There's no distinction, even though I try hard to make distinctions through scheduling activities. Still I yearn for something outside me—for something that's not just me, for something, or someone, who opens me up to something new. And so those moments with other people—talking to a colleague on the phone, chatting with a friend in the backyard, participating in Torah study or in services—are moments of opening to something new. How precious those moments are in the time of COVID, I think we all know. They give shape to time and to our self.

How does this relate to being Jewish (and “Being Jewish”)? Sartre's wrong, Levinas says, that an authentic Jew is one who makes himself what he is and has no origin. Instead, what is original about being Jewish is “breaking with a world that is without origin.” For not only time but my very being requires relation with an other, an other without whom it's all just blur despite my efforts to give definition to things. I am not my own origin. I do not simply make myself. There's no subjectivity without intersubjectivity, we might say—no self without an other. And so we say, every day, “Modah ani lifanekha melekh hai vekayam shehehezarta bi nishmati....” I give thanks to you, living sovereign, for returning to me my soul....” Every day, in other words, we give thanks to *you* for originating *me*. And that's what it is to be Jewish according to Levinas—at any time including in the time of COVID.

Deborah Achtenberg / Has lived in Reno since 1982. As a Temple Sinai member she belongs to the choir member and Jewish Practice Committee, teaches trope, and is the Torah Study corresponding secretary.

GRIEVING DURING A PANDEMIC: MY EXPERIENCE

Lynda Goldman

March 2020 marked the beginning of what, for many, became an extended period of life in quarantine. We did not know then that we would remain self isolated for a year, maybe longer. We did not know then what impact this would have on each of us. For me, the experience of self-imposed 'exile' was and is painful as well as liberating.

On December 25th, 2018, after a cherished relationship of 28 years, my husband, Michael, died of complications from Parkinson's Disease (PD). The last year was the most difficult. Michael's PD included Lewy-Body involvement which meant, in addition to the traditional challenges of PD (tremors, loss of balance, 'freezing', difficulties swallowing and digesting food, loss of speech, etc.) he suffered from horrifying delusions and illusions, confusion, memory issues, and a feeling of constant threat. In a moment of clarity, he described it as being locked in an alternate, terrifying universe, without a way out. My experience of caring for Michael, witnessing his suffering, and ultimately letting go was prolonged, complex, and traumatic. I remember feeling shocked, scared, steeped in an unending sense of unrepairable loss, deeply angry, guilty and remorseful, exhausted, helpless, hopeless; lost.

My first year of mourning was heart wrenching. Retrospectively I recognize I was in shock the first three months. Every day I awoke and remembered that Michael was no longer physically with me. Repeatedly, I re-experienced the agonizing reality that he was gone; absent. For me, the challenge of the first year was simply to accept this profound loss and pray for a path forward. Friends and family asked what they could do to help. I had no idea. I didn't even want to get out of bed. I felt immobilized. Gradually, I went through the motions of living.

Three months into my second year of grief, Covid 19 attacked the world and prompted physical isolation. No in-person Shabbat dinners, Synagogue worship, get-togethers with family and friends, travel, etc. Certainly, virtual contact continued. However, as I was in lock-down, alone, I felt Michael's absence amplified and his presence in my heart heightened. I craved his smile, his touch, his sense of humor, his thoughts. I wanted the simple things; to make dinner and enjoy sharing it with him, to enjoy photographic expeditions and look at his photos with him, to watch a movie with him, to hold hands and embrace. I wanted him; beside me, again. Sometimes, 'absence' does not mean completely 'gone', just as 'presence' does not mean completely 'here.' It was as if Michael had become a shadow, still with me but not tangible.

As I was finally beginning to understand and acknowledge the dimensions of my grief, accessing support from others was curtailed by COVID. This is not to imply I was not supported. I was and I am greatly appreciative of family and friends whose efforts sustained me. Rather, for me, the limitations of the pandemic intensified my experience of loss and reinforced my sense of 'aloneness'.

While I understand and support the Jewish prohibition of excessive mourning, I struggled with the notion that grieving operates on a timetable. My grieving was not a linear process. While I sensed my healing occurred layer by layer, I also felt I was moving through the grieving process, slowly, by taking two steps forward, and one step back.

Perhaps the prohibition of excessive mourning is linked to the concept of the sacredness of life. For me, the energy to move through grief came from my deeply held belief that life is



precious. The Jewish mandate to protect, cherish and celebrate life means moving through loss and sorrow. At some level, whether I wanted to or not, a part of me kept pushing forward. It is said that if you save one life, it is as if you have saved the whole world. Mine was the life I needed to save.

As time went on, I found myself thinking about my future; constructing a path not constrained by the architecture of my past, but enabled by it. Then, one day I vividly remembered that throughout my childhood, every evening before going to sleep, one or both of my parents would come into the room my youngest sister and I shared, to say our evening prayers with us. The prayer began, "Thank you, dear G-d, for all our blessings..." Sometimes, this was difficult to say and accompanied by tears. At 6 and 7 years old, I didn't understand how I could be thankful when my Bubba and Zayde died, or when my friend broke her leg. My parents explained that at the core of the pain I felt was the love of those I held dear; that love was the blessing. I came to appreciate that Michael's memory is a blessing. I felt grateful that for 28 years, he and I shared a great love.

Eventually I realized that he would be saying to me, "Enough with the sorrow. It is time to choose life. Embrace life." I knew he would be saying this because he had said it to me many times; when friends and family of mine died and I was overcome with grief, when I was physically assaulted in the workplace by a fellow executive, when I went through major surgery and a yearlong recovery, etc.

It is now three months into my third year of loss. Out of necessity, I looked hard at who I have been, who I am, and who I aspire to be. I could not escape this task. I wanted to, but there are few distractions living in the echo chamber of isolation. I cannot describe step by step how I

got here, but I now feel a deeper level of gratitude. It isn't rocket science, but studying rocket science seems to me to be far easier than my last two years.

I still have sad, tearful moments. But I now also have moments of profound joy. I can smile and laugh again. I have plans for my future, again. I feel I have purpose and my life has meaning. I believe that getting to this stage of grieving would have taken longer, without the isolation accompanying the pandemic. I was forced to explore my thoughts and feelings precisely because I was alone with them. Don't get me wrong – there is nothing good about a pandemic. But something good is emerging for me: greater confidence and capability, a renewed sense of direction and purpose, and a deeper appreciation for all my blessings.

Lynda Goldman moved to Reno in 2014 and within the week joined Temple Sinai. She has served on the Board of Directors, and the Membership, Caring and Library Committees. Currently, under the auspices of the Library Committee she co-facilitates, Beyond Words, the synagogue book club.

JEWISH COMFORT FOOD AND PANDEMIC QUARANTINE

Lynda Goldman

For the last year, I have been self-isolated due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Being home, alone, for 12 months, was not easy. I missed being free to visit with friends and family, worship, in person, travel, and more. I found myself thinking back to the 'good times.' Many of these involved convivial experiences; enjoying meals together.

As far back as I can remember the good times in our Jewish household included food. For example, one Sunday a month, our extended family gathered at our house to enjoy Sunday brunch. It began with the early morning trip to Raphil's delicatessen on 41st Street in Miami Beach, where I grew up. It was a very narrow shop with long showcases displaying the copious delectable offerings. First, there was the fish; Salmon- Lox and Nova, Whitefish, Sable, Herrings, and more. Then came the side dishes; potato salad, coleslaw, pickles, sour tomatoes, eggplant salad, egg salad, hummus, etc. Finally, the meats; tongue, corned beef, pastrami, salami, among others. The deli also sold freshly baked breads, bagels, and bialis, as well as cream cheese and halva of all flavors. As a child I was fascinated by how Ray, the deli's owner, would 'surgically' slice the salmon thin and perfectly uniform with his razor-sharp long knife. He was also a master 'schmooser'. He knew all of his repeat customers and got to know the new ones. He would ask about the well-being of the family, mentioning people by name and referencing issues. "So, how is Faegele? Has she recovered from the pneumonia?" Best of all he always offered samples and treats! Then, back home for the preparation; setting the large dining room table, preparing the deli platters, cutting up and arranging the fruit platters, and gathering flowers from the garden for the table. Sunday brunch included grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends, and lasted from 10AM-4PM.

Of course, the same food focus was evident in the weekly Shabbat dinners, holiday gatherings and special occasions; birthdays, graduations, deaths, etc. Eating together was a central cultural thread that held the family together. Over food we talked, sharing life's joys and sorrows and discussing (making sense of) the events of our times and times past. It was during these extraordinary culinary events that I absorbed my Jewish family heritage.

So, is it surprising that during the isolation of the pandemic my soul ached for the 'tastes' of my youth? I found myself cooking some of the traditional food that brought me back to the communal eating experiences with my



family. Every Shabbat, I made chicken soup. The familiar aroma and the delicate but complex taste of the broth combined to provoke, for me, the feeling of being 'healed' physically and spiritually; essential during a pandemic.

I also felt compelled to prepare my mother's chicken stew. As she prepared this dish, she would recount the days of poverty during her youth. She came to this country as a 3-year-old child. The family had very little money, so stretching provisions was an essential skill. Every chicken or piece of flanken had to provide multiple meals for a family of 8. There was also sweet and sour chicken and meatballs (my personal favorite), brisket, baked chicken, fish and boiled potatoes, mushroom barley soup, borscht, chopped liver and chopped herring, and so many more.

While I am not a great cook, I observed these dishes being prepared so often, I absorbed the recipes. Preparing them during this time of isolation brought some comfort; solace from times of communal gatherings enhanced by sharing family history expressed through the sight, smell, and taste of familiar food.

Chicken Stew Recipe - Sweet and Sour Chicken and Meatballs **(4-6 People)**

Ingredients

Meatballs and Chicken:

2 pounds ground beef
1 cup Challah crumbs
2 large egg, beaten
2 teaspoons kosher salt
½ teaspoons fresh ground pepper
2 pounds chicken (I use skinless chicken thighs; my sweet mama used whatever parts she had.)

Sauce:

1 cup chopped onions
1 cup chopped celery
½ cup carrots, finely chopped in small food processor)
1 cup sliced mushrooms (optional)
5 teaspoon fresh lemon juice (I love Meyer lemons from my daughters' yard, when in season!)
3-4 Tablespoons granulated raw sugar
2 tablespoons honey, or to taste (the sweet and the sour should be balanced)
2-3 teaspoons kosher salt (to taste)
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1 can chopped tomatoes undrained (28 ounces)
1 can tomato paste (6 ounces)
2 bay leaves
Drizzle of olive oil.

Directions:

Prepare Meat:

Meatballs

1. Combine all ingredients for the meat mixture in a large mixing bowl and mix well.
2. Form into small balls; do not pack too tightly.

Chicken

1. Using a paper towel, 'pat' chicken dry.

Cook:

Use a Dutch oven or other large heavy pot. (I still have my mother's pot. Every time I use it, I think of her. It must be 80+ years old by now!)

1. Drizzle olive oil into the pot, heat.
2. Gently, brown meatballs on all sides and carefully remove from pot.
3. Brown chicken on both sides and remove from pot.
4. Place vegetables in the pot and sauté until onions are golden.
5. Add chopped tomatoes and tomato paste.
6. Add lemon juice, sugar, honey, salt and pepper.
7. Stir well.
8. Add bay leaves.
9. Bring to a slow boil.
10. Gently place meatballs and chicken back into the pot.
11. Simmer for 1 ½ -2 hours.
12. Taste the sauce. Adjust sweet/sour balance, as needed. Adjust salt and pepper, as needed.

It is best to prepare a day ahead of serving as the flavors improve.

Serve over rice, noodles or potatoes.

Enjoy!

Lynda Goldman moved to Reno in 2014 and within the week joined Temple Sinai. She has served on the Board of Directors, and the Membership, Caring and Library Committees. Currently, under the auspices of the Library Committee she co-facilitates, Beyond Words, the synagogue book club.

KADDISH ALONE

Rabbi Benjamin Zober

In a room with 3 children and two working rabbis, it is seldom quiet. But the solitary voice I heard coming out of my mouth as I led mourner's kaddish for our online service was jarring.

When I recite the mourner's kaddish alone, the silence around me is striking. Silence is often the last thing we want to hear. Especially when we are uncomfortable, we want sounds, noise, any distraction from our own thoughts. For me, when I spend too much time in my head, I often get depressed or lonely. But Kaddish lets me take a moment with those thoughts, all the bad - and the good, that I have anesthetized myself to through constant work. It might only be a minute or two while I recite the prayer, but all of the hubbub of daily life, the din of modern living, the distractions and the deviations, they are all gone. Now, I can get to remembering and considering and thinking. Not enough time to spiral downwards. Not enough time to get re-mired in my grief. But enough time to do what I need to do. Now I can get to mourning.

As I recite Kaddish alone, I hear only my own voice winding its way through the Aramaic.

I need to hear my voice - only I can say kaddish. Kaddish, as my Grandfather used to marvel, does not mention death. It is not the prayer for the dead. It is the mourner's prayer. Literally, kaddish yatom means "orphan's kaddish." It is a prayer for the lonely, the bereft. It is a prayer for the living, when in confrontation with the finitude of life.

And so, I am doing this for me. My pain and my healing depend on this prayer. And I can only heal myself. The community that I have come to expect to surround me and support me, can only do so much. Perhaps I lean a little too hard. This prayer is there to get me to lean differently. It speaks of God - God as a crutch. God cannot straighten my spine, God cannot get me out of the house, with a fresh shirt or to do the chores of daily life. Only I can do that. The prayer I say for me, to help me get closer. The words recall God, and they comfort me.

Angels don't know Aramaic - and no one knows my grief. So I say this prayer for me, in a language that can only be understood by man and God. Without any other voices, I hear myself say the words, really hear them. And in hearing them, I understand.

I understand why we don't say this prayer alone. To recite this prayer alone feels unsteady, hollow, even embarrassing. There is no shame when I mourn in community. There, I am surrounded by my congregation, my friends, my fellow mourners. We grieve collectively and support each other collectively as well. When I am not alone, I know that stumbling through the prayer will go unnoticed, I will not feel inadequate for being at less than my best. But should I stumble in person, it will not be unnoticed; it will be met with comfort and support.

As I recite Kaddish alone, it feels hard. And this is hard. Hard to hear, hard to accept. But acceptance is a part of Kaddish. In reciting Kaddish, we accept God's power. We accept the

judgments of heaven. There is a lot to accept when we lose a loved one. We accept the idea that they are gone. We accept how our lives now look different. We accept change.

I accept that this has been a time of change. It is a time that will change again, and much will never change back. As I grope for something familiar, something constant, something comforting, I realize it is Kaddish. Kaddish praises God: constant and eternal. Kaddish is a prayer said in loneliness, even in a minyan.



I recite Kaddish alone, but I am not alone. Even though I cannot hear other people's, as we work together through the kaddish, the voices of this community are there, and even apart we are here to support each other in our grief. I have to remind myself that the voices are there. I have to tell myself not to listen for the sound of those words, chanted alongside me, but to feel them. I have to let myself trust that they are being said.

I trust. The same way I trust that God hears my prayer, I trust that I am not truly alone. I trust that this isolation will end - it is the same prayer I pray when I recite Kaddish in my grief. Kaddish is my prayer for a return in my lifetime and in my days, speedily and soon.

Rabbi Benjamin Zober has been a Reno resident for 3 years and is a rabbi at Temple Sinai.

MY SHABBOS TRIO

Jill Flanzraich

As I write this, the sundown will welcome the 52nd Shabbat since my COVID pandemic lockdown began on March 9, 2020. 52 meals, 52 kiddushim, 52 candle lightings, 52 virtual services.

Initially, from the confines of my downtown Reno apartment, I thought it unfamiliar and sad to be joining Sabbath prayers virtually. Nine months earlier I had returned from a trip to Poland with my daughter. Now I found myself equating my solitary praying to what it might have felt like to *daven* during the horrors preceding and during World War II. With time I've come to realize that was erroneous for although I prayed alone, I did pray with community, my synagogue community, albeit through a monitor.

As the days of pandemic social distancing mounted the line between weeks started to blur. But then would come the Sabbath. Friday's became my demarkation. "*Good Shabbos*", I'd think to myself, just as my mother and grandmother would say in Yiddish. Each Friday I cleaned my apartment, prepared a meal for myself, and set out my Shabbos trio. If I lost track of the dates, when I awoke the next day my trio, still present on my dining table, reminded me it was Saturday, Shabbos morning.

My Shabbos trio is not a trio of audible musicians. Mine is a trio that silently, but loudly brightens the Sabbath. The tallest candlestick came to Reno from New York City. It was part of the pair my mom & dad received as a wedding gift in 1948 from my father, Bernie's, parents. Each base of the silver holders were engraved with a script "*G*" to denote the couple's last name, Gerber. When my mother, Florence, passed in 2001, my sister and I each kept one.

The pair of shorter silver candlesticks travelled almost 6,000 miles to Reno. I purchased them while visiting a Krakow market in 2019. I don't definitively know their history but I'd like to think they lived in a Jewish home. I decided they needed to be lit again so I packed them in my suitcase and my single candlestick joined them to make my Shabbos trio.

Each Shabbos my trio, with silent resonance, joins me in song to welcome the Shabbat bride, to mark my week, and to usher in a time for personal reflection. Together we sing, "*Good Shabbos*."



Jill Flanzraich, a member of Temple Sinai since 2015, has chaired the Social Action Committee and currently chairs the Library Committee.

SHOFAR? SO GOOD?

Aaron Hill

I spent several years of my adult life unaffiliated with the Jewish community. When I came back to Jewish life, the first reason why I was glad that I did was the immediate intergenerational human connection. Even at modestly attended events, I could count on seeing kids, teenagers, people around my age (broadly defined), and lots of energetic young-at-heart people. Living in a town without any of my biological family in the vicinity, finding that community of supportive people is part of what empowered us to decide to have a kid. Yes, the sleepless nights would be as advertised, but part of the joy that was going to outweigh the stress was supposed to be getting to bring the kid to the Synagogue and giving everyone there a chance to enjoy watching him grow.

Ronan was around nine months old when the pandemic hit. It's hard to remember how long we expected these circumstances to last when they first began, but I have a clear memory of exchanging pun ideas with Rabbi Benjamin in reference to those expectations. It seemed obvious that Remote Shavuot would be a likely plan, but when the topic of Zoom Kippur came up, I remember having a certain naive feeling of, "Yes, it'll probably be online, but I sure hope everything is much better by then."

Given that a majority of his life has now been spent in these circumstances, Ronan's connections to his Jewish identity have been particularly meaningful to witness. He's gone from not talking or eating solid food at all to being able to say "challah" and thoroughly enjoy devouring it. Having heard me practice the shofar for Rosh Hashanah, he got in the habit of pointing at the shofar and asking me to play it for him for months after the High Holidays were finished. He enjoys applesauce with latkes, and if the fridge is ever left open long enough for him to see a jar of applesauce, he yells "SAUCE!" persistently until he gets to have some. We lit Chanukah candles on our windowsill, which prompted our friendly neighbors across the street to leave some very sweet gifts on our doorstep along with a nice note about how inspired they were to learn more about Judaism since learning that they have Jewish neighbors. Our PJ Library subscription has given him some of his favorite books, particularly the Tu B'Shvat book where he likes to pat the ground on the page where the family plant trees and the Havdalah book where the girl enjoys singing songs and looking at the stars in the sky with her Moms, Saba, and Savta.

Just before this writing, I had my first chance to attend an in-person service for Natalie Sera's lovely Bat Mitzvah. Thanks to recent CDC recommendations on indoor gathering with other fully vaccinated people, we will be enjoying a small Passover Seder. To anyone reading this, I'm looking forward to seeing you soon.

Aaron Hill, Temple Sinai member and Reno resident since 2018.

THE WORDS OF THE YEAR

Judith Schumer

Last December I was listening to NPR one morning when Ben Zimmer of the *Wall Street Journal* was being interviewed because he had written about the “Words of the Year for 2020” in the paper. Zimmer is the chair of the American Dialect Society’s New Words Committee and he’s the Language columnist at the WSJ.

The top word was, of course COVID, and the digital word of the year was “Doomscrolling” – obsessing over bad news on social media and websites. But I was delighted to hear that one of the words of the year was the Yiddish – derived “Oys-ge Zoomed” - being fatigued and over exposed to Zoom. For those of us, including me, who are tired of meetings, family gatherings, and even weddings and B’nai Mitzvot on Zoom, this was a perfect new word.

We were a Yiddish speaking household when I grew up in NYC. My father, Moshe Elbaum, was the City Editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* when it was still a fully Yiddish newspaper. We frequently used the prefix “oys-ge” though it’s difficult to translate into English. “Oys-ge pootzt” is flamboyant; “oys-ge tracht” is imaginary; “oys-ge geben” is what’s said when a last child has gotten married.

It was wonderful having some lexical cheer at a gloomy time of the year.

Judith Schumer has been a Reno resident and Temple Sinai member since 2004 where she is a synagogue volunteer, Torah for Tots teacher, presenter, and former board member.

TO BE BORN ANEW

Talia Guzmán

As a Jewish high school student, I'm used to being a part of multiple communities and having a hundred and one commitments to take care of. While this was the case for my first two and a half years of high school, this last year has been completely different.

I left school expecting to return after the extra week of break, but now, twelve months later, I'm still Zooming into my classes, unable to see my classmates or Hebrew school students any way besides through a screen. Most extracurricular programs, if not all, went virtual, struggling to gain traction between various restrictions on travel and gatherings.

Luckily, though, there have been amazing opportunities that came from these such online programs. The first of these I participated in was with Brandeis University's Precollege Program: three weeks of all-day online learning in July. With this program, I was meeting new people- albeit online- for the first time since March. Growing up in Reno, I was not exposed to a large or diverse Jewish population, so I can say with certainty that the people I met and bonded with absolutely changed my life. After the program ended, I stayed in regular contact with some of my peers from that program. Through these people, I saw that Judaism can be vibrant, joyous, and fascinating for a young person in ways I had never experienced or thought possible. With them, I marked Tisha B'Av for the first time in my life, I had an actual chaver, and even went to the international USY convention, albeit online. Even now, hardly a day goes by in which I don't learn something new about our history or traditions.

It takes nine months for a person to be born, and in the nine months that have passed since Genesis, I feel as if I myself have been, in a sense, born anew. We have all been shaken over this last year, but I am grateful that I have settled here, in a moment where I am free to learn all I can-- that most Jewish of pursuits.

Talia Guzmán has lived in Reno for 18 years. She is a member of Temple Sinai and Sinai School teacher.

WHEN YOU JUST CAN'T BE THERE

Amy Goldberg

The Fifth Commandment states, “Honor your mother and father.” Judaism mandates that children tend personally to their parents’ physical and psychological needs. Today, many children live far away from their parents and have not lived near home since leaving to go to college. This makes taking care of aging parents difficult, even in normal times. Then throw in the COVID pandemic and all the obstacles that have come with it, and it is almost impossible, both physically and emotionally, to feel like you are doing an adequate job fulfilling your responsibilities. This is the situation I am currently in.

Being one of three daughters, each of us is responsible for a different aspect of our mother’s care. As the only one with a medical or nursing background, I am left with the task of advocating for my mother’s best interest and making sure she is comfortable and safe. I do this willingly and out of love. Ever since my father passed away 19 years ago, I have been able to manage her medical care primarily remotely, attending numerous doctors’ appointments, and being with her in person when she rehabbed from both hip and double knee replacement surgeries.

My 82-year-old mother lives alone in the city where I grew up – Beachwood, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. It takes me two flights, and at least 7 ½ hours to cover the 2,200 miles between Reno and Beachwood, anytime I want to visit her. In the past, I have seen her three or four times a year, trying to coordinate my visits around her numerous doctors’ appointments. She is medically very complicated and will probably have a shortened lifespan. My mother currently resides in a Jewish, long-term care facility, after several stints of rehab for repeated hip dislocations and one stay in a different long-term care facility.

In her previous facility, new COVID cases were being identified on a daily basis. The virus was becoming rampant, infecting residents and staff alike. Staffing coverage subsequently became very limited as more employees were exposed to the virus and needed to quarantine for the government mandated 14 days. Eventually, everything in the facility shut down for several weeks, including my ability to video chat with my mom. My heart ached that I couldn’t be there in person and was not even able to see her through FaceTime to tell her how much I loved her and that she would get through this tragedy. It was just a matter of time before my mother would contract the virus too. As a nurse, I was doing my best to make sure she was protected (isolated from contagious residents) and trying to accurately assess her medical status. At the same time, I was preparing myself emotionally for the inevitable call that she was COVID positive and going into isolation. Given her medical co-morbidities, my fear was that when, not if, she acquired COVID, she would not survive.

One day, about a week after she tested positive for COVID, I was finally able to have a video call with my mother and she looked horrible. She was thin, pale and appeared to be gasping for air during our conversation. She was more confused than usual and the left side of her mouth was drooping as she spoke. After about five minutes, I abruptly ended the video and

called the nurse and described my mother's condition and my concern for her well-being. I insisted she be evaluated immediately. The nurse called me back and told me that my mother was, in fact, in severe respiratory distress and requiring increasing amounts of oxygen. She asked for my permission to have my mother transported to the hospital via ambulance for further evaluation. I said "absolutely." This was the only way to possibly save my mother from this terrible disease.

When the ambulance arrived at the facility, they called me again to tell me that my mother was adamantly refusing to be transported to the hospital. Once again, I felt like I wasn't there for her. She was scared and just needed my hand to hold and reassure her that everything would be okay. I asked them to let me speak with my mother and I told her firmly that if she didn't go, she was going to die! At that point, she acquiesced and was put on the stretcher and taken to the hospital.

On admission, she was found to be critically ill and was quickly started on a treatment of Remdesivir and steroids, as well as supplemental oxygen. Because of my mother's wishes not to be resuscitated (DNR), she was kept on a regular medical floor and not admitted to the ICU. She remained in the hospital for a total of eight days and was discharged back to her long-term care facility very weak and frail. My mother is a true fighter and to think that she had to battle this awful virus without family and loved ones at her side breaks my heart.

COVID has made my task of overseeing her care nearly impossible. Traveling to see my mother was not an option. First, I couldn't fathom potentially exposing myself to the virus on a plane, in the airport or in a hotel, and then passing it onto my elderly mother. Second, the Governor of Ohio mandated that there be no outside visitors at long-term care facilities, so my only choice would have been to stand outside her window and just wave to her. I have not been able to see my mother for the past nine months in either of her long-term care facilities. I have had to trust what the nurses and other caretakers are telling me about how my mother is doing and about her care. Some of which has been accurate. Some of it, not so much. Totally relying on others is not in my blood. I am used to be extremely hands-on and COVID has prevented this.



I never imagined that my mother would have declined during a global pandemic and that she would be in a long-term care facility, by herself, with family and friends unable to visit her. As a daughter who both loves and has cared for my mom for many years, it is heartbreaking to see her suffer. She has declined both mentally and physically, and it seems like she has just given up on having any normalcy in her life. Almost every time I speak with her, she tells me she wants to leave the facility, that I just dumped her there and that I am not a good daughter. I know she says these things out of frustration, but it is nevertheless hurtful to me and heart-

wrenching. COVID has prevented me from holding my mother's hand and hugging her during the very difficult aging process of going from living independently to being totally dependent upon others. Although I can't be there in person, I call her every day, video chat each week and make sure that she understands that I haven't given up on her and that she is loved more than she knows by her three girls.

Amy Goldberg has lived in Reno for the past 5 years. She and her husband, Jay became members of Temple Sinai shortly after moving here from New Jersey. She has been active in the Membership Committee and Sisterhood.

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