

Descendant of HFBA co-founder organizes tribute reunion

After 97 years, the Louis Garber Association is still going strong

Sixty-five descendants of Louis Garber got together in late October to honor the memory of their nineteenth-century ancestor and rejoice in each other's kinship. Garber, an immigrant from Medzhybizh — once in Russia, now Ukraine — was a co-founder of Hebrew Free Burial Association and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. For actor Alan Ceppos and Garber's other descendants, Garber is the model for a life of service and love of the Jewish people.

"Louis' charitable and religious gifts resonate to this day," says Alan, Garber's great-great-grandson, who observes that HFBA and HIAS continue their work into his generation and beyond. "I like to think Louis would be proud of the loving family tribe he and my great-great grandmother Yetta generated, and proud of our determination to live their values."

Aunt Byrdie held the family association together

Alan remembers the big family reunions of the Louis Gerber Association from his childhood days in the 1950s and 1960s (for reasons unknown, the descendants changed "Garber" to "Gerber"). Back then, the association, incorporated in 1926, met at least twice a year.

"The whole Garber clan owes a debt to my Aunt Byrdie — Louis' granddaughter," Alan says. "She remembered that Louis was a rabbi on the Lower East Side and the first *mohel* at Beth Israel Hospital. She also recalled how on Jewish holidays, the family got together

at Louis and Yetta's Norfolk Street home and put on musical shows. "There was laughter and rejoicing all the time," Byrdie wrote in her short family history."

After Byrdie died in 1998, the family ties loosened, and the Garber descendants stopped getting together. Alan, a natural at organizing events and researching

his family tree, eventually tracked down Garber relatives via social media. He found 455 names and 130 emails. Seventy-four respondents were excited about renewing their bond. They spent their October weekend together in New York City touring the sights.

The high point for 20 reunion participants was a visit to Louis and Yetta's gravesite at HFBA's Silver Lake Cemetery.

"Thanks to the Louis Gerber Association, I have met so many people and heard so many different stories," Alan says.

A love of family keeps the memory of Garber alive

Alan also studies his family history by visiting the Louis Gerber Association Cemetery in northern New Jersey. He has looked up the names on grave markers and tries

to ferret out personal histories. "The fact is, I remember many of the people buried there," he says. "I've never forgotten them."

Alan is already organizing the 2026 family reunion.

"Medzhybizh, where Louis was born, was also the home of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic



Louis Garber, co-founder, HFBA, with his wife, Yetta

Descendant *continued from front page*

movement,” he says. “It was and still is a sacred town. For me New York is my sacred town. Every time I walk around the city, I see my father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather. For them and myself, I have a strong desire to continue the family tradition of service and entertainment. It’s a feeling of responsibility and it’s a feeling of love. You can’t explain these things.” ♦



Gerber (AKA Garber) descendants at Silver Lake Cemetery. Photo courtesy of Alan Ceppos.

PROFILE

Efrem Reis, HFBA assistant director

Jewish educator reroutes career to teach — and learn — about *chesed shel emet*

Efrem Reis’s role as HFBA’s new assistant director comes as something of a surprise, not least of all to Efrem himself. He was on track for a career in Jewish education when he led a school trip to Mount Richmond Cemetery and fell in love with HFBA.



“Soon I was exploring new ways to educate people beyond the classroom,” Efrem says. “It turns out that being part of a community organization has let me do just that.”

On Efrem’s “syllabus” is the importance of *chesed shel emet* — the unrewarded act of kindness displayed by the living to the dead. “Working at

HFBA lets me show people that we, as New York Jews, are dedicated to caring about all of our Jewish brethren, throughout the entire life cycle and beyond.”

Given that Efrem’s previous work history was largely in the Solomon Schechter day school system, he says he is looking for not-for-profit best practices from his new colleagues at HFBA. He is inspired every day he comes to work.

Learning from a seasoned organization

“There’s the funeral staff that investigates the Jewish background of an unidentified individual by searching through various online sites, including ancestry.com, cemetery records and Facebook, to name a few,” Efrem

says. “This sort of research isn’t always the easiest to do, but we go the distance to determine who qualifies for burial by HFBA.”

Indeed, Efrem’s inspiration comes from personalities all up and down the organization.

“Not long after I arrived, I spoke with a wonderful group of volunteers at Mount Richmond Cemetery from the Stella K. Abraham High School for Girls in Hewlett, Long Island,” Efrem says. “One of the students asked to stop by the grave of her uncle. Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, our cemetery chaplain, joined us to say that when her uncle’s grave marker arrived, he discovered it had been engraved incorrectly. He sent the stone back to the maker and asked that it be fixed. I told the student, ‘Do you realize the rabbi does 300 or more funerals a year, and he remembered your uncle?’ What’s amazing is that he is ready to do the same for every single person we bury.”

Lesson learned: All Jews are brothers and sisters

Efrem observes that Rabbi Plafker’s *menschlichkeit*, or decency, radiates out to the members of HFBA’s volunteer *minyán*, “who stop their lives on a dime to attend burials. They live the ideal that the Jewish people are all brothers and sisters.”

Efrem is also inspired by HFBA’s *chevra kadisha*, whose male and female members ritually prepare the body for burial.

“They are truly some of the unsung heroes of the Jewish community,” Efrem, says. “They respond to a call early in the morning or late at night. They remain anonymous and find reward in the task itself.”

Efrem Reis came to HFBA to broaden his role as teacher. He stays on as a student of *chesed shel emet*.

HFBA Helps

Names, details and images have been anonymized to preserve confidentiality



Donald E., 74, was a retired school lab assistant when he died from injuries sustained in a Queens apartment fire. We learned about him and his death at a local hospital from a cousin in Chicago, who could only say that he was divorced. A newspaper story said it took 60 firefighters and EMS workers to bring the blaze under control. Only HFBA's Rabbi Shmuel Plafker and volunteer *minyan* attended Donald's burial.

Saul I., 46, had once trained to be an electrician, but his fear of heights limited his work opportunities. Saul's sister Miriam told HFBA that Saul had shown potential, but he succumbed ultimately to drug abuse. He died in a New Jersey care facility of cancer. Miriam said their mother died recently, and whatever monies the family had had gone to her funeral expenses. Miriam, five friends and a family rabbi attended Saul's funeral.

Isaac Z., 71, died in a Brooklyn assisted living facility of a heart attack. While he was alive, Isaac's sister Fay and her husband set up a pre-need arrangement with HFBA, and the care facility knew to call HFBA when Isaac died. In her graveside eulogy, Fay said her older brother had had a brilliant mind until he suffered a psychiatric break in his twenties. He'd been institutionalized for 30 years, but when he showed improvement, he was moved to the assisted living facility. From that point on, Isaac

prayed, put on *tefillin* and studied Talmud every day until he died.

Charles F., 66, died in Queens of lung disease. He had suffered since his adolescence from schizophrenia. HFBA learned of Charles' death from his cousin Victor, who said Charles became a ward of the state after his parents died. "During more 'normal' times, Charles understood his life was not like other people's," Victor said at his cousin's graveside funeral at Mount Richmond Cemetery. "He lived a sad life."

David G., 38, was stabbed to death while visiting a city upstate. He had been living in the South with his girlfriend and her four children when he was reported as being unstable, despite taking psychiatric medication. HFBA learned about David's death when his mother called to ask about a traditional burial. HFBA brought the body from Onondaga County to Mount Richmond Cemetery, where HFBA's Rabbi Plafker officiated at the funeral. A dozen people, including David's mother, attended.

Marilyn N., 79, was a theater director, actor and teacher who once taught at the Yale Drama School and NYC's Neighborhood House. A Tel Aviv-based lighting designer and long-time friend told HFBA that Marilyn also established a traveling theater troupe that mounted productions based on classical drama and Commedia dell'arte. In the late 1980s, Marilyn fell on a loose pipe at a movie theater and herniated seven discs. She became too disabled to work but maintained friendships with friends and students. "Her strength of spirit, active mind, wide knowledge and kindness have been an inspiration to me," her friend said. "She is sorely missed."



Annual monument delivery marks a significant day

The arrival of monuments at Mount Richmond Cemetery marks the day when HFBA lives out its commitment to memorialize every Jew with a grave marker. Overseeing the October 16 delivery is Dana Riess, director of logistics, who ensured that hundreds of markers were set at their designated sites as quickly as possible.



РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

Translated summaries of articles appearing in this issue of *Chesed*

Потомок соучредителя HFBA организовал встречу памяти о нём

Шестьдесят пять потомков Луиса Гарбера собрались в конце октября, чтобы почтить память своего предка, жившего в 19-м веке, и чтобы порадоваться от общения друг с другом. Гарбер, эмигрант из Меджибожа – городка Российской империи, ныне принадлежащего Украине, – был соучредителем Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро и Еврейского общества помощи иммигрантам. Для Алана Сеппоса и других потомков Луиса Гарбера их предок является примером служения и любви к еврейскому народу.

«И благотворительная, и религиозная деятельность Луиса отдаются эхом и по сей день», – говорит Сеппос, являющийся праправнуком Гарбера.

Сеппос помнит большие семейные встречи Ассоциации Луиса Гарбера ещё со времен своего детства в 1950-х и 1960-х годах. (По неизвестным причинам потомки изменили фамилию Гарбер на Гербер).

«Весь клан Гарберов в долгу перед моей тетей Бёрди, внучкой Луиса», – говорит Сеппос. «Она всегда помнила, что Луис был раввином в Нижнем Ист-Сайде и первым мозлем в больнице Бет Исраэль. Она также любила вспоминать, как по еврейским праздникам вся семья собиралась в доме Луиса и Йетты на Норфолк-стрит и устраивала музыкальные представления».

Все 65 потомков Гарбера были счастливы от возобновления регулярных встреч. Октябрьские выходные они провели вместе, осматривая нью-йоркские достопримечательности.

Для двадцати из собравшихся кульминационным моментом встречи стало посещение могилы Луиса и Йетты на кладбище Сильвер-Лейк.

Алан Сеппос изучает историю клана во время посещений кладбища Ассоциации Луиса Гарбера в Нью-Джерси. Он выучил все имена на табличках и старается собирать истории каждого. «Я помню многих, похороненных там», – говорит он. «Я никогда их не забывал».

Еврейский педагог меняет карьеру, чтобы учить и самому изучать милосердие к усопшим (хесед шель эмет)

Новая должность Ефрема Райса в качестве помощника директора Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро (HFBA) стала неожиданностью и для него самого. Он собирался сделать карьеру в еврейском образовании, когда возглавляемая им школьная поездка на кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд резко изменила его жизнь. Он загорелся тем, чем занимается HFBA.

«Вскоре я уже искал новые способы обучать людей за пределами классной комнаты», – говорит Ефрем.

Случай, произошедший в самом начале работы Ефрема в HFBA, иллюстрирует этот его подход к обучению. «Как-то на кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд я беседовал с замечательной группой добровольцев из средней школы для девочек имени Стеллы К. Абрахам на Лонг-Айленде», – рассказывает он. «Одна из учениц попросила посетить могилу ее дяди. Наш раввин, г-н Шмуэль Плафкер, присоединился к нам и рассказал, что когда доставили надгробный камень с именем её дядя, он обнаружил ошибку в гравировке. Позже рав. Плафкер позаботился о том, чтобы надпись на каменной табличке была исправлена. И я заметил этой ученице: «Видишь, наш раввин проводит более трёхсот похорон в год и всё же помнит имя твоего дяди? И он готов совершить такой же акт милосердия к усопшим (хесед шель эмет) для каждого человека, которого мы хороним».

Таким образом, Ефрем Райс пришел в HFBA, чтобы расширить свою роль учителя. Он стал учеником хесед шель эмет.

Все, что необходимо – просто прийти

Скотт Даймонд помнит тот день, когда ему позвонили с кладбища Маунт-Ричмонд с просьбой о помощи. Он как сейчас помнит, что это была пятница, 9 апреля 2010 года. Просьба была ко всем, кто мог составить миньян на похоронах потомка человека, пережившего Холокост, у которого не осталось в живых ни семьи, ни близких. И два дня спустя, в воскресенье, 75 человек пришли на кладбище, чтобы оказать милосердие тому, кого почти никто из пришедших не знал лично.

«В то воскресенье многие осознали, что HFBA – организация, о которой многие из нас не слышали – постоянно нуждается в миньяне добровольцев», – вспоминает Скотт. «Вскоре после того, как обряд похорон закончился, некоторые из нас, жителей Стейтен-Айленда, сообща решили, что мы будем участвовать в миньяне всякий раз, когда HFBA будет нуждаться в нас».

За эти тринадцать лет Скотт сотни раз присоединялся к миньяну добровольцев на похоронах, проводимых HFBA.

«Даже люди, оказавшиеся в тяжелом положении, имеют право голоса», – говорит Скотт. «Но те из нас, кто умирает в одиночестве, не могут попросить, чтобы мир отнёсся к ним с уважением». Вывод Скотта: «Всё, что вам нужно сделать – просто явиться».

Чтобы узнать о миньяне добровольцев HFBA на Стейтен-Айленде, свяжитесь со Скоттом Даймондом по адресу slzdiamond@hotmail.com.

Грустные истории

- Чарльз Ф. умер в Квинсе в возрасте 66 лет от болезни легких. С подросткового возраста у него была шизофрения. HFBA узнало о смерти Чарльза от его двоюродного брата Виктора, сообщившего, что после смерти родителей Чарльз жил на иждивении штата. «В периоды просветления Чарльз осознавал, что его жизнь не похожа на жизнь других людей», – сказал Виктор на похоронах своего двоюродного брата на кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд. «Жизнь его была невесёлой».

- 84-летняя Джанет К. умерла в своей субсидированной квартире в Манхэттене, по-видимому, от сердечной недостаточности. Её ведущий из организации социального обслуживания рассказал сотрудникам HFBA, что в молодости Джанет была известным преподавателем танцев в нескольких университетах. На её похоронах присутствовал только миньян из добровольцев HFBA.

- 46-летний Саул И. когда-то учился на электрика, но страх высоты ограничивал его выбор места работы. Сестра Саула, Мириам, рассказала HFBA, что тот стремился к нормальной жизни, но в конце концов стал жертвой злоупотребления наркотиками. Саул скончался от рака в одном из медицинских учреждений Нью-Джерси. Мириам сообщила, что их мать умерла недавно, и все деньги семьи ушли на её похороны. На церемонии погребения Саула присутствовали Мириам, пятеро друзей усопшего и раввин, близкий к их семье.

Счастливой Хануки всем нашим друзьям и дарителям

Во втором веке до н.э. Маккавеи успешно сражались и освободили Иерусалим и еврейский храм. Свечи, которые мы зажигаем в течение восьми дней Хануки, напоминают нам о той победе. Все мы – сотрудники HFBA – желаем вам счастливой Хануки, и чтобы мы добились безопасности для всех евреев, как на земле Израиля, так и в диаспоре.

“Showing up is all you have to do”

Staten Islander is a founding member of HFBA’s volunteer minyan

Scott Diamond remembers the exact day a call went out for help at Mount Richmond Cemetery. It was Friday, April 9, 2010 and the request was for anyone who could make up a *minyan* at the burial of a Holocaust survivor descendent with no living family or close friends.



Two days later, on Sunday, as many as 75 people showed up at the cemetery to participate in an act of kindness for a man almost nobody knew.

“It seems obvious now, but that Sunday it dawned on several of us that HFBA — an organization many of us hadn’t heard of — had an ongoing need for a volunteer *minyan*,” Scott says. “Sadly, the gentleman we had buried was not the only deceased who has passed out of life alone. Soon after the service ended, several of us Staten Islanders decided we wanted to answer the call for a *minyan* whenever HFBA needed us.”

Scott went home that day and talked over the morning’s events with his wife, Linda.

“We decided it would be a nice thing for me, and for our son, who’d just turned thirteen, to help make a *minyan* at funerals,” Scott says.

An exceptional track record

Over the past thirteen years, Scott has joined HFBA’s volunteer *minyan* hundreds of times. He notes that two other volunteers have almost 2,000 *minyan* attendances between them.

Scott’s participation in the volunteer *minyan* is rooted in his commitment to Judaism.

“As I’ve grown in my religious observance, I’ve come to understand the importance of *chesed*,” he says. “Even people in dire circumstances have a voice, and they can speak for themselves. But those among us who die alone cannot ask that the world acknowledge them with respect. Many *halachot* (religious laws) discuss how a Jew should be treated upon death, and I feel a big connection to that.”

Scott observes that Staten Island’s 13-year-old volunteer *minyan* has had a 73 percent success rate to date in 2023: HFBA sent out 86 requests for a *minyan*, with 63 responses resulting in at least ten men per call. An RSVP is never required.

“Showing up is all you have to do,” Scott says.

For information about HFBA’s Staten Island volunteer minyan, contact Scott Diamond at slzdiamond@hotmail.com. ♦

Tax-free donation: An easy way to fund your favorite charities

Dr. Herbert Lasky’s support for HFBA began with saying kaddish for his father

Back when he was a history graduate student at NYU, Herbert Lasky drove out to New Jersey with his father to visit a relative’s grave.

“On the way home, he asked me to say *kaddish* for him when the time came,” Herbert told HFBA. “I had no idea that within a year, he would die at age 57.”

Since then, Herbert, a retired dean at Eastern Illinois University, has said *kaddish* for his father, family and friends in many different settings. In one sketchy New York neighborhood, he was even escorted to a *shiva* house by a tough-guy Mafia street boss.

“The upshot is, I grew to appreciate *kaddish* as a ritual that connects me to the people I want to honor,” Herbert says.



QCD facilitates regular charitable donations

Herbert learned about Hebrew Free Burial Association through Charity Navigator, a US-based organization that evaluates and rates 501(c)(3) non-profits. He was looking to make an enduring donation by drawing upon a required minimum distribution at age 70^{1/2}. A qualified charitable distribution, or QCD, taken directly from his 403(b) plan, fit the bill: Herbert’s tax-free gifts have gone directly from his university retirement plan to HFBA for 15 years.

“I don’t need mugs or T-shirts in return,” Herbert says. “What draws me in is HFBA’s selflessness.”

Herbert and his late wife, Jane, also underwrote a quarter-million dollar fellowship for University of Illinois Department of Music graduate students.

“It’s been a long journey from my Lower East Side roots,” Herbert says. “I invented myself but carried my ethnicity with me. Donating to the organizations I care about keeps me connected to the educational and philosophical convictions I acquired in my youth. QCD is the means by which I support them compassionately and economically.” ♦

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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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 2023.

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.

With Grateful Acknowledgment

HFBA thanks the students from area schools and organizations for volunteering their time to clear debris from Mount Richmond Cemetery.



Students from **ASHAR** (Rockland County) bonded with each other and HFBA as they raked leaves on Clean-Up Day.



Students from **Yeshiva of South Shore** (Hewlett, Long Island) exhibit pride in the bags of leaves they amassed on Clean-Up Day.



Students from the **Stella K. Abraham High School for Girls** (Hewlett, Long Island) pay tribute to a student's uncle.

Happy Chanukah to our friends and supporters



In the second century B.C.E., the Jewish Maccabees fought to recapture and secure the temple in Jerusalem. The candles we light over eight days of Chanukah remind us of their victory. All of us at HFBA wish you a happy Chanukah — and the restoration of security for Jews in Israel and the Diaspora.