

# Tri-Valley Cultural Jews:

Your East Bay Secular Humanistic Jewish Community

(925) 485-1049

Tri-ValleyCulturalJews.org

CulturalJews@aol.com



Affiliated with the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations  
Our mission statement: "A Secular Humanistic community serving those who identify with the Jewish People through family, culture and history, rather than through religion."



## Upcoming Events for July 2011

**Wednesday, July 6:** 7:30 p.m. Planning meeting. 1817 Sinclair Drive in Pleasanton. All members invited.

**Saturday, July 30:** 3:00-7:00 p.m. Family havdalah and pool party at the Looney's. Bring an appetizer to share and \$6.00 per adult for pizza. Call 510-888-1404 for more information.

**Coming up: September Movie Night.** Our movie in June, *Life is Beautiful*, was memorable. Be sure to look for the next one in September. This is open to all members!

Ad hoc fall holiday pick-up band and chorus. If you like to sing and/or play an instrument and you're planning on attending our Rosh Hashanah and/or Yom Kippur observances, you might like to join our ad hoc holiday pick-up band and chorus. We'll get you the music and will have a couple of rehearsals prior to the events. We will lead most of the songs, but we might actually perform one that most people won't know at each holiday. Interested? Let us know by calling 925-485-1049 or e-mailing [CulturalJews@aol.com](mailto:CulturalJews@aol.com).

## Jewish Culture School - on summer vacation

Our trip to Angel Island was postponed due to the weather. No one wanted to cancel, but we all decided that walking around in the rain and possible thunder storms did not sound like fun. Fortunately, our pre-paid ferry trip and entrance fee can be used for a future trip. Look for more information as we reschedule the trip for the fall.

### Message from the President

In other parts of this newsletter, you will read about Levi's Bar Mitzvah experience. As Levi's dad, I can say that his experience will be nothing like mine. I took 4 years of Hebrew School, memorized a bunch of stuff, "performed" my Bar Mitzvah, and had a party. Levi's experience will be far more meaningful for him and me.

### Mishpokha (family)

Happy July birthdays! Be sure to send us news of your family.

## Didja know?

You probably know that the entertainment business has a lot of Jews. But did you know that magic is a Jewish occupation? According to a great exhibit at the Skirball museum, during the "golden age of magic" (who knew there even *was* a golden age of magic??), many, many Jews were prominent in the field. Houdini, of course, was one, but there were many more. One Jewish family, the Bambergers, had magic as the family business for six generations! The famous magicians Okito and Fu Manchu were really Bambergers!

## Who We Are

President	Kevin Coren 925-240-5612
Board Members	Judith Seid 925-485-1049 Phyllis Looney 925-803-0574 Jamie Ireland 510-888-1404
Newsletter	Marisa Castaldini 925-240-5612 Phyllis Looney 925-803-0574 Ed Looney 925-803-0574
Webmasters	Noah King 925-371-8585 Solomon Ireland 510-888-1404
JCS Teachers	Judith Seid, Jamie Ireland
Phone Chair	Phyllis Looney
Family Shabbat/Havdalah Coordinator	– Jamie Ireland
Publicity	Kristie Wang. 925-596-0416
Movie Coordinator	Wendy Berenson 925-829-0554

## This Summer in Jewish History

This summer is the 50th anniversary of the freedom rides in Alabama and Mississippi. Freedom Riders were black and non-black, primarily young people, who went south to integrate trains, busses and even airplanes. They were arrested and held in jails in terrible conditions for weeks at a time. Somewhere between half and two-thirds of all non-black freedom riders were Jewish. One was San Diego congressman Bob Filner. The Jewish Women's Archive has some stories of Jewish women active in the civil rights movement at <http://jwa.org/discover/infocus/civilrights/rides.html>.

## In The Community

East Bay Int'l Jewish Film Festival will run screenings of the popular Israeli television series *Srugim* on three consecutive Thursdays in July. *Srugim* follows the romantic life of six 30-somethings in Jerusalem as they look for love in all the wrong places. What: Episodes 8–15, Year 2 of *Srugim*. When: **July 7, 14 and 28 at 7:30 PM**. Where: Contra Costa JCC, 2071 Tice Valley Boulevard in Walnut Creek. Admission: \$10; \$5 for 2011 Festival pass holders. Tickets are available at the door.

View the new documentary, *BETWEEN TWO WORLDS*, a personal essay film about the American Jewish culture wars. **July 28 in San Francisco** at the Castro Theater and **August 3 in Berkeley** at the Roda Theater as part of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival - <http://www.sjfff.org/>. The Castro Screening will be followed by a panel discussion with special guests. Journalist Gershon Gorenberg wrote in *The American Prospect*: "As you watch [the film], you'll feel compelled to ask whether you have ever pushed facts or questions aside to keep your ideals uncomplicated."

[http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=antidissent\\_disorder](http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=antidissent_disorder). You can find more information about the film and the trailer at the website: [www.btwthemovie.org](http://www.btwthemovie.org).

## **Why a Bar Mitzvah? A Parent's Perspective**

When Levi was born, we had to have the “circumcism discussion.” Having already decided that we probably wouldn’t raise him Jewish, because we had not found a Jewish community in San Jose we were comfortable with, it was not a given one way or the other. It was the beginning of our realization, though, that these types of discussions might continue to be had as he, and then Michelle, grew. Then we found TVCJ which showed us that we could, in fact, raise the kids with an identity and an appreciation for their Jewish roots.

In the last year, as Levi turned 11 then 12, we started thinking about whether or not he would have a bar mitzvah. He was not thrilled with the unknown idea. But for Kevin, whose grandfather, father, brother, cousins, etc. had all had bar mitzvahs, it was an expected part of growing up. I was raised Catholic, and never had any inkling that my grandfather was Jewish and had been bar mitzvahed as a child in the Hebrew Orphan Home, or that his siblings had raised their children Jewish. Not having been raised Jewish, I can’t say I ever felt that we were raising the kids in a “Jewish household.” Our household is a combination of how we were both raised, although any holidays I grew up with like Easter and Christmas, are now secular for us. The bar mitzvah feels like a very tangible, identifiable, Jewish tradition, and we decided that we felt it was simply a part of being Jewish.

If Levi had really protested, would we have made him do it? No, that’s not our style. But we discussed what it meant to us and his grandparents and that it would give him a great sense of accomplishment. It is one of those things you only appreciate afterwards, as during the program you’re seeing it through the eyes of a 12-year old with other things to do. Fortunately, protesting is not Levi’s style; so he is going along with it.

So far, it has been a good experience. The 30-hours of community service made us look for ways to volunteer as a family, something we had wanted to do anyway. We found a group called LITA (Love is the Answer, [info@litaofcontracosta.org](mailto:info@litaofcontracosta.org), (510) 527-2055 or (925) 212-4573) which links individuals and families with convalescent homes who are looking for volunteers. Levi spent a week as a camp counselor at the Lindsey Wildlife Museum in Walnut Creek and really enjoyed it. We have continued our tradition of cleaning up Marsh Creek on family walks. Academically, Levi did a project on the Jews during Roman times. This summer, he is working on a project about the history of Jews and the comics. When 7<sup>th</sup> grade starts, he’ll see what the social studies themes are and plan projects around them. He will also be visiting YiddishAcademy.com to learn more about the Yiddish language.

It may not be the bar mitzvah of our cousins, but that’s not our style anyway. It will be a meaningful experience that helps Levi connect with his roots and has already helped him grow as a young man. We are proud of his decision to be willing to experience something new. When I asked him how it’s been, his answer, “It could be worse” is a good sign that while he’s growing up, he is still a 12-year old, not quite willing to admit he could possibly be enjoying some of this! We know he is!

~Marisa Castaldini (Levi’s mom)

## **Bar Mitzvah - a Student's Experience**

My name is Levi Coren, and I am doing community service for my bar mitzvah. One of the things I am doing is taking my dog to a convalescent hospital. We have gone about six times now, and I record every visit. The people there love her. On our most recent trip, something excellent happened. First, we gave a photo of my dog, Willow, to a woman who had wanted to take her picture with her phone the week before. She was recovering from a stroke and got out on the Saturday after that. She was very happy to receive the photo. The biggest thing was that we took Willow to the main room. There was someone there who, on all previous attempts, was unresponsive when we asked if she would like to pet Willow. This time she petted her for at least ten minutes! It made us feel good.

## In the Jewish Community

**Sunday, July 10, 2:00pm-4:00pm, Yiddish Sing-Along at a private home in Oakland.** Sing-Along combined with the bi-monthly meeting of the KlezCalifornia *Flisik Salon*, but you don't need to speak Yiddish to come and sing! Donation requested. More info: [info@klezcalifornia.org](mailto:info@klezcalifornia.org).

**July 21 - August 8. This year's San Francisco Jewish Film Festival** includes two films of particular interest to KlezCalifornia members: A new documentary, *Sholem Aleichem: Laughing in the Darkness*, and *Tevye*, the 1939 classic with Maurice Schwartz. KlezCalifornia co-presents these films. More info: [sfjff.org](http://sfjff.org).

**Sunday, July 31, 1:00-3:00pm. Monthly Klezmer Brunch, at Porto Franco Art Parlor, San Francisco.** Hear The Gonifs perform rocking klezmer music and Yiddish songs. Second floor; no elevator. Admission and vegan food for sliding scale donation, \$0-\$100. Reservations recommended. Tickets: [porto francoart.com](http://porto francoart.com). More info: [sergei@porto francoart.com](mailto:sergei@porto francoart.com).

**San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society Lecture and Meeting, Sunday, July 17, 2011** Congregation Beth Israel-Judea, 625 Brotherhood Way, San Francisco, CA 94132, (just off the beginning of I-280, next to Brandeis Hillel Day School). Doors open 12:30 p.m. Program begins 1:00 p.m.

Topic: Tracing Family Treasure to Reclaim Lost Family Heritage, Speaker: Linda Frank

"*After the Auction*" follows a woman's search for an antique seder plate looted by the Nazis, a quest that leads to threats, murder, the revelation of a diabolical deal, and romance. Author Linda Frank will talk about the fictional story of her book and about the real history behind it.

The meeting is free and everyone is welcome to attend. For more information visit <http://www.sfbajgs.org/>.

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Pleasanton, CA 94588

