

# Chesed



## Executive director looks back on a quarter-century of change and stability at HFBA

*"I cannot say enough good about the people of HFBA"*



Amy Koplow still remembers 86-year-old Marvin Miroff. After he died in 2002, HFBA learned that Marvin's body was in a medical school morgue awaiting use as a cadaver. Koplow and her staff at Hebrew Free Burial Association sprang into action. They retrieved the body and gave Marvin — deaf, mute, and blind since birth — the dignity denied him in life.

By the time Marvin was interred at HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery, Koplow had been on the job for two years and had dealt with comparable situations. Koplow's biggest challenge in her early days, however was getting smart about the organization. For one, HFBA's two properties — Silver Lake Cemetery and Mount Richmond Cemetery — had fallen into a state of semi-neglect, due largely to insufficient resource planning.

"I believed that burying people with dignity also means maintaining their graves with dignity," Koplow says.

Under Koplow's leadership, a much-needed restoration project at Silver Lake Cemetery began in 2011 with the use of ground-penetrating radar to assess the location of burials. In 2017, HFBA received a New York State historic preservation grant and made extensive improvements to the site, including the installation of a drainage system and the removal of 180 wild trees. A current project involves the construction of a wall of remembrance bearing the names of every burial.

Koplow has also overseen improvements at Mount Richmond Cemetery. Most recently she and two key staff members addressed the increase in antisemitic vandalism in Jewish cemeteries by acquiring grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and New York State. Newly installed are stronger windows and doors, lighting, cameras, and an automated front gate with enhanced security protections.

By 2013, Koplow recognized the need for a permanent place to do *taharas*, or ritual cleansing of bodies.

"We never again wanted to find ourselves in a situation where a funeral home is bought out or closes down, and we lose our space to do *taharas*," Koplow says.

Koplow proposed building a *tahara* facility at Mount Richmond under the supervision of HFBA rabbinic advisor Elchonon Zohn. It opened in 2014 with a newly trained *chevra kadisha* (who prepare the deceased for burial according to Jewish law).

### COVID is an unprecedented challenge

With the arrival of the COVID pandemic, HFBA was positioned to manage the onslaught of burials. Capitol Funeral Service of New York funeral director James Donofrio located a 40-foot refrigerated trailer to store bodies that HFBA's walk-in refrigerator was too small to hold.

In the first months of the pandemic, HFBA buried as many as 12 people a day. Koplow becomes emotional when she calls her staff "heroic."

"I asked Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, our chaplain, 'How can you do this nonstop?'" Koplow recalls. "'HFBA will pay for you to talk to somebody.'" Shmuel said, 'This is my job. I will keep doing it.'"

*Continued on page 2*



Continued from front page

### Big events of the day come to HFBA

Other historical events had an impact on the mood in New York — as well as on HFBA's daily operations.

"On 9/11, I was on my way to buy office supplies when I looked down Sixth Avenue and saw the first tower burning," Koplow says.

From Day One, Koplow had turned to her contacts at UJA-Federation of New York when she had questions about operations and fundraising. Now she alerted them to say HFBA stood ready to help. A more immediate problem, however, was figuring out how to get her staff home.

"They lived across the city and Long Island," Koplow says. "All public transportation stopped. Some people walked home, some found rides. One of my staff was in her seventies. I walked her many blocks up Sixth Avenue to my brother's law office. He drove us both home to the Bronx."

With the city shut down, how would HFBA organize funerals? Not everyone had a cellphone. Faxing and emailing were relatively slow. Zoom was off in the future. The staff relied on the trusty landline telephone. Sadly, HFBA did not end up with any 9/11-related cases as few bodies could be recovered.

In 2012, the problems stemming from Hurricane Sandy demanded tact and perseverance.

"We had two tough cases," Koplow says. "One was a man whose body lay in a flooded hospital morgue. The hospital didn't immediately reveal the obstacle involved in retrieving him. The other case concerned a burial for a reserved grave at Silver Lake Cemetery. Our staff had to clear downed trees before they could get equipment in to open the grave."

### Tech changes optimize HFBA processes

In 2000, when Koplow was still a rookie executive director, every HFBA employee had a desktop computer. One employee had the "mother computer" with a floppy disk that housed HFBA's records. The organization did not have a server, which would have facilitated sharing data over a linked network. Moreover, many records were still on paper. The only "digitization" resided on spools of microfiche.

"We did have one computer program that kept track of funerals and burials and one that kept track of donors," Koplow says. "I talked to the then-president about developing a program that combined both. He couldn't understand why we didn't go to Staples and buy an off-the-shelf solution. I said, 'Staples doesn't sell a computer program that tracks donor lists, burial records, and cemetery management!'"

Koplow and senior funeral operations manager Rhonda Stein

worked with two young developers to create a hardware-software solution. By 2003, HFBA began using "HFBA Manager," its first integrated computer program.

Last year, with Koplow's support, assistant director Efreim Reis and director of logistics Dana Riess, moved HFBA's donor relations to a more flexible customer relationship management system.

### Fundraising is the lifeblood of HFBA

Koplow observes that HFBA's operations depend on fundraising revenue. "Fundraising makes our most strategic goals possible," she says. "First comes our need to advocate for the dead and the resources necessary to bury them with dignity. Second, we need to reach out to more people about our services and history. Third, we have to maintain our cemeteries."

Arguably, only HFBA's co-founders, who understood early on the need for a second cemetery, experienced the financial anxiety Koplow especially felt during the COVID years.

"You gotta help us out," Koplow says, citing how she pleaded with UJA-Federation of New York and other generous donors for emergency funds during the pandemic. Koplow credits long-time fundraising consultant Margy-Ruth Davis for helping to track down other financial support to address HFBA's urgent needs.

### People are HFBA's greatest resource

Koplow is unequivocal when she points to HFBA's greatest natural resource. "I cannot say enough good about the people of HFBA," Koplow says. "Whether they are working on funeral arrangements, donor relations, or cemetery management, they leave no stone unturned."

When asked what she's most proud of, Koplow points to the creation of HFBA's volunteer *minyán* in 2010. She praises Scott Diamond, a Staten Island-based biotech sales executive, for putting together HFBA's first volunteer *minyán* for the son of Hungarian-Jewish Holocaust survivors.

"Scott, who'd never heard of HFBA until he learned of this man's death, wanted to keep the *minyán* going," Koplow says. "When we talk about what's important in life, it's showing up. That's what our *minyán* does."

It's what Amy Koplow has done for the past 25 years. She has shown up — in the best of times and the worst of times — and transformed a century-old Jewish organization into a not-for-profit that has championed the most fragile among us.

"HFBA is the pride of New York City's Jewish community," Koplow says.

The same can be said of Amy Koplow, who guided HFBA with love and fortitude for a quarter-century. ■



To honor Amy Koplow,  
please consider donating  
to the Silver Lake Cemetery  
wall of remembrance

<https://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/silverlakedonations>



SCAN TO DONATE

## New executive director looks ahead to expanded HFBA mission

### Former JewishGen director will honor the Koplow legacy

At first glance, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in Lower Manhattan appears to be at a significant remove from Hebrew Free Burial Association. Yet for Avraham Groll, HFBA's recently arrived executive director, his 17-year-long tenure at MJH's JewishGen division dovetails with HFBA's mission of *chesed shel emet* — acts of kindness performed for the deceased.

"At JewishGen, we helped people honor the memory of their ancestors," Groll told *Chesed*. "By documenting family lineage, we keep alive the flame of memory that might otherwise be extinguished by the passage of time. It may not be immediately obvious, but respecting the dead, whether by traditional Jewish burial or through the remembrance of their deeds, are similar sacred acts."

### Preserving memory, advocating for education

Groll views HFBA's mission as a continuation of his previous work.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Amy Koplow," he says. "I want to focus on sustaining HFBA's critical mission: ensuring that Jews in need receive a traditional Jewish burial. And we'll maintain our cemeteries to preserve the memory of those buried there."

Groll observes that HFBA and JewishGen have long recognized the role that cemeteries play in educating young people about



their history. As part of a JewishGen roots trip to Poland he developed, students cleared away leaves and other detritus in a neglected cemetery.

"We used the lens of Jewish genealogy to teach university students about their ancestors' commitment to the Jewish people," Groll says.

He notes that HFBA likewise helps students at Jewish day schools appreciate the concept of *chesed shel emet*

by inviting them to participate in its Cemetery Clean-up project. Students rake leaves and collect branches — an act of kindness for which they cannot be compensated.

"I hope to draw on my experience developing and running a variety of programs to engage audiences who are not familiar with HFBA's work," Groll says.

HFBA's new executive director also understands the importance of maintaining the financial health of the organization. He plans to find new sources of revenue and target young donors and anticipates raising HFBA's profile in the Jewish world by reaching out to communal and rabbinic organizations. Most important, he will emphasize the value of educating Jews to choose a traditional Jewish burial over cremation.

"I feel the weight of the task at hand," Groll says. "I look forward to partnering with the board and staff to serve hundreds of our Jewish brothers and sisters who rely on HFBA for a dignified burial." ■

## HFBA HELPS

**Charlotte N., 78**, died of a heart attack at a nursing home in the Bronx. HFBA learned about her from a Jewish agency that serves the elderly. Charlotte was Jewish by dint of her mother's lineage yet the agency's social worker planned on having her cremated and the urn buried next to her father in a non-Jewish cemetery. Charlotte's two surviving siblings did not want to be involved with funeral arrangements. HFBA stepped in to explain that cremation was not consistent with Jewish law. Within a few days, HFBA gave Charlotte a traditional Jewish burial.

**Morris Z., 84** and a longtime waiter at various exclusive New York restaurants, died of heart failure at a Queens hospital. HFBA learned of Morris's death from Howard, a friend. Howard told us that Morris was a Holocaust survivor and gave us the contact info for Eva, Morris's wife in Poland. Eva helped us complete Morris's paperwork, but she did not return to the US for the funeral. Ten people, some of them notables from the literary world who used to frequent the restaurants where "Mr. Morris" once worked, attended his burial in Mount Richmond Cemetery.

**Emil A., 89**, died of cardiac arrest in a New York nursing home. He emigrated from Poland 35 years ago. The nursing home put us in touch with Emil's friend Natan in Florida. Natan confirmed that Emil was Jewish and had been orphaned as a young child. Natan also told us that he'd met Emil in Israel when they were college students, and that Emil, the owner of a small import business, had been living in the US illegally. Emil never married, and no one attended his burial except for HFBA's volunteer *minyán*. ■

## РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

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

### **Исполнительный директор вспоминает четверть века своей работы в HFBA – годы как стабильности, так и перемен**

Эми Коплоу всё ещё помнит 86-летнего Марвина Мироффа. После его смерти в 2002 году в HFBA узнали, что тело Марвина находится в морге при медицинской школе, чтобы быть препарированным в учебных целях. Г-жа Коплоу и её команда из Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации (HFBA) смогли забрать тело и обеспечить Марвину, который был слепым и глухонемым с рождения, похороны с тем уважением и достоинством, которых ему не очень-то доставалось при жизни. Г-жа Коплоу успела проработать два года, когда был похоронен Марвин, и уже сталкивалась с подобными случаями.

Когда в сентябре 2000 года она приступила к работе в качестве исполнительного директора, два принадлежащих HFBA кладбища, Сильвер Лейк и Маунт Ричмонд, находились в состоянии полуупадка. Под руководством г-жи Коплоу в 2011 году был наконец-то начат проект реставрации кладбища Сильвер Лейк. Эми Коплоу также руководила базовой реорганизацией работ на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд.

### **Все четверть века – не одно, так другое**

Г-жа Коплоу столкнулась ещё с одной, давно назревшей проблемой: нужно было найти постоянное место для проведения тахара – обряда ритуального очищения тел перед погребением. В качестве нового директора она предложила построить здание для тахара на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд под наблюдением постоянного консультанта HFBA, раввина Элхонона Зона. Здание открылось в 2014 году, и в нём сразу начали работу недавно обученные добровольцы – члены хевра кадиша.

А в марте 2020 HFBA была вынуждена справляться с многократно возросшим числом похорон во время пандемии ковида. Джеймс Донофрио, директор похоронного дома при HFBA, помог организации приобрести сорокафутовый фургон-холодильник для хранения тел умерших, так как стационарный холодильник не мог их вместить.

В первые месяцы пандемии Ассоциация проводила до 12 погребений в день. Вспоминая те дни, г-жа Коплоу еле сдерживает слёзы, говоря, что поведение сотрудников было просто героическим.

### **Новые технологии и оптимизация работы HFBA**

В 2000 году, когда Эми Коплоу только вступала в должность исполнительного директора, у каждого сотрудника был настольный компьютер, а все записи хранились на гибком диске головного компьютера. У HFBA не было своего сервера, обеспечивающего эффективный обмен данными через внутреннюю сеть.

«У нас была одна программа, регистрирующая похороны и погребения, и ещё одна, ведущая учёт доноров», вспоминает Эми. «Тогдашний президент Ассоциации предлагал купить стандартную компьютерную программу в магазине канцтоваров Staples. На что я возразила, что Staples не продаёт специализированные программы, способные вести списки доноров, учёт всей связанной с погребением документации, и ещё помогать в ежедневной работе кладбища».

В итоге Эми Коплоу и Ронда Стайн – старший менеджер по работе кладбища – наняли двух разработчиков, которые и создали первую в HFBA многопрофильную компьютерную программу, «HFBA Менеджер».

### **Люди – ценнейший ресурс HFBA**

Г-жа Коплоу подчёркивает, что деятельность HFBA всегда зависела от сбора пожертвований. Но она не устаёт повторять, что величайшее достояние HFBA – это сотрудники. «Не хватит хвалебных слов о всех тех, с кем я работала и кого теперь оставляю», – говорит она. «Будь то работа по организации похорон, взаимодействие с донорами или управление кладбищем, мои сотрудники не упускают ни одной детали».

Когда её спросили, чем г-жа Коплоу гордится больше всего, она вспоминает создание миньяна добровольцев в 2010 году. Эми особо отмечает вклад Скотта Даймонда, директора по продажам в одной из фирм на Стейтен Айленде. Г-н Даймонд создал первый в HFBA миньян во время похорон сына венгерских евреев, переживших Холокост. «Скотт, который до тех похорон и не слышал о существовании HFBA, сделал многое, чтобы миньян продолжал действовать», продолжает г-жа Коплоу. «Так что когда мы говорим, что в жизни важно, вспоминаешь появление таких людей, а наш миньян действительно делает очень важное дело».

И это именно то, что Эми Коплоу делала последние 25 лет. Она появилась в трудное, но и в замечательное, время и превратила еврейское учреждение с вековой историей в современную благотворительную организацию, продолжающую заботиться о самых уязвимых среди нас. «HFBA является гордостью еврейской общины Нью-Йорка», говорит Эми Коплоу. То же самое можно сказать и о ней самой, в течение четверти века руководившей Ассоциацией с любовью и стойкостью.

### **Новый исполнительный директор смотрит в будущее, планируя расширить миссию HFBA**

Казалось бы, работа Музея Еврейского Наследия (МН) в Нижнем Манхэттене довольно далека от задач Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации (HFBA). Однако для Авраама Гролла, недавно назначенного исполнительным директором HFBA, его 17-летняя работа в МН, где он возглавлял отделение еврейской генеалогии, естественно переплетается с миссией HFBA – chesed shel emet, добрые дела, творимые для усопших.

Г-н Гролл рассматривает работу в HFBA как продолжение своих обязанностей в JewishGen (отдел еврейской генеалогии). «Благодаря вкладу Эми за эти четверть века я могу продолжить усилия по сохранению кладбищ Маунт-Ричмонд и Сильвер-Лейк, и в то же время искать новые способы познакомить членов еврейской общины с нашей главной миссией: обеспечить каждому нуждающемуся еврею традиционные еврейские похороны», говорит он.

### **HFBA поздравляет с Ханукой и желает всем радости, счастья и света**

Спасибо за то, что вы являетесь светом, помогающим в нашей повседневной работе. В этот праздник Хануки пусть вы и ваша семья будете наполнены теплом наших еврейских традиций. ■

# Annual monument delivery brings dignity to Mount Richmond graves



Granite markers arrived at Mount Richmond Cemetery on October 20, 2025 via a 50-foot-long flatbed truck from Elberton, Georgia



HFBA staff help unload and organize monuments for unmarked graves

# Students from area schools experience *chesed shel emet*



Students from The Leffell School in Hartsdale, NY, spent hours in early autumn at Mount Richmond Cemetery to clear leaves and branches



Students from MTA High School in NYC combined their volunteering spirit with a commitment to *chesed shel emet*



Students from Adolph Schreiber Hebrew Academy of Rockland (ASHAR) participate in a clean-up day at Mount Richmond Cemetery



Abraham Joshua Heschel School students plant flags at Mount Richmond Cemetery to observe Veterans Day, 2025

# HFBA wishes you joy, happiness, and light

## A Chanukah greeting to our donors and friends during the "Festival of Lights"

Chanukah gives us the opportunity every year to reflect on Proverbs 20:27: "The light of G-d is the soul of man."

These words tell us that at the heart of an individual is a sacred being. Hence, in death — and in life — every person deserves to be treated the way we treat G-d: with honor and lovingkindness. Indeed, the proverb highlights HFBA's commitment to *chesed shel emet*, true lovingkindness that cannot be repaid.

Thank you for being the light that sustains our work. May you and your family be filled with the warmth of our Jewish tradition.



## 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 2025.

### DONATE STOCKS

Many HFBA supporters donate appreciated stocks while also legally avoiding capital gains tax.

### REMEMBER HFBA IN YOUR WILL

Your legacy gift ensures that the work of *chesed shel emet* can continue.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Avraham Groll · Executive Director · (212) 239-1662



SCAN TO DONATE

### WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR YOUR ONGOING HELP!

Support HFBA's mission by making a donation at [www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate](http://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate), or use our QR code.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Doron Bar-Levav, President

Bryan Alter	Stefanie Ruch
Ralph Harary	Shari Safra
Andrea Harris	Alan Samuels
Deborah Newborn	Audrey Trachtman
Aaron Ovedia	Donny Tuchman
Daniel A. Pilarski	

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Avraham Groll

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR EMERITA**  
Amy Koplou

**CEMETERY CHAPLAIN**  
Rabbi Shmuel Plafker

**RABBINIC ADVISOR**  
Rabbi Elchonon Zohn

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
Charles M. Greinsky  
Minna Monte Seitelman  
Rabbi Dr. Henry Sheinkopf

### CHESED IS PUBLISHED BY HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

Barbara Finkelstein, Editor · Molly Bokor, Designer  
Printed by Print & Communication Services, LLC

125 Maiden Lane, Unit 5B, New York, NY 10038  
PHONE (212) 239-1662 · FAX (212) 239-1981  
EMAIL [info@hebrewfreeburial.org](mailto:info@hebrewfreeburial.org)  
WEBSITE [www.hebrewfreeburial.org](http://www.hebrewfreeburial.org)  
FACEBOOK [www.facebook.com/hebrewfreeburial](http://www.facebook.com/hebrewfreeburial)

