



# Chesed

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## Acts of Chesed

# Gone But Not Forgotten: Community Buries A Woman of Valor

### In This Issue

Welcome to our new look and new format. We invite you to learn more about the tangibles and intangibles that make us who we are: the acts of chesed that motivate our fellow Jews and the cadre of volunteers and staff who work at the Hebrew Free Burial Association.

As always, we welcome your comments. Please write to us at  
363 Seventh Avenue,  
New York, NY 10001  
or call 212 239-1662.

**A** community in Queens reached out to aid one of its own members during the last months of her life -- and HFBA was there to help.

Sara F.\* lived her entire adult life in the seaside community of Rockaway. Though she never married, Sara involved herself in the life of her community, joining Hadassah and eventually rising to the office of president of the local chapter. She was well known and well liked, always ready to help.

All that began to change when Sara's health failed. She became more reclusive, relying on her pet cat for companionship and rarely venturing beyond her modest apartment's walls. Unknown to others, her financial situation was failing along with her physical condition,

sapping her of the strength she needed to live.

The sad story might have ended like too many others, a lone, elderly woman sharing her pet's food for sustenance, had it not been for the *chesed* of a neighborhood rebbetzin and her congregation. As soon as she learned of her situation, Rebbetzin T. began making calls to ensure that Sara's needs were met. Neighbors cooked and delivered hot meals to her door; Rebbetzin T. arranged for Kosher Meals on Wheels to add Sara to their client list. Shabbat food was provided weekly, always in a way that maintained Sara's dignity.

One day there was no answer at Sara's door. The volunteers who brought Sara food were worried. They called the area hospitals, but couldn't find her. Hatzalah eventually

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UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

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## In My Opinion

**Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, HFBA Officiating Rabbi**

On Saturday, November 25, the *parsha* (Torah portion) of *Chayei Sarah* will be read in synagogues around the world. The reading begins with the death of our Matriarch, Sarah, the wife of Abraham. After her passing, Abraham negotiates with the local inhabitants of Hebron to purchase a burial site for his wife. In fact, the description of the negotiations and the price paid record the first sale of land in *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel, to a Jew.

From this passage in the Torah, we derive the necessity for Jews to have their own burial grounds, to bury their dead with dignity and to mourn the loss of a loved one before continuing with one's life and routines. Throughout our history, the message of *Chayei Sarah* has been scrupulously observed by Jewish communities large and small. Every community established its own cemetery and formed a burial society whose task it was to prepare the deceased for burial according to Jewish traditions.

Here in America, the conventions of *Chayei Sarah* still play a crucial role in our lives. From the beginning of American Jewish settlement in the "new land," Jewish cemeteries have been part of the landscape. No matter how far one strays from other religious traditions, most American Jews want to be buried with the same simple dignity described in the *Torah*.

But what of those who can't afford the rising cost of an American funeral? For over 110 years, HFBA has guaranteed that New York's poorest Jews can be buried with honor and dignity.

As one of our valued friends you know this, but several years ago we realized that too many people were unaware of our existence. Our response was to initiate an educational and fund raising campaign in cooperation with Metropolitan-area congregations. We designated *Shabbat Chayei Sarah* as the weekend when rabbis would speak to their congregations on our behalf.

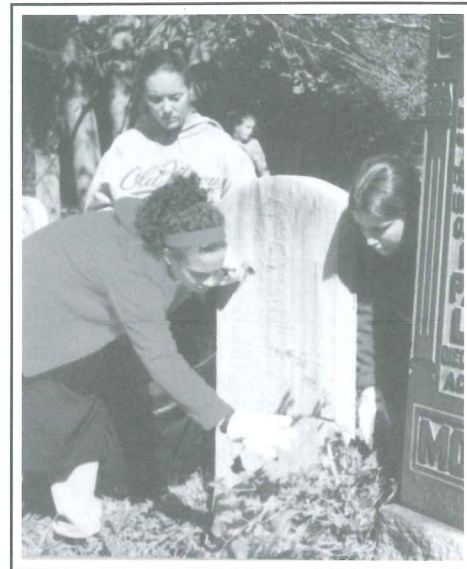
From its first year, the campaign was a tremendous success. Every year the scope of the campaign has grown as hundreds of rabbis talk about HFBA on *Shabbat Chayei Sarah*. More people learn about our important work and become involved by contributing to our operating budget and/or the Leave Your Mark campaign.

This year *Shabbat Chayei Sarah* coincides with Thanksgiving weekend. Most of us will celebrate with family and/or friends, thanking G-d for the blessings of freedom and prosperity we enjoy in this country. In this time of happiness, it is incumbent upon us to remember that for many Jews, Thanksgiving is just another day of relentless poverty. The need for HFBA is as strong as ever.

## Several Schools Help To Clear Cemeteries During Fall Cleanup

It happens every year: summer turns into autumn and leaves begin to fall. Keeping Silver Lake and Mount Richmond Cemeteries clean and clear of leaves and other natural debris is time consuming, but not thankless. We are grateful to the girls of Stella K. Abraham High School, a division of the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, for help with our annual fall cleanup. These three girls were part of a group of students who worked tirelessly with their teacher, Atara Siegel. The school has made the cleanup part of their annual calendar.

Several other schools have made plans to help with this year's cleanup. For information on how your school can get involved, please call Amy Koplow, Executive Director, at 212 239-1662.



### HFBA Welcomes Amy Koplow

The Hebrew Free Burial Association is pleased to announce the appointment of Amy Koplow to the position of Executive Director.

Amy has had extensive experience as an educator, grantwriter, designer and curriculum developer at Queens College, Parson's School of Design, and other colleges and schools. Most recently she is the co-founder of the Riverdale Omanut Project, a community-based arts education and resource project for children and adults.

Ms. Koplow holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from Brandeis University. She lives in Riverdale, New York, where she is an active member of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

### Watch for our web site!

The HFBA web site is under construction and will be up for viewing soon.

Our goal is to reach people who are "surfing" for information on Jewish communal organizations, New York philanthropy and other related topics.

The site will provide data on HFBA and provide a means for donating to HFBA via secured credit card transactions.

The site is expected to be operational within the next few months. The address is [www.hfba.org](http://www.hfba.org).

## Meet The Staff

## Anne Leist Counts Thirty Two Years Of Helping People

**W**hen a bereaved person or a government agency calls the HFBA office to arrange for a burial, the person they will most likely speak with on the phone is Anne Leist. Anne is more than “the voice” of the agency; in many ways, she personifies its soul.

“We are here to serve the people,” stated Anne. “We make sure everything is taken care of so the families can mourn their loss without distraction.” At the same time, she is charged with the sometimes frustrating task of working with city, state and federal agencies to ascertain whether burial stipends are available for each person we bury -- and collecting the funds when they are.

For the past thirty-two years, Anne has interviewed clients, made funeral arrangements and sorted out the red tape of city, state and federal regulations regarding indigent burials. She freely admits that the job has gotten more complex as HFBA has grown. Several funerals are performed every week, and each one means conversations with families, hospitals, nursing homes, public administrators, the NYC Police

Department, and others, plus reams of paperwork that must be filled out and followed up. To Anne, it seems that ever year brings new rules and more paper. Yet her good cheer never varies.

When asked to describe a “typical day” at HFBA, Anne shrugs with a smile. One day might find Anne consoling a family who has come to make arrangements for a grandparent’s funeral in the morning, working with a nursing home to bury an elderly resident who has just died in the afternoon, and following up with the public administrators in all five boroughs throughout the day.

After more than three decades, the sorrow that accompanies clients into the office still weighs heavily upon Anne’s soul. She has had to make arrangements to bury infants, children, parents and grandparents. She has spoken with families at the breaking point, explaining the mundane details of the burial process while they are still wrestling with their loss. Yet she remains optimistic about what each day will bring, ready to help Hebrew Free Burial Association.



Anne Leist

Remembering the Hebrew Free Burial Association in your will is easy.  
Call 212 239-1662 for information on how you can continue to ensure that every Jew  
can have a Jewish burial.

## Leave Your Mark

### Memories of Holocaust Tragedy Motivate Donor



Margaret Dreichlinger Bank's paternal grandmother and aunt, pictured with her father, perished during the Holocaust.

Margaret Dreichlinger Banks considers herself lucky to live in the comfort and security of the United States. But she cannot forget those members of her family who were caught in the claws of death in Europe during the Second World War.

Ten members of her family, including three grandparents, an aunt, four uncles and two cousins, were killed in the Holocaust. Every time she thought of them, Mrs. Banks was saddened by the reality that they were denied a Jewish burial and that their remains lie forever unmarked and unrecorded.

While this loss can never be recovered, Mrs. Banks has left a lasting legacy in their names when she chose to

participate in HFBA's Leave Your Mark program. By endowing ten monuments that will be placed over the graves of ten indigent Jews buried in Mt. Richmond Cemetery, Mrs. Banks is helping to ensure that no other Jews suffer the indignity of anonymity forced upon her relatives and the millions of other men, women and children whose bones or ashes littered the landscape of eastern Europe by the end of 1945.

"This donation is being given in the memory of my grandparents, aunt, uncles and cousins who were lost in the Holocaust," Mrs. Banks wrote in a letter that accompanied her purchase of the markers. "Sadly, there are no monuments for these ten loved ones. In their revered memory, ten others will have their places remembered."

Mrs. Banks joins scores of others who have contributed to the Leave Your Mark program this year. Her name has been added to our wall of honor at Mt. Richmond Cemetery.

*We are pleased to announce that the following names have been added to our Leave Your Mark Donor Plaque in the Weinberg Chapel at Mt. Richmond Cemetery.*

MARGARET DREICHLINGER BANKS

RONI & YEHUDA BLINDER

LOUIS H. BLUMENGARTEN

CONGREGATION OHAB ZEDEK,  
WHITESTONE, NY

JOEL F. & RABBI TAMAR CRYSTAL

GIMPRICH FAMILY FOUNDATION

MR. & MRS. LOUIS GERSTLE

MURIEL V. HERMAN

DR. & MRS. THOMAS & ANDREA KOLB

J. JUSTIN & HARRIET ROTHSCHILD

THE FAMILY OF HERBERT SHAPIRO

MR. & MRS. TOBIAS B. SCHAPIRO

NORMAN TEPPER

ALICE, JERRY & LAWRENCE WARTELL

STEVEN & YOLANDE ZAHLER

## Acts of Chesed

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was able to enter the apartment, but it was empty. Sara had suffered a stroke. Rebbetzin T. and her "committee" visited Sara in the hospital and the nursing home to which she was later transferred. They brought comfort to her last days, but their friendship did not end with Sara's death.

Rebbetzin T. knew how important Judaism and being part of a Jewish community was to Sara and she was determined that Sara would

school of Yeshiva Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway.

As HFBA made arrangements to transfer Sara's remains first to the *Chevra Kadisha* (burial society) that would prepare her for burial and then to Mt. Richmond Cemetery, where she would be interred, Mesivta Chaim Shlomo recruited a minyan of young men to assist at the funeral. The high school boys showed their respect for the deceased and for the observance of the funeral traditions by carrying Sara's casket from the hearse to the graveside, carefully lowering it into the ground and filling the grave with earth. They listened as Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, officiating rabbi of the Hebrew Free Burial Association, and Bjorn Bamberger, President, recited the *kaddish* and other graveside prayers.

Rebbetzin T. and her community continue to grieve for Sara F. They are comforted by the compassion shown by everyone at HFBA and by the knowledge of the unique partnership HFBA has formed with communities across the New York area.

have a Jewish funeral and burial. As soon as she learned of Sara's death, she called the Hebrew Free Burial Association to arrange for the burial. She then contacted the *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Mesivta Chaim Shlomo, the high

*\*The name of our client and many of the identifying details of her life and community have been changed to protect her privacy.*

**R**ebbetzin T. was determined that Sarah would have a Jewish funeral...Her first act after hearing about her passing was to contact the Hebrew Free Burial Association.

### In My Opinion

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You can help make this year's *Chayei Sarah* campaign a success. Ask your rabbi to speak about HFBA during the sermon on that Shabbat. Talk to your friends and fellow worshippers about HFBA. Make a contribution and ask them to match it.

We need your help to educate every Jew about our vital work. We need everyone's help to continue our mission and to see that every poor Jew receives the same kindness that Abraham showed to his wife even as he mourned her death.