Two beloved Gussies bring donors to HFBA



Sam Goldenberg, Bill's grandfather. Bill learned of his Jewish ancestry only after the death of his father.

A loving son pays it forward

For much of his life, Bill H. had no hard and fast evidence of his paternal Jewish ancestry. After his father's death, he started piecing together his own memories as well as documentary evidence that his father, in fact, was Jewish. Bill graciously shared the story of his Jewish roots with Chesed.

I was the kind of kid who was always asking questions. When it came to my family, though, I simply accepted that my sister and I were Lutheran because our mom was Lutheran. My dad's father had an accent, but nobody ever said where it came from. I didn't ask for details. After my grandma Gussie died in her early thirties from pancreatic cancer, Grandpa lived alone in an 8'x8' room with a portable closet and a bathroom out in the hallway. He worked at the Playland Amusement Park in Rye breaking down dollars for customers.

One day, my parents asked me to get something out of the headboard in their bedroom. I stumbled across a mimeograph of an enlistment record. I didn't think much about it at the time, but I never forgot it.

After my parents were gone, I decided something wasn't right. Every time I tried to investigate my father's background, I hit a brick wall. It finally occurred to me that the name on my grandpa's buzzer was different from my dad's. It was Goldenberg, I went

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Did Tali's chesed shel emet lead to marriage?

For Tali G., community service and the unknown author of a memorial tribute combined to reveal the hand of fate. She gave Chesed her account of hashgacha pratis, or divine providence. Out of respect for Tali's privacy, we have given her a pseudonym.

In high school, my friends and I wanted to be together on Shabbat. We figured we should do something worthwhile with our time, so we chose to visit people at a nursing home in Brooklyn. It was an eye-opening experience. Many residents simply sat and stared into space all day long.

We were just teenagers with no particular

skills or training. We decided to sing with the patients. We felt our singing lightened the gloomy atmosphere.

Gussie Sachs was different from most of the residents we visited. She was an adorable lady with a cute little ponytail and a sweet smile. She had no children, although I recently learned she had been married.

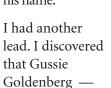


Tali's family bought a headstone to mark the grave of the nursing home resident they called their friend.

A descendant's research

continued from front page

to ancestry.com and up popped that enlistment record. The only difference between the copy I found on Ancestry and my parents' copy was the surname. The serial numbers on both documents, however, matched. At some point, my dad had changed his name.





The landsmanschaft that paid for Gussie's stone inspired Bill to become an HFBA donor.

my dad's mother — was buried in a Jewish Long Island cemetery. My wife and I took a drive and found Gussie's grave. The stone marker was of a tree cut short — a headstone design popular in the early 20th century for a person who died young. The marker was beautiful. I thought, "Grandpa didn't have two sticks to rub together. Somebody else paid for this." My research confirmed Gussie's landsmanschaft — her Polish hometown club — had put up the money.

Another clue: my father used to talk about having lived in the Hebrew National Orphan Home in Tuckahoe for eight years. He would reminisce about riding a Clydesdale there called Stocking. How could a poor kid have a horse? During my genealogical search, I came across a book about the orphanage. I couldn't believe it: the young "inmates" recalled a Clydesdale named Stocking.

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A marriage built on chesed shel emet

In 1993, when I was 23 years old, we arrived at the nursing home only to learn Gussie had been hospitalized. One Sunday I went with my mother to visit Gussie. Gussie's doctor walked into the room. I can't help but think it was a sign of *hashgacha pratis*.

The doctor told us Gussie wasn't doing well. My mother said, "You should have our phone number in case you need to reach us."

Who would bury Gussie?

Shortly after our visit, the doctor called us to say Gussie passed away.

We learned Gussie had nobody to bury her. I'm pretty sure we called Rabbi Elchonon Zohn because he was associated with *tahara*, the traditional ritual purification of the body before burial. He told us to get in touch with the Hebrew Free Burial Association. Neither my mother nor I had ever heard of it before.

HFBA took it from there. They made all the funeral and burial arrangements.

Most impressive of all was HFBA's Rabbi Shmuel Plafker. The whole time he officiated at Gussie's funeral, I was saying to myself, "What an angel!" The way he handled everything — it was beautiful. He was a pure soul.

Three years later, my family paid for a gravestone. A friend of mine told me she knew somebody who could compose a *d'var Torah*, or a short talk based on the weekly Torah portion, to be delivered at the stone's unveiling. She called him up, told him about Gussie, and he wrote us a *d'var Torah*. My father read it at the unveiling.

Now, when all this was going on, I was dating a boy. I was so excited about my whole experience with Gussie — my visits to the nursing home, our experience with HFBA, the unveiling, the *d'var Torah* — that I told him all

about it. I thought he'd value what I had done. I was stunned when he broke up with me.

continued from front page

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

He said, "I don't want my wife running around putting up grave markers. I don't want a soup kitchen in my house!"

Wow. I'd felt so good about honoring Gussie. My *chesed shel emet* ended my relationship.

Why can't I get a guy like him?

Remember my friend who knew somebody who could write the *d'var Torah* for Gussie's unveiling? It turns out she was dating him.

"I'm not sure about him," she told me. "He's in medical school and I'm looking for somebody more established."

I thought to myself, "Why can't somebody nice like him want me?" I was going out with the craziest people.

Pretty soon, my friend told me she had stopped seeing this guy. She suggested I go out with him. That man became my husband. Of course, he was the boy who wrote Gussie's *d'var Torah*. Hashgacha pratis!

How we chose HFBA

Maybe I can't draw a straight line between Hebrew Free Burial Association and my finding my husband. But HFBA was an important piece in the jigsaw puzzle of my life. And when my husband and I looked for an organization we could support, we thought of the same one. After everything HFBA did to bury Gussie with honor, this wasn't a hard decision.

From beginning to end, my involvement with Gussie felt divinely ordained. How could I not commit my family to such a wonderful organization?

A descendant's research

continued from page 2

DNA testing sealed the deal. I was 50 percent Ashkenazic Jewish.

A time to pay it forward

It bothers me that my father and his family kept his Jewishness a secret. But I've come to understand what antisemitism in New York was like in the early twentieth century. At five foot two, the last of the Goldenbergs was a scrapper. He had to defend himself against bullies. Maybe changing his name and submerging his Jewish identity were his ways of defending himself.



Grandma Gussie with Bill's father

My wife and I decided to give money to a charity whose mission we support. There are no orphanages anymore, so we looked into burial groups. A Google search led us to Hebrew Free Burial Association. Because a landsmanschaft in the 1920s was once kind to my grandparents, it's our turn to pay it forward.



MICHAEL D., 53, was sick with metastatic cancer when he had a heart attack and died. His mother and sister, both on Supplemental Security Income (SSI), were ready to cremate Michael, despite his stated wish for a traditional burial. HFBA assured the family they would not incur any burial costs. Michael's two family members attended the funeral at Mount Richmond Cemetery, along with HFBA minyan volunteers. Michael's mother described her son as "having a good heart."

JANET K., 84, died in her subsidized Gramercy Park apartment, most likely from heart failure. A case manager from an organization that provides for the welfare of senior citizens told HFBA that in her younger days, Janet had been a respected dance instructor at Brandeis, University of New Hampshire and Juilliard. Indeed, a 1968 newspaper review of a dance program featuring Janet hailed her as a "well-trained body inhabited by an adventurous spirit." Only HFBA's volunteer minyan attended the funeral.

LUBA H., 89, died of kidney failure at a nursing home where she lived the last ten months of her life. Luba's son told us his mother had earned a Ph.D. in engineering from a university in the Former Soviet Union and had worked at a highly classified level of the Soviet space program. Luba wanted to emigrate to Israel, but was not permitted to leave the FSU until 1996. She arrived in the U.S. with few English language skills and could only find work cleaning people's homes. "My mother's life was difficult," Luba's son told us.

GRIGORI W., 104, died of cardiac arrest. We learned of his death from his son, a Russian immigrant in his eighties. Grigori, a civil engineer in the USSR, arrived in the U.S. 30 years ago from Ukraine, but was unable to find work in his profession. The family got by on SSI, Medicaid and Section 8 housing. Fewer than 20 people, including Grigori's wife, 101, and son attended the burial. HFBA worked with Grigori's son to reserve graves for himself and his mother.

TAMMY W., 61, died of a heart attack. We learned of Tammy's death from the director of residential services at the Institute of Applied Human Dynamics, a New York-based organization serving people with cognitive disabilities. Tammy was born with Down syndrome and spent much of her early life in the notorious Willowbrook State School. In a quirk of fate, the facility to which Tammy was moved closed down late last year. Her uncle feared that the anxiety associated with Tammy's last move may have precipitated her death. Tammy's "personality all her own" drew eight loving group home residents and staff, as well as our volunteer minyan. One funeral attendee was Tammy's half-brother. The two had never met.

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

Translated summaries of articles appearing in this issue of Chesed

ПОРТРЕТ ОДНОГО ИЗ ДОНОРОВ

Сын исследует семейное древо своего отца и платит добром за добро

После смерти отца Билл Г. (имя изменено) начал перебирать воспоминания из своего детства, а также документы, подтверждающие еврейство его отца. Билл поделился с нашей газетой (Хесед) историей поисков своих еврейских корней.

В детстве я всегда задавал множество вопросов. Но когда дело касалось семейной истории, я так или иначе принял то, что мы с сестрой лютеране, так как наша мать была лютеранкой. У моего деда был акцент, но никто объяснял, откуда он взялся.

Однажды родители попросили меня достать книгу с полки в изголовье их кровати. В поисках книги я наткнулся на мобилизационный листок, но в тот момент не обратил на него особого внимания.

После смерти родителей я стал замечать нестыковки в том, что мне рассказывали. Например, фамилия моего деда у звонка на двери в подъезд (Голденберг) отличалась от фамилии моего отца. Но пытаясь проследить историю моего отца, я каждый раз как будто упирался в стену.

Позже я зашёл на сайт ancestry.com и сразу же наткнулся на уже знакомый мне мобилизационный листок. Номер серии совпадал с листком у нас дома, но фамилия была другая. Очевидно, что в какойто момент мой отец сменил фамилию. Позже я узнал, что Гасси Голденберг — моя бабушка со стороны отца — похоронена на кладбище на Лонг Айленде. Я обнаружил, что общество взаимопомощи (ландсманиафт) выходцев из её родного города в Польше собрало деньги на её могильную табличку. Позже, тест ДНК подтвердил мои догадки. Он показал, что на 50 процентов я — ашкеназский еврей.

Меня не радует, что мой отец и его семья держали в секрете своё еврейство. Но я постепенно узнавал, как силён был антисемитизм в Нью-Йорке в начале двадцатого века. Может быть то, что мой отец скрывал свою еврейскую идентичность, было его способом бороться с антисемитизмом.

Моя жена и я вполне обеспечены. Мы решили пожертвовать деньги на какую-нибудь благотворительную организацию, чьи цели нам нравятся. Поскольку детских приютов практически не осталось, мы изучили несколько организаций, занимающихся похоронами. Так поиск в Google вывел нас на Еврейскую Благовторительную Похоронную Ассоциацию. Поскольку маленькое общество взаимопомощи (ландсманшафт) в 1920-х годах позаботилось о моих бабушке и дедушке, теперь наша очередь отплатить добром за добро.

ЕЩЁ ОДИН ПОРТРЕТ ДОНОРА

«Я вышла замуж за человека, увлечённого хесед шель эмет (милосердием к усопшим)»

Для Тали Хекшер (имя изменено для защиты частной жизни) работа на благо общины и неизвестный автор надгробной речи явили руку судьбы. Она рассказала газете Хесед о хашгаха пратис — Б-жественном провидении.

Пожалуй, мои отношения с HFBA начались лет тридцать тому назад, когда я познакомилась с Гасси Сакс. В старших классах мы с друзьями хотели вместе проводить шаббат, при этом делая что-то полезное. Мы навещали пациентов в одном из бруклинских домов престарелых. Многие их них просто сидели и целыми днями смотрели в пустоту. Мы пели этим людям, чувствуя, что наши песни скрашивают мрачную атмосферу.

Хвостик и милая улыбка

Гасси отличалась от большинства пациентов, которых мы навещали. Она была очаровательной дамой с милым маленьким хвостиком и обезоруживающей улыбкой. У нее не было детей, хотя я узнала, что когда-то она была замужем.

Однажды в шаббат в 1993 году (мне было 23) мы приехали в дом престарелых и узнали, что Гасси в больнице. В одно

из воскресений мы с мамой навестили её там. Зашёл врач, лечивший Гасси, и сказал нам, что дела у неё не очень. Моя мать предложила: «Не запишете ли наши номера телефонов, если понадобится с нами связаться?»

Вскоре после того посещения нам позвонил врач и сообщил, что Гасси скончалась. У Гасси не было никого, кто мог бы её похоронить. Сначала мы позвонили рабби Эльхонону Зону, зная, что он был связан с ритуалами тахара (очищением тела перед погребением). Рабби Зон посоветовал нам обратиться в Еврейскую Благотворительную Похоронную Ассоциацию. До этого ни я, ни моя мать никогда не слышали об этой организации.

HFBA взяла на себя все заботы, связанные с похоронами и погребением Гасси. Особенно нас впечатлил раввин, г-н Шмуэль Плафкер. Всё то время, пока он проводил обряд похорон, я повторяла про себя: «Это - ангел». Только человек с чистой душой мог всё проделать с таким участием.

Некто пишет двар тора – надгробную речь

Прошло три года, прежде чем был установлен памятник на могиле Гасси. Одна из моих подруг упомянула, что знает человека, который мог бы написать $\partial bap\ mopa$ — краткую речь, основанную на недельной главе Торы, для произнесения на открытии памятника. Моя подруга связалась с этим человеком, тот написал $\partial bap\ mopa$, которую мой отец зачитал на открытии памятника Гасси.

Надо вам знать, что в то время я встречалась с парнем. Я была так взволнована воспоминаниями о Гасси, что рассказала ему всё это. И была ошеломлена, когда он расстался со мной, говоря при этом: «Не желаю, чтобы моя жена бегала и ставила надгробия. И не хочу иметь в моем доме бесплатную столовую!». Ну и ну. Так моё увлечение хесед шель эмет положило конец этим отношениям.

«А как и мне найти такого парня?»

Помните мою подругу, знавшую того, кто написал речь двар тора на открытие памятника Гасси? Оказалось, что она с ним встречалась. И не знала, хочет ли продолжать встречаться. А я подумала: «Почему бы кто-то похожий на этого человека не мог быть у меня?» Ведь я знакомилась всё с какими-то неадекватными людьми.

Тем временем подруга моя перестала встречаться со своим парнем, и посоветовала мне сходить с ним на свидание. И так случилось, что тот самый юноша, написавший двар тора для Гасси, стал моим мужем! Так что от начала и до конца моё участие в жизни Гасси было как бы предначертано свыше. Как же я могу сегодня не посвятить деятельность моей семьи такой замечательной организации как HFBA?

HFBA помогает

• Люба Х. скончалась в 89 лет от почечной недостаточности. Последние десять месяцев жизни она провела в доме престарелых. Сын Любы рассказал нам, что его мать была кандитатом технических наук в бывшем Советском Союзе и работала в одной из секретных космических программ. Люба хотела эмигрировать в Израиль, но ей не разрешали покинуть страну вплоть до 1996 года. Она приехала в США почти без английского, и смогла найти работу только по уборке домов. «Жизнь моей матери была трудной», – подытожил сын Любы.

Поздравляем с праздником Песах и искренне благодарим всех, кто нас поддерживает

В самом начале пасхальной аггады есть слова: «Каждый, кто голоден, пусть войдёт и ест. Каждый, кто нуждается, пусть присоединяется к нам». В Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации мы буквально живём этим принципом, как в Песах, так и во все остальные дни. Мы помогаем нуждающимся в традиционном еврейском погребении, и мы очень благодарны всем, кто помогает нам в этом деле. Всем нашим друзьям и спонсорам мы говорим: Спасибо! Желаем вам на идише зиссен песах – счастливого праздника Песах!

Federal and state funding helps protect HFBA cemeteries

Security, environmental planning and historical preservation are key

It's a reality: cemeteries are among the "soft targets" vulnerable to terrorist attack.

With an eye to securing its two cemeteries, HFBA has received grants from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal **Emergency Management Agency** (FEMA), and the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services.

At Silver Lake Cemetery, this funding facilitated the installation of new security cameras and lighting to protect the site from vandalism. The work was completed in July 2023.

HFBA faced some challenges at Silver Lake. Acceptance of funding, for example, which ran from September 2020 to August 2023, required that nonprofits comply with federal and state guidelines

for environmental planning and historic preservation — two areas in which HFBA has long demonstrated sensitivity.

An additional stumbling block arrived during the COVID pandemic when the supply chain crisis temporarily stalled the fabrication and delivery of equipment at Silver Lake Cemetery. By early 2023, the supply chain logiam was largely over.

A final challenge was bringing electricity into Silver Lake from adjacent Victory Boulevard. HFBA worked with ConEd to accomplish the task.

Security measures are also under way now at Mount Richmond Cemetery. The grants will pay for security cameras, lighting, front-gate security, reinforced windows, and safe building entrances.



The only intruders caught on camera at Silver Lake Cemetery to date.

Safety of HFBA staff and volunteers is foremost

"These days there's always the potential for antisemitic incidents as well as ordinary vandalism," says HFBA executive director Amy Koplow. "We're making sure the premises at Mount Richmond in particular are safe for funeral directors who drop off decedents at the cemetery's tahara facility, and for the *chevra kadisha* members who arrive late at night and early in the morning."

Fortunately, the only intruders caught to date on camera have been wild turkeys at Silver Lake Cemetery.

"Our goal is to keep it that way," Koplow says. ■



Student volunteers connect with HFBA's values

In November 2023, eighth-grade boys from Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey (RYNJ) volunteered their time at HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery where they raked leaves and learned the value of maintaining a cemetery in a dignified way.

Mount Richmond Cemetery spring holiday hours Расписание работы кладбища Маунт Ричмонд в весенние праздники

PASSOVER ПЕСАХ	HOURS ЧАСЫ РАБОТЫ
Monday, April 22	9:00 a.m 1:00 p.m. sharp
Понедельник, 22 апреля	9:00 – строго в 13:00
Tuesday, April 23	CLOSED
Вторник, 23 апреля	ЗАКРЫТО
Wednesday, April 24	CLOSED
Среда, 24 апреля	3AKPЫTO
Monday, April 29	CLOSED
Понедельник, 29 апреля	3AKPЫTO
Tuesday, April 30	CLOSED
Вторник, 30 апреля	ЗАКРЫТО
SHAVUOT WABYOT	HOURS ЧАСЫ РАБОТЫ
Tuesday, June 11	9:00 A.M 1:00 P.M. sharp
Вторник, 11 июня	9:00 – строго в 13:00
Wednesday, June 12	CLOSED
Среда, 12 июня	3AKPЫTO
Thursday, June 13	CLOSED
Четверг, 13 июня	3AKPЫTO

Yizkor is recited on the last day of Passover and Shavuot: Tuesday, April 30 and on Thursday, June 13. | Изкор читается в последний день Песах и Шавуот: вторник, 30 апреля, и четверг, 13 июня.

A sincere word of thanks at Passover to our supporters In the Haggadah, we read, "All those who are hungry, come and eat. All those in need of Passover, join." At Hebrew Free Burial Association, we live by these words at Passover and every day of the year: we reach out to all those in need of a traditional Jewish burial, and we are grateful to all those who join us in our mission. To our



friends and supporters we say thank you. We

wish you a zissen Pesach and a joyous Passover!

SAVE THE DATE

HFBA'S ANNUAL RIVERDALE COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

JOIN US AS WE HONOR

Valerie Altmann and Daniel Perla Tamara Fish Abby Marcus Rabbi Stephen Shulman

Sunday, May 5, 2024 | 9:30 am

Riverdale Jewish Center 3700 Independence Avenue • Bronx, NY 10463

For more information visit: www.hebrewfreeburial.org/riverdale

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 2024.

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 • Executive Director • 212-239-1662

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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