



## Two Jews in World War II Shanghai: Werner Gellert and Mike Sutton

by Claudette E. Sutton



arrived at the home of Werner Gellert in Albuquerque's Northeast Heights one warm spring day, with a headful of questions and a box of

cookies.

A mutual friend suggested this visit, knowing that Gellert had lived in Shanghai under Japanese occupation during World War II at the same time as my father, Mike Sutton. Gellert had arrived from Germany as a young teen, seeking refuge with his parents from the Nazis. My father had been sent to Shanghai from Syria in his late teens to work for an uncle, with hopes of finding a way to get the family to America. I was curious to learn how these two men's experiences differed and how they overlapped.



*Werner Gellert Painting by Leo Neufeld*

Arranging the visit a week or so before through Gellert's part-time caregiver, I said, "I'd love to bring him something. Does he have any dietary restrictions?"

"He *loves* cookies," she said without hesitation. "Anything but peanut butter."

The door opened at last, and I was greeted by an elderly man with a gracious smile and a dog by his side. I handed him the little box tied with pink and white baker's twine, and Gellert — 89-year-old Holocaust survivor, scholar, retired banker, rabbi, master of several Asian and Western languages, and cofounder of the Holocaust & Intolerance Museum of New Mexico — grinned like a birthday boy.

"Would you like to go out, Calef?" he asked the dog as he led me down a wheelchair ramp to the living room. "You see, I have a Jewish dog," he explained. "Calef means 'dog' in Hebrew." Gellert kept the patio door ajar so the dog could wander in and out at will. At times he struggled to remember dates and details, and he strained to hear me no matter how loudly I felt I was shouting, but for almost two hours he shared distant, often painful memories, generously and graciously.

Gellert was born to a Jewish family in Breslau, Germany in 1926. His parents gave him up for adoption out of economic necessity when he was four or five years old. The Gellerts, who adopted Werner, were a highly-assimilated Jewish couple that nevertheless found themselves caught in the Nazi

web of hate. Werner was pulled from school in his neighborhood by the Gestapo and sent to one expressly for Jewish children, far from his house. "We left school and the Nazi Youth were waiting for us," Gellert recalled. "You had to learn how to run."

After the Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938, Gellert's father was sent to the concentration camp at Buchenwald. His mother secured his release, on the condition that the family leave the country within a month. Arrangements were made to go to Venice, where Werner and his

parents boarded a ship for Shanghai, one of the only cities in the world at that time that would accept Jewish refugees.



*Claudette E. Sutton*

Gellert, then a young boy just past his bar mitzvah, found the trip on an Italian luxury liner an exciting adventure, and a relief from the dangers of Germany. My father would board a ship in Port Said, Egypt, on the same route to Shanghai less than two years later, possibly on the same cruise line. The month-long journey presented thrills and challenges for a Syrian boy from a strict Jewish family who had never eaten a bite of non-Kosher food. At the port in Bombay, Dad bought a huge stalk of bananas to keep in his cabin in case there was nothing he could eat at dinner.

Their two journeys, from their different countries of origin, differed in subtler ways. Gellert noted that British authorities prohibited Jews from disembarking at port cities under their control, yet Dad,

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**Fall Conference Las Cruces  
November 14-15: See p. 5**

## President's Column



Our Fall Conference, November 14-15, in Las Cruces celebrates the NMJHS 30th anniversary year, with programs and panels that demonstrate the unique and diverse range of New Mexico's Jewish legacy. The number 30 has special meaning. The Talmud says that 30 is the age at which we reach the prime of our energy (Avot 5:21). In today's understanding of brain plasticity and neurologic development, 30 is the age at which the prefrontal cortex has reached its full development, giving ability for long-range planning, delay of gratification, adaptability, and acceptance of differing points of view. It is an integrative time of development.



**NMJHS President  
Paula Amar Schwartz**

This is the third time the organization's annual fall conference will be held in the southern part of the state. Several early books on Jewish pioneers and on the phenomena of the crypto-Jews were written by Rabbi Floyd Fierman of Temple Mt. Sinai in El Paso in the 1980s. I am reminded that Rabbi Fierman's love of the Southwest played a role in forming my own love of New Mexico and its history. He was the assistant rabbi at Temple Rodef Shalom in Pittsburgh when I was growing up, freely sharing his love of the West with his Sunday School students. I am also certain that I owe my love of historiography to Rabbi Solomon B. Freehoff, whose scholarship and love of history shaped my academic development.

Thanks to the work of Linda Goff and her committee this conference includes new materials and presenters specifically focused on the southern part of New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. Dr. Ilana Lapid of the Film Department at New Mexico State University and her students will be videotaping these sessions for our archival records.

A thread running through this year's conference is a celebration of our NMJHS 30-year history along with projections for the next 30 years. This year has seen the start of cooperative projects with the Museum of History and Art in Albuquerque and the New Mexico History Museum at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. Both museums are creating major exhibits on aspects of Jewish settlement of New Mexico. There is a documentary film underway, through the fiscal agency of the New Mexico Community Foundation, which will bring our history to a much larger world. Wherever I go, when I speak of New Mexico's unique Jewish history, I am received with rapt attention.

None of this would be happening had we not had the benefit of 30 years of research, outreach, education, and the loving attention of the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and its members. I look forward to seeing you and personally thanking each of you as we gather in Las Cruces at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum. ✧

**Many Thanks for Your Contributions:  
See p. 10**

**NMJHS is now on Facebook and Twitter. Please "like" us at <https://www.facebook.com/NewMexicoJewishHistoricalSociety> and follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/NMJewishHS>.**

### Mission Statement

The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society is a secular organization that welcomes all interested people, regardless of religious affiliation. Its mission is to promote greater understanding and knowledge of New Mexico's Jewish history within a broad cultural context.

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## Two Jews in World War II Shanghai *(continued from p. 1)*

coming from Syria, was able to get off at every port. My father was traveling with a French passport, since France had claimed Syria as a protectorate just after World War I. Jews from Germany had no citizenship after the Nazis revoked their citizenship under the Nuremberg Laws. Gellert assumes that British authorities feared these newly-stateless Jews would stay behind in Singapore or Ceylon and not re-board the ship. “I was able to get off in a couple of places,” he said. “I was a kid. Adults, it was different.”

When the Gellerts’ ship arrived in Shanghai, they were received at the dock by representatives from Jewish relief organizations. “They met us at the wharf and took us to a place called Hongkou” — the dilapidated district that came to be known as the “Shanghai Ghetto.” Anticipating the huge influx of Jews from Europe, members of Shanghai’s Middle Eastern and Russian Jewish communities had begun converting abandoned schools into rudimentary accommodations for these refugees — who ultimately numbered some 20,000.

Werner was given a bed in the boys’ dormitory. His mother was set up in the women’s dormitory and his father in the men’s. (Some of the wealthier Jews were later able to find better accommodations elsewhere in Shanghai, though the Gellert family was one of those that remained in Hongkou.) My father lived just across the Huangpu River in the YMCA near the Bund, in the city’s international district, enabled by his French citizenship to live where he chose within Shanghai.

“Was Shanghai also an adventure for you as a teenage boy, as the boat trip had been?” I asked Gellert. I had read accounts of a vibrant Jewish community in Hongkou, with their own cabarets, cafés, even Yiddish newspapers.

“No,” he said. “It was harsh. We all, everyone, suffered from something” He contracted askaris worms from infected meat, as well as malaria and typhus —

“Oh, I had all kinds of stuff” — which often sent him to the hospital.

On December 8, 1941, just a day after the bombing by Japan of the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Japanese troops marched into Shanghai. Overnight, the haven for Jewish refugees became a city at war. The business my father was sent to Shanghai to work for, exporting hand-embroidered textiles to the United States, came to a halt. The European Jews who moved to other parts of Shanghai were forced back to Hongkou. Germany placed unremitting pressure on Japan to turn over the Jews in their occupation area but Japan refused, consenting only to round up European Jewish refugees and confine them in Hongkou until the war ended.

Gellert asked to see a photo of my father, and I found a photo in my book, *Farewell, Aleppo*, of Dad on a Shanghai street during the war, in a wide-breasted topcoat and fedora.

“I’m sorry to say I don’t recognize him,” Gellert said, which hardly surprised me given the number of Jews in Shanghai at the time and the fact that Dad didn’t live in Hongkou. What *did* surprise me was his reaction to my father’s clothes — not the dated style, but the quality.

“Even his clothing was still very good,” Gellert said with an edge of wistfulness, describing a photo of himself after he had lost his hair from typhus.

This observation provided another laser view into the experiences of these two young Jewish men, stranded in the same city during World War II. Both were displaced from their homes, separated from friends and family. Both found themselves pawns in an international chess game, under rules far beyond their control. Dad recalls bundling in long underwear day and night after Japanese troops seized

radiators to melt for tanks. He describes relentless uncertainty as to when and how the war would end. Yet with his French papers, he was free to go where he wanted within Shanghai, since France was not at war with Japan. Gellert, across the river in Hongkou, endured scarcity, confinement, and disease-infected food. From time to time he rubs the back of his head where it still bears the pain of a beating he suffered from a Japanese guard who thought Werner was mocking him, when he simply didn’t understand what he was saying. “I was just a child,” he said.



Mike Sutton, c. 1942

“I hope it’s not been painful to remember all this,” I said.

“That, I will know tonight,” he answered. “I still sometimes have problems of dreaming about Germany.”

Calef came in from the patio, wagging his tail. “I think it’s time for us to have a goodie!” Gellert said, and we relocated to the kitchen for rugelach and sugar cookies (no peanut butter) and reheated coffee.

“Did you ever go back to Shanghai?” I asked. Opportunity never presented itself, he said, and now his health wouldn’t permit such a long journey.

“Did you go back to Germany?”

“Absolutely not,” he said, adding, “and I mean not,” as if there had been a shadow of doubt. Shanghai, I realized, left him with physical ailments that persist to this day, but Germany left the far more insidious wounds of hate.

Driving home, I considered the many ways we humans have of reacting to the very human phenomena of hate and intolerance. Some respond with more hate, finding vindication in their own acts of

*(continued on p. 4)*

# Betsy Nordhaus Messeca: 2015 Hurst Award Winner

by Sharon Niederman



In recognition of her outstanding service to the New Mexico Jewish Historical Society and to New Mexico Jewish history, the society is pleased to honor

Betsy Nordhaus Messeca with the 2015 Dr. Allan P. and Leona Hurst Award.

A descendant of New Mexico's Nordhaus and Staab Jewish pioneer families, Betsy herself is a bit of "living history." She has continued her family's distinguished tradition of dedicated community service.

Betsy has worked with the New Mexico Anti-Defamation League, Women's Housing Coalition, and Hadassah tutoring program, as well as NMJHS. In April, 2009, she joined the NMJHS board and immediately found a way to combine her love of

New Mexico history with the preservation of Jewish New Mexico history. Starting in 2010, she spearheaded a project to save the panels created for the breakthrough

Jewish Pioneers of New Mexico exhibit at the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe. Through her efforts, and with a grant from the Jewish Federation, the Jewish Community Center displayed two exhibitions of the panels, the panels were displayed at museums in northern and southern New Mexico, and education modules were developed from them. In addition, plans for a permanent exhibit at the JCC are underway.



*Betsy Nordhaus Messeca*

Following her growing up in Albuquerque's North Valley, the daughter of Bob and Ginnie Nordhaus, Betsy attended Vassar College where she studied sociology and European history.

Her distinguished professional career took her from housing and urban

development in New York to real estate banking management for Chase Manhattan in New York and Paris. She went on to executive language training and founded a real estate development firm in Paris.

Meanwhile, she contributed her efforts to international volunteer work of relief and development fundraising for Africa, adult continuing education in Paris, and publishing in Luxembourg.



*Sharon Niederman*

In 2001, Betsy and husband Michel returned from Europe to make their home in Albuquerque. They continue to ski at Sandia Peak, the ski area founded by Betsy's father, Bob Nordhaus, with Ben Abruzzo, and spend time in the summer at Trout Springs, the historic family summer home above Las Vegas, New Mexico. They have two children and several grandchildren living in Israel, where they frequently travel.

It is with great pride and gratitude that NMJHS adds the name of Betsy Nordhaus Messeca to the honored list of Hurst Award recipients.✧

## Two Jews in World War II Shanghai *(continued from p. 3)*

bigotry or revenge. Others retreat in fear, depression or self-loathing.

Gellert and his late wife, Frances, responded by creating a vehicle for education and inspiration: the Holocaust & Intolerance Museum of New Mexico. This small museum, which opened in January of 2001 in a storefront on Central Avenue in downtown Albuquerque, bears witness to many acts of oppression around the world, including the Holocaust, the Christian genocides (Armenian, Greek and Assyrian) of Ottoman Turkey, Rwanda, the Native American cultural genocide, and American slavery.

The effect of seeing these historical events represented side by side is transformative, inspiring a realization that hate

is not isolated to one period, place or people but a constant force that requires our vigilance. By extension, the museum acknowledges *all* people targeted for race, religion, practice, sexuality or belief. It seeks to help us recognize the steps by which prejudice leads to genocide.

The museum calls on us not just to remember the past but to be alert and responsive to oppression and hate we witness in the present, out of the Gellerts' conviction that these acts affect us all. A sandwich board facing visitors as they exit the museum asks: "What can you do to make a difference?"

In June, about two months after this interview, Werner Gellert suffered a stroke, and he has been living since then at the

St. Catherine Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center in Albuquerque. Calef is in the care a member of the Jewish Federation of New Mexico.

His legacy, the Holocaust & Intolerance Museum of New Mexico, 616 Central Avenue SW in Albuquerque, continues to spread his message. The museum is open Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., offering exhibits, community projects, and a lending library. School classes and other group visits are available, (505) 247-0606. ✧

*Claudette Sutton, author of **Farewell, Aleppo: My Father, My People, and Their Long Journey Home**, published by Terra Nova Books, lives with her husband and son in Santa Fe.*

# 30th Anniversary NMJHS Fall Conference

by Linda Goff, Conference Chair



MJHS will hold its annual conference in Las Cruces on November 14-15 at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

For further information, check our website, nmjhs.org, or contact Judy Weinstein, Office Administrator, admin@nmjhs.org, 505-348-7741, or Linda Goff, Conference Chair, lagoff@aol.com, 505-428-0591.

Keynote speakers at the conference are Dr. Rick Hendricks and Dr. Jon Hunner.

Rick Hendricks is the New Mexico State Historian, and the topic of his keynote address is "Go West Young Man: Jewish Migration to the Southwest in the 19th Century." He holds a Ph.D. in Ibero American Studies from the University of New Mexico and also attended the Universidad de Sevilla in Spain. Rick is an historical researcher and consultant. He has written and collaborated on numerous books and articles about the history of the American Southwest and Mexico, and has served as editor of the Southern New Mexico Historical Review and as president of the New Mexico Historical Society. Two recent books are *The Casads: A Pioneer Family of the Mesilla Valley* (2012) and *Four Square Leagues: Pueblo Indian Land in New Mexico* (2014), co-authored with Malcolm Elbright and Richard W. Hughes.

Jon Hunner is a history professor at New Mexico State University, and the topic of

his keynote address is "A Path Not Taken: J. Robert Oppenheimer," the subject of his book *Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the Cold War, and the Atomic West* (2009). Jon holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of New Mexico. He is active in preserving nearby history and local heritage through his research and writing, and by serving on many boards and committees in New Mexico, nationally, and internationally. Jon has also published books about the legacy of U.S. Senator Pete Domenici; the Mesilla Valley, co-authored with students in the Public History Program; and the community of Los Alamos. He contributed two chapters to Marta Weigle's book, *Telling New Mexico: A New State History* (2009). ☆

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# A Friend Forever: Claire's Memories

Interview Summary by Shari Reed



When David Dankner and Celia Udelsman left their Galician shtetls, they left behind family, friends and all that was familiar in their young lives. They

both entered the United States through Ellis Island and settled in New York City. By 1919, they had met, married, and moved to Passaic, New Jersey. In Passaic, they ran a deli and became the parents of two lively girls. Passaic was just eight miles from New York City, but a relatively small town of 70,000. They lived in a spacious apartment above Dankner's Deli. Five Orthodox synagogues were the foci for the town's large Jewish population.

Many of these Jewish immigrants had, like the Dankners, left many family and friends behind in the Old Country in

Europe. The deli was a meeting place for neighbors to come in the evenings, trade news, and catch up on local happenings. Spirited discussions were the norm at those evening gatherings and close friendships were formed.

Claire Dankner was born in 1919 and grew up in this close-knit immigrant community. When the news of her birth went out in the neighborhood, many came to see her, including Saul Jaffe, an eleven-year-old boy from across the street. His involvement in Claire's life would continue for 80 years.

When Claire started elementary school, she walked the distance between home and school. By second grade, she was walking and talking with Miriam Dorff every day. When Miriam and Claire weren't in school, they were still to-

gether playing at one another's homes with other siblings joining in. Claire and Miriam continued walking and talking through 12th grade and cemented a bond that has lasted until this day.

Miriam was very outgoing and popular. She played the piano well and was ready for any adventure. Claire studied ballet and elocution, and was a most loyal and caring friend. When Claire and Miriam



*Claire Jaffe*

graduated from high school, Miriam's aunt told them about Penn State, the college she had attended, and urged them to go also. Claire had wanted to go into a medical field, but her parents felt nursing was too physically difficult. Since so few girls became doctors, Claire's sister Helen suggested that Claire and Miriam become hospital dietitians. Miriam and Claire

felt that was an excellent idea, so the girls decided to go to Penn State to study nutrition.

Only one road block remained – Claire's parents. To see their beloved daughter go away to college was difficult. Having their immediate family near was very important. But Saul Jaffe, the boy across the street, came to the rescue. He had graduated from Harvard and told the Dankners that Claire would be safe and really enriched by attending Penn State. Claire's parents acquiesced, and Miriam and Claire were off to the great adventure of college.

While tensions were increasing in Europe and World War II was beginning, Claire and Miriam were college room-mates for four years studying to be dietitians and attending parties. They dated and dressed up for formal events, enjoying every minute of the experience. Claire was also on the Penn State debate team. When they graduated they both found internships, jobs, and marriage.

Claire was doing her internship in Brooklyn when Saul Jaffe, now an attorney, started coming to visit her regularly. Meanwhile, Miriam's hometown boyfriend, Arthur Hocheiser, now a dentist, reappeared in Miriam's life and they married.

The years passed quickly with the war, babies, and moves, but Claire and Miriam continued to talk. Claire and Miriam



*Shari Reed*

each had three children, and both women still pursued their chosen careers. Claire stayed at home and did volunteer work until her children were old enough. Then, at the urging of her husband, she went back to college, earned an M.A. in nutrition, and worked at the Science Information Exchange Center in Washington, D.C., where she loved her work and her colleagues.



*Miriam Hocheiser and Steve Weiss, Youngest Son of Shari Reed*

Miriam's daughter died too young, and both husbands died when the women

*(continued on p. 7)*

## Finding Lilo Waxman

by Kay Miller



Writing my first book, *Jews of the Wild West: A Multicultural True Story*, a book for all ages, led me to research my family's history. After the book was published in 2012, I continued exploring my roots. One day I came upon a news article about a member of the Ilfeld family of whom I had never heard.\*

The article was about elderly Jews who donated personal items that were connected to the Holocaust. Lilo Waxman had donated her dollhouse, filled with miniature furnishings, to the New Mexico Holocaust Museum.

Her gift was a family heirloom that originated in 1853. During World War II, Lilo's dollhouse was hidden from the Nazis in a gentile neighbor's attic.

I was thrilled to discover that Lilo was a relative of mine. She was a descendant of the Ilfeld family of Bad Hamburg, Germany. Louis, Charles, and Ludwig Ilfeld were subjects of *Jews of the Wild West*, and Louis was my great-great-grandfather. Charles was Louis' brother and Ludwig was Charles' nephew. Lilo's grandmother was Ludwig's sister.



*Lilo heirloom dollhouse, New Mexico Holocaust & Intolerance Museum, Albuquerque, NM*

Lilo's Uncle Ludwig sponsored the Lang family, including Lilo, her brother, and parents, to come to the United States, which allowed them to escape Hitler's Germany in 1936. Lilo's grandfather and aunt on her father's side of the family were not so lucky. Lilo was reunited with her heirloom treasure after the war.

I thought that Lilo's life would be a worthy subject for my next book. For some reason, I doubted that Lilo was still among the living. The article I had read was a few years old; and I knew that people connected to the Holocaust were of an advanced age and every year there were fewer of them.

I contacted Lyn Berner of the New Mexico Holocaust Museum where the exhibit of "Lilo's Hidden Treasure" was on permanent display. I told Lyn about my first book and my relation to Lilo. Next, I asked if Lilo's daughter Lora was alive and Lyn told me that she had passed away. After I promised Lyn that I would mail her a copy of *Jews of the Wild West*, we said goodbye.

About a month later, I called Lyn again and learned that Lilo was

alive, well, and 93 years old. I phoned her and we had a wonderful conversation. After we conversed about mutual relatives and ourselves, I said, "Lilo, I would like to write a book about your life."

Lilo was open to the idea and I began to interview her. We spoke frequently after that and she mailed me some of her biographical information. Her son Harold emailed many fabulous photos of the dollhouse to me. Lilo had many family photos, beginning with her youth in Bad Hamburg. She also had photos from her days in New Mexico, as well as later pictures.

I made arrangements to visit her in St. Louis and soon we were getting to know each other in person. I copied many of her photos to add to the manuscript, *Lilo's Hidden Treasure*. The photo



*Lilo Lang, 1937*

(continued on p. 11)

### A Friend Forever (continued from p. 6)

were in their seventies. Despite sadness, Miriam and Claire stayed in touch. After both husbands were gone, the widows took a Caribbean cruise. Like old times, Miriam danced well into the night forgetting her troubles and Claire was as always there for support. When Claire had her 90th birthday, Miriam flew to New Mexico to help Claire celebrate.

Today Miriam lives in an assisted living home in Florida near her son and still plays the piano to liven up group events. Claire lives in an assisted living home too, near her daughter, and holds the record for the most visitors of any resident. She still has her hair done and goes out to lunch. Miriam and Claire still continue to talk by phone, exchange news about family, and reminisce.

Their friendship has lasted almost 90 years and both of their lives have been greatly enriched by it. When Claire's parents had to leave those close relationships in Europe, they couldn't have predicted that their daughter would have a friend forever. ✨



*Kay Miller*

# Congregation Nahalat Shalom “Jewel of a Shul”

by Rabbi Deborah Brin / Nahalat Shalom Members and Staff

**I**n 1982, a small group of young families, feminists, gays, and lesbians were in quest of a welcoming place to practice inclusive Judaism. In early 1980s America, this was indeed a grand quest. Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, one of the first women to be ordained and a pioneer in nonsexist, ecologically responsible Jewish peace culture, became the founding rabbi.

The congregation settled on its name: Nahalat Shalom, “Inheritance of Peace.” As a Jewish Renewal congregation, there is shared commitment to a holistic and creative transformation of Jewish liturgy and law, one that engages body, mind, and spirit while valuing diversity and honoring each individual’s spiritual journey.

In its early years, Nahalat Shalom was a congregation of wanderers; services were held in backyards, parks, community centers, and various churches. Eventually, it was decided a permanent space was sorely needed and, in 2000, an old Baptist church in the heart of Albuquerque’s historic North Valley was purchased. Many congregants rolled up their sleeves and worked hard to claim the space and make it Nahalat’s own.

## A NEW ERA

In 2006, Nahalat Shalom welcomed Deborah Brin as its new spiritual leader. Rabbi Brin is one of the first 100 women rabbis to be ordained and is in the first generation of lesbian rabbis. She holds a bachelor’s degree in religious studies from

Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota; a master’s degree in pastoral counseling from La Salle University in Philadelphia; and a master of Hebrew letters and ordination from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Wyncote, Pennsylvania. On June 6, 2010, Rabbi Brin received an honorary doctorate from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College for 25 years of service to the Jewish community.

Her career within the rabbinate is rich and varied (geriatric chaplain, hospice chaplain, college chaplain and pulpit rabbi) and has taken her to Philadelphia; Toronto; Grinnell, Iowa; and Albuquerque. While in Toronto, she helped establish a community mikveh. She is a founding member of the Women of the Wall group, fighting for the right of women to pray openly



*Replicas of Jewish Temple Doors in Spain  
Handcrafted by Hershel Weiss*

at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem; she led the first prayer service of Women at the Wall on December 1, 1988. Since moving to Albuquerque, she started a Hevra Kaddisha Society, is the founding president of the Rabbinical and Cantorial Association of Albuquerque (RACA), and the founding president of the interfaith group, Albuquerque Religious and Clergy United.

## THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Transformation of the facilities, reflecting a Southwest aesthetic, is ongoing. A serene, adobe-walled courtyard with fruit trees, grapes, and Biblical trees such as fig, pomegranate, and almond has replaced asphalt. The sanctuary doors, replicas of Jewish temple doors in Spain, were handcrafted by local designer and

master artisan Hershel Weiss. The Klezmer band performs where the old baptismal pool once stood. Generous patrons provided a library that is well stocked by donors with an excellent collection of Hebrew and Jewish-themed volumes. A once-barren storage area is now a bright, welcoming art gallery that hosts regular exhibitions.



*Rabbi Deborah Brin*

Diverse programming and services at the synagogue center around the changing needs and interests of congregants and, when possible, community interests. As an example, the New Mexico Jewish Genealogical Society holds its community-wide monthly meeting at the synagogue, and these gatherings are appealing to a variety of individuals from the Albuquerque area and beyond.

## MUSIC AND DANCE

The Nahalat Shalom Community Klezmer Band (NSCKB), formed in 1995, is one of the world’s oldest and largest (23 members and growing) intergenerational community klezmer mixed orchestras. The band is taught and directed by Nahalat Shalom’s cantorial soloist and music director Beth Cohen, a highly experienced music teacher to students of all ages, world music and classical music performer, and band and orchestra director. Over the years, the NSCKB has learned and performed a repertoire of exciting, lively, and beautiful klezmer, Jewish, Israeli, Sephardic and Eastern European dance music.

The NSCKB performs professionally throughout New Mexico, at Nahalat

*(continued on p. 9)*



**Jewel of a Shul** *(continued from p. 6)*

Shalom's services and events, public and private concerts and *simchas* (joyous celebrations). The NSCKB also hosts an "open to all" klezmer jam at Nahalat Shalom's monthly "Der Freylekher Shabbes," which is usually held on the first Friday of each month.

Alavados Holy Days band is comprised of Beth Cohen and congregation members. Since 1999, Alavados has provided beautiful accompaniment for congregational prayers, songs, and dances during Rosh Hashanah, Kol Nidre, Yom Kippur, S'lichot, Der Freylekher Shabbes, Chanukah Simchat Shabbat, Tu B'shevat, Purim, Shavuot services, and other Nahalat Shalom services and special events, including the Festival Djudeo-Espanyol.

Nahalat Shalom's Yiddish dance troupe, Rikud, also leads traditional Jewish dances to the music of these great bands.

The annual KlezmerQuerque is a three-day festival of concerts, workshops, and dance parties featuring "klezmer," which is the traditional dance and instrumental music based in the ancient wedding ceremonies of the Eastern European Jewish people. The festival presents a variety of events for all ages and abilities. World-recognized klezmer guest artists are brought to Albuquerque to play, teach, and continue the evolution of klezmer.

**HERITAGE AND OUTREACH:  
HOME FOR CRYPTO JEWS**

Nahalat Shalom is an inclusive congregation that affirms and supports the discovery and exploration of our diverse identities and heritages through worship, learning, dialogue, joyful celebrations, community involvement, arts, music, and dance. Services reflect Sephardic and Ashkenazic heritages, e.g., allowable foods for both groups at Passover.

The synagogue's commitment to creating a home for the "crypto" or "hidden" Jews of New Mexico, begun in the mid-1980s by founding Rabbi Emeritus Lynn Got-

lieb, continues today under the leadership of Rabbi Deborah Brin.

Rabbi Lynn recognized the breadth of this population that existed outside the established Jewish institutions, and incorporated Ladino prayer and melody into Nahalat Shalom's services. This developed into a regular Sephardic Shabbat service led by Lorenzo (Lawrence) Dominguez, may he rest in peace, and Maria Sanchez. Lorenzo, whose Hebrew name was Levi ben Macario, was well known for his ground-breaking radio program, "Mi Seferino," aired on KUNM-FM in 1999-2000. He chanted the entire Friday evening service, accompanying himself on guitar and later on oud. Throughout the 1990s, outreach to the crypto-Jewish community resulted in return ceremonies, poetry readings, music, and Sephardic festivals organized by Lorenzo.

Beth Cohen, Nahalat Shalom's cantorial soloist, worked closely with Lorenzo and Rabbi Lynn to form the synagogue's High Holy Days band, Alavados. Beth continues to enrich the Sephardic experience with her vast knowledge and love of its music and has played a central role in the development of Sephardic and crypto-Jewish programming.

Lorenzo Dominguez's tragic death in 2003 dealt the congregation a terrible blow. His presence was huge, and his visibility and leadership as a crypto-Jew blazed a wide path for others to follow in discovering and celebrating their Jewish identity and finding a welcoming community.

Upon her arrival in 2006, Rabbi Brin embraced this aspect of Nahalat Shalom. Monthly Sephardic/crypto-Jewish Shabbat dinners continue, as well as the annual Festival Djudeo-Espanyol, which seeks to gather and unite the members of the oldest members of the Jewish communities of New Mexico and, indeed, the United States. Many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Iberian Jews who had converted to Christianity in order to escape the

clutches of the Spanish Inquisition found their way to what is now New Mexico, then the northern reach of the Spanish Empire in the "new" world.

Descendants of these hidden Jews are today coming to grips with the effects of centuries of secrecy, hiding, isolation, and fear. The festival is committed to bringing together this community that has been historically divided and hidden, using the arts as a means of stimulating hidden cultural memory. Art is presented in the historical/cultural/spiritual context of the Sephardic Jews of the Southwest and serves an educational function, as well as aiding the establishment and re-enforcement of a Jewish identity that is uniquely New Mexican. Educating the more visible and established Jewish community about the rich culture of the Sephardic and crypto-Jews, who sometimes are not accepted as Jews, creates an awareness that helps them feel comfortable among Jews in Albuquerque.

The 2015 Festival Djudeo-Espanyol was held 29-31 May, with the theme "Sephardic Culture Across the Centuries: History, Poetry, and Song." The featured speaker was folklorist and editor Enrique R. Lamadrid, UNM distinguished professor emeritus of Spanish. Other events included: dramatic reading of poetry from medieval Spain, directed by Salomé Martínez Lutz; expressive writing workshop; personal story-telling; enchilada lunch; and "Café Sepharad," featuring tapas and vegetarian paella, with Sephardic music performed by Stephanie Sofie Shefia Cohen, Neil Manuel Frau-Cortes, Sheila Fox, and Don Shapiro. Yearly festival information can be found at [nahalatshalom.org](http://nahalatshalom.org).

In summary, Nahalat Shalom describes itself as a warm, welcoming place for individuals and families of "all shapes and sizes." ✧

*Nahalat Shalom is located in Albuquerque at 3606 Rio Grande Blvd. NW, [NahalatShalom.org](http://NahalatShalom.org), 505-323-8227*

# In Memoriam: Abe Silver

by Lance Bell



be Silver, Jr. (1926-2015), will be remembered in Santa Fe and throughout New Mexico for many years to come. Abe was born in Greenwood,

Mississippi, on February 17, 1926, to Abe and Ninny Silver. Abe Silver, Jr., attended Tulane University in New Orleans and graduated with a degree in journalism. He served in the Louisiana National Guard during World War II and then went to work as a journalist for the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans.

Abe met Marian Petchesky when she ventured off to Louisiana for college. They married and chose Santa Fe to raise their family and start their careers by joining Marian's pioneering retail family business. Marian's

grandmother opened the White House in 1912 in the Catron Block located on the northeast corner of the Plaza. This store eventually changed names; when Abe and Marian took it over, it was already known as the Guarantee Ladies Clothing and Shoe Store. Many would argue that this store was the finest in the

state and for years helped dress generations of Santa Fe ladies.

Abe was a kind, witty, and passionate businessman who lived a successful life and gave back generously to his community. Abe exemplified tikkun olam. Known for having a kind heart with a great sense of humor, he would always



Abe and Marian Silver

leave anyone who crossed his path with a smile. You can't think about him without mentioning his lifelong partner and wife, Marian. They were married for 63 years and have been recognized as Mr. and Mrs. Santa Fe.

In addition to his colorful business career, Abe's family was instrumental in the success of organized Jewish life in Santa Fe. He helped with the beginnings of Temple Beth Shalom, where he served as president. The Silver family has long been active in Temple Beth Shalom and has furthered its growth with their generosity.

Abe and Marian also were longtime members and supporters of the NMJHS.

In the summer of 2006, Abe and Marian led a downtown Santa Fe Jewish history walk and shared fascinating stories of downtown, as well as of the many Jewish businesses and interesting people that helped shape Santa Fe's character and charm. (Their Jewish history walk was filmed and arrangements can be made to purchase a copy.)

One of Abe's proudest moments occurred in 2008, when he and Marian were awarded the title of Santa Fe Living Treasure. In 2010, then-Governor Bill Richardson awarded the couple with the Governor's Award for Excellence in Arts.

The city of Santa Fe will never be the same without Abe's presence. He will live on in the many contributions he made for the betterment of Santa Fe. For all who knew Abe, I have no doubt they will smile each time he comes to mind. During this difficult time, we send our deepest condolences to Marian, as well as to their children and grandchildren. ✧



Lance Bell

## Many Thanks for Your Contributions

### Pioneer

a. j. and Harold Melnick  
Noel Pugach  
Sharon Niederman

### Friend

Julia and Lance Bell  
Irene and Jerry Brown  
Catie Dixon  
Stuart Feen and Carol Sonnenschein  
The Gaon Institute of Tolerance  
Studies/Yom Limmud Committee

David Gorlick  
Linda and Ed Goff  
Jewish Community Council of  
Northern New Mexico  
Doreen Kelsey, U.S. Bank Branch Manager  
Betsy Nordhaus and Michel Messeca  
Susan Michaelson and Bill Stein  
New Mexico Community Foundation  
Stuart and Rosalie Simon  
Hyman and Marjorie Weissberg  
Gila Yaniv

### Sponsor

Harold Abroms  
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Dona Ana County Historical Society  
Halley and Ruth Anne Faust  
Los Alamos National Laboratory's  
Vecinos Volunteer Program

### Guardian

Dorothy and Tony Amsden  
Paula and Mel Schwartz

# Interview with Author Stephan Helgesen: *My Name is Aron*

by Dianne Layden



Stephan Helgesen is a retired U.S. diplomat who has lived and worked in Europe, Asia, the Caribbean Basin, and the Pacific Rim. In 2014, he published

*My Name is Aron* about Aron Straser, who survived four concentration camps in Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, and Germany. Stephan serves as honorary German consul for New Mexico and lives in the East Mountains. Aron is an accomplished wood carver and lives in Rio Rancho. *My Name is Aron: Journey to the Light of Freedom* is available on Amazon.com.

*How did you meet Aron Straser?*

Shortly before the end of World War II, Mr. Straser was sent to what was the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, a collection point for many Holocaust survivors, where he stayed until 1950.

He came to my office in 2012 seeking German citizen services. My book was spawned by his moving story, which later brought the German consul general in Houston to Albuquerque to meet Mr. Straser.

*Why did you write this book?*

I wrote the book for several reasons: To help a Holocaust survivor tell his story; to “pay down a debt” to international Jewry by keeping history and the memories of the millions of Holocaust victims alive; and to do something small as a Gentile

to show we are all brothers and sisters in the struggle for human rights, irrespective of our religious beliefs. Writing this book changed my life.

*Describe your research process.*

I interviewed Mr. Straser extensively and tried to use his voice in telling his story. I read several accounts by other concentration camp survivors and tried to let those accounts “speak” to me. I also researched the camps where Mr. Straser was interned and contacted the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., for permission to use maps of the camps.

*Summarize your conclusions about Aron Straser’s life.*

Like so many survivors of Nazi atrocities, Mr. Straser’s memories were vivid and still affect his existence

even after so much time has passed. Most impressive was his sincere belief in the inherent goodness of man despite the brutality he witnessed. This indicates a wisdom and strength of character that symbolizes the most admirable parts of the human condition – to forgive.

*What words best represent your book to the reader?*

These would be the opening and closing words. The opening words are: “Even the lowliest insect struggles to survive, not because he knows why but because

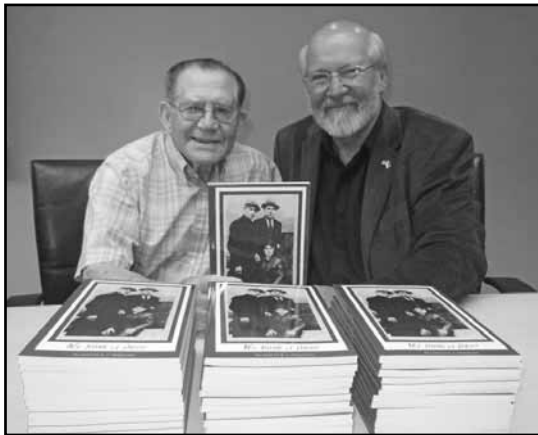
he knows he must.” (p. iii) The closing words are: “To borrow a phrase from the Sanskrit: ‘Today, well-lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.’” (p. 96)



Dianne Layden

*Were there any unexpected discoveries in writing this book?*

I had nightmares after speaking with Mr. Straser and reading about the Holocaust. What I learned is that the human mind can push the harsh reality of life to a remote place and not let it destroy the individual. The small “victory” of daily survival was enough for many to keep going, believing that maybe tomorrow could possibly bring relief from pain and suffering, proving the indomitable spirit of human beings.✧



Aron Straser and Stephan Helgesen



**Erratum: This is Diana Presser. The picture with her name on p. 11 of Summer 2015 Legacy is Nancy Terr.**

## Finding Lilo Waxman (continued from p. 7)

of Lilo as a girl in Germany, posed on top of a huge work horse, was one of my favorite images. I copied photos of Lilo skiing, horseback riding, and playing the accordion. There were also photos of her family, additional heirlooms, and

her travels, many of which have been included.

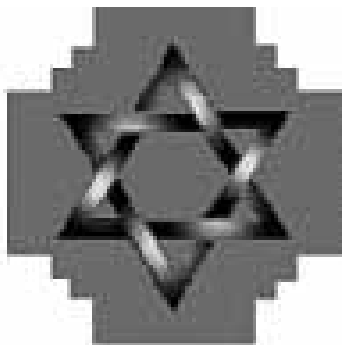
As I continue to work with the manuscript, I keep in touch with my adventurous relative and friend, Lilo Lang Waxman.

\*Contreras, Russell. “Holocaust survivors donating ‘everyday’ items.” CNSNews.com. November 11, 2011 <<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/holocaust-survivors-donating-everyday-items>>.

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society  
 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE  
 Albuquerque, NM 87109

**Membership in NMJHS**

For information contact the NMJHS office at 505-348-4471 or [admin@nmjhs.org](mailto:admin@nmjhs.org) to request a membership brochure. Alternatively, you can download a membership application from the NMJHS website [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)



**Calendar of NMJHS Upcoming Events**

**Check for future events at [www.nmjhs.org](http://www.nmjhs.org)**

November 8: “From Our Mouth to God’s Ear: Local Jewish Women Poets,” co-sponsored with Temple Beth Shalom, 2 PM

November 14-15: Fall Conference, Las Cruces, see p. 5

February 28, 2016: Genealogy program with Bennett Greenspan, morning/afternoon presentations, Jewish Community Center, Albuquerque

May 1, 2016: Montefiore Cemetery Clean-up, Las Vegas, N.M.

May 15, 2016: Annual Spring Meeting, Albuquerque

Santa Fe Jewish Film Festival, [SantaFeJFF.org](http://SantaFeJFF.org), [admin@SantaFeJFF.org](mailto:admin@SantaFeJFF.org), 505-216-0672.

**2015 JCC Book Fest & Author Series**  
 Wed Oct 21 - Wed Nov 4  
 engaging topics • entertaining speakers • year after year

Wed, Oct 21	7 pm	<b>Film Presentation: <i>Woman in Gold</i></b>
Sun, Oct 25	2 pm	<b>Letty Cottin Pogrebin, <i>Single Jewish Male Seeking Soul Mate</i></b>
Wed, Oct 28	11:30 am	<b>Jessica Fechter, <i>Stir</i></b>
Sun, Nov 1	2 pm	<b>Simon Goodman, <i>The Orpheus Clock</i></b>
Wed, Nov 4	7 pm	<b>Hannah Nordhaus, <i>American Ghost</i></b>