

The Work of a Cemetery is Never Done

"We are the voice of the voiceless."

Those we bury cannot speak for themselves. Their souls have returned to their Maker. Their deeds on this earth, their stories and their memories are now a part of history. Still their physical remains are left to us to inter with dignity and with grace. The cemetery's grounds must be tended, monuments erected and the families comforted.

Because he walks the length and breadth of the grounds so often, he notices changes in the landscape and flags problems as they arise.

When asked about his role, Rabbi Plafker said, "I feel an obligation towards the people I've buried. I want to make sure that their graves are maintained with respect."

Lena Samofal, HFBA's cemetery coordinator, meets the families as they bury their loved ones and some months later, she arranges for headstones.

"People ask me how I can work here – every day we are seeing people who are emotionally destroyed," she says. "I answer that someone has to do this. I am helping mourners do the right thing for their loved ones. I feel good that I can help them."

For families and friends of the deceased, Lena is the face of Mount Richmond Cemetery. Her small office, neatly crammed with files and paperwork, is just at the cemetery's entrance. She is there to take each call and greet visitors as they enter. "When we bury someone," Lena explains, "I always

ask if there's a spouse and whether we should reserve a spot next to the burial. When the family is ready, I work with them on the headstones, to make sure they align with the cemetery's rules."

"It isn't always easy," Lena sighed. "Some people are

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Michael Turek @capturek_photographer

These are the sacred tasks of Mount Richmond Cemetery's devoted staff. The work isn't easy.

HFBA's Funeral Director **James Donofrio** explains, "HFBA handles the most difficult cases in the funeral industry. In over three-quarters of the cases, there's a tragedy behind the burial. The stories remind us that not every life goes well. These are people whose families have abandoned them or maybe they are handicapped people who never caught a break. Many have not been in touch with their families for years. Their children don't talk to them. No one wants to take care of these people."

As funeral director, James oversees all the technical aspects of the burial. As required by New York State law, a licensed professional must oversee the removal of the remains and be present at the cemetery for every burial.

Perhaps no one is more identified with Mount Richmond Cemetery than **Rabbi Shmuel Plafker**, the cemetery chaplain. He is its eyes and ears. Rabbi Plafker is on site all the time. Of course, he officiates at most funerals — but he also oversees the setting of all monuments.

Rabbi Plafker and James Donofrio finishing paperwork before a burial.



AP Photo/David Goldman



In the Mail

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

My name is Louise Moskowitz and in researching my family history, I found a few relatives buried in the Silver Lake Cemetery, Carrie Annie (1907), Morris and Yetta Moskowitz (1908). I learned that Yetta and Morris died in a fire set by an arsonist whose identity was never discovered. Carrie Annie died from a fractured skull when she fell from the fire escape the year before.

In memory of my relatives, I've asked my financial institution to send the Hebrew Free Burial Association a donation...Funds to be used to provide a Jewish burial to those in need.

Thank you for all you do!

Louise Moskowitz

For the past 55 years, I have been going to Mount Richmond Cemetery in Staten Island to visit the grave of my husband's beloved grandmother, Sadie J.

Sadie died on October 8, 1951, shortly before Yom Kippur, survived by an impoverished daughter and young grandson.

This year when I went to the cemetery, I was impressed by all the recent improvements. Toppled gravestones were now upright, the old gate house was freshly painted, the grass was mowed, the visitors' rest rooms were fixed up as were the outdoor wash basins.

Thanks to all the donors, volunteers and staff for graciously implementing the mitzvah of chesed shel emet.

W.A.

My heart breaks when I read your stories about yidden dying alone or unable to pay for a burial.

Continue to do what you're doing. You should be blessed in all your endeavors. I can only give in small amounts. Keep sending me your newsletters. I only wish that I can pay for someone's burial.

With much admiration and respect for your work...

L.G.

Much appreciated for all your help. At this time, you have made it much easier for us while we are grieving.

A.R.

Thank you for the wonderful assistance you provided to Pearl M. who was involved in the burial of my aunt, Sarah U. I really appreciate that you were kind and helpful. I have enclosed a donation for your organization.

C.N.

The Work of a Cemetery is Never Done

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very appreciative but others hear what they want to hear. I try to be very patient. It involves a lot of explanations. When people are ready to listen, they are very happy afterwards."

Groundskeeper **Tomas Cortez** lowers the casket into the ground and is there to cover it with earth. "It is a beautiful job, sad but something that is good to do," Tomas tells us. "It is a privilege to be here."

"When there is no family, I fill the grave by hand until the casket is covered. When there are family members, they cover it. Some families prefer to do most of the work, others don't want to do it. Then I finish up by machine."

Tomas goes on, "When Rabbi Plafker says the prayers, I stand a little far away for respect and for safety during COVID. I know that the prayers are very good for the deceased."

Even after the burials and the end of visiting hours, the work of Mount Richmond Cemetery is never done. The snow must be plowed. The grass must be cut. Inevitably, there are repairs to be made and new rows prepared for the inevitable burials.

Rabbi Plafker, Fidel Zosayas and Tomas Cortez prepare a grave.



AP Photo/David Goldman

Ira Epstein is the manager of Sanford Epstein, Inc., a general contractor with expertise in cemetery management. His company provides the labor and landscaping for Mount Richmond. While Ira works at 30 cemeteries in the New York area, Ira comments that "The cemetery is in really great shape. The people at Mount Richmond Cemetery are very special. They really care. They work all hours of the day and night and are constantly fielding phone calls. They want to make sure that everyone gets a proper Jewish burial. It's very inspiring."

—Margy-Ruth Davis

HFBA Helps

*Names and details
have been changed to
protect confidentiality.*



Norma S., who died of COVID at age 79, had witnessed her parents' murder by the Nazis when she was only two years old. She somehow survived the Holocaust and arrived in the United States 50 years ago after spending several years in France. Norma had no family and had never married. The stray cats she took in and nurtured were her only companions. After her death in a Queens hospital, she was buried by HFBA. Rabbi Plafker stood alone as she was buried, reciting the prayers.

Evelyn H. died of COVID at the age of 83. Her son's girlfriend called to advise us of her death but neither she nor Evelyn's son would authorize the burial. HFBA contacted the Public Administrator. In a cruel twist of fate, especially during a pandemic, the PA investigator's computer had crashed, causing him to lose all the information he had about his cases and investigations. It took days for HFBA to get permission to bury Evelyn. As soon as we did, she was laid to rest at Mount Richmond Cemetery. No one attended the burial.

Leonid, 78 at the time of his death, had lived in New York for 41 years, emigrating from the Ukraine. He told his friend Jake that he wanted to leave his Brooklyn nursing home to go back "home" before he died to see his children. Jake generously bought him a plane ticket and at the scheduled day of departure, picked him up

at the nursing home and dropped him off at JFK Airport. Later that day, Leonid's body was found floating in Sheepshead Bay. A son was reached in the Ukraine who wanted nothing to do with his father's burial arrangements. Leonid was buried at Mount Richmond Cemetery with only the HFBA volunteer *minyán* in attendance.

Mark F. unexpectedly died at the age of 35. He had been divorced with four young children, all of whom had been removed from the home and put in foster care. The whereabouts of Mark's ex-wife were unknown. At the time of his death, he had not worked in over two years, had no income and no bank account. He was able to survive through public assistance, food stamps and Medicaid while living in NYCHA Section 8 housing. However, he was in such dire financial straits that his electricity had been turned off for three months because he could not pay his bills. HFBA was able to locate Mark's father who authorized Mark's burial but did not attend.

Joanna T. who died of COVID at 72, was estranged from her son Ken. Even after her death, he was so antagonistic toward his mother, that he left her body in the morgue for two months, refusing to authorize her burial. The Public Administrator finally stepped in and gave HFBA permission to bury Joanna. No one attended the funeral.



אגודת חסד של אבות
The Hebrew
Free Burial
ASSOCIATION

Q. Why are Jewish graves not decorated with flowers?

A. There are several answers to this question which was first addressed in 19th century Jewish responsa.

There is a specific prohibition against deriving benefit from articles related to a burial. That would include flowers which enhance a visit to a grave with their fragrance and beauty. Others rely on a somewhat mystical notion – that putting something "living" on a grave mocks the dead.

Another opinion is that flowers on some graves, but not others, goes against the edict that rich and poor must be buried alike, as it implies a distinction between those who can, and cannot, afford to decorate a burial site. However, the most generally accepted reason is that this custom is an imitation of a non-Jewish practice, always to be avoided.

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

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

«Мы – голос безмолвных»

Те, кого мы хороним, не могут уже ничего за себя сказать. Их души вернулись к Создателю, а их поступки на этой земле, их перипетии и воспоминания теперь становятся достоянием истории. А наша забота – предать земле их бренные останки, уважая при этом достоинство усопших. Помимо этого нужно следить, чтобы территория кладбища была ухожена, чтобы надгробные памятники устанавливались вовремя, и чтобы посетители кладбища получали столь необходимое утешение. И всё это – почётные обязанности сотрудников нашего кладбища Маунт Ричмонд.

Лена Самофал – сотрудница HFBA, координирующая работу кладбища, – первая встречает семьи, пришедшие хоронить своих близких. Несколько месяцев спустя она же устраивает всё для установки надгробий.

Наш раввин г-н Шмуэль Плафкер находится на кладбище почти всё время. Он проводит церемонию погребения, и зачастую он – единственный, кто присутствует на похоронах. Он также контролирует установку всех надгробных памятников. Его сострадание и преданность и ушедшим, и живым достойны восхищения.

Наш смотритель кладбища Томас Кортес во время похорон опускает гроб в землю и затем засыпает землёй. «Это печальная, но по-своему возвышенно-прекрасная работа, и мне приятно её делать», говорит Томас. «Для меня большая честь находиться здесь».

Распорядитель похорон HFBA Джеймс Донофрио отмечает: «HFBA занимается самыми трудными делами в похоронном деле. Более чем в трёх четвертях случаев мы имеем дело с трагедией. Истории тех, кем мы занимаемся, напоминают, что не каждая жизнь проходит благополучно. Многие усопшие не общались со своими семьями много лет. Часто этими людьми никто не хочет заниматься».

Айра Эпстейн – наш главный подрядчик, чья компания предоставляет работников и услуги по уходу за территорией кладбища Маунт Ричмонд. Он как бы подытоживает описание преданности сотрудников кладбища HFBA своему делу: «Работающие на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд – люди особенные. Они вкладывают в эту работу душу. Они трудятся в любое время дня и ночи и к тому же постоянно отвечают на звонки. Они хотят быть уверенными, что каждый будет здесь похоронен в полном соответствии с еврейскими традициями. Такой подход к делу очень вдохновляет».

Наша почта

Меня зовут Луиза Москович. Когда я занялась изучением истории своей семьи, то нашла нескольких родственников, которые были похоронены на кладбище Сильвер Лейк – Кэрри Анни (1907 год), и Моррис и Иетта Москович (1908 год погребения). В память о них я проинструктировала мой банк послать Еврейскому Благотворительному Похоронному Бюро пожертвование. Эта сумма будет потрачена на обеспечение погребения по еврейскому обряду для нуждающихся.

Спасибо за всё, что вы делаете!
Луиза Москович

HFBA помогает

Леонид, скончавшийся в возрасте 78 лет, прожил в Нью-Йорке 41 год после того, как эмигрировал из Украины. Он регулярно говорил своему другу Джейку, что хочет «вернуться назад» из бруклинского дома для престарелых, чтобы увидеть своих детей до того как умрёт. Джейк щедро оплатил Леониду билет, в назначенный день забрал его из дома престарелых и посадил в аэропорту Кеннеди. Но в тот же день тело Леонида было обнаружено в заливе Шипсхед Бей. Дозвонились до сына Леонида на Украину, но тот знает ничего не желал об организации похорон своего отца. Леонид был похоронен на нашем кладбище Маунт Ричмонд, и на похоронах присутствовал только наш миньян из добровольцев.

HFBA в цифрах

Число погребений в 2019 году: 352

Число погребений в 2020 году: 523

Вопрос: Почему на еврейские могилы не кладут цветы?

Ответ: Некоторые считают, что класть «живое» на могилы умерших – это насмешка над ними, поскольку умершие не могут испытывать радости от этих цветов. Другие еврейские авторитеты упоминают запрет на получение выгоды от предметов, связанных с погребением. Это относится к цветам, которые могут привлечь посетителей прийти на кладбище именно из-за красоты и аромата цветов. А некоторые приводят мнение, что возложение цветов на одни могилы, но не на другие нарушает принцип, что все – и богатый, и бедный, – должны быть похоронены по одному обряду. Самая же распространённая причина в том, что класть цветы на могилы – это следование нееврейским обычаям, чего нужно избегать.

FreeWill (сайт помощи в составлении завещаний) и Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро

Заканчивается зима, и мы уже предчувствуем наступление весны, а с ней и время оформлять налоги! Если Вы пытаетесь упорядочить свои финансы до крайнего срока подачи налоговой декларации, есть два способа снизить налоговую нагрузку и одновременно обеспечить достойное погребение для малоимущих евреев:

Пожертвование из пенсионного накопительного счёта (IRA). Зайдите на сайт hebrewfreeburial.org/QCD чтобы получить информацию и начать действовать.

Пожертвование акций. Об этом можно узнать на сайте hebrewfreeburial.org/stocks

Мы желаем всем, кто поддерживает HFBA, счастливого праздника Песах, здоровья, избавления от страха и нужды, и хорошего года впереди.

Прошедший год принёс всем нам «одинадцатую казнь», несчастие, которое затронуло жизни буквально всех жителей Земли. Когда мы сядем за пасхальный стол, в одиночестве или с близкими, давайте будем благодарны за то, что имеем и за то, к чему имеем возможность стремиться – общение с любимыми, хорошее здоровье, и возвращение к тем занятиям, которые дарят нам радость и обогащают нашу жизнь.

Mount Richmond Cemetery

Hours of Operation During Passover and Shavuot Holidays

Passover

Sunday, March 28 CLOSED
Monday, March 29 CLOSED
Friday, April 2 9 AM - 1 PM
Sunday, April 4 CLOSED

Shavuot

Sunday, May 16 9 AM - 3:45 PM
Monday, May 17 CLOSED
Tuesday, May 18 CLOSED

Yizkor is recited on Sunday, April 4 and Tuesday, May 18

Расписание работы кладбища Mt. Richmond на время еврейских праздников – весна 2021

ПЕСАХ

Воскресенье 28 марта ЗАКРЫТО
Понедельник 29 марта ЗАКРЫТО
Пятница 2 апреля 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Воскресенье 4 апреля ЗАКРЫТО

Поминальная молитва ИЗКОР читается 4 апреля, в воскресенье

ШАВУОТ

Воскресенье 16 мая 9:00 AM – 3:45 PM
Понедельник 17 мая ЗАКРЫТО
Вторник 18 мая ЗАКРЫТО

Поминальная молитва ИЗКОР читается 18 мая, во вторник

FREEWILL

As winter ends, we can begin to glimpse two new seasons: spring and tax season!

If you are organizing your finances before the tax deadline, consider two ways you can reduce your future tax burden while providing dignified burials for indigent Jews:

Give from your IRA:

Tax-free IRA gifts are powerful ways to support our sacred work – and they can be to your financial benefit. IRA gifts reduce your future tax burden and can meet your required minimum distribution for 2021. Visit hebrewfreeburial.org/QCD to learn more and get started.

Donate stocks:

Many HFBA supporters donate appreciated stocks to support our mission, thereby avoiding capital gains tax. Visit hebrewfreeburial.org/stocks to learn more.

Save the Date! Riverdale Breakfast

Join us as we honor

Judy Matthews

Sophia Sigal

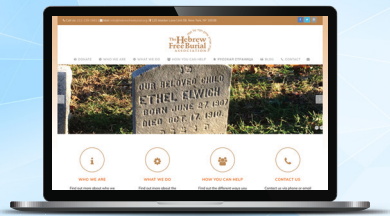
Rabbanit Tali Schaum Broder

*at the annual
Riverdale Community Event*

Sunday, April 25, 2021
(virtual event)

For more information please visit
**[www.hebrewfreeburial.org/
riverdale](http://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/riverdale)**





**Your help is needed
now more than ever.**

**Donate online at
www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate**

**Giving on our secure website
is both easy and efficient!**

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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CHESD IS PUBLISHED BY THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

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Printed by Print & Communication Services, LLC

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***Wishing all our HFBA supporters a
Happy Passover, good health, freedom from
fear and want, and a better year ahead.***

This past year has brought the "eleventh plague," a disaster that has affected the lives of everyone around the globe. As we sit down to our seders, alone or with others, let us be grateful for what we have and can look forward to – time with loved ones, good health and a return to activities we enjoy and enrich our lives.

Underwrite a Burial

Every funeral and burial costs HFBA about \$5,400. In 2020, HFBA arranged 523 burials – nearly 50% more than 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.