

H A P P E N I N G S

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER NEW HAVEN, INC.

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Leonard J. Honeyman, Editor

Message from the President, Rhoda Sachs Zahler

As I listen to the sad news each day about businesses that are closing, unemployment rates that are rising, struggles our Jewish institutions are facing, I think of our past. I think about my grandparents who came from the Ukraine to escape the czar, with nothing. I think of my parents, who survived the depression as children and World War II as young adults. I think of our past community leaders who created the Jewish institutions we have in our community today. What can we learn from them as we face today's challenges and hardships? I often search the pages of past volumes of *Jews in New Haven* for guidance.



In recent months, we have begun to participate in a national project initiated by the Jewish Women's Archive (www.jwa.org), documenting the experiences of American Jewish Women whose lives were changed by World War II. Marian Ottaviano and I went to West Hartford to help the JHS there conduct a "Road Show". More than thirty women brought pictures, letters, scrap books they had saved, and told their stories. We helped to record these stories. Here in New Haven, we have interviewed four women as part of this project: Mitzi Bargar, who was in high school when the war started; Lucille Alderman, who lost her beloved brother Sidney during the war; and cousins Rita Melman, who helped her mother run the family's hotel while her father and brother were in the army, and Laura Small Levine, who followed her husband to various military bases around the country and worked as a lathe operator in a munitions factory outside Boston—our own Rosie the Riveter. They all said that when times were tough, they had to develop resources they never knew that they had. They learned to live with ration coupons, blackouts and without the family breadwinners who were far from home. Their views of women's roles in society often shifted as a result of the roles they had to assume. DVDs of these interviews are available in the JHS archives, and for purchase. Thanks to everyone who shared their pictures letters and other memorabilia from this period. We are still involved in this project, so please keep your materials and interview suggestions coming.

Our board has been working hard on our special projects for the year. Dr. David Fischer is working with our former student intern, Robert Francis, to prepare the index for Volume IX of *Jews in New Haven*, and our Publication Celebration Committee is planning a festive luncheon for Sunday, May 31, at noon at the JCC, where the first copies will be sold at a discount. Aaron Goode and Judy Janette have created a Makom course that will begin in March, and focus on our local Jewish history. Merle Spiegel, Renee Glassner and Barry Vine are preparing plans for a multi-media "Essay Contest" for high school students in the fall. Archivist Marvin Bargar is working with volunteer Jordan Lazareck to put our "Finders Guide" on our Web site, so that researchers will know what they can find in our collection.

Thanks to all our members for your continued support of our work. Be sure not to miss our program at this year's Taste of Honey at the JCC on Saturday, January 31: *Memories of Camp Laurelwood!* I hope to see you or hear from you soon!

Answer to last issue's photo: **Samuel Kravitt, internationally known photographer. For more information about him, come to the Celebration Luncheon for the publication of *Jews in New Haven, Volume IX*, and read the article written by Marcia Kravitt.**

New Mystery Photo:

Remember this woman in uniform? Answer in the next Happenings issue. Can't wait? Call 392-6125 with your answer.



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Save the Dates

Jan: 31: Jewish Historical Society at Taste of Honey. Watch for details

May 31: Launch of *Volume IX, Jews in New Haven* at gala brunch celebrating publication at JCC, 12 noon

June 28: Annual meeting and brunch of Jewish Historical Society, 10 a.m. to noon at JCC

Request from the Ethnic Heritage Center, home of the JHSGNH

Material, papers, photographs and objects are needed for upcoming Ethic Heritage Exhibits:

1) An Ethnic History of New Haven

Ethnic Center staff are particularly interested in obtaining the actual (or reproduced) objects brought to the US by immigrant forbears.

2) Weddings

For this summer's exhibit on wedding customs and traditions, EHC staff would love to obtain wedding garments, photographs, and wedding memorabilia.

You will receive a list of what you have loaned to the Ethnic Heritage Center, signed by the Executive Director, along with an agreed-upon date that the material will be returned to you. Ethnic Center staff are willing to pick up material, if that is preferred. Please contact Ann Newhall at (203) 392-6126 or email her at: ctethnic@yahoo.com.

More than 100 pack JCC to hear Allen Ruff talk about old New Haven and new book

Bookies in a Jewish neighborhood years ago in New Haven? Sure, at least three of them.

Jews in boxing? Do Jews do that. You bet. And many, many did bet.

There were lots of surprises last Oct. 26, when New Haven native and author Allen Ruff packed the auditorium at the Jewish Community Center to read parts of his book, "Save Me, Julie Kogon." The event was sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of Greater New Haven.

But the audience surprised Ruff nearly as much as he surprised them as they took the JHS invitation to tell of their experiences in the former Jewish area to heart and regaled Ruff and their fellow audience members with many tales of the varied fabric of the neighborhood where many of them grew up.

The novel is a fictionalized account of Ruff's own family. It's set in 1989, when three generations of fathers and sons come together to bury the family's patriarch.

Over a two-day period preceding the funeral, they recall the rough and tumble Legion Avenue of the 1940s and '50s, when locals helped defend Israel by smuggling guns out of New Haven wrapped in bags of clothing, and Jews fought and bet at the old New Haven Arena. The book title comes from a true incident involving the New Haven boxer Julie Kogon.

There were gasps of surprise both from the audience and from Ruff as the tales of the bygone era and the area that was bulldozed to make way for a highway project that never materialized during the All-America Cities mania led by Mayor Richard C. Lee. For example, audience members and Ruff found out that there were at least three bookie joints operated by supposedly upstanding community members.

There were many hugs and tears as Ruff was reunited with the people he and his family grew up with.

For those who missed this memorable event, it was videotaped by JHS Archivist Marvin Bargar.

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Bob Silverman, left, the secretary of the Jewish Historical Society, shares some stories with Allen Ruff at the October event. Photo by Michael Marcus.