

Tri-Valley Cultural Jews:

Your East Bay Secular Humanistic Jewish Community

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Tri-ValleyCulturalJews.org

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<http://trivalleyculturaljews.wordpress.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."



July and August 2015

TVCJ Community Event Dates

Planning Meeting: Tuesday, July 14, 7:30-9:00 pm, at the Greenbergs', 4698 Shearwater Rd, Pleasanton.

Community Shabbat: Friday, July 24, 6-8 pm, at the Kings', 5210 Diane Ln, Livermore. A little ceremony, pizza and hanging out. Everyone gets home in time for bed. \$7 for adults, kids eat free.

TVCJ goes to the ball game: Jewish Night at the Oakland A's, August 4. See the Evite and respond by July 1.

Community Havdalah Ice Cream Social: Saturday, August 22. 4 pm - ? Site TBA, it will be a park.

10th Anniversary and First Day of JCS Kick-off: Sunday, August 30, 10:30 am – 12:00 pm. A kumzits – a singing and dancing party. We'll teach easy Yiddish, Hebrew and English songs and some easy Israeli and Yiddish dances. Fun for all ages. Come and see what TVCJ is all about; learn about our Jewish Culture School and our adult programs. No charge for anyone.

Upcoming dates for your calendar:

September 13, Rosh Hashana

September 22, Yom Kippur

September 27, Sukkot

Jewish Culture School Sundays

10:30 am -12:30 pm

moving to Pleasanton for
the 2015-2016 year

Music, dance, history, crafts,
language, literature and
cooking. Interested for your
kids or grandkids? Call us!

Who We Are

President	Kevin Coren 925-240-5612
Board Members	Judith Seid 925-485-1049 Jamie Ireland 510-888-1404 Noah King 925-371-8585 Amy Greenberg
Newsletter	Marisa Castaldini 925-240-5612
Webmasters	Noah King 925-371-8585
JCS Teachers	Judith Seid, Jamie Ireland
Family Shabbat/Havdalah Coordinator –	Amy Greenberg
Publicity	open
Movie Coordinator	Wendy Berenson 925-829-0554
Adult Programming	Karen Furst

Our Jewish Culture School Students Recommend JCS!

Some of our all-time favorite JCS activities are singing Jewish songs and cooking Jewish foods (including Israeli chop salad, hummus and applesauce cake). We do these around a different theme each year, which for this past year was Israel. Some of our other memorable lessons included: Yon Hardisty and Moses Gates coming to talk about life in Israel, learning the aleph bet and Hebrew phrases and writing to pen pals in Ashdod, Israel.

We learned about multicultural life in Israel which Ella equated to a box of crayons- because of all the different types of people that live there. We also learned about creating utopian societies and in small groups the students created their own kibbutzim.

Please join us for the upcoming year as explore new topics in Jewish Culture School.

Classes will be held at the Seid/Gates home, 1817 Sinclair Dr. in Pleasanton.

Calling all Preschoolers!

TVCJ is starting a new PRESCHOOL program to explore the Jewish holidays in a secular way. Holiday crafts, activities and food. Apples and Honey for the new year!

A great way to spend Grandparent's Day- bring your grandparents along to do crafts together.

First session: Sunday- Sept.13 10:30-11:30 at the Ireland Home-19663 Fremery Ct. Castro Valley
Call 510-888-1404 if you have questions and to let us know you're coming.

Teen Group

Become founding members of the teen group! Meet once a month for socializing over dinner and learning together about various religions. Recommended ages 12-16. Dates and locations TBA.

Members' Corner

Book Review

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother

By James McBride

Report by Levi Coren

McBride's book is semi-autobiographical, as the chapters alternate between the young life of the author and the life of his mother. Rachel Deborah Shilsky was a part of a Jewish family that included her sister, her disabled mother, and her father, who was a traveling rabbi before settling down in Suffolk, Virginia and opening a store. The chapters of Rachel's story detail a dysfunctional family life centered around her father, a cruel, money-oriented, and prejudiced man nicknamed "Old Man Shilsky" by neighbors. Periodic escapes to New York to work with her mother's family acted as Rachel's saving grace, and she eventually left the family and struck out on her own. The result of this is a painful break from her family, who said *kaddish* for her and considered her dead. Ruth then describes meeting her future husband, a black man named Andrew McBride, and the difficulties with their marriage, culminating in his death and her meeting her second husband, another black man named Hunter Jordan.

In the alternate chapters, James McBride describes life as one of the many middle siblings in his own family, raised almost solely by Ruth. He describes the experience of being a black child with a white mother, and trying to make sense of that and being unable to, not helped by his mother, who avoided the subject. McBride talks about the death of his step-father, Hunter Jordan Sr., and the downward path that his life took, and pulling out of that. He describes the journey of trying to figure out his mother's life.

The two stories make an interesting parallel. Both mother and son try to escape their homes and young lives for something bigger or better. Ruth searches for a more accepting community, which she finds in the black community. James searches for his mother's story, which is a part of his own story. Towards the end of the book, James describes his events returning to Suffolk and visiting the synagogue and meeting his mother's neighbors. Perhaps most interestingly, while the book does not portray Judaism in a particularly positive light, the experience that Ruth had bears similarities to the repeated collective experience of the Jews, where oppression and pain kept them bound in one place before evicting them to go on to brighter futures, evolving as necessary to either fit in or make a place to fit in.

Mishpoka (Family)

Happy July and August birthdays to Solomon Ireland, Jamie Ireland, Noah King, and Isaac Passovoy

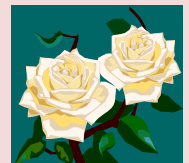
In July and August we remember:

Bunny Simmel, grandmother of Solomon Ireland, great-grandmother of Sophia and Rebecca Ireland,

Allen Coren, father of Kevin Coren, Grandfather of Michelle and Levi Coren,

John Gates, father of David Gates,

Lou Garcia, husband of Wendy Berenson Garcia



Mazel Tov
Sierra Randel
on your Bat Mitzvah

Sierra's Bat Mitzvah was held July 20 at a lovely spot in Hayward, the Hayward Japanese Gardens; the oldest Japanese gardens in California with a traditional design.

The ceremony was held in the adjacent Senior Center with family, friends, and community members. Sierra presented her Bat Mitzvah projects about Jewish literature, the Black Plague and her Torah portion discussing the use of animal sacrifice in Jewish rituals. After the ceremony we danced out the door and into the gardens, where we strolled and enjoyed the beauty of the gardens.



Oy! Hello, Dolly!

Our very own father and son thespian duo, Kevin and Levi Coren, are at it again, this time in Hello Dolly. Presented by The Brentwood Theater Company.

If you are interested in seeing the show, tickets can be purchased at the door or at www.thebrentwoodtheater.org.

Show dates are weekends, Friday July 17 through Aug 2. Liberty High School 850 2nd St. Brentwood

Message from the President

TVCJ got another chance this last month to celebrate a Bat Mitzvah. This is the third time we've been able to have this kind of celebration. I really enjoyed Sierra's Bat Mitzvah. I enjoy hearing about the different things related to our culture.

I particularly enjoyed hearing about the black plague and its relationship to further persecution of the Jews. The irony of the situation was amazing. The Jews were blamed for the plague partly because they suffered from it far less than other groups, but it was their customs that kept them from contracting the deadly disease. They bathed weekly and cleaned their dead before burying them, so the disease was less likely to spread. Further irony, I suppose would be that if these groups had decided to join the Jews instead of persecute them, they would have also been less likely to be stricken with the disease. Of course that didn't happen. The people then were ruled by their prejudices and would rather attack things that were different rather than learn about them. Although we have come a long way since that time, for many, that same attitude persists today.

Everybody had a good time, it was a beautiful day in a wonderful setting and it was nice to see so many of the Randels' family and friends join us as well. We are looking forward to the next one for Emma Greenberg. Who's after that?

Carrots with Lemon Tahini Dressing

- Preheat oven to 450
- Cut 5 lbs. of carrots into 1 inch pieces
- toss with olive oil to coat, roast in baking pan 30-60 minutes until al dente and beginning to caramelize around the edges, cool slightly
- Dressing:
 - 1/4 cup olive oil
 - 1/4 cup tahini
 - 1/4 cup lemon juice
 - 4 cloves garlic minced
 - 1 tsp kosher salt
- Whisk ingredients together, toss with carrots and 2 T chopped parsley
- Serve at room temperature.
- Contributed by Tom Green

July from KlezCalifornia

Monday, July 6, 7:00-8:30pm, *Bubeh Maysez: A History of the Yiddish Language*, with Ken Blady. Tickets: \$8 / free for members; register for course H300-BJ. More info: 415.276.1506, lehrhaus.org.
At JCC East Bay, Berkeley

Friday July 10, 8:00-11:00pm, Majorly Minor (new group) featuring Naomi Zamir and others, playing klezmer and East European music for the Stanford International Folk Dancers. Dancing led by Karen Bergen. At First Baptist Church, Palo Alto

Sunday, July 19, 4:00pm, Songs of Love and Summer, with Nigunim Chorus. An afternoon of love songs in Hebrew, English, Yiddish and Ladino. More info: Facebook.
At JCC East Bay, Berkeley

Wednesday, July 22, 7:00-8:00pm, Klezmer Creek performance followed by jam. Fourth Wednesday Klezmer Nights. Entertainment free with \$5 minimum purchase. More info: 707.544.2491, Gaia's Garden. At Gaia's Garden, Santa Rosa

Thursday, July 23 - Sunday, August 9, San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. More info: San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.

Interfaith Interconnect

Intercultural Communication Program on August 9 from 7:00 to 9:00 PM.

This program will teach you to understand and communicate more effectively with people of different cultures, religions, and/or socio-economic backgrounds. In today's multicultural society, daily interactions at work and in the community are becoming increasingly more intercultural. Dr. Sasha Arjannikova, a consultant specializing in diversity, will be our program facilitator."

Contact
interfaith.interconnect@gmail.com

TVCJ - Annual Meeting 6/7/15

If you missed the annual meeting, you missed a great discussion. Here are the highlights:

The budget was reviewed and projected income versus expenses continues to be a concern. We reviewed membership fees and tuition (main source of revenue) – a motion agreed to increase rates to \$150/single household and \$225/family. Reviewed school fees and Bat/Bar Mitzvah prep fees; no changes made at this time. We will need different revenues and/or look into expenses. Some ideas included a preschool program, paid ad on Facebook, charging more for events that are at paid locations, and rotating teaching duties. No firm plans were made except for the above membership fee increase and the preschool program. Escript - we get a small amount of money from this, and it's free to sign up; have to do this each year and designate TVCJ as a recipient. Amazon Smile - a way to get revenue - Jamie will look into this. Along the lines of budget, bank signers Noah and Judy will continue in this role.

Ideas for our 10th anniversary were kicked around and it was decided to combine our usual First Day activities with an anniversary kick off. It was suggested to do a singing/dancing event; Israeli group will perform for free - Judy to confirm and ensure they will do secular music; suggest doing it at Bothwell. We need publicity, possibly a Facebook ad, post on Nextdoor Neighbor; JCC, Articles in local paper - Noah has contact at the Independent; Karen has a contact, use of Mail Chimp.

JCS - families will rotate to help with clean up after class - Many thanks to Jamie and Solomon for opening their home for this. JCS now moves to the Seid-Gates Home.

Havdalah Sign up - reviewed some of the positive elements and stressors of hosting these events. Several families expressed the challenge of hosting this event (many homes cannot accommodate the number of attendees) - ideas to address this - have event at a set location; families who host can have their event out in the community (walks or meet at a park).

As Game - Members agreed that we should go on Jewish Heritage night versus a different game. Solomon will take the lead and send out information about getting tickets.

Camping - a planning meeting has been set up and each family who is attending has 1 rep come to review the event. Thanks to Amy for helping get this organized.

Recognitions -

Noah - Web King

Amy - PR Queen

Marisa - Newsletter

Jamie and Judy - Culture School teachers

Karen - Taking on Adult programs

Other topics of discussion included: Board Elections - Kevin, Judy, Jamie, Amy, Karen and Noah will remain on the board, Teen Class - 12-16 year old 1x month at Judy's home; have food and educational program. Need more participants. Leah indicated that she would help set up a hiking group. Board Insurance - Judy will look into rates and getting Board Insurance too (it turns out it's already a party of our policy). We have a poster display - thanks to Marisa for putting this together! Last, we reviewed the survey results on adult activities.

It was a very productive annual meeting and we appreciate everyone's participation. Please consider joining us next year and sharing your views on how to continue TVCJ.

The SECOND ANNUAL SHAVUOT BOOK REVIEW

KIDS

Sofia enjoyed the book *The Chocolate Lab* by Eric Luper. She shared a book about animals last year, as well – We know she’s an animal lover!

Adam read the book *Simon Bloom, the Gravity Keeper* by Michael Reisman, about a sixth grader who finds a book allowing him to control the laws of physics. Of course he runs into some bad guys who want to steal the book back, and he has to use some fancy formulas and some help from his friends to thwart their evil plans. This is the first in a series.

Becca read *How to Speak Dolphin* by Ginny Rorby. Lily has an autistic brother Adam who doesn’t speak. They meet a friend who is blind named Zoe. She bonds with Adam and tells him they can speak dolphin. They try to help Nori, a dolphin with cancer who needs to be released from captivity. Adam goes in the water with Nori and she even lets him ride her.

Becca also recommended the *The Brilliant Fall of Gianna Z.* by Kate Messner.

Sierra reminded us of the wonderful book *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. This is the story of a very spoiled girl named Mary, whose nannies do everything for her. When a disease wipes out everyone on her estate, she goes to live with her reclusive uncle, where the maid forces her to become more self-reliant. She discovers a neglected garden and brings it back to life with the help of a new friend, and teaches her sickly and spoiled cousin to be more like her.

Emma shared *Paper Towns* by John Green. (His book *The Fault in Our Stars* was shared last year.) The main character Quentin (or Q) adores his mysterious neighbor Margo, who loves to go out on adventures. After Margo disappears, Q searches her room for clues. He and a few friends leave to search for her and have to deal with complex friendship issues as they travel together. The movie version of this book will be out in July... always read the book first!

ADULTS

Amy shared *The Interestings* by Meg Wolitzer (who happens to come from Amy’s hometown). The book starts with a group of young kids who meet at camp, and follows them into adulthood. The story takes place in the always-fascinating 80s, with lots of details AIDS, relationships, wealth, and jealousy.

Amy also recommends *Steal Like an Artist* by Austin Kleon. This isn’t a novel – it’s a motivational book for staying inspired in art and creativity. Amy keeps this guide with her (and she is quite a talented artist, so you know it must be good).

David read *How the Hippies Saved Physics* by David Kaiser. This is about a new breed of physicists, beginning with the Fundamental Physics Club in Berkeley. Physics was revolutionized from the nerdy, pocket-protector types to a “spooky science,” a conjunction of expanding consciousness and physics. David also shared *The Art of Dress: Clothes Through History 1500-1914* by Jane Ashelford. A book about fashion? That David is full of surprises! He liked reading about what someone’s attire revealed about their class and position, including the “stomacher” that went over the midsection like armor (only for women, of course). This is an interesting read about the culture and psychology of the time.

Debby told us about *The True Meaning of Smekday* by Adam Rex. It’s a well-written, fun, engaging story about a girl with an assignment to tell about Smekday, involving aliens coming to Earth, and of course lots of adventure. This is a science fiction book for about 4th/5th grade on up, but a good story for any age.

Debby also shared *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi. It’s an easy read about a woman born and raised in Nigeria. She moves to the U.S. for school and work and then returns home. The story is about her work and education, and how she sees different cultures.

Other recommendations from Debby:

Ancillary Justice by Ann Leckie – sci-fi, with a female protagonist

Predictably Irrational by Dan Ariely – behavioral economics

Jamie shared *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* by Laurie King. This is a Sherlock Holmes story, which takes place in 1915, but is a modern-day story. A 15-year-old girl meets up with Sherlock and helps him solve crimes.

Derek has been kept busy reading ALL the Sherlock Holmes he could find, as he was told he needed background before reading *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*.

He also shared the original *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie, which he warns is very different than the Disney version. About two-thirds of the way through the book, Derek realized "I've been had!" and that the author had been one step ahead of him all along, so that he had to go back to see how the story made sense. What a mystery!

Another Derek recommendation was *Devil in the White City* – Erik Larson. This takes place in the Edwardian era, when "everyone has gout" according to Derek. It's a rewarding, fun book.

Noah shared *The Golem and the Jinni* by Helene Wecker. The author is Jewish, and her husband is Arab, so her book combines their folklore in a beautiful way. In 1899, a man traveling to America from Europe commissions a golem to become his wife. He dies on the ship, sending the golem alone to New York. Then a tinsmith in New York discovers a jinni (genie), who crosses paths with the golem and forms a friendship.

The second recommendation from Noah was *The Martian* by Andy Weir. This is *Robinson Crusoe* on Mars: During the 3rd manned mission to Mars, a dust storm causes evacuation, but leaves someone behind, presumed dead. After waking up, he realizes he has to figure out how to survive until the next mission arrives in four years.

Levi took on the daunting *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. Quixote believes he is a knight, convinces his friend Sancho Panza to be his squire, and they go off on adventures. The book bounces from one little story to another, and Levi was surprised at how funny a 16th century book was. The 2nd part takes place about 10 years later, when a student visits Quixote to talk to him about the book written about him.

Tom shared *The Hungry Years* by T.H. Watkins, a history of the Great Depression.

Watkins is a great writer and tells a great story from the ground level: not the legislation or world events, but the life of the people on the street. Watkins' father was a labor organizer, so the story's point of view is the working person and the working conditions (or lack thereof) of the time.

Sara shared *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell. It is a lot of stories put together to show that what you think you see at first isn't reality. It starts with the story of a statue that the Getty Museum believes to be real, but turns out to be a fake. The book goes into the psychology behind the stories – a good psychology read that's user-friendly, without a lot of academic terms.

Carol shared *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr. This novel separately follows two young lives at the end of World War II: a young, blind French girl hiding with her father, and an orphaned German boy who is talented in radio technology, forced to serve in the Hitler Youth. Their lives remarkably intertwine, and the book spans into modern day.

Carol also just finished *The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown. This incredibly well-written and well-researched book tells the story of the 1936 Berlin Olympics gold medal crew team from the University of Washington.

Alynda read many books by the author Jude Deveraux. The author starts back in the 1400s, and brings the stories through to the 1600s, following the same families.

Further books move all the way to the 21st century, still intertwining all these relatives together, from the Highlands to New York. Her research is quite in depth.

Alynda is now reading *A God in Ruins* by Kate Atkinson.

Kevin read *Focus* by Daniel Goleman. This book talks about how people focus (or don't). The author tells us that 90% of our thoughts are daydreaming and deals with issues around maintaining focus (for kids and adults), addresses the myth of multitasking, and gives exercises we can use to help improve focus, although it's not a how-to book.

Kevin also read *The Rise and Fall of the Great American Education System* and *Reign of Error* by Diane Ravitch. These deal with so-called education "reform" – the author argues that it isn't based in reality. While we have lately been focusing (ha!) on our world ranking, this doesn't give us a whole picture of how we're doing in educating our kids.

Joy shared *Pack of Two* by Caroline Knapp, about the relationship between people and their dogs. The author lost her parents, became an alcoholic, and was pulled back to life by the stray dog she took in. She interviews dog behaviorists, trainers, and psychologists about influence of dogs on people. The book talks about the many people dogs help, including the handicapped and people with PTSD and other psychological disorders.

Wendy shared *Driving with the Top Down* by Beth Harbison. This is an easy read (or easy listen, if you prefer audio books) about a woman who is unsatisfied with her life and marriage, and goes on an extended road trip. She is forced to take on her brother-in-law's juvenile delinquent daughter, and while they have a troubled relationship at first they learn to enjoy each other's company.

Solomon shared *The Circle* by Dave Eggers. This is a short dystopian parable about modern lack of privacy. A woman working at a Facebook-type job "drinks the Koolaid" at her company, posting and tracking everything, and has to make a choice about whether this is what she wants.

Solomon also shared *Sarah's Key* by Tatiana de Rosnay. The book is set in Paris in early 2000s, when the news is covering the 60th anniversary of the deportation of Jews from Paris. It goes into a flashback of a girl who was deported, following her story into present-day.

Judy shared *Mudbound* by Hillary Jordan. This book is told from the point of view of a white southerner, returning from WWII with experiences that make him question his upbringing and how things are in the South.