

## TAKE THE TREE - A TRUE MITZVAH STORY

BY CJDAME

As many of you know, although I work in a Jewish synagogue, I am not Jewish. While this story takes place at a Christmas tree lot, it is not, per se, a Christmas story.

When I was in my 20s, my youngest sister had a son. His name was Lyden, and as children were not going to be possible for us (or so we thought – but that is a different story), Emily very generously shared him with us. He came to stay every Friday night and we kept him over until Sunday.

Lyden was a beautiful toddler, with huge blue eyes, chubby red cheeks and the most beautiful fine golden-red hair that often floated up from his head like a halo due to static electricity. His hair was so striking that people were drawn to it, and many could not resist reaching out to touch it. Alas, Lyden was painfully shy and most decidedly did not want to be patted. In fact, at 2-1/2 years of age, he became quite proactive, and took to shouting out “I don’t say hi” to anyone who approached us, before ducking behind my legs.

Well, one Sunday, we went shopping for a Christmas tree. My apartment was quite small, and we had 3 cats whose life mission was to topple our Christmas trees, and so I was looking for a small tree, about 2 to 3 feet high. We stopped in at a local tree lot that had been run by two brothers since I was a child myself. One brother was clean-shaven, small and wiry, with the energy and vibrance of a tightly coiled spring, very talkative and the salesman of the duo. The other was a huge, hulking man well over 6 feet with a beard almost as long who never spoke, whose job was to tie up the trees and bring them out to the buyers’ cars.

We walked up and down, and my nephew became fixated on a tree – not a pretty little tree, but a magnificent stately blue spruce that was at least 12 feet tall, if not taller, certainly taller than the ceiling in my apartment. Sure enough, the zippy little brother appeared, flanked by his silent vanguard. “Hey, great choice, little fella,” he said, reaching down to ruffle my nephew’s hair with the speed of a striking cobra, to which

Lyden screamed out his mantra “I don’t say hi” before ducking behind me. Not missing a beat, Mr. Salesman zoomed with a hard sales pitch, extolling the virtues of this giant (and expensive) gem that had so enthralled my nephew. I explained that we were looking for something more modest and we would let him know when we found it.

As we walked down the row of trees, a face appeared down low between the trees. It was the giant brother, crouched down to toddler height. “I don’t say hi” he said, disappearing as quickly as he had appeared. This game continued, turn a corner and there he was “I don’t say hi,” turn around and there he was “I don’t say hi!” Soon, my nephew was laughing and looking high and low, peering between trees and yelling “I don’t say hi” back, a charming game of hide and seek between two kindred spirits.

We found our tree, took the tag off, and went to pay for it. We were waiting by my car, a tomato-red Chevy Chevette - the car my husband and I had dubbed “the sardine can with a hatchback.” Suddenly, the giant brother came charging down the drive, holding the huge blue spruce under one arm like a lance, and a blanket and rope under the other. Throwing it all on top of my car, he began to laugh, saying “I can’t believe I am doing this. My brother is going to kill me.”

I was a bit horrified, trying to figure out how to gracefully refuse, to explain that it was not a question of finances, I just really wanted a small tree. He was so lit up over giving us this magnificent tree, I just did not know what to do.

But Lyden knew. Solemnly he lifted his arms up and the huge man swooped him off the ground. Lyden gently patted both sides of the man’s grinning face and said: “Thank you, Mr. Hero.”

I gave them the moment. I took the tree.



- *Liz and Larry Eckman for our kitchen and bathroom supplies*
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- *Stephen Singer and Jeff Klein for organizing Wednesday morning minyans*
- *David Winthrop for being our Gabbai*
- *Michael Sydney for overseeing the Hebrew Cemetery and our Hebrew School building upgrade plans*
- *John Weber for his financial acumen and continued support*
- *Carol Sternberg Chairperson of the Kitchen Krew, Lunches and Gift Shop*
- *Kiddush Krew - Renee Brenner, Monique Shaffer, Merle Paltrow, Carol Pressman, Carol Sternberg & David Winthrop*
- *Ruth Chevion for her wonderful stories about her family’s escape from the Holocaust to America*
- *Temple Israel Book Club Leaders - Ken Cohn, Aida Koocher and Benay Birch*
- *Marc Stober for his collaboration on musical services*
- *Steve Saulten for taking care of our security needs*

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Hello mispocheh (family in Yiddish):

I want to take this moment to give a hearty loud thanks to our office administrator Christine Dame for going above and beyond the call of duty. She spent multiple Sundays cutting weeds, collecting leaves, and clearing brush and stumps in out shul's backyard.

My thanks, also, go to all the other volunteers who gave of their time for this project. Let's all look forward to next spring and summer and happy joyful spirited community gatherings there.

Hey, and why not; when you find yourself in Shul or just admiring the spiffy backyard, why not drop a note of thanks to Christine. I'm sure she'll be most appreciative of your gesture. Kindness matters.

Article submitted by Ken Cohn

### Temple Israel Gift Shop Sales Dec 4 & 11 from 10-noon

Chanukah is the highlight of the year, bringing family and friends together as they light the menorah. Many gift items will be on sale, including Michael Davidow's new book Chanukah Land.

Many thanks to Carol Sternberg for ordering, displaying and photographing so many useful items for holiday and everyday use throughout the year.



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# A Love Story

## by Ruth Chevion

There was an incident during the war that concerned a big ugly fur coat my father was wearing. My mother would chuckle when it came up, get this kind of witchy glint in her eye, and look at him sort of sideways, but I could see my father didn't like the story.

Before the coat incident, there was a romance. It flared up at a dance in Tarnow in 1939. Mom was a relative newcomer to Tarnow. She had moved to Tarnow Poland from Vienna Austria. This alone gave her a sort of exotic appeal, but she was pretty as well, with soft olive skin, big green eyes, full lips, and a mass of wavy chestnut hair. Her mother Sarah dressed her in good clothes, as only the loving mother of a fatherless child can do. Mom's father had died in Vienna many years earlier.

Dad was no less a catch. The eldest son of a wealthy family - his father owned a factory — dad was the elected president of the local chapter of *Samo-Pomoc*, (Sah-moh-Poh Motz) "Self-Help," an organization committed to fighting antisemitism in Poland. One of the goals of *Samo-Pomoc* was to integrate swimming pools, as Jews were not allowed to swim in municipal pools in Poland.

Dad had led a protest a couple of years earlier against the "No Jews in the Pool" rule, which culminated in a bloody brawl between Jewish boys and Catholic boys, and which actually succeeded. In Tarnow thereafter, Jews used the city swimming pool as equals.

In the summer of 1939, the Tarnow chapter of *Samo-Pomoc* held a dance. Mom went. Dad asked her to dance, and that's how it began.

The romance proceeded from there to a picnic. Dad invited his best friend, along with Mom and her best friend, so they were a group of four. Dad's friend, an aspiring journalist, brought his camera along. He took a lot of photos, many too suggestive for a 17-year-old and a 15-year-old of the time, even if they were semi-chaperoned by another boy and girl. Mom's mother was reportedly angry when she saw the photos, which probably did little to lower the temperature between the two young romantics.

The war broke out just a couple of months after the picnic. Pelek and Herta did not see each other again for the duration of the war, from 1939 to 1945, except for the one incident which is the subject of this story:

Dad made a huge effort to locate her, and finally did find her on her grandfather's farm on the outskirts of Lvov. But she refused to let him in and sent someone in the family to send him away. She said it was because he looked awful in the big ugly fur coat he was wearing.

Why did she do it? Why did she send him away? To be sure, my mother could flirt, and this could be interpreted as flirtation, but I'm saying it was not because he looked awful; it was because she looked awful. She had contracted scarlet fever in the famously freezing cold winter of 1941 that left her with stubby blackened front teeth, plus deaf in one ear. No antibiotics were available during the war, even if it had been possible to get a doctor.

Then too, because the war caught her in the east during her summer vacation, she had no proper winter clothes, no coat, no proper boots. She couldn't wash properly or keep her hair nice.

The whole farm situation had deteriorated into poverty because the Russian occupiers, though they did not molest them for being Jews, nonetheless took their horses, cows, and farm produce. There was hunger.

Knowing my mother as I do, I can safely say it was not his big ugly coat that kept her from coming out of the house. I'm saying she did not want the object of her romantic affections to see her looking ugly, thin, unkempt, wearing rags and house slippers in the middle of a Polish-Ukrainian winter.

After the war, after many trials and escapes, her internment in the ghetto, escape from the ghetto, passing and then being caught, escaping again, and then the hiding, and liberation, she found him and went to him, and at his mother's invitation, lived with his family in their home. I'm pretty sure there was no shacking up, but it was not long before Dad's mother, Grandmother Miriam said they had to get married.

I think it's pretty funny that Mom stuck to the big ugly coat story to the very end of his life and hers. My mother could keep a secret. What I wrote here is just my guess based on putting two and two together. As for my father, he did ultimately see her in pretty much the same bad condition at the end of the war. When they met, she asked him how he could still want her. But he did.

Here's one of the photos from the picnic. That's her handwriting on the photo: Tarnow-1939.







**December 2022**

**7 Kislev to 7 Tevet 5783**



Dec 1 - Morgan Hallock

Dec 6 - Hannah Turtle

Dec 7 - Catherine Davidow

Dec 10 - Nicholas Hammond

Dec 10 - Nicole Rosenthal Klein

Dec 15 - Phyllis Turtle

Dec 19 - Rabbi Gary Atkins

Dec 20 - Lexi Guttman

Dec 21 - Anna Gaby

Dec 21 - Julia Preis

Dec 21 - Jeffrey Singer

Dec 23 - Sheryl Hammond

Dec 26 - Daniel Cohen

Dec 28 - Raffi Zack

Dec 31 - Margaux Oxman



Dec 16 - Lea & Neil Themea – 5 years

Dec 19 - Elizabeth & Alan Gaby – 23 years

## Upcoming Services and Events

**Morning Minyans:** Every Wednesday morning at 7:00am

**Shabbat Services:** Saturdays at 10:00am on Dec 3, 17 and 31

**Adult Education:** For the Sake of Heaven: How Judaism teaches us to disagree constructively – via ZOOM @ 7:00pm  
Dec 1 - War or Trust Peace? From Jacob and Esau through Chamberlain and Menachem Begin to today.  
Dec 8 - “Fake News” or Uncovering the Truth? From Joseph and his brothers through Jefferson and Hamilton to today.

RSVP link <https://forms.gle/K79gGezi1D82tYHV8>

**Sunday Funday:** Dec 4 – 9:30-10:15 am. Open to children aged 3-6 and their caregivers.  
 Contact: Liz Sommers at [familyeducator@outlook.com](mailto:familyeducator@outlook.com)

**Gift Shop Sales** – 10:00am-noon on Dec 4 and Dec 11.

**Temple Israel’s Jewish Book Club:** ZOOM meeting on Dec 14 at 4:30pm –via ZOOM. RSVP required.  
 Contact Ken Cohn at [newbegin04@yahoo.com](mailto:newbegin04@yahoo.com)

**Bedowitz Baby Naming and Shabbat Service:** Dec 17 at 10:00am, followed by kiddush and teaching by Rabbi Gary Atkins. Contact Sherri at [sherri0409@yahoo.com](mailto:sherri0409@yahoo.com) or text to number 917-971-1050

**Braverman Chanukah Party:** Dec 18 at noon. RSVP required to <https://conta.cc/3THed4x> or call 603.622.6171 if you do not have computer access

**Annual Menorah Lighting:** Dec 21 at 4:45pm on the Ekman Terrace (back yard). RSVP not required.

**SAVE THE DATES!**

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