



Chesed

VOLUME 9/NO. 2

APRIL 2001/NISAN 5761

In This Issue

- 2 Words of Torah: Our president describes how the biblical Moses set an example for HFBA to follow
- 3 A teenager chooses to celebrate his *bar mitzvah* by ensuring that others are cared for
- 4 HFBA staff is always compassionate and always on call
- 6 A generous gift from a humble donor

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

Chesed is published by the Hebrew Free Burial Association
363 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
Telephone 212-239-1662



UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

Acts of Chesed

A Lonely Burial

On a cold, overcast day this past winter, HFBA buried Rose G.* A former resident of Queens,

Rose's case was referred to HFBA by the chaplain of the hospital in which she died. Her body arrived for burial accompanied by a plastic bag containing all of her worldly possessions; a few changes of clothing and an

overcoat. There was no one to claim her belongings, no one to sort through them and relive memories. At sixty three, Rose could not be considered elderly, yet she died alone in the world. There was

no family and friends to attend the funeral; HFBA's officiating Rabbi, Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, served as both Rabbi and mourner.

"When Rose's body arrived with her few belongings, it was a stark reminder that loneliness is not only experienced in life,

"It was one of the most painful burials I have ever conducted," says Rabbi Plafker. "When Rose's body arrived with her few belongings, it was a stark reminder that loneliness is not only experienced in life,

but also in death."

Rose's burial represents one third of the burials HFBA performs, in which no family or friends are in attendance. When most people suffer a

continued on page 5

Bjorn Bamberger

Message from our President

Passover is approaching, and in just a few days, we will all be sitting at a beautiful seder table, surrounded by children and grandchildren, reading from the *Haggadah*, recounting once again the inspirational story of the exodus from Egypt.

In Genesis, in the famous “Covenant Between the Pieces,” G-d informs our patriarch Abraham that his descendants will be slaves in a foreign land, but He also promises Abraham that He will judge the children of Israel’s oppressors, and they will leave *bir’chush gadol*, with great wealth.

Indeed, the Torah informs us that as they left Egypt, the children of Israel “requested from the Egyptians silver vessels, gold vessels and garments... and the Egyptians granted their request—so they emptied Egypt” (Exodus 12, 35-36).

Yet Moses himself was not a participant in this collection.

Citing the verse from Proverbs (10,8) “the wise of heart will seize *mitzvos*,” the Talmud (*Sota* 13a) explains that while the Israelites sought gold and silver from their Egyptian neighbors, Moses was busy fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *mais mitzvah*—the sacred obligation to care for the remains of the dead.

While others were engaged in gathering spoil, *Moshe Rabbenu* himself retrieved the remains of Joseph from their place of concealment in the Nile river, so they could be brought to the Holy Land where they would be properly buried in Shechem.

While others were engaged in amassing earthly possessions - an act commanded by G-d—Moses knew that observing the final honor of giving a kosher *k’vurah* to a deceased Jew is the most important *mitzvah* we can perform.

Inspired by this example, the Hebrew Free Burial Association is dedicated to carrying out the sacred task of burying the *mais mitzvah* not only at Pesach time, but throughout the entire year. We conduct between 350 and 400 funerals for indigent Jews each year—each with consummate dignity, and each in full compliance with *halacha* and Jewish tradition.

Thanks to generous supporters like yourself, the Hebrew Free Burial Association has always been able to answer the call of the needy for this final earthly *chesed*. With your help, we will continue to try to live up to the example Moses set for us.

So, as we all complete our preparations for Passover, it is entirely fitting and appropriate that we include a generous check to the Hebrew Free Burial Association.

I wish you and your entire family a happy and kosher Pesach!



Bar and Bat Mitzvah Circle

Celebrating a Milestone with a Good Deed

Jesse Gross, a seventh grader at the SAR Academy in Riverdale, New York, decided to commemorate his *bar mitzvah* by actively taking upon himself the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*, charity. Celebrating this important milestone with family and friends, Jesse wanted to acknowledge his entry into Jewish adulthood with an act that would help those less fortunate than he. When Jesse discussed with his father the idea of donating a portion of the gifts he would receive for his *bar mitzvah* to charity, his father suggested a number of worthy Jewish organizations, HFBA among them. Ultimately, Jesse chose to donate his *bar mitzvah* money to HFBA, as the act of providing the indigent with burial represents *chesed shel emet*, true righteousness. "I liked the idea of doing something good and not expecting anything in return," says Jesse. "Giving charity in a situation when you can not be repaid is one of the highest forms of a good deed."

Included in Jesse's *bar mitzvah* invitation was Jesse's request that in lieu of a gift, guests

could express their congratulations to Jesse with a contribution to HFBA. In choosing to commemorate his *bar mitzvah* with this act of charity, Jesse joined HFBA's Bar and Bat Mitzvah Circle, a group established to encourage and acknowledge the participation of young adults in the *mitzvah* of burying the Jewish poor. Following his *bar mitzvah* in December, Jesse received a framed certificate from HFBA that serves as a remembrance of his celebration and participation in this important *mitzvah*. The manner in which Jesse chose to celebrate his *bar mitzvah* is a tribute to his Jewish education and the values with which he was raised. HFBA congratulates Jesse and his family on the special occasion of



his *bar mitzvah* and on his decision to celebrate it in a way that preserves the dignity of the Jewish people.

For information on how your child can join the Bar and Bat Mitzvah Circle, please contact Amy Koplrow, Executive Director, at 212-239-1662.

Meet The Staff

Meet Rhonda Stein, HFBA's Caring Office Manager

Rhonda Stein's daily schedule demonstrates that the Hebrew Free Burial Association does much more than arrange funerals. As office manager, on any particular day she will speak with concerned relatives, connect clients with social services, and make follow up calls to see how a family is faring after a loss. In handling inquiries about burials, Rhonda often hears heart-wrenching stories and detects needs beyond the immediate arrangement of a funeral. Having worked with HFBA for seven years, Rhonda is adept at navigating the city's network of social services, and helps people obtain the assistance they need, be it counseling, shelter, or a ride to a funeral. "My job is about working with people," says Rhonda. "I try to help in whatever way I can."

One recent case stands out in Rhonda's mind. Two brothers, Joseph and Saul,* lived together for many years and had a particularly close relationship.

When Joseph got sick, Saul cared for him. When Saul called the HFBA to inquire about burial arrangements, he was despondent about the prospect of losing his closest companion. Rhonda immediately contacted the Jewish Adult Services Association, which assigned a

social worker to Saul's case.

Shortly thereafter Joseph died, but Saul did not have to suffer his loss alone. The social worker still visits Saul, and Rhonda is in touch with Saul to see how he is faring.

When someone passes away after hours or on weekends, it is Rhonda who is on call to arrange the burial. "We need to be there for people whenever they experi-



"My job is about working with people. I try to help in whatever way I can."

continued on page 5

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 respectful Jewish burial.

"Lonely Burial" continued from page 1
 loss, thoughts immediately turn to informing loved ones and making arrangements. Every funeral is terribly sad, but the bitterness is often sweetened by sharing the pain with others. Yet in many of HFBA's burials, there is no one else to share the sorrow. HFBA

preserves human dignity by ensuring that there is a caring Jewish presence at the burial. "Rose's case highlights what HFBA is about," says Rabbi Plafker. "We are there for people who may be all alone."

**The name of our client has been changed to protect her privacy.*

"Rhonda Stein" continued from page 4
 ence loss, no matter what day of the week or time of year it is," says Rhonda. As Jewish tradition mandates that burials take place as soon as possible after death, Rhonda often has to make quick decisions about how HFBA can best help each client. With each burial there is also paperwork and

necessary follow-up with city, state, and federal agencies. Given the breadth of her responsibilities, Rhonda jokes that she is "assistant to everyone." While her job is demanding, she finds it incredibly meaningful to be able to offer help and comfort to those in need.

**The names of our clients have been changed to protect their privacy.*

Breakfast Honoring Yocheved Liss & Jane Flechner

Join us in Riverdale for our gala breakfast honoring Yocheved Liss and Jane Flechner, Sunday April 22, 2001, 9:30 am, at the Riverdale Jewish Center, 3700 Independence Avenue, Riverdale, NY. To make a reservation please call Amy Koplow at 212-239-1662.

Double Your Donation to HFBA Through Your Company's Matching Gift Program

You can double or even triple the dollar value of your gift to HFBA if you work for a company with a Matching Gift Program.

It's easy – simply obtain a form from your company's Matching Gift Coordinator, fill it out, and send it along with your gift to us.

Thank you!

Leave Your Mark

A Humble Donor, A Lasting Gift

This past fall HFBA received a letter from an attorney informing us that he had found a bankbook among his deceased client's records. Unbeknownst to us, a sizeable account was left in trust for HFBA by the late Helen Stark, who received and occasionally responded to our mailings over the years.

HFBA has applied this generous gift

to our Leave Your Mark campaign, which provides monuments for the graves of Jews in our cemetery so that the indigent need not lie in anonymity. We are pleased to honor the legacy of a humble woman in a manner that ensures that the names of those who could not afford a grave marker are forever etched in stone.

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

Joseph Alexander Foundation, Inc.

The Saul and Lillian Ash Foundation, Inc.

Mr. Sidney Axelrod

In Memory of Fanny Beiner

Mr. Jack Dock

William P. Goldman & Bros. Foundation

The Nathan P. Jacobs Foundation

Jonas Family Foundation of the JCF

Mr. & Mrs. David Kufeld

The Price Family Foundation, Inc.

Rubin Family Charitable Trust

Mr. And Mrs. Robert A. Sacks

Adolph & Ruth Schnurmacher Foundation

The Silverweed Foundation, Inc.

In Memory of Helen Stark

Mr. & Mrs. Gerald Tohn

In Memory of Darcia Weiss

Mr. Jacob Weinreb

Spring is here, and HFBA needs volunteers to help with seasonal cleanup at our historic cemeteries in Staten Island. To arrange for your school, group, or synagogue to do this *mitzvah*, please call Amy Koplow at 212-239-1662.