

## A Gift to the Dying

by Amy Koplow, HFBA Executive Director

I remember the day I buried my mother, may she rest in peace. Our family huddled around the open plot, recited the eternal prayers and joined in the ceremony of filling the grave.

The one comfort we had – and it was a comfort that sustained me in the days and years that followed – was that we were with my mother during her last days. We escorted her to her final resting place. *We said the kaddish.* We were there for her.

**And yet...hundreds of Jews die alone in this city.**

In all the work we do at HFBA, there's one scene that breaks my heart. It is when an elderly person, dying alone, cannot ensure his own Jewish burial. There are no assets. And there is no one left, no relative or friend, who can undertake this final *mitzvah*, this *chesed shel emet*. Without an advocate on his behalf, burial in a common, anonymous grave is an ominous, even likely, possibility.

There is, however, a gift we can give to the dying. We can offer agency, the opportunity to have some control over their burials and final resting places.

HFBA is working with social workers and chaplains helping them to navigate these very difficult – yet deeply satisfying – conversations. Through the support of the

Applebaum Foundation, an outreach coordinator will meet with these dedicated professionals. She will discuss HFBA's options and share our pre-arrangement forms, which confirm that the patients receive a proper Jewish burial.

It is not easy for these professionals to broach this conversation. Aviva Kiffel, of the Promenade Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, serves as a burial agent for some of the Jewish patients with whom she works.

"For many patients, I become their burial agent," Mrs. Kiffel told us. "I talk to the patient – it could take four or five conversations. I tell them, "Judaism has such beautiful traditions. Why would you want to be buried in potter's field? You should live for 120 years, but when you die you should go out as

a Jew, just as you came into the world as a Jew."

"The people who work for HFBA are wonderful," Mrs. Kiffel explained. **"And the best thing is, HFBA doesn't turn anyone away."**

Mrs. Kiffel described one of her patients. Judy was in her late 60's, in a wheelchair, but otherwise healthy. After learning about HFBA, Judy gladly signed the pre-arrangement form and designated Mrs. Kiffel as

*In all the work we do at HFBA, there's one scene that breaks my heart. It is when an elderly person, dying alone, cannot ensure his own Jewish burial.*

*continued on page 2*

*From January 1 through October 31, HFBA performed 441 burials, including 169 burials of people who lost their lives to Covid-19.*



# Dina Grossman, Former Russian Refusenik, Buried at Mount Richmond Cemetery

From the late 1960's through the 1980's, people all over the world demonstrated support for the Russian "refuseniks," Jews who wanted to emigrate to escape Soviet anti-Semitism. The Soviet authorities accused the refuseniks of espionage and treason. They were watched by the KGB, denied employment in their areas of expertise and forced to find menial work to survive. Some endured the horrors of Russian prisons and threats of execution.

On October 16th, HFBA buried Dina Grossman, a refusenik and activist, born in 1954. Between 1975 and 1981, her anti-government activities included public demonstrations against Soviet oppression and the regime's refusal to allow Jews to emigrate. She also taught art at an underground Jewish kindergarten, an offense which, if discovered, could have carried a jail sentence of up to ten years.

Dina was one of four protestors who participated in a two-week hunger strike during the 1980 Moscow Olympics. The Soviet government, eager to avoid publicity about the plight of Soviet Jews while in the international spotlight, granted her an exit visa.

Dina immigrated to Israel. After studying at the Moscow Art Institute, she began further studies at the Bezalel Art Institute. She eventually came to New York City to continue her art studies at Pratt Institute. Her

artistic talent was apparently familial – she was related to the notable Jewish artist Jacques Lipschitz. She wrote poetry throughout her life and published her own non-fiction book in English and Russian.

During the last ten years of her life, Dina pursued an interest in filmmaking, sometimes earning money by working as an extra on movie sets. Already in her 60's, she was accepted into a filmmaking program in Europe. Unfortunately, although she was planning to attend the school, the coronavirus pandemic made that impossible.

Dina suffered from bi-polar disorder and diabetes. When she suddenly died in October Chana Aberson, an old friend from Moscow, called HFBA. We were able to locate Dina's body at the Medical Examiner's office.

Dina, refusenik, artist, author, poet and aspiring filmmaker, was laid to rest at Mount Richmond Cemetery. Chana, unable to attend the funeral, was grateful that the volunteer *minyán* was present for the recitation of the *kaddish*.



Self portrait

## A Gift to the Dying ...continued from page 1

her burial agent. Very soon afterward, and completely unexpectedly, Judy suffered a massive heart attack and died. Because she had signed the form, Judy was buried the next day, according to Jewish tradition.

Rabbi Rachmiel Rothberger, the Jewish Community Liaison at Calvary Hospital, told us how he uses the pre-arrangement form with HFBA's support.

"First," Rabbi Rothberger explains, "I'll find out if the patient has made other arrangements. If there are no means, I'll call HFBA. Sometimes, the patient asks for cremation, because he doesn't have the money for a burial. When he hears that HFBA is ready to bury him, he is very appreciative."

If there is no end-of-life plan in place, tragic mistakes can be made.

Perhaps because the decedent was so young, one of Rabbi Rothberger's cases makes a strong impression.

Michael, was a 39-year-old man, who passed away in Calvary Hospital. His mother had been buried in HFBA's

Mount Richmond Cemetery. Michael's wife was very distraught; she wasn't sure what he wanted. Michael's brother knew that he wanted to be with his mother. The wife panicked, however, and arranged for cremation.

After long family discussions, and at the very last moment, Michael's wife and brother decided on burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery. HFBA picked Michael up from the funeral home, performed his *tahara*, and provided a complete funeral and burial.

Michael's story underlines the need to have funeral and burial plans in place.

Judy Uman, Director of Social Services for the Bronx Jewish Community Council, has been referring patients to HFBA for 35 years. She told us, "People are very relieved after they've signed a pre-arrangement document. People who resist it just do not understand the relief they will feel, once it's done."

**"I'm not a religious person," Ms. Uman continued, "but what HFBA does is such a service to the Jewish community."**

# Leave Your Mark

On October 27th, HFBA's annual order of grave markers arrived at Mount Richmond Cemetery from Georgia. The HFBA team checked each of the 253 stones for accuracy and quality. They organized the stones according to the cemetery section in which they would be placed.

Many thanks to Dana Riess, HFBA's assistant office manager who is in charge of the Leave Your Mark program, Andrew Parver, HFBA's Director of Operations, Mount Richmond Cemetery staff members Rabbi Shmuel Plafker and Lena Samofal, and Ben Epstein and his efficient workers from Sanford B. Epstein, Inc.

Most importantly, we thank our HFBA Leave Your Mark program donors whose contributions ensure that every grave in our cemetery is marked with the name of the one who rests beneath.



*Unloading the monument delivery in Mount Richmond Cemetery*

# Donate Appreciated Stocks

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## In the Mail

*Letters below have been edited for clarity and to protect confidentiality.*

I really was shocked when I read your Summer 2020 newsletter. It's unreal how many Jews die without a relative or friend or any assets with which to receive a proper Jewish burial. Continue your good work!

**A.F.**

Please accept this *tallit* of my brother's. He received it upon the completion of his master's degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Thank you for your work. I donate whatever I am able.

**M.M.**

My wife and I previously made our annual donation to HFBA. However, in view of the burdens that Covid-19 has put on HFBA in general, and on Rabbi Plafker in particular, I am sending this additional contribution in his honor.

**A.K.**

Thank you so much for your amazing assistance and care to bury Fran C. It was an overwhelming experience for me and all of us who knew her. You handled it with a lot of compassion, professionalism along the way, and efficiency. Rabbi Plafker was outstanding and amazing. He made it personal, respectful, and emotional.

Under the circumstances, I am impressed with everybody's dedication to honor those Jewish souls and give them fast and proper burial according to the *halacha* (Jewish law).

Thank you so much!

**A.J.**

# РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

BELOW ARE TRANSLATED SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE OF CHESED.

## Последний дар усопшим

*Эми Коплоу, Исполнительный Директор, Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро (HFBA)*

Я хорошо помню день похорон моей матери, да покоится она с миром. Наша семья сгрудилась у открытой могилы, прочитала молитвы, не изменившиеся за столько веков, и приступила к обряду закапывания могилы. У нас было одно утешение, и оно поддерживало меня в те дни и многие годы потом: мы были с матерью в её последние дни, мы проводили её к месту последнего упокоения, мы прочитали кадиш. Всё это мы для неё сделали.

И однако сотни евреев в нашем городе умирают в одиночестве. Но есть у нас дар, который мы можем дать умирающим, и этот дар – возможность для одиноких евреев участвовать в планировании своих похорон и в выборе места упокоения. Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро (HFBA) обучает социальных работников и раввинов, помогая им проводить эти нелёгкие, но столь важные беседы. Благодаря поддержке Фонда Эппельбаума, наш координатор по инструктажу свяжется с этими преданными своему делу людьми, чтобы обсудить возможности HFBA и ознакомить их с нашей формой планирования, которая обеспечивает их клиентам проведение похорон по еврейскому обряду.

Для социальных работников и духовных наставников вовсе нелегко начинать эти беседы. Авива Киффель, работающая в доме престарелых и реабилитационном центре Променад, занимается вопросами похорон и погребения со своими пациентами. Она говорит: «Сотрудники HFBA – замечательные люди. И самое замечательное – HFBA не отказывает никому».

Джуди Юман, директор социальных услуг еврейского общинного совета Бронкса, направляет пациентов в HFBA вот уже 35 лет. Вот её слова: «Многие испытывают огромное облегчение, когда подписывают форму предварительного планирования последних услуг. Те, кто не хочет заполнять эту форму, не понимают, насколько легче им станет, когда это будет сделано». Г-жа Юман продолжает: «Я не очень религиозна. Но то, что HFBA делает для еврейской общины – это истинное служение».

## HFBA помогает:

*Бывшая советская отказница похоронена на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд*

С конца 60-х до середины 80-х годов прошлого века люди во многих странах мира активно выступали в поддержку советских «отказников». Дина Гроссман, чьи похороны были недавно организованы HFBA, с 1975 по 1981 год устраивала демонстрации против притеснения советских властей и против запрета на еврейскую эмиграцию. Она также вела рисование в подпольном еврейском детском садике, что могло повлечь серьёзное наказание если бы власти это обнаружили. Дина была одной из четырёх протестующих, которые объявили двухнедельную голодовку во время

московской Олимпиады 1980 года. Советское правительство, опасаясь привлечения международного внимания к проблеме советских евреев, в конце концов выдало Дине выездную визу.

Дина эмигрировала в Израиль, где продолжила образование, полученное в Московском Художественном Институте. Она поступила в школу искусств Бецалель. В последствии она переехала в Нью-Йорк и продолжила учёбу в институте Пратт. Её талант художника был не редкостью в семье Дины – она приходилась родственницей известному еврейскому художнику Жаку Липшицу. Она писала стихи всю свою жизнь, опубликовала книгу документальной прозы на английском и на русском и увлекалась созданием фильмов.

Когда Дина скончалась в октябре от инфаркта, её подруга ещё по Москве Хана Аберсон позвонила нам в HFBA. Дина – отказница, художница, поэт и режиссёр, была похоронена на нашем кладбище Маунт Ричмонд. Хана, которая не могла быть на похоронах из-за эпидемии, с благодарностью узнала, что наш миньян добровольцев прочитал кадиш по Дине.

## Новости! Интерактивная карта кладбища Маунт Ричмонд теперь доступна

Маунт Ричмонд является основным кладбищем, используемым HFBA с 1909 года. Поскольку кладбище занимает 25 акров (12 гектар) и вмещает 55 тыс. могил, зачастую было трудно найти определённую могилу. Теперь же, благодаря нашей новой интерактивной карте (её можно найти в Интернете по ссылке [hebrewfreeburial.org/map](http://hebrewfreeburial.org/map)), любой посетитель может ввести имя, после чего его проводят к нужной могиле. Карта будет регулярно обновляться и включать места новых захоронений.

## Нам пишут

«...Моя жена и я уже сделали наше ежегодное пожертвование в пользу HFBA. Однако, ввиду новых проблем, возникших из-за пандемии у всей вашей организации и в частности у раввина г-на Плафкера, я посылаю дополнительный вклад в его честь»

А.К.

С первого января и до конца октября HFBA провело 441 погребение, включая похороны 169 человек, скончавшихся из-за пандемии Ковид-19.

## Счастливой Хануки!

В наше время, когда буквально весь мир столкнулся с беспрецедентной болезнью и вызванной её смертностью, естественно чувствовать себя потерянным во тьме отчаяния. Но когда мы зажжём ханукальные свечи и вспомним победу горстки повстанцев над полчищами врагов, пусть свечи пробудят в нас надежду, молитву и веру в Б-жественные чудеса.



Three weeks after the death of **Norman P.**, Edie, who had known him as a loyal employee of her family's business for 30 years, called HFBA. She told us that Norman had died in a nursing home and she wanted to make sure that he received a Jewish burial. HFBA's staff discovered that Norman was scheduled for a city burial. Fortunately, they were able to intercept and avoid that outcome. They were also able to locate his estranged brother Saul. As our staff pursued the matter further, they discovered that HFBA had buried another brother, Moe, with a similar last name. Saul confirmed that all three were brothers and a genetic illness had probably contributed to the early deaths of Norman and Moe. Saul authorized the burial but claimed that he had no money to contribute towards the cost. Edie, however, reached out to her family to help pay for Norman's funeral and burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery.

**Irina T.**, 72, an immigrant from the Former Soviet Union, had lived in the United States for 26 years when she died of Covid-19. Prior to her death she had expressed her wish to be buried at Mount Richmond Cemetery near her parents. Her daughter Annika called HFBA to authorize the burial. Annika, her husband and two daughters attended the funeral. Also present was Irina's husband, suffering from dementia, and four friends. Irina was eulogized by her daughter and a close friend.

**Stuart B.** died of Covid-19 at the age of 99. His wife had died 12 years before and no one knew the whereabouts of their son. Although family members were buried in various New York area cemeteries, there was no grave reserved for him nor anyone to authorize a burial. Stuart

was one of the thousands of victims of the coronavirus whose body lay unclaimed for months after death. After working with the Public Administrator, his body was located in one of the many Medical Examiner's morgue trailers. He was buried five months after his death at Mount Richmond Cemetery with HFBA's volunteer *minyán* in attendance.

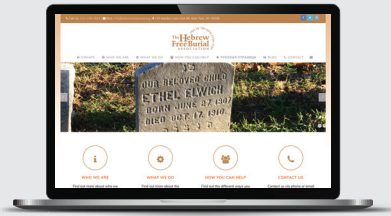
**Isaac N.** died of cardiac arrest and sepsis at the age of 70. He had been married to Dora for 40 years and had worked as an accountant. Unfortunately, at some point he became disabled and could not work. Because of financial constraints, he was unable to keep up with the dues of his fraternal organization and lost access to his burial benefits that the society provided. Dora authorized his burial with HFBA. However, due to a bureaucratic error during the worst of the pandemic, it turned out that Isaac had been buried in city cemetery two weeks prior! Dora, distraught, insisted that her husband have a Jewish burial. Isaac's body was disinterred and buried at Mount Richmond Cemetery.

**Vera H.**, suffering from advanced dementia, lived in a Queens nursing home. When she died at 80 years old, the Medical Examiner's office referred her case to HFBA reporting that Vera had no next of kin. However, the HFBA staff recognized her name and remembered that HFBA had buried her husband Manny in February. When Vera died, HFBA located her sister Joan to authorize her burial. Although she could not attend the funeral in person, Joan participated by phone and was grateful that *kaddish* could be recited with the volunteer *minyán* in attendance.

## Q. According to Jewish law, under what circumstances may a body be disinterred and reburied in another location?

**A.** In general, Jewish law prohibits the transfer of remains from one grave to another. There are some exceptions to this rule including: (1) if the dead person will be reburied in the same cemetery as parents or other close relatives; (2) if the deceased will be reburied in Israel; (3) if the decedent had been buried in a non-Jewish cemetery and would be reburied in a Jewish cemetery; (4) if one was buried by mistake in a grave that did not belong to them and the rightful owner will not agree to any compromise that will allow them to remain there; (5) if one could not be buried in their designated grave and was buried on condition that the remains would be moved in the future; (6) if the grave's location is compromised by ground conditions (such as water seepage) or the threat of disinterment by vandals. In all instances, a rabbi should be consulted.

*This article has been reviewed by Rabbi Elchonon Zohn.*



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### HFBA MISSION STATEMENT

THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION devotes its resources to performing *chesed shel emet* (the ultimate act of loving kindness). It is the only agency in the New York metropolitan area dedicated to assuring that every Jew, regardless of financial means or religious affiliation, receives a dignified, traditional Jewish funeral and burial.

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### CHESED IS PUBLISHED BY THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

Renée Septimus, *Editor* Adam Rawson, *Designer*  
Printed by Print & Communication Services, LLC

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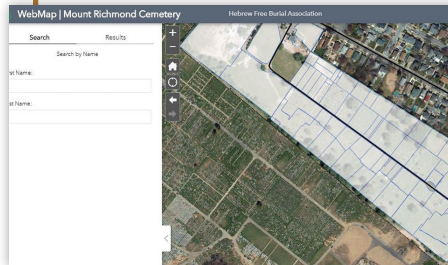
## HAPPY CHANUKAH!

At a time in which the entire world is facing unprecedented illness and death, it is easy to feel lost in darkness and despair. As we light the Chanukah menorah, and recall the victory of the few over the many, let the candles rekindle hope, prayer and belief in G-d's miracles. As we stand in the brightness of the candles, looking at the darkness outside our windows, we look to a better future- one in which we will be together with those we love, in good health, with G-d's help and blessing.

## **NEW!** Interactive Map Available for Mount Richmond Cemetery

Mount Richmond Cemetery has been the main burial location for HFBA since 1909.

Given that the cemetery covers 25 acres and contains over 55,000 graves, it was often a challenge to locate a particular grave. Now, however, thanks to our new interactive map (available at [hebrewfreeburial.org/map](http://hebrewfreeburial.org/map)), anyone can enter the name of a loved one and be immediately directed to the grave's location. The map will be updated regularly to include new burials.



## Underwrite a Covid-19 Burial

Every funeral and burial costs HFBA about \$5,400. This year, HFBA is on track to do 500 burials – 42 percent more that we arranged in 2019.

You can participate in the *mitzvah* of taking care of one Jewish soul at the end of life. If you underwrite the full cost of a burial, we will send you the name and profile of the deceased and a *yahrzeit* notice next year, creating your personal connection to someone everyone else has forgotten.