

Chesed



A foster parenthood inspires a heartfelt donation



Leo Slonim wasn't surprised to learn that Ilana Horowitz Perez died of an overdose at the age of 34. Ilana had come into his family's life when she was ten — one of nine children whose parents couldn't manage her care — and stayed until her *bat mitzvah*.

Ilana arrived just after the death of a younger sister. Leo recalls how Ilana was traumatized not only by the loss of a family member, but also by the anonymity of her sibling's burial: no monument was ever placed on the child's grave.

"Ilana trembled at the thought that she too could die without

anybody to mourn her or mark her grave," Leo told HFBA. "I promised her that would never happen."

Over the next 22 years, Ilana reached out to Leo every now and then for financial help. Unbeknownst to him, Ilana also used his name as a reference on her apartment lease. That's why the apartment management company could inform him about Ilana's death.

Leo never anticipated getting drawn back into Ilana's life — and certainly not into her death. "But now that she was back in our lives, I felt the need to do something on her behalf," Leo said.

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A widow speaks from the heart: "If only I had known about HFBA"

We offer hope of a traditional Jewish option

Sheila Nilva's husband did not have an easy death. A series of illnesses began with lymphoma, progressed to four bouts of COVID, moved on to RSV and concluded with a rare incurable condition called hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH). "Nobody expected him to get so sick and to die so fast," Sheila told HFBA.

Rob Nilva's rapid decline, as well as unforeseen financial stresses, played a role in his cremation.

Before Rob's death, Sheila's mother announced she wanted to be buried in a mausoleum. At her mother's insistence, Sheila purchased three mausoleums in a Florida cemetery: one for her mother, one for herself, and one for her husband. These were in addition to two remaining burial plots in New Jersey, originally purchased in the 1940s.

To Sheila's surprise, her mother changed her mind: now she wanted to be buried in one of the two plots.

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TO DONATE TO HFBA, VISIT [HTTPS://WWW.HEBREWFREEBURIAL.ORG/DONATE/](https://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate/)

Continued from front page

A foster family pays it forward

At about the same time Leo learned of Ilana's death, he spoke with a friend in hospice who was worried about paying \$7,000 for his grave. Leo was stunned by the high cost of a funeral.

Here for a higher purpose

He was at a loss as to what he could do for Ilana. A friend advised him to contact Misaskim, a Jewish organization that addresses care for the deceased and provides services for the bereaved. The Misaskim representative Leo spoke with told him about HFBA.

When HFBA undertook all arrangements for Ilana's burial — including the job of verifying Ilana's

converso and Jewish ancestry — Leo recognized just how powerful the Jewish community was when it came together to support HFBA.

"Given the economics of an American burial, I saw it was incumbent on me to support HFBA," Leo said.

It wasn't until Ilana's burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery that Leo fully appreciated what a donation to HFBA meant.

"Around 20 people, including Ilana's mother, biological father and four siblings, attended the funeral at Mount Richmond Cemetery," Leo said. "Some of the siblings started squabbling with

each other, but Ilana's mother and father reminded them that they were at Mount Richmond for a higher purpose. Then it hit me: HFBA changed the lives of an entire family by giving Ilana the burial she deserved."

Nobody can predict whose funeral Leo's donation to HFBA will enable.

"All I know is that somebody paid it forward for Ilana, and now I was paying it forward for somebody else," Leo said. "Ilana's family had peace of mind, and now my family did too." ■

All names in this story are pseudonyms.

Continued from front page

Widow wishes she'd known about HFBA

"I never wanted to put Rob in a mausoleum," Sheila said. "But three people don't fit into two burial plots. I felt awkward discussing my mother's change of heart with him. Instead, I spoke with my son and daughter-in-law. They agreed: 'Dad would say to do the cheapest thing.' That meant cremation.

"Cremation went against everything I believe in," Sheila said. "To this day, it bothers me a lot that we went this route."

Sheila wishes she had known about Hebrew Free Burial Association during her husband's lifetime.

After Rob's cremation, a friend told Sheila about the traditional burial services HFBA has provided the Jewish community since 1888. She also learned that when a loved one's official cause-of-death includes COVID, HFBA helps the bereaved apply for burial grant money through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Although she cannot undo what's done, Sheila believes she has gained a broader understanding of her options.



Rob and Sheila Nilva. Sheila wishes she had known about HFBA before her husband died.

"I can't roll back time," she said. "But I take comfort in knowing that what HFBA did for our ancestors, they do today for anyone in need. Nobody should ever feel boxed into a corner." ■

Clean-up day opens young volunteers' eyes to HFBA mission

A field trip to Mount Richmond Cemetery is part of a Hebrew school lifecycle project



The fifth-grade Hebrew school class of Congregation Beth Israel, Scotch Plains, NJ, takes part in a funeral at HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery.

Fifth-graders are a common sight throughout the year at Mount Richmond Cemetery. They come primarily to do the hands-on work of clearing away debris left behind in the wake of summer and winter storms. Less common, however, are fifth-graders who arrive to tidy up and attend funerals, many of them for people who might have ended up in City Cemetery if not for HFBA. One Sunday in April found the fifth-grade Hebrew school class of Congregation Beth Israel as participants — along with their parents — at two funerals in which the deceased received a traditional burial that is every Jew's due.

The pre-Passover trip was part of a lifecycle project at the Scotch Plains, NJ, religious school designed to examine birth, *brit milah*, baby namings, *b'nei mitzvot*, death and mourning. It came about thanks to fifth-grade teacher Lou Sobo, who was surprised to learn that an organization like HFBA was located so close to Scotch Plains.

He reached out to HFBA assistant director Rabbi Efreim Reis and found out more about the role HFBA plays in ensuring that every Jew, regardless of ability to pay, is given an honorable burial.

"We couldn't anticipate how poignant our visit to Mount Richmond would be," Beth Israel's Rabbi Howard Tilman told HFBA. "Children and parents were present at the funerals of people without family or synagogue affiliation, people, who, sadly, lay for weeks in the Medical Examiner's office before being cleared for burial."

On hand was James Donofrio, licensed director for Capitol Funeral Service of New York, who responded frankly to student and parent concerns about the operations involved in HFBA's mission.

HFBA funeral director speaks frankly

"We were glad Mr. Donofrio could explain the technical details involved in burying people," said Rabbi Tilman. "Where people are buried, where the gravestones come from, why the need for a tractor, how a grave gets filled in, etc. The students appreciated having someone with expertise explain what has to happen to make a burial possible."

Speaking on behalf of the parents, Dave Levenson said he hadn't known anything about the cemetery or HFBA's purpose.

"I had no idea that an organization like HFBA existed and could search databases to help identify Jews who needed a proper burial," Levenson told HFBA. "My son was just as astonished to find out what effort goes into identifying a fellow Jew who may have been invisible to the Jewish community."

Levenson admits to being surprised that the fifth-grade curriculum focused on such profound lifecycle events. "At the end of the day, I was really happy that we all got to experience the ritual and HFBA's volunteer *minyán*," he said.

Students and parents stayed on to tend children's graves, some of them going back to 1909.

"*Chesed shel emet* has a special impact on you when you experience it in person," Levenson said. ■

May you enjoy the blessings of a good new year

The days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are known as the Ten Days of Repentance (*Aseret Yamei Teshuva*). They give us time to reflect on who we've become and how we want to live our lives. If we've had a good year, we can't help but wonder, "Why am I so blessed? How can I share my bounty with my brethren — *Am Yisrael?*"

From all of us at HFBA, we wish you a new year of good health, prosperity, and peace.



РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

Приемные родители делают щедрое пожертвование

Лео Слоним был не слишком удивлен, узнав, что Илана Хоровиц-Перес умерла в 34 года от передозировки. Задолго до этого десятилетняя Илана появилась в его семье и прожила с ними до своей бат-мицвы. Илана – одна из девяти детей из неблагополучных семей, которых Слонимы принимали на несколько лет.

Лео вспоминает, как Илана в то время переживала из-за смерти другого ребёнка в своей биологической семье и была потрясена из-за того, что ребёнок был похоронен в неизвестной могиле, где так и не был установлен памятник.

«Илана дрожала при мысли о том, что она тоже может умереть, и никто не будет её оплакивать и приходить на могилу», -- рассказывает Лео сотрудникам HFBA. «Я обещал ей тогда, что этого не произойдет».

Лео не ожидал, что жизнь вновь сведёт его с Иланой, и уж точно не думал, что это будет смерть его бывшей воспитанницы.

«Но теперь, когда наши пути пересеклись, я почувствовал необходимость сделать что-то для её памяти», — сказал нам Лео.

Достойные похороны для каждого еврея

Лео был ошеломлен высокой стоимостью похорон и сомневался, что сможет полностью оплатить традиционное еврейское погребение для Иланы. Его друг посоветовал Лео обратиться в «Мисаким», еврейскую организацию, которая занимается уходом за умершими и даёт советы скорбящим.

«Я ничего не знал о Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации (HFBA), и она так бы и осталась вне поля моего зрения, если бы не смерть Иланы, и если бы не участие представителя Мисаким», говорит Лео.

HFBA взяло на себя организацию похорон Иланы, в том числе подтверждение её еврейских корней и той части её родословной, восходящей к евреям, насильно крещёным в средневековой Испании (Converso).

«Раз узнав, насколько дороги похороны в Америке, я почувствовал, что каждый из нас должен поддерживать работу HFBA», заключил Лео.

Думая о таких как Илана

Только придя на похороны Иланы на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд, Лео в полной мере оценил, что даёт пожертвование в пользу HFBA. По его словам, «Около двадцати человек пришло на похороны, включая мать Иланы, её биологического отца и четырёх её братьев и сестёр». Некоторые родственники начали ссориться, но родители Иланы укорили их, что на кладбище они пришли с высокой целью. И тут я осознал: HFBA, обеспечив Илане достойные похороны, благотворно повлияло на всю её семью». Для пожертвований посетите сайт <https://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate/>

Вдова: «Если бы я только знала о существовании HFBA»

У Роба Нилва, мужа Шейлы, была нелегкая смерть. Болезни начались с лимфомы, затем четыре эпизода Ковида, которые спровоцировали респираторно-синцитиальный вирус (РСВ), а затем неизлечимый аутоиммунный «цитокинетический шторм». По словам Шейлы, «Никто не ожидал, что он так сильно заболевает, и что конец наступит так быстро».

Столь быстрое угасание Роба вместе с неожиданными финансовыми трудностями, сыграли роль в решении Шейлы о кремации Роба.

Задолго до его кончины мать Шейлы выразила желание быть похороненной в семейной усыпальнице. По настоянию матери Шейла приобрела три места в усыпальнице на одном из кладбищ Флориды: для матери и для себя с мужем. Это было в дополнение к двум ещё не использованным семейным участкам на кладбище в Нью-Джерси, зарезервированным ещё в сороковые годы прошлого века. К удивлению Шейлы, мать её переменяла своё решение: она хотела быть похороненной в Нью-Джерси на одном из оставшихся двух участков.

Нелёгкое решение

«Я никогда не хотела хоронить Роба в усыпальнице», говорит Шейла. «Но троих не похоронить на двух участках. Посоветовалась с сыном и невесткой, они согласились, что отец выбрал бы вариант подешевле». Это означало кремацию.

Знакомимся с Рондой Стайн

Это серия квартальных историй. В этом номере мы расскажем о работе старшей сотрудницы HFBA, отвечающей за организацию похорон.

Какой день работы в HFBA приносит Вам особенное удовлетворение?

День, когда мы можем предотвратить кремацию или погребение в общей могиле на городском кладбище Нью-Йорка.

Вы работаете в HFBA уже 30 лет. Что изменилось за это время?

Наша работа в HFBA изменилась радикально, когда мы перешли от учётных карточек и гроссбухов к ведению записей в компьютере. Раньше, общаясь с соцработниками, мы вели все записи вручную. Благодаря цифровизации мы просто посылаем им нужную форму, они заполняют её и отсылают снова к нам. Поскольку вся информация находится в базе данных, наш персонал имеет к ней доступ в любое время дня и ночи. Например, родственники подписывают разрешение на погребение просто используя DocuSign. И, благодаря современным технологиям, HFBA сегодня помогает людям в их генеалогических поисках.

HFBA помогает

Этель Х. умерла полгода назад в возрасте 95 лет в одной из больниц Бруклина. Долгие годы перед этим она была в доме престарелых. В своё время, после развода, она работала секретаршей в страховой компании.

Мы узнали о смерти Этель от её сына Нила. Он рассчитывал, что дом престарелых займётся похоронами его матери, и был удивлён, когда офис судмедэксперта уведомил его, что Этель собираются похоронить на городском кладбище, если только он не организует что-то другое.

Поскольку тело Этель было в ведении судмедэксперта уже полгода, HFBA предложило провести погребение в 24 часа. Чтобы обеспечить похороны Этель по еврейскому обряду, мы проинструктировали Нила, что ему следует делать. После улаживания с офисом городского администратора некоторых возникших сложностей, HFBA провело похороны Этель. Нил на кладбище не явился.

Пусть к вам придут благословения хорошего Нового Года

Дни между Рош Хашана и Йом Кипуром известны как десять дней раскаяния (Асерет Ямей Тшува). Эти дни дают нам возможность оглянуться на то, кем мы стали, на то, как мы идём по жизни. Если год был хорошим, мы не можем не восхищаться: «Мне – все эти благословения? Как я могу разделить их с братьями моими – Ам Исраэль? (народом Израиля)»

От всех нас в HFBA мы желаем вам Нового Года, полного духовных поисков, благополучия, безопасности и веселья.

GETTING TO KNOW

Rhonda Stein

A quarterly series about the relationship HFBA staff and donors have with New York's oldest free burial association. In this issue, we spotlight HFBA's senior funeral operations manager.



What is a good day for you at HFBA?

It's a day we can stop a cremation or prevent a burial in City Cemetery.

What situations have caused you pain?

I've gotten calls from elderly Jews who wanted to be sure they'd have a Jewish burial. I help them with registering their wishes. It is extremely sad when they die. I can't help but be affected by it.

Whom do you admire?

My mother. She was born in 1918 and had a difficult life. She became widowed relatively early in her life. She worked in the NYC public school system until she couldn't manage the travel anymore. At 80, she volunteered to take care of elderly people at a senior center. That's the kind of person she was.

You've been at HFBA for 30 years. What changes have you seen?

HFBA changed substantially when we transitioned from index cards and ledger books to computerized record-keeping. When working with social workers, for example, we used to hand-write all our notes. With digitization, we simply send them a form they fill out and send back to us. Because burial records are all digitized, our staff has access to them at any hour of day or night. People signing off on burials simply use DocuSign. They don't have to wait to deal with paperwork at the cemetery and can simply focus on the burial of a loved one. And with the advantage of technology, HFBA also aids people in their genealogical research. That's something we couldn't do much of in the days of paper record-keeping.

How do you keep doing what you do?

Sometimes I have to walk away from the phone and have myself a good cry. Truthfully, I have to balance compassion with self-preservation, or I couldn't do my job. ■

HFBA HELPS

True stories about the people HFBA serves. Names and details have been anonymized to preserve confidentiality.

ETHEL H., 95 and a long-time nursing home resident, died at a Brooklyn hospital six months ago. After her divorce, Ethel worked as a clerk for an insurance company. We were informed of her death by her son Neil. He'd expected the nursing home to handle his mother's burial, and was surprised when the Medical Examiner's office told him Ethel was scheduled for a City Cemetery burial unless he made alternate arrangements. Because Ethel's body had already been with the ME for half a year, HFBA offered to perform the burial within 24 hours. To ensure Ethel received a traditional Jewish burial, we urged Neil to take action. When he didn't, we ironed out some complications with the public administrator's office, and then buried Ethel. Neil did not attend the funeral.



GERTY S., 90 and disabled her whole life, died en route to the hospital from her group home. In the 40 years she was institutionalized, no family ever came to visit Gerty. We learned about her death from YAI, a Brooklyn-based institute for the disabled. YAI records confirmed Gerty's Jewish ancestry. HFBA's volunteer *minyán* attended Gerty's funeral, as did Ms. Vasquez, a group home social worker. Ms. Vasquez traveled by bus from Manhattan to Staten Island to pay tribute to Gerty. She remembered Gerty had worked briefly in a library where she enjoyed looking at pictures in magazines. Through tears, Ms. Vasquez remembered Gerty as a "sweet pleasant woman." ■

SCOTT G., 45, was disabled his whole life. He and another sibling, also disabled, were looking after their elderly parents when Scott fell ill and died at a Brooklyn hospital. Scott's uncle put HFBA in touch with Scott's father. In speaking with Mr. G., we learned that family members had once stepped in to pay for the burial of the family's first-born son, killed in a car accident. Some 20 people, including Scott's brother and sister, attended the funeral. Mr. G. eulogized Scott as a devoted son who went grocery shopping for his parents at 5:00 a.m. ■

FALL HOLIDAY CEMETERY SCHEDULE

It is traditional to visit the graves of our ancestors and loved ones before and during the High Holiday season.

Mount Richmond Cemetery Кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд

ROSH HASHANA | РОШ АШАНА

Wednesday, October 2 9:00 A.M - 1:00 P.M.
Среда, 2 октября

Thursday, October 3 CLOSЕD
Четверг, 3 октября закрыто

Friday, October 4 CLOSЕD
Пятница, 4 октября закрыто

YOM KIPPUR | ЙОМ КИППУР

Friday, October 11 9:00 A.M - 1:00 P.M.
Пятница, 11 октября

SUKKOT | СУККОТ

Wednesday, October 16 9:00 A.M - 1:00 P.M.
Среда, 16 октября

Thursday, October 17 CLOSЕD
Четверг, 17 октября закрыто

Friday, October 18 CLOSЕD
Пятница, 18 октября закрыто

SHMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH ШМИНИ АЦЕРЕТ И СИМХАТ ТОРА

Wednesday, October 23 9:00 A.M - 1:00 P.M.
Среда, 23 октября

Thursday, October 24 CLOSЕD
Четверг, 24 октября закрыто

Friday, October 25 CLOSЕD
Пятница, 25 октября закрыто

Silver Lake Cemetery

Open Sunday, September 29 and October 6 9:00 A.M - 3:45 P.M.

Yizkor is recited on Yom Kippur, October 12 and Shmini Atzeret, October 24.

Изкор читается в Йом Кипур 12 октября, и Шмини Ацерет 24 октября.

Mount Richmond Cemetery closes at 1:00 P.M. on Fridays throughout the year.

Кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд закрывается в 13:00. по пятницам в течение года.

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW MORE THAN EVER

You can support HFBA's mission by making a donation at www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate

To **donate** via Venmo, use @HebrewFreeBurial or our QR code.



HFBA MISSION STATEMENT

Hebrew Free Burial Association devotes its resources to performing *chesed shel emet* (the ultimate act of loving-kindness). It is the only agency in the New York metropolitan area dedicated to assuring that every Jew, regardless of financial means or religious affiliation, receives a dignified, traditional Jewish funeral and burial.

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