

CONNECTIONS

Jewish Social Services of Madison

Newsletter Sponsored by the Anna & Oscar Bentley Fund

Fall 2001, Vol. 1, No. 2

Alex Krichevsky *JSS Helped Us 'Belong'*

BY STACY SCHIFF, M.A., JSS Volunteer Coordinator

Alex Krichevsky came to the United States as a refugee from the Former Soviet Union in October of 1991 and was resettled by Jewish Social Services. I wanted to know what JSS had done for him and his family when he arrived in Madison. I was hoping Alex would mention a few examples of the many things JSS does to help families resettle; but instead he paused, smiled, and said "everything". Of course we then got into specifics about housing, job connections, details regarding immigration, furniture, English skills, and other kinds of support. But the most important thing that Alex mentioned was that JSS gave him and his family a sense of belonging that they never had before. They could be "Jewish" and participate in the community.

I met Alex at the Annual Tay Sachs Screening Event, November 14-15, at the University of Wisconsin Memorial Union, where he joined nine other medical professionals recruited by JSS to draw blood from participants. Tay Sachs disease, long associated with Ashkenazi Jews, is an incurable, fatal genetic disorder

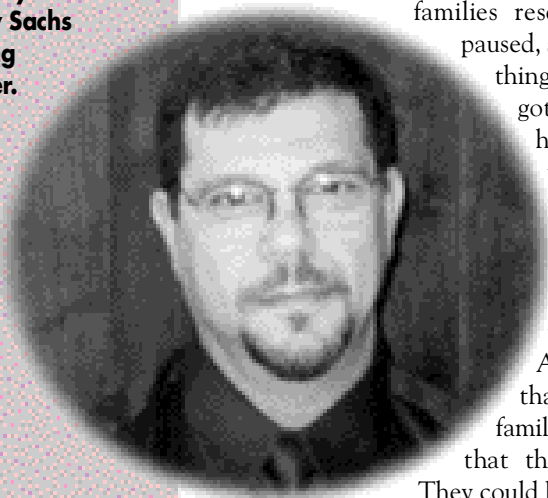
that causes progressive destruction of the central nervous system.

Students in Professor Raymond Kessel's genetics course organize the screening which is offered at no charge to the Madison public. Student volunteers from Hillel, fraternities and sororities target publicity efforts to reach young, unmarried people. By taking the blood test before having children, individuals can find out their risk of having a child with the disorder and explore their options through genetic counseling.

Alex was an anesthesiologist in the Former Soviet Union, and is currently the Surgical Recovery Coordinator at UW Hospitals. Married, with two teenagers, Alex is a busy man. But he makes time each year to volunteer for several shifts at the Tay Sachs screening. When asked why, Alex told me that it's important to him and he enjoys giving back to JSS and the student community, and because he can. He has the skills and he uses them wherever they are needed.

Who better to know the importance of JSS and volunteers than someone who has both received and given, as Alex and his family have? Alex told me that once as a child he asked if he could learn some Yiddish words. He was told that that would be a terrible idea, that to "be Jewish," to speak Yiddish, would be asking for trouble—to be discriminated against. Alex felt that he was being denied his identity, his heritage. Jewish Social Services helped him get it back.

A sense of belonging brings Alex Krichevsky back to JSS as a Tay Sachs Screening volunteer.



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Our Volunteers

Over the years, nurses, medical technologists, physicians and phlebotomists have all enthusiastically come to help with the Tay Sachs Screening. Like them, other professionals who volunteer their services to JSS can do something tremendously meaningful in a small amount of time. If you can lend your expertise in medicine, law, accounting, psychology, marketing, business or other areas, feel free to contact anyone at JSS, or call Stacy Schiff, 278-1808, Ext. 26.



A Bikur Cholim Story*

Socks, Soup and Spirituality Pave the Way to

For some people it's sitting by the bedside and holding their hand, but sometimes it's socks for their kids and Woolite.

In this instance, for this mother, the visit from Jewish Social Services was a little of both. Her daughter was in the hospital for yet another difficult medical procedure, and some necessities had slipped her mind. She had come from another city—or another state as so many do to the big medical center in Madison—she had no support system, and she was Jewish.

When JSS discovered her, staff and volunteers began to visit her as part of our *bikur cholim* (visiting the sick) program. It would be weeks on end of living in the hospital and eating all her meals at the cafeteria, so her first request from us was a chopped liver sandwich and chicken soup. That helped break the ice and she was able to accept volunteers stopping by and visiting with her.

Then she began to talk about her anger and maybe begin the long process of healing. "Someone should publish a book about what not to say," she told JSS, "like 'G-d never gives you more than you can handle.' And I hate it when people say 'I know how you feel.'"

So what *can* you say to comfort someone? JSS Director of Services Barbara Spierer suggests simply, "I am so sorry, I can't imagine what it must be like."

Since illness reminds us of our own frailties, vulnerabilities and mortality, many people report becoming more relaxed about their own fears by learning to listen with an open heart to people in crisis. That is one of the skills developed at the *Bikur Cholim* Training program JSS coordinates with area synagogues through the Hand In Hand initiative.



Hand in Hand strives to aid individuals, families and groups in physical, emotional and spiritual need. It is based on successful programs in cities such as Minneapolis, St. Louis, Chicago and the National Center for Jewish Healing in New York.

“When one visits the ill, it is as if he takes away a portion of the illness and lifts (the burden of) the illness.”

—Maimonides, Mishnah Torah

Newcomers to Madison's *bikur cholim* training explore the spiritual aspects of this *mitzvah* – it can comfort and elevate both the visited and the visitor. Practical matters are also on the agenda (see some tips below).

While the majority of *bikur cholim* visits are to Madison-area residents in nursing homes, in the hospital or at home, JSS also routinely serves visitors to Madison. We check hospital lists for people who register as Jewish or who specifically request a visitor. Sometimes the hospital will call and let us know about an out-of-town parent or spouse who is kosher and we'll set them up with home hospitality for *Shabbat*.

On occasion when an accident turns into a stay of months, or an organ transplant requires repeated trips to Madison, JSS social workers provide professional discharge planning and case management, as they do regularly with our local Jewish patients.

To find out more about our next *bikur cholim* training, to be held in April, and opportunities, please call Volunteer Coordinator Stacy Schiff at 278-1808, ext. 26. She can also provide a brochure about the Hand In Hand initiative, funded by Joe and Jeanne Silverberg and an anonymous donor.

**Details have been altered to ensure confidentiality*

VOLUNTEER CONNECTION

Ten tips for visitors

(adapted from various sources for hospital, senior care facilities or home visits)

1. Satisfy the person's need to talk or to be silent, to laugh or cry. Remember presence is often the most important present.
2. Adopt a quiet, pleasant, calm manner in entering the room.
3. Focus on the person, not your own problems.
4. Position yourself in the room to allow conversation without overwhelming the patient.
5. Sitting or standing: Generally sit to enhance eye contact and to create a more relaxed tone.
6. Let the person take the lead in the subject material she wants to discuss. Draw the patient out by asking "second and third" questions.
7. When visiting someone at home, you might find it necessary and helpful to define or limit your involvement (e.g., I can help you write letters, but I can't help with your income tax forms; or I would like to visit you once every week, if that is acceptable to you).
8. Be careful in assuming responsibilities for the person you visit. Don't take on tasks of which you feel unsure or which may harm the patient.
9. Don't stay too long. In hospitals, fifteen to twenty minutes is long enough.
10. Be sensitive to the person's need to be left alone. Sometimes, you can show more concern by leaving than you could do by staying.

The Trouble with Trinkets

Twenty-six children received Hanukkah gifts from JSS this year, thanks to the generosity of Jeanne and Joe Silverberg (in memory of Nadine Shapiro) and an anonymous donor we talked to.

Please tell us about your family tradition.

We had always been anti-big-Hanukkah gift-giving, so we gave our children small gifts. But it occurred to us, about fifteen years ago, to allocate a part of the budget and give it in our children's names to JSS. We gave each of our kids an envelope that said, "in lieu of giving you another gift, we gave it to a family that is less fortunate." And it became part of our family tradition, and we're still doing it.

How did it work out?

Our kids still got some things every night. But in addition, they received a thank-you note from Barbara at JSS. And when the kids received thank-you notes from the children who received gifts through JSS, that made them feel very good.

Recently, on a family vacation, our children were reminiscing, and they said one of the most meaningful parts of growing up was participating in somebody else getting something – that they didn't get everything. Where we thought they might be resentful, they thought it was a very positive experience.

It was very moving to me when they mentioned this was something they really

remembered – something really important. It's affected their own values for giving.

What would you say to other people?

You know the expression, *shmukes**? – a little trinket. You can buy your children a bunch of *shmukes* or do something meaningful. And it's not just for Hanukkah anymore. Let the gift go to people who are most needy, or to a service that's more important.

**Yes, a real word according to our Yiddish scholar.*

Did you know..?

- Because there is no Jewish adoption agency in Wisconsin, JSS is a source of information for Jews who wish to make an adoption, averaging two or three requests per year.
- JSS is expected to deliver 33 menorahs to nursing homes and assisted living facilities this year along with lighting instructions for the staff, so that our elderly who live in culturally non-Jewish environments can celebrate Hanukkah. At the end of the holiday, volunteers return for a social visit when they pick up the menorahs.
- Acknowledging October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, JSS partnered with Hillel and the UW

Health Services Relationship Violence Coordinator to develop and conduct a workshop on sexual assault and relationship violence to new freshman pledges from predominately Jewish fraternity and sorority houses. This marks the beginning of an ongoing collaboration of the three organizations.

- Also in October, JSS paired with Midrasha to bring its students a presentation by Dr. Paul Grossberg, UW-Madison Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, who discussed the roles alcohol, drugs, sexuality and societal pressures play in stereotypical gender behaviors, in an effort to encourage young people to think differently about how they relate to and value one another.

Thanks to another anonymous donation offered in lieu of exchanging gifts within a family, two elderly individuals in need will be receiving assistance.

Thank You to Meriter Friends of Friends

Meriter Friends of Friends made a grant to the JSS Loans and Grants Fund, which provides emergency financial assistance to individuals in the greater Madison area. Thanks to Jeanne Silverberg, who made it possible for us to apply.

Jewish Social Services of Madison Connections

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Stacy Schiff, Barbara Spierer

Make the Direct JSS Connection – 278-1808

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Office Hours Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Home visits and after hours appointments available. Our office is wheelchair accessible.

Log on to www.jewishmadison.org/JSS for updates.

E-mail: jss@jss.net

JSS Offers A Sincere

Thank

The following contributions were made between Jan

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Steve Stern and Florencia Mallon

Nort Stoler's 70th birthday

Joel Kupferberg

Birthday of Harry Tobias

Alfred J. and Maxa dai Frank

Daughter Shanna's Bat Mitzvah

Paula Volpiansky

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How Tributes Help

We appreciate when you honor and remember others with a gift to JSS. Gifts that are unrestricted in nature allow JSS to use them where the greatest needs exist.

Every donation means a great deal to us. We have made every effort to make sure our thank you lists are accurate and complete, but if we have inadvertently neglected to list your name, please let us know. Call Sherry Minkus, 278-1808. Thank you.

for your gifts to Tribute Funds

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January 1, 2001 and November 23, 2001

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Please Make a Year-End Donation

If you haven't already, please join the many individuals, foundations, corporations and organizations who help JSS "provide help where help is needed." We rely on your tax-deductible contributions when others turn to us for help.

A return envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

James Harold Davidson

Joel Davidson

Mother, Faith, and grandmother, Della

Karen Shevet Dinah

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Kelly Dwyer-Wenzlow and Louis Wenzlow

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Therma Princer

Kindness to mother, Sylvia

E. Katherine Bizem

Lois Frank

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Jill Maidenberg and Richie Thal

Michael and Michelle Felber

Francie Smith Saposnik

Joan M. Riggs

Lechayim for birthday wishes

Annabelle Argand

Election to Board of Directors

Gary and Marsha Seltzer

Friends of JSS

We are most grateful for your gifts throughout the year to Friends of JSS, and we're pleased to have the opportunity to thank you by publishing the Year 2001 donor list in the next issue of *Connections*.

Proud to be an American



What are the duties of Congress? Can you name the two senators from your state? Name one right guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Questions like these (you can check out others at www.INS.gov) make up the civics exam every *émigré* takes to become a U.S. citizen. Americans-to-be must be in the country for five years before they can apply, and they must also demonstrate elementary level English literacy.

“English is the biggest barrier, especially for people who aren’t working and required to use it every day. It’s one of the most difficult languages to learn,” says JSS Resettlement Coordinator Janice Fiksel, who should know. She holds a Master’s Degree in Linguistics from UW-Madison.

With funding from the United Way, JSS helps by providing a citizenship tutor, Fadey Feyman, who meets with candidates in their homes for an hour each week over the course of six months to a year. Right now he has seven students, with a high of 15 in a year. Janice also supplies sample tests to everyone in the program and helps them complete their citizenship applications. The JSS program is very successful – nine out of ten qualify!



If helping an émigré with English might appeal to you, please call Janice Fiksel at 278-1808, Ext. 17.

Yevgeniya Aleksandrova and best friend and neighbor Dora Kaplan received citizenship certificates from JSS at the United Way Day of Caring citizenship party in September 1999.

Then they challenged volunteers to take the test, too!

Русский уголок Горд быть американцем

Каковы обязанности Конгресса? Назовите имена двух сенаторов Вашего штата. Назовите одно из прав, гарантированных Первой Поправкой.

Подобные вопросы (их можно найти на www.INS.gov) входят в состав экзамена, который обязан сдать каждый, желающий стать гражданином Соединенных Штатов. Если Вы проживаете в стране пять лет, Вы можете право подать документы на статус гражданина, на котором необходимо также продемонстрировать элементарное знание английского языка.

«Английский – самый тяжелый барьер, особенно для людей не говорящих на нем ежедневно. Это один из самых сложных для изучения языков, – считает Дженис Фиксель, Координатор в MJSS, женщина старшая магистр Лингвистики.

MJSS предоставляет учителя для подготовки к экзамену. Фадей Фейман занимается с желающими у них дома по часу один раз в неделю. Курсы длятся от шести месяцев до года. Дженис также предоставляет варианты теста всем желающим и помогает заполнить необходимые документы.

По вопросам, касающимся сдачи экзамена, звоните Дженис Фиксель по телефону 278-1808.

На фотографии: Евгения Александрова и ее лучшая подруга и соседка Дора Каплан получили от MJSS сертификаты о Гражданстве на празднике в сентябре 1999 года, посвященном его получению. Затем они вызвали волонтеров из теста, желающих сдать экзамен.

September 11: A day like no other

Most of us have experienced something which shatters our personal world. These crises tend to be the times when JSS is called upon to offer services. We cannot publish this issue without acknowledging how all of our lives were changed on September 11, and to let those who lost loved ones in the tragedy know how sorry we are.

We waited anxiously to hear word about the families of our own Stacy Schiff and Janice Fiksel, both of whom are from New Jersey. Mindful of so many Jewish students from the East Coast, Hillel called us to set up trauma counseling on campus. We would like to thank psychologists Michael Spierer, Dan Levin, and social worker Pam Olson for their quick and willing responses to join JSS staff on September 11th and 12th.

At the same time, JSS staff visited senior care facilities, checking in on people who had family in the New York area, and contacting their family members so we could reassure them that everyone was okay.

Even though it was a day like no other in the history of the world, in some respects it was a typical day at JSS. A new person in crisis walks through the door, and we do the work of caring.

Would You Like To Receive Connections In The Mail?

JSS *Connections* is published four times a year. If you’re not currently receiving it in the mail and would like to be, please call Sherry Minkus at 278-1808, or complete and mail this form to JSS, 6434 Enterprise Lane, Madison, WI 53719.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

How did you hear about *Connections*?

How *Connections* got its name

I'd like to tell you my JSS story. It's my "coming out," because during the four years I cared for my mom Sadye Berman and her Alzheimer's Disease, I kept the secret she couldn't bear to accept.

In January, 1997, I had never heard of Jewish Social Services, let alone set foot in a synagogue for twenty years, and I could count all my Jewish friends on one finger. But with one phone call from my mom in Florida, in the hospital, afraid and disoriented, I knew it was time to pull my head out of the sand and, as her only child, uproot her and move her to Madison.

But how to create a Jewish life for her? And connect with people who spoke Yiddish, the language of her childhood that was seeping more and more into her speech?

Enter Francie Smith Saposnik (Director of Senior Services)—the ray of sunshine that bathes anyone's particular storm. I felt so at home in her office, it jolted me when she brought up the sacredness of confidentiality. As a client of JSS, I was treated with the highest ethics, my situation, thoughts and feelings all closely guarded (very important because, remember, I was party to a big secret).

The extent of services we consumed was enormous. Francie even came to care plan visits to the senior residence, probably as much to temper my rage as to advocate for my mom. While JSS created a home for her here, they worked a wonderful alchemy in my life, now rich with Jewish friends.

When asked to help create this newsletter, I wrote a private little poem of appreciation; I'm humbled to share it with you.

— *Rachelle Richardson*

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Jewish Social Services of Madison

CONNECTIONS

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To JSS, In Gratitude

I arrived with my mother, stranger in a strange land.
I knew nothing of you, but I needed a hand.
An awful disease had stripped Mom of her reason
But her Jewishness beamed from her like a beacon.
In the space of a month, we made her a community
With Jewish friends, a psychologist and resources in unity.
Shabbat services, Lechayim, the Senior Seder –
She didn't want to go, but I made her.
After some time, she felt somewhat at home.
I was so grateful that she wasn't alone.

What I didn't expect from this transformation
Was my very own migration
Back to Judaism from assimilation.

Connections like I hadn't felt in thirty years,
Connections sung in joy and wept in loving tears,
Connections to a journey without fear.

And on the night my mother died,
I was flanked by those connections,
Hand-in-hand, side-by-side.

Now what draws me back, what nourishes me
Is a healing *Mi Sheberach* of empathy
And profound connections yet to be.

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