

Families connect with long-lost ancestors thanks to HFBA

Editor's note: HFBA has become a resource for people seeking a bond with their ancestors. We recently received two letters that shine a light on HFBA's special role in genealogical research.

"At long last I visited Uncle Morris's grave"

Alice Schildkraut's homage to her baby uncle spans the generations

For his bar mitzvah, I wanted to present my grandson Josh with our complete family tree. I worked with Susan Gold, a genealogist, to fill in what I didn't know.

Susan got us started with my late father, Bennie Frankel. I told her he had had a twin brother Morris who died as a very young child. Susan found Morris listed in the 1920 Census. He had died at age six months.

I got hold of Morris's death certificate from the NYC Department of Records Municipal Archives online

database. Cause of death: measles pneumonia, a rare and deadly condition. Susan learned that Uncle Morris had been buried at HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery.

I owed it to Josh and my father to visit Morris.

Susan directed me to the general



Bennie Frankel and family circa 1946. Bennie is in the back row, second from the right.

area of my uncle's grave, and Rabbi Shmuel Plafker patiently helped me pinpoint the actual gravesite. He told me Morris's grave — like many children's graves

at HFBA's two cemeteries — had gone unmarked for years. [Leave Your Mark donations at Mount Richmond Cemetery have made it possible to replace unmarked graves with stones bearing the children's names.]



Standing at Uncle Morris's grave, I had an overwhelming feeling of emotion. I was probably the only person in 102 years to visit. I said some things to this child who never got to live his life, and then placed a stone on top of the marker to show he was still loved. My father, may he rest in peace, would be happy that I helped solve the mystery of Morris's short life.

I like to think my grandparents too would be glad that I was representing them.

If my father were alive, he would have paid for his brother's gravestone. Somebody had already done that for Morris. Now it was my turn to put a name on another child's marker. Two hundred and fifty dollars is not a lot of money, but this small contribution was the most rewarding donation I have made in a while.

"It's been a miracle to connect with my Jewish family"

Betsy Miller relies on 66-year-old HFBA records to identify her grand-uncle

My father never wanted to talk about his ancestors. My own genealogical research led me to a man named Mark Den, who was most likely my grand-uncle on my father's side. I believe Mark was born into my grandmother Jennie's family as Marcus Goldin on 6 December 1874 in Moscow. I was raised Catholic, and

continued on page 5

We dedicate the Chanukah issue of *Chesed* to our generous donors. Thanks to your support, HFBA is able to provide a traditional funeral for every Jew, regardless of financial circumstances. Your lovingkindness — *chesed shel emet* — keeps us going. We are deeply grateful to you.



HFBA speaks your language

The mother tongue helps overcome barriers and misconceptions

It's no accident that HFBA communicates with our clients in English, Russian, Yiddish, Spanish and Hebrew. Our current multilingual staff reflects the history of Jewish New Yorkers over the past seven decades, particularly with our caseload of Jews from the former Soviet Union and, to a lesser degree, Holocaust survivors. Sadly, our staff also deals with clients from a wider array of immigrant groups whose loved ones have succumbed to mental illness or drug addiction.

We asked our staff members how their native language helps further HFBA's mission to provide comfort for family and friends in a time of sorrow.

YIDDISH



Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, cemetery chaplain.

"In the 1990s, during my early years with HFBA, we had a big Jewish immigration stemming from the break-up of the Soviet Union. People 60 and older felt most comfortable speaking Yiddish. While this

cohort has largely disappeared, every so often a client will request that I officiate at the funeral of their loved one in Yiddish. This happened once during the pandemic and again last year. The sound of *mame-loshn* helps lighten the pain of losing a loved one."

RUSSIAN, HEBREW



Polina Dolgopolskaia, associate funeral coordinator. "A lot of our Russian clients don't speak English or don't speak it well. They are relieved when I respond to them

in Russian. I assure them we will accommodate their needs within the parameters

of *halacha* (Jewish law). Quite often Russian-speaking clients will call HFBA on the weekend when no Russian-speaking staff member is on duty. When I, or another Russian speaker, follows up with them on Monday morning, we can hear their tension subside. My Russian — and Hebrew — are absolutely essential in reviewing birth, marriage and death certificates. These let us corroborate a decedent's Jewishness. Moreover, I now work remotely from Jerusalem, and because of the time difference, I provide office coverage when my New York colleagues are not available."

RUSSIAN

Yelena Kleban, associate funeral coordinator. "Russian is most useful to me when it comes to examining documents. We have had cases where a decedent's birth certificate showed she was Ukrainian or some other nationality, but not Jewish. We've had cases where the decedent's name was questionable, but her birth certificate indicates that in fact she was Jewish. We've also had cases where a decedent's mother was Jewish, and we can proceed with burial because now we recognize the decedent as *halachically* Jewish. We've also handled cases where the decedent was not identified as Jewish on his birth certificate, yet additional documents proved that he was. It can get complicated, and deciphering original documents is invaluable."



SPANISH, HEBREW

Dana Riess, director of logistics. "You don't typically associate Spanish with Jewish languages today, yet my Spanish has been useful in at least three different instances. We have Spanish-speaking clients whose significant other was Jewish, and they are more at home with Spanish than English. We also get genealogical requests from Spanish-speaking individuals around the world who seek connections with their Jewish ancestors. Our most practical use of Spanish comes when I need to communicate with our Spanish-speaking cemetery workers. Indeed, I use Spanish more frequently than Hebrew, although recently I was able to help two siblings — one here and one in Israel — who needed help in choosing a monument for their loved one."



RUSSIAN

Gabby Spektor, associate funeral coordinator. "I was born in America, but Russian was my family language. Working at HFBA has given me the opportunity to perfect my Russian language skills and to offer comfort to our grieving clients. My English is unaccented, and people are pleasantly surprised that I can converse with them in their native tongue. They are relieved they don't have to rely on a third party to act as a translator between them and us."



continued on next page

RUSSIAN



Lena Samofal, cemetery operations coordinator. “A large portion of my job involves interacting with the people who work with Russian-speaking monument dealers. I find myself mentoring them in how to speak to our Russian-Jewish clients and vice versa.

Regarding our clients, sometimes a conversation starts out a little tense. When they find out I speak Russian, and that we may have gone to the same school, may even have played in the same playground, they become more receptive to the Jewish traditions. For example, I often explain that the words or symbols they want engraved on a monument are not in keeping with our cemetery monument rules. By the end of our conversation in Russian, they actually feel friendly toward me and HFBA.”

HFBA Helps

Names, details and images have been anonymized to preserve confidentiality.



Russell D., 40, died in his apartment and was discovered by his young son. His ex-wife Jennifer told HFBA that Russell had been severely ill the past four years and hadn't been able to work. He had no savings, lived with a roommate and applied for Medicaid. Jennifer expressed shame that she had to ask HFBA to handle Russell's funeral. We assured her we never discuss an individual's personal or financial matters with anyone. Rabbi Shmuel Plafker officiated at the Mount Richmond Cemetery funeral where more than 40 mourners attended. Russell's son gave a touching eulogy.

Donor expresses gratitude every year

Dear Rhonda Stein:

We would like to thank you for your patience and for your caring work.

I have instructed our portfolio manager to take an amount out of my required minimum deduction this year for donation to the Hebrew Free Burial Association (I never thought I would reach an age for this mechanism to kick in). We'd like to continue this withdrawal/deposit in each subsequent year.

With sincere gratitude,

John Michel and Jane Finkle

Harris W., 67, was the scion of celebrity restaurateurs and showbiz musicians and actors. After 20 years as an advertising copywriter, he opened a film production company based in NYC and the Netherlands.

When Harris's dreams didn't pan out, he began drinking. By the time he died in a Staten Island nursing home, Harris had alienated family and friends. The sum total of his savings: \$1,000 in a patient needs account.

Eight months after Harris's death — HFBA received a call from the Medical Examiner's Office. Nobody had ever claimed his body.

We buried Harris at Mount Richmond Cemetery. Only our volunteer *minyán* showed up.

Lisa G. was known to us through Judy Uman at the Bronx Jewish Community Council. While Lisa was alive, Judy registered Lisa, who suffered from multiple sclerosis, and her son, who was disabled but high-functioning, with HFBA as “pending cases,” and we reserved graves for both mother and son. Lisa's brother in Florida was not in a position to help with burial costs (he was in rehab recuperating from an accident). Three days after Lisa died, Rabbi Shmuel Plafker conducted the funeral service. Lisa's brother listened in quietly by phone. His wife sobbed as she described Lisa as a wonderful sister and sister-in-law.

Julia B., 31, was found dead on the sofa of a friend living on Long Island. She had moved in after she and her ex-husband split up. Along with four of Julia's family members, her ex attended the funeral at Mount Richmond Cemetery and recited *Tehillim (Psalms)*. Julia's likely cause of death: drug overdose. ♦

How to support HFBA (and help yourself)

Give from your IRA A tax-free IRA gift is a powerful way to support our sacred work while reducing your future tax burden and meeting your required minimum distribution for 2022.

Donate stocks Many HFBA supporters donate appreciated stocks to support our mission while also legally avoiding capital gains tax.

For more information contact Amy Koplow, HFBA executive director, 212-239-1662.

HFBA стало важным источником информации для тех, кто ищет связь со своими еврейскими корнями. Недавно мы получили два письма, иллюстрирующих особую роль HFBA в этих генеалогических поисках.

МОРРИС ФРЕНКЕЛЬ

«Ну вот наконец я посетил могилу дяди Морриса»

Своему внуку на бар-мицву я хотел подарить наше полное семейное древо. В заполнении пробелов на этом древе мне помогала Сюзен Голд, специалист по генеалогии.

Мы начали с моего отца, Бенни Френкеля. Я рассказал Сюзен, что у отца был брат-близнец по имени Моррис, который умер в юном возрасте. Сюзен разыскала запись о нём в переписи за 1920 год. Из муниципальных архивов нью-йоркского департамента гражданских записей мне прислали свидетельство о смерти на имя Морриса. Причина смерти – воспаление лёгких как осложнение после кори, редкое и опасное заболевание.

После этого Сюзен установила, что Моррис был похоронен на кладбище HFBA Маунт Ричмонд. Она примерно указала, где находится могила, и раввин г-н Плафкер с большим терпением помог мне найти точное место, сверившись с томом записей HFBA о погребениях детей.

Стоя у могилы моего дяди Морриса, я испытал наплыв чувств – вероятно за 102 года я был первым, кто навещил эту могилу. Я мысленно поговорил с этим ребёнком, которому не суждено было прожить долгую жизнь, и положил камешек на его надгробие в знак того, что Моррис всё ещё любим.

Будь мой отец жив, он бы оплатил надгробие своего брата. Но кто-то уже сделал это для дяди Морриса. И теперь была моя очередь помочь установить надгробие на могиле еврейского ребёнка. Сто пятьдесят долларов – небольшая сумма, но это скромное пожертвование принесло мне наибольшее удовлетворение за последние годы.

БЕТСИ МИЛЛЕР

«Это чудо, что я смогла связаться с потомками моего отца»

Отец мой не хотел рассказывать о своих корнях. Мои собственные генеалогические поиски привели меня к некоему Марку Дену, скорей всего брату моего деда с отцовской стороны. Я уверена, что Марк родился в семье моей бабушки, Джени Рабинович, 6-го декабря 1874 года в Москве, и его полное имя было Маркус Гольдин. Сама я выросла католичкой, и это поистине чудо, что я смогла разыскать потомков моего отца и воссоединить наше семейное древо.

Имя Маркуса всплывало в моих поисках неоднократно: список приплывших в 1902-м в Америку пассажиров, общенациональные переписи 1910 и 1920 годов, свидетельство о натурализации датированное 1914-м, запись о призыве в 1918-м, и наконец архивы HFBA за 1956 год. На всех этих документах совпадают подпись Марка Дена, дата и место рождения и сведения о прибытии из Антверпена 6-го октября 1902 года на борту корабля «Vaderland». Так я смогла проследить его переезды в Сан Франциско, Чикаго и наконец в Нью-Йорк. По-видимому, Марк занимался во всех этих городах не слишком квалифицированной работой.

Как я полагаю, все эти документы указывают, что Маркус Гольдин и Марк Ден – один и тот же человек. Но даже если окажется, что это не брат моего деда, я нахожу историю его жизни, такую полную лишений, очень похожей на тысячи других людей, о которых HFBA заботилась и продолжает заботиться.

HFBA похоронило Марка в 1956 году, десятого сентября. В память о нём я вкладываю в это письмо своё пожертвование для программы «Увековечь своё имя». Я надеюсь, что оно поможет установить надгробие на могиле какого-либо усопшего, ныне не отмеченной.

HFBA говорит на Вашем языке

Мы спросили наших сотрудников: знание каких языков помогает им следовать высокой миссии HFBA – облегчать скорбь родственников и друзей усопших.

Идиш – Шмуэль Плафкер, раввин нашего кладбища

«В 1990-е годы была большая еврейская иммиграция после распада

Советского Союза. Тем из приезжавших, кому было за 60, было комфортнее всего говорить на идиш. Хотя сейчас этот пласт в основном исчез, иногда попадают родственники усопшего, которые просят на похоронах их близких проводить церемонию на идиш. Маме-лошн помогает немного смягчить боль от потери близкого человека.»

Русский, иврит – Полина Долгопольская, зам. координатора по погребениям

«Многие русскоговорящие клиенты испытывают облегчение, когда я обращаюсь к ним по-русски. Я заверяю их, что все их пожелания будут выполнены в строгом соответствии с Галахой (свод еврейских правил). И моё знание русского и иврита абсолютно необходимы, когда нужно исследовать свидетельства о рождении, браке или смерти. Документы эти помогают подтвердить еврейское происхождение усопшего.»

Русский – Елена Клебан, зам. координатора по погребениям

«Знание русского особенно полезно при изучении документов. У нас были случаи, когда свидетельство о рождении показывало, что усопшая была украинкой, а не еврейкой. В других случаях имя усопшего вызывало сомнение в еврейском происхождении, но свидетельство о рождении это подтверждало. Иногда удавалось установить, что мать усопшего была еврейкой, а значит согласно Галахе он является евреем. Сложных случаев много, и возможность «расшифровать» документы-оригиналы очень ценна.»

Испанский, иврит – Дана Риесс, помощник менеджера

«У нас много испаноговорящих клиентов, у которых муж или жена – еврейского происхождения, и им намного легче общаться по-испански, чем по-английски. Также мы часто получаем запросы из разных испаноговорящих стран – помочь найти еврейские корни. И конечно же испанский особенно пригождается, когда я общаюсь с работниками кладбища. Если подумать, испанским я пользуюсь чаще, чем ивритом. Иврит пригодился например недавно, когда я помогла двум братьям – один живёт здесь, а другой – в Израиле, – вместе выбрать надгробный памятник для их близкого родственника.»

Русский – Габи Спектор, зам. координатора по погребениям

«Я говорю по-английски без акцента, и клиенты бывают приятно удивлены, что я могу общаться с ними на их родном русском. Им не нужно беспокоиться о поиске посредника (переводчика), значит, можно общаться напрямую.»

Русский – Лена Самофал, координатор работы кладбища

«Довольно большая часть моей работы – взаимодействовать с теми, кто контактирует с нашими русскоговорящими клиентами и изготовителями надгробий. Я часто учу и тех, и других, как более эффективно добиваться взаимопонимания. А когда наши клиенты узнают, что я говорю по-русски, и может мы ходили в одну и ту же школу или даже играли на одной и той же детской площадке, мне намного легче, например, объяснять им те правила и еврейские традиции, которым мы обязаны следовать.»

ГРУСТНЫЕ ИСТОРИИ (HFBA помогает)

Джулия Б* была найдена мёртвой в возрасте 31 года в квартире её подруги на Лонг Айленде. Наиболее вероятная причина смерти – передозировка наркотиков.

К подруге Джулия переехала после расставания с бывшим мужем. Он присутствовал на похоронах на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд вместе с четырьмя другими членами семьи, и во время церемонии прочитал Техилим (псалмы).

* имена изменены

Мы посвящаем ханукальный номер «Хесед» нашим щедрым дарителям. Благодаря вашей поддержке Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро (HFBA) продолжает предоставлять традиционное погребение каждому еврею вне зависимости от финансового положения. Ваша доброта – хесед шель эмет (милосердие к усопшим) – позволяет нам продолжать нашу миссию. Мы вам искренне благодарны.

Lots to do on monument delivery day at Mount Richmond Cemetery

The arrival of monuments at Mount Richmond Cemetery makes for a busy day. Working alongside the cemetery crew, HFBA staffers help unload, vet and prepare hundreds of monuments to be set at their designated gravesites as quickly as possible. Here are some scenes from our exciting November 2 delivery.



HFBA's Dana Riess spray-cleans the monuments after their long journey from Elberton, Georgia.

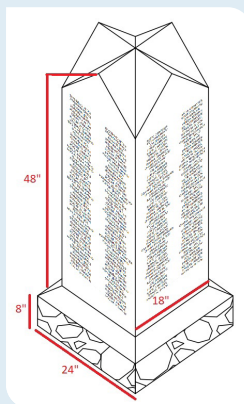


Cemetery associate Fidel Zosayas transports monuments to their designated sites.



HFBA's Dana Riess (L) and Yelena Kleban (R) organize the array of new monuments.

"Leave Your Mark" campaign at Silver Lake Cemetery Obelisk-style monument design honors unnamed souls of a bygone era



For our "Leave Your Mark" campaign, HFBA has designed four-foot monuments memorializing 10,000 souls whose gravesites have gone without markers for a century or more (see sketch). The elegant obelisk design ideas are in keeping with the various original faceted granite monuments produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (see photo). Over the past three decades, HFBA has placed stones in Mount Richmond Cemetery to honor thousands of previously unmarked graves. As our "Leave Your Mark" campaign expands to Silver Lake Cemetery, we are humbled by our generous donors who stepped up in 2022 with contributions of \$5,000 per obelisk — each monument listing up to 400 names. With your continued support, we will record the names of every soul ever laid to rest at HFBA's first cemetery (1892-1909).



Families connect with ancestors

...continued from page 1

it's been a miracle to connect with my father's descendants and rebuild our family tree.

Marcus's name turned up in many official family-related documents, including HFBA records from 1956. Mark Den's signature on all these documents is consistent, as is his birth date, birthplace, and arrival from Antwerp aboard the SS Vaderland on 6 October 1902. I was able to track his movements to various cities. It seems he held various jobs, such as box maker, locksmith, and cook's helper.

My great-uncle could have been a curious soul taking advantage of the Land of Opportunity. He might have

been a loner. Why no one in Mark Den's prosperous, extended family ensured his burial is a mystery to me.

Given the historic persecution of the Jews, I can see why a Jewish man might want to secularize his name, as Mark did in 1941 when he reapplied for U.S. citizenship. I think the documents I've found point to Marcus Goldin and Mark Den being one and the same person. But even if he turns out not to be my grand-uncle, I find his story poignant and representative of so many others who have been in your care.

HFBA buried Mark on 10 September 1956. In Mark's honor, I have enclosed a donation to the "Leave Your Mark" campaign. I hope it will provide a marker for another soul. ♦

**We need your help now
more than ever**



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

Giving on our secure website is 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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Flatbush hosts meet-and-greet *melave malke* for HFBA

A big thank you to the fabulous women of the Flatbush community who held a getting-to-know-you *melave malka* in Brooklyn for us. Some 170 people attended the November 5 *motzei* Shabbat event at the Kingsway Jewish Center that showcased HFBA's mission. The evening's program included speeches by HFBA's Rabbi Shmuel Plafker; Sarah S. Berkovits, author of *Gratitude With Grace*; and several individuals helped by HFBA in their time of need. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to the organizing committee for making the evening a resounding success.

A lasting impact with HFBA

Did you know you can include Hebrew Free Burial Association in your estate plan?

A legacy donation in your will helps HFBA in our mission to treat every Jew with the respect so integral to Jewish law and tradition — regardless of financial status.

Let us know you've included us in your plans for the future by visiting **FreeWill.com/Record/HebrewFreeBurial**. You can get started by filling out the form on the website or by scanning the QR code above. Thank you in advance for your loving support and generosity.



FREEWILL

May we know gladness during the Festival of Lights!

All of our holidays tell us that Jewish existence is miraculous. None, however, are more symbolically miraculous than Chanukah: eight consecutive days of lit candles come at the darkest time of year and remind us that, in the words of Psalm 30, "In the evening one lies down weeping, but with dawn — a cry of joy!" In honor of the holiday that commemorates the Maccabean revolt against the Greek Empire and the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, may we all rededicate our lives to love of our people and the accomplishment of good deeds. *Chag sameach!*

