



LOOKING BACK AND TO THE FUTURE

by Rabbi Zoë Klein Miles

Did you know that Temple Isaiah's Religious School started *before* Temple Isaiah? While the Temple was formally founded in 1947, the Religious School was started years before that when a group of people who were not affiliated with any temple decided to form a *havurah*.

They wanted a place for their children to have a Jewish education, so they rented classrooms at Hamilton High School. One parent carried all the Religious School books in the trunk of her station wagon. That was the library!

The Temple hired Rabbi Albert Lewis as their first rabbi in 1948 and he headed up the Religious School. In 1952, Rabbi Lewis hired two people to help him, Penrod Moss to teach the upper grades, and Sandy Bernstein to teach the lower grades.

I called Sandy as I gathered information for this article, and when I asked her about the beginnings of our Religious School, her voice lit up with happiness, remembering those early days at Hamilton High School. She remembered when in 1957 Rabbi Lewis hired Jack Horowitz from Winnipeg, Canada, to lead our school.

"When Jack arrived," Sandy said, "he had very different ideas than Rabbi Lewis and I about the school. He didn't know what we were talking about!" Sandy giggled. "So we told him he had to go to school to find out what we were talking about. And he did. He went to UCLA. By then we had a building."

Jack Horowitz directed the Religious School for twenty-four years, from 1957 – 1991. Jack was an inspiration to children, families and colleagues, had a great love for Israel, and built the foundation of education at Isaiah that we still enjoy today. Many recall that over his desk, Jack had a plaque that read, "Don't Weaken!"

Rabbi Gan said, "That saying was about him, about a man who had the fortitude and strength to shine a new and important light on Jewish education and to stand with our people, whatever our challenge happened to be."

Jean Abarbanel said, "Together with Jack, Jay and

I planned a series of lectures on 'What is Jewish Art?' including sessions on the history of Jewish Art, Israeli art, Photography and Contemporary Judaica. The lecture series culminated in a Festival of Jewish Artisans, a gathering of extraordinary artists who came from all over the world to exhibit and sell their work. The Festival continued for almost twenty-five years and became an important event in the life of Temple Isaiah and the entire Los Angeles Jewish community."

In 1963 and 1964, the Religious School created the "Omer Festival Pageant," held in the large Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. The event was designed and implemented by students, and proceeds went to build a recreational center in Kiryat Gat in Israel.

In 1967, in the midst of Israeli's miraculous Six Day War, the Religious School presented the community an incredible program, "The Great Yarid." The entire Temple and grounds were converted into three major settings: a café in Tel Aviv, a Mella in Morocco and a shtetl in Eastern Europe. Over 5,000 people came to "The Great Yarid," and enjoyed unique Jewish foods and music and mingled with Temple members dressed in distinct costumes.

In 1971, Temple Isaiah Religious School launched its unique Rishonim program, starting with twenty-four students. As Rishonim, High School students become role models of Jewish living and involvement for the younger children. They serve as assistant teachers and assume responsibilities in leadership. Many people still remember that the very first real paycheck they received in their life was from Temple Isaiah as a Rishon. Over the years, Rishonim have become Religious School teachers, Hillel directors, and Jewish youth leaders.

At one point, the Religious School had three sessions, one on Saturday and two on Sunday, totaling over 1,000 students.

The Robert J. Green Contact Center has also provided the funding to the Temple Isaiah Religious School to conduct intensive and splendid annual family education programs, the publication of LaMishapacha, a creative and popular family newsletter, Shabbat retreats for children grades 4, 5, 6 and 7, and many junior and senior youth group programs.

Ellen Goldberg became the Principal of Temple Isaiah Religious School in 1991 after having been Jack's assistant. Under Ellen's leadership, the Religious School grew from 185 to 530 students. Ellen once wrote, "I've seen many of our students grow into adulthood and then return as Temple members, or as teachers here, which really makes me kvell!" For thirty years, Ellen taught our children how to see the world through Jewish eyes. She ignited thousands of children to glow with a love and joy for their tradition. Ellen's teaching staff adored her, calling her an inspiring mentor. Rina Etkes called her a "menschlichkeit pillar, caring for students, supportive of teachers." She was wise, fair, kind, generous, graceful, with a deep love for the Temple community and well-respected by her colleagues. Under Ellen's leadership, the Temple engaged in the Re-Imagine, a consortium of synagogues engaging together in an eighteen-month study of religious school and envisioning its future.

In 1994, Carla Kopf joined our education team as Assistant Principal. At the time, Jack was still tutoring students for their B'nai Mitzvah. Carla told me, "One afternoon I was very frustrated because something was not going the way I wanted it to. I don't even remember what it was, but what I do remember is that Jack saw me and my frustration. He said to me in a very soothing voice, 'It will be OK, remember, you are doing God's work.' Ever since, I keep that in mind when things in the school are challenging. I know that the work that we do here is sacred. We are helping to raise Jewish children, to teach them to make good choices, to be good human beings, good daughters and sons, kind friends, helpful members of a community."

Carla worked with Ellen Goldberg for sixteen years. "We had a great partnership and supported each other in anything that needed to be done to run the continuing growing school," Carla said. "I learned so many things from Ellen, most

importantly, to be a kind listener to all parents, children and teachers, and do everything in my power to ensure a positive experience in our program and our synagogue."

We have been blessed to work with top educators, including Joshua Mason Barkin and Rabbi Aimee Gerace. In 2009, Stephanie Schwartz joined our team of educators primarily focusing on the teen program.

Over the years, the educational programs of Temple Isaiah Religious School have been acclaimed nationally and in Israel. The Religious School has been awarded numerous honors and curriculum awards presented by the National Association of Temple Educators and the Central Conference of American Rabbis in the areas of curriculum development, extracurricular activities, teacher training, parent education, arts projects, Hebrew programming, camping and friendship projects with the children of Kiriat Gat, Kiriat Ata and Kibbutz Givat Brenner in Israel.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM MORE RECENT YEARS INCLUDE: Shabbat B'Yachad, our immersive Shabbat family program which for ten years has been deeply transformative to participants; Furnishing eight apartments for homeless families with Upward Bound House; Serving hundreds of meals to people in need at several homeless shelters; Being a hub during Big Sunday; Tiyl, learning Judaism in people's homes; Arts through Activism; Our 2nd grade Mussar (Jewish values) program; L'Dough v'Dough, baking challah with Holocaust survivors; Torah in the Home; Donating Tzedakah to outfit an ambulance in Israel; Advancing our Hebrew program to include Hebrew Through Movement and Hebrew Intensive; Our 8th grade Israel Twinning program; Taking confirmation students to participate in the Religious Action Center program to lobby Congress in Washington DC; Taking 11th and 12th graders to Israel to learn about the dual history; Taking teens to the south to learn about Civil Rights and the Jewish participation.



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This past month at the Chai Dinner honoring all people who have been members of Temple Isaiah for eighteen years or more, it was incredible listening to people talk about how they joined Isaiah initially for the Religious School, and then as a family, grew to form their closest and most meaningful relationships here.

Jack Horowitz once wrote, “What a joy and inspiration it is year after year to experience the sights and sounds of our Religious School! Our classrooms are alive with beautiful, creative environments, realia, maps and paintings. There is singing of Hebrew songs and prayers, dancing of Jewish folk dances, and lively discussions of teachers and children. A wonderful ruach permeates the halls, the classroom, our entire Temple!”

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The Vision of Temple Isaiah’s Religious School, as written in the “Journeys Through Judaism” guide to Jewish Education at Isaiah, reads:

“Our school will be a center for developing Identity, Community and Wonder. Our curriculum and programs are designed to develop strong Jewish identity through rituals, language, history and culture, to create lasting relationships and community through meaningful conversation, music, shared activities, projects, trips and friendships, and to foster a sense of awe, curiosity and wonder through prayer, and deep, honest exploration of our faith.”

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*I’m not Jewish
Our 9 year old girl did adamantly state.
Oy vey, Bill and I wondered
Are we too late?*

*To the rescue came
Temple Isaiah’s religious school
Jack Horowitz and his teachers
Made Judaism sound cool.*

*Before we blinked
A bat and bar mitzvah we did celebrate
Cantor Nadell and Rabbi Gan
Ah, they were first rate.*

*Fast forward lickety split
And we were middle aged
And now what should we do
As we reached this stage?*

*Once again Temple Isaiah
To our rescue did come
Offering eventful times
And a havurah where we always had fun.*

*And darned if the years
Didn’t keep galloping by
With Temple dinners, holidays, classes
And, all of a sudden, a village called Chai
With Chai Village our rabbis understood
That no matter your age
Involvement, activities, giving back
Are needed at every stage.*

*So what does Temple Isaiah
Mean to me and to Bill
A place to honor each time of life
And to grab great joys still*

*It’s connectedness and memory
And friends galore
It’s continuity and identity
We’ve been blessed, for sure.*

by Myrna Hant