

JFCS shares history of "neglected survivors"



BY DEBORAH MOON

Jews in the Soviet Union had vastly different experiences from other European Jews during and after the Holocaust. Rather than being sent to extermination camps such as Auschwitz, Soviet Jews experienced a “Holocaust of Bullets” – they were rounded up and shot near their towns. After the war, survivors were not allowed to emigrate the way many Jews in western and central Europe did.

Many of the 40 Holocaust survivors from the former Soviet Union receiving assistance from Jewish Family & Child Service’s Holocaust Survivors Program have told the agency Americans don’t understand those differences.

To share that history, JFCS presented a Feb. 19 lecture by Professor Natan Meir that drew 150 people, in person and via livestream. A scholar of the region, Meir is the Lorry I. Lokey Professor of Judaic Studies and Academic Director of The Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies, Portland State University. American Sign Language interpreters and closed-captioning in English and Russian online helped make the program accessible. You can see the full presentation at jfcs-portland.org/hss-lecture/.

Before 1939, most of the 3 million Jews in the USSR lived in cities and worked in the professions. In a country where 50% of the population was engaged in agriculture, only 6% of Jews were in agriculture. When the Nazis invaded Poland from the west, the Soviets occupied the eastern half of Poland and the Baltic states under a nonaggression pact with Germany. That put another 2 million Jews under Soviet rule.

When the Soviets occupied the eastern European areas, the “bourgeois” shopkeepers and merchants were sent east to the Soviet

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Professor Natan M. Meir emphasizes a point during his lecture, “The Neglected Survivors: Soviet Jews Under Nazi Rule,” in the Pollin Chapel of Congregation Beth Israel. Jewish Family & Child Service provided the community educational event. American Sign Language interpreter Judi Webb was one of two ASL interpreters at the event. Photo by Robyn Taylor.

80% of Jewish Family & Child Service's Holocaust survivor clients are from Ukraine or another country of the former Soviet Union.

UKRAINE INVASION (Continued from page 1)

Circle expects to resettle another new arrival soon. Funding for the local Welcome Circles is provided by the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland’s Ukraine campaign (jewishportland.org/ukraine-crisis), which has raised \$150,000 to assist those who come to Portland with rent, utilities, food and other expenses.

Daria has written the family’s story (in English), illustrated by photos of their homes and city before and after the invasion. Sharing the presentation, she tearfully compares photos of the school she attended as a child and pictures of it days after the invasion. Pictures of the beautiful park near their homes contrast with images in the same area days later. You can see her story and photos at cdn.fedweb.org/fed-29/2/we-dont-have-a-home.pdf.

Next to a photo of bombs exploding just a few blocks away, Daria writes: “How they did not want to believe that at 4:50 in the morning on February 24 an explosion would wake us up and the first thought was that no, this could not be. But after a few seconds, you will understand that you no longer just hear these explosions, but you see how the battle is going on with your own eyes.”

Alex pulled up one of the images on his phone and pointed to his home. The photo

shows his bombed apartment building, and he anxiously pointed out his home with holes in the walls of the apartments one floor above and one floor below from shells that hit the building.

Daria goes on to describe the fighting and explosions they could see over the next few days. The family fled and moved into the small house of Daria’s grandparents – “we gathered 12 people and nine cats.”

Eduard speaks about the family’s harrowing drive to western Ukraine, a normally short drive that took three days. They fled over the western border into Poland, where they stayed in a Warsaw JCC for several months. Thanks to HIAS and the generous sponsorship by Neveh Shalom, they were able to come to Portland.

The story of how the Welcome Circle is helping them start a new life here will be in the March 15 issue of the Jewish Review.

For more information about the role and impact Jewish Federations across North America, including Portland, have made on the lives of so many in Ukraine and those who fled, visit cdn.fedweb.org/fed-29/2/2023_Ukraine_OnePager.pdf. The Greater Portland community has raised more than \$600,000 to support those in Ukraine and refugees who have come/are coming to Portland.



Alex shared this photo that shows where bombs hit just above and below his home in the apartment building. It is one of many pictures of Ukraine before and after the invasion that are included in “[We Don't Have a Home](#),” by his daughter-in-law, Daria.

SURVIVORS

(cont. from previous page)

interior, where shortages and harsh weather made life difficult. At the time seen as a tragedy, most of those sent east survived the war.

When the Nazis invaded in June 1941, the Jews who had remained in the shtetls and cities were slaughtered.

“It was a localized Holocaust in each city and town,” said Meir. “They were murdered near their home – often with the assistance of their neighbors.”

Mobile killing units that traveled quickly behind the advancing lines would round up the Jews in a town, take them to a nearby ravine and mow them down with machine guns. That made it difficult to determine how many were killed – estimates range from 1.1 to 2 million. At Babi Yar alone, 30,000 Jews were murdered in just three days, with mass killings continuing throughout the Nazi occupation of the region.

The heavily wooded region did make it possible for some to escape into the forest and hide or join partisan bands.

As the Nazis advanced rapidly, Stalin ordered factories and personnel (including Jews) to be evacuated to the east, where they also largely survived.

After the war, Soviet Jews were forbidden to emigrate until the era of Glasnost under Gorbachev in the late 1980s.

Given the tremendous civilian losses and destruction of towns, Jews who tried to talk about their tragedy were dismissed by the people and the government. Any memorials were to “peaceful Soviet citizens.” It wasn’t until Ukraine gained its independence in 1991 that the Babyn Yar (Ukrainian for Babi Yar) Holocaust Memorial commemorated the Jews murdered at the ravine near Kyiv.

During a Q&A moderated by former Oregonian columnist David Sarasohn, Meir also touched on the current situation in Ukraine and Putin’s ludicrous claim he is “denazifying” a nation led by a Jewish president.

At the program’s conclusion, JFCS Executive Director Ruth Scott thanked its partners for helping to bring the history of these forgotten survivors to light.

Beth Israel Senior Rabbi Michael Cahana said the congregation was honored to host the program and partner with JFCS and other organizations.

“Connections between different organizations bind us as a community,” he said.

Organizations partnering with JFCS and CBI for the program were the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland, Jewish Federations of North America and the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education. The Federation’s Women’s Giving Circle provided a grant for the live transcription (in English and in Russian for those on the livestream) and ASL interpreters.

10 years of Kehillah (community)

BY SYDNEY CLEVEGER

Nathan Burgess was a care provider at Jewish Family & Child Service in 2014 when he was asked to apply for the role of in-house manager at Kehillah Housing by a parent there.

“I used to come here to take folks out in the community to do fun things,” says Nathan. “I met a parent here, and she said they were looking for an on-site manager.”

That was eight years ago, and Nathan has been managing the apartments and tending to the needs of Kehillah’s 14 residents ever since.

“I love it here,” he says. “The residents are like your family. Some need a little more help than others, but we love all of them.”

Kehillah Housing – a project of Cedar Sinai Park in collaboration with Jewish Family & Child Service – is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. Its mission is to care for adults with developmental disabilities who need affordable housing and access to social services that support their ability to live independently in the community.

Kehillah, Hebrew for community, perfectly describes what has evolved at the facility.

In 2012, ground broke on the facility on the Cedar Sinai campus. It opened Sept. 1, 2013, with management through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. There is little resident turnover at Kehillah, says Nathan. Of the orig-

inal residents, 11 remain and the waitlist is long, an indication of the lack of housing for adults with special needs.

Current residents range in age from 30 to 50; 10 are male and four are female. Most



In-house manager Nathan Burgess loves to cook and care for Kehillah residents.

work at least one day a week at a job off-site.

Nathan also works outside of Kehillah, full time at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, where he supervises and trains GED tutors and helps inmates with their training, often in the facility’s computer lab. Friday night through Sunday, he is fully con-

centrated at Kehillah, coordinating cooking classes, movie nights, crafts, games, parties and more.

“I try to get the residents out of their rooms to try new things,” says Nathan. “People love to eat, and their favorite foods are pizza and tacos.”

Nathan grew up in southeast Portland near Mt. Tabor. His office is lined with Space Legos, and he confesses his Kehillah apartment has many more completed Lego sets, décor that is OK, he says, for his new fiancée, Brandy.

The self-described “solid cleaner who is good with a plunger,” Nathan is supported by Cedar Sinai Park’s Facilities team on bigger fix-it projects.

“Everyone is really friendly here, and it’s a good community,” says Nathan. “We all get along, and I’m a big fan of the activities where people are enjoying themselves.”

Jobs board

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland’s job board includes ongoing listings of job opportunities in the Jewish community. For all openings and to see full description of two openings below or submit job openings go to jewishportland.org/ourcommunity/jewish-jobs.

CONGREGATION SHARA TZEDECK

Executive Director

Full time

Congregation Shara Tzedek in Vancouver, BC, Canada, seeks an Executive Director to serve our membership base of 500 families from all over the world. Our

synagogue is the largest and most established Orthodox Synagogue in Western Canada. Submit CV and cover letter to careers@scharatzedeck.com.

B'NAI B'RITH CAMP

Grants & Communications Writer

Salary: \$45,000-55,000, full time

This position is responsible for writing grant and marketing content in print and digital mediums. Research, develop, write, edit and report grant proposals and various communications to support agency programs and capital needs. Submit a cover letter and resume to [Laura Jeser at ljesper@bbcamp.org](mailto:ljesper@bbcamp.org).