

# News from *Remember Us*

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Family  
Stories



Fall/Winter  
2008

*“So long as we live they too shall live, for they are part of us as we remember them”*

## Bat Mitzvah Spans the Generations



*Emma Fredgant displays the tallit that she painted with her mother, Diane, for her Bat Mitzvah in Portland, Oregon. The tallit was made to honor the memory of Sonia Gordon, z”l, who died in the Shoah. Sonia’s brother, Isaac, who now lives in New York, tied the tzizit.*

A parent in Portland, Oregon sent us this amazing story of connection, redemption, and community building arising from a simple commitment to the legacy of memory. —*Editor*

Our daughter Emma’s Bat Mitzvah was approaching, and we wanted to go beyond the immensely meaningful act of leading the service and reading from the Torah, so that Emma could connect community and ancestors to her

Bat Mitzvah. (Her Hebrew name is Keshira, a blend of Keshet [connection] and Shira [song].)

We had heard from past B’nai Mitzvah about the Remember Us Project, and every time we had encountered it we had been moved by the way it resonated through the decades, a linking of the dark past with the reasonably light present. Emma was enthusiastic about having that as a mitzvah project. She had already read some about the individuals who had survived

and perished in the Holocaust. She contacted Remember Us, and the name of the 12-year-old girl she was to honor was on the way. Emma wanted to create a hand-painted silk tallit (I am an artist who hand-paints silk), make it a part of the ceremony, and then bury it to honor the life of the young girl.

Soon after, I went to a birthday celebration with six women at a Cirque du Soleil performance. A daughter of the woman

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## *Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project*

invites children who are preparing for bat/bar mitzvah to connect with the memories of children who were lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah.

**T**his issue of the Remember Us newsletter is dedicated to students and families whose experience in remembrance has been enriched by an active interest combined with good fortune. The active interest comes in the form of commitment, trying to build a bridge to the children being remembered. The good fortune, as is usually the case, depends on encounters with people. We help each other along the way. We hope you will enjoy these stories, and share your stories of remembrance with us through our web site and e-mail.

Also, we provide news that brings you up to date on the vitality of the Remember Us concept. To date, 9,062 children in 401 congregations have participated in the Remember Us Project. Most are in the United States, and in the past six months congregations have joined in from Canada, Israel, and Mexico. ■

### Bat Mitzvah Spans the Generations Continued from page 1

whose birthday we were celebrating was due to have her Bat Mitzvah the week before Emma's. We talked about the Remember Us Project and the mother was interested.

The woman next to me, Terre Gordon, whom I had just met, asked more about the project. The conversation led to a discovery: Terre was married to a man whose parents are survivors. His father's sister Sonia and mother had died in the Vilna Ghetto when his sister was 12 years old. Terre was pretty sure that her husband Noah and his father, Isaac, would be willing to answer a few questions and help Emma make a direct connection with her own personal remembrance project.

**T**hings moved quickly from that point. Noah was going to visit his parents for Passover in New York that week. On the same day we got confirmation that Isaac had agreed to this idea, we received the name of the girl for Emma from Remember Us.

We called the woman whose daughter was to be Bat Mitzvah the week before Emma, and they were elated to honor Ellen Rosenberg. The Gordon family came to lunch, and shared pictures of their family and a trip they had taken to see the Vilna Ghetto. Emma presented the questions she had created for Noah to interview his father, who generally did not like

**T**HE STORY OF EMMA FREDGANT'S BAT MITZVAH is a stirring example of the potential healing power of the simple spiritual practice that is Remember Us. As the bat mitzvah service unfolded we witnessed its palpable effect on Sonia Gordon's family members. For me, it was as if painful, scattered, unspeakable memories were being knit together, as if something lost was being reclaimed. In this particular situation, which all along the way involved a number of synchronicities, it felt to me that important tikkuneem (sacred fixings) were being made from a very deep—and to us, incomprehensible—level of soul."

Rabbi Aryeh Hirschfield  
Pnai Or Congregation

to talk much about those awful times. The 12-year-old's questions ranged from what Sonia's favorite color was, to if she liked to read, to if the family was religious. Noah went to New York and came back with some great information about Sonia Gordon, the aunt he never got to meet. He brought back a beautiful photo of Sonia, and Emma was most struck that she and Sonia were not that different.

But it goes further. It happened that our family already planned a trip to New York in the summer, and we arranged to meet Isaac and Rivka ourselves. In a great trip, this was the highlight. The Gordons welcomed us into their home—sweet, warm people—and were most generous in their sharing of food, chocolate, and best of all, stories. They both had fought in the Resistance, stepping up to heroism when they should have just had to worry about dating. They accepted us so fully it felt like we were family.

But talking was not all that occurred. Back in Portland, Emma had designed a tallit which we both would paint and then which would be presented to Sonia's nephew, Noah, and her great nephew, Gabe (Noah and Terre's son) at Emma's Bat Mitzvah. The tallit featured a dancing Sonia (a favorite activity of hers), and a weeping willow whose falling leaves, representing the souls of those who perished in the Holocaust, floated down a river peacefully until they soared up to meet God. We brought Sonia's tallit with us for Isaac to tie the tzitzit. To say that he was moved would not begin to capture the welling up of emotion he felt for his sister whom he had not seen in 64 years, and for our family, whom he had met an hour before. Amazing moments.

**T**he Bat Mitzvah itself was two months later. Emma did great. Noah and his family were there. After we showed the tallit to the congregation and told a bit of our story, the tallit was used to cover the Torah between readings. To an already emotional day, it added a whole other dimension. It was like Emma was sharing her Bat Mitzvah with Sonia. In the lobby was an enlarged photograph of Sonia, with some paragraphs about her life. After the service Noah received the tallit, and weeks later, during High Holy Days, he delivered it to his parents in New York.

We feel so fortunate to have been able to meet the Gordons and to involve Sonia and Emma in the same great event. The confluence that led to this was beshert. We were hoping for meaning, we got meaning and so much more. Thank you to the Remember Us Project for being the open doorway for depth and healing and remembering. ■

Diane Fredgant  
northwestjewishartists.org

# Teen-ager Builds Remember Us Project in Mexico

We are proud to introduce readers to our second international volunteer representative, Thanya Asse Zapan of Mexico City, Mexico. She is 15 years old and in the 9th grade at the Colegio Hebreo Maguen David. The activist teen-ager became interested in Remember Us this year after her brother's bar mitzvah, where he remembered a child who was lost in the Shoah before coming to the Torah.

Thanya spends her time helping Remember Us by contacting as many Bnai Mitzvah students as she can. She has personally given out more than 111 names of lost children to students who are taking on the mitzvah of remembrance. She encourages rabbis and educators in her community to help her spread the word. Because of her efforts there are now six participating schools/synagogues in the Mexico City area. Thanya says:

"I hope the project will grow here in Mexico until it becomes something every student wants to be a part of. I hope to help Remember Us give away all the names of the lost children so every single child can be remembered.

"Here in Mexico, Orthodox and Conservative students usually give a speech at their ceremony in which they thank G-d, their parents, their family, their teachers. Some include the child they are remember-

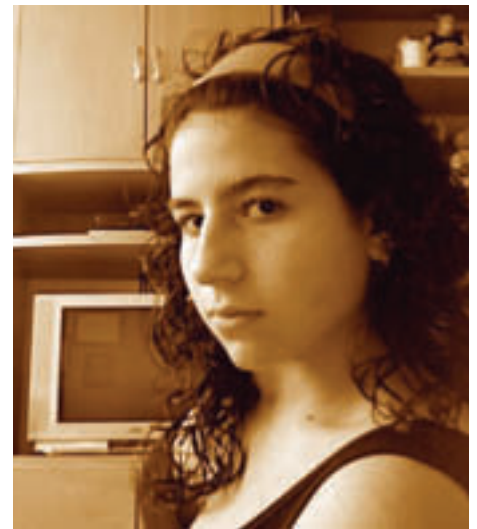
ing in their speech. Others light a candle in memory of the lost child. Some don't give a speech but instead mention at the end of the ceremony that they are doing their Bar Mitzvah for a lost child from the Holocaust.

"In Orthodox communities, which are the majority here in Mexico, girls participate in a group ceremony of 20 to 80 girls. During the ceremony they go to the temple, but they do not read from the Torah. Then there is a big dinner in which the girls act in small plays and dance and sing. So far no girls have participated in the project because these group Bat Mitzvahs are done once a year, in June. In June 2009, I expect there will be many girls participating.

"The families who have participated so far really like the project. They say it is a great way to do something for those who lost their lives during the Holocaust. They also feel it is very relevant and appreciate that new generations are getting involved. They also like the commitment because it also shows students how to be responsible."

Remember Us is grateful to Thanya for all her hard work in representing Remember Us in Mexico. Inspired by her commitment, all the Remember Us material has now been translated into Spanish versions. Since Thanya has begun her work, we have had a child participate in

**Remember Us  
materials now  
available in  
Spanish**



*Thanya Asse Zapan, the Remember Us volunteer regional coordinator for Mexico.*

Costa Rica, and Remember Us materials have been provided to the Jewish community in Havana.

Thanya is a wonderful example of the next generation taking responsibility for the memory of those lost in the Shoah. Families and students that wish to help share this practice of remembrance are invited to contact Remember Us for our Service Guide, which outlines the process for students to develop community participation. ■



*Thanya with her father Jose Asse, her mother Claudia Zappan, and her brother Carlos Asse Zapan, whose participation started developments in Mexico.*



**Remember Us**  
The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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# Research Creates a Bridge of Memory

Daniel Pyser of Har Sinai Congregation in Owings Mills, Maryland, with the encouragement of his parents, participated in the **Remember Us Project**. Daniel did research on the child he chose to remember, Adam Ungar, with help from Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. This is an account of how he went about it and what he learned.

## Process and progress of Daniel's research

**D**aniel writes: I was given a boy named Adam Ungar. I thought that in order to remember him, I should know some things about him. I decided to contact the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum to see if they could get me in touch with any family members. They asked that I write a letter detailing why I wanted the names of the family members. They would send the letter to the family members who could choose if they wanted to contact me or not.

I am grateful that a family member, Judy Finkelstein, decided to contact me. Her husband Abe's mother was Adam's sister, making her Adam's niece-in-law. Adam's sister's name was Helen and she was the only surviving family member. She is still living. Judy told Helen about me and what I was doing. I sent Judy a list of questions for Helen to answer. I was at summer camp when Helen called, so my mom talked to her. Helen also sent me a brief note about Adam.

Judy sent me a picture of Adam with Helen, as well as his death certificate, which I displayed next to a *yahrzeit* candle on the *bimah* at my Bar Mitzvah. I prepared a brief speech to tell the congregation and that speech also appeared in the program of that morning's service. During the service I read a speech describing exactly what I was doing, and I also led *kaddish* in his memory. At my party, I lit a candle for Adam as part of the candle lighting ceremony. This is what I said: "This last candle is a special one. It is in honor of Adam Ungar, a Polish boy who was not able to have the privilege of becoming a Bar Mitzvah. He was born on October 27, 1930 and was killed not even 13 years later on October 15, 1943 during the Holocaust. This candle and this day are dedicated to him and in his memory."

I received a donation from Helen's temple, in honor of my Bar Mitzvah and

remembering her brother. I was honored to hear about that and glad she and her family appreciated what I did. The whole experience allowed me to learn about and remember a kid, just like me, whose life was cut short, solely because he was a Jew. Judy continues to remember us, especially during the Jewish holidays. My mother continues to email her at different times of the year.

## What Daniel Learned about the life of Adam Ungar and his family

Adam Ungar was born on October 27, 1930 in Krakow, Poland to Alfred and Stefani Ungar. He had one younger sister, Helen. Adam was killed during the Holocaust on October 15, 1943 by the Nazis.

Their family was together at the beginning of the Holocaust. They had run away. Their mother had papers so that the family could become Gentile. She was shot by the Germans about four months before Adam died because of the diamonds that she had. After she was shot, the Germans found the papers. Helen and Adam ran away with five other children. Adam was sent to a camp and his sister Helen was taken in by a Polish family and then a Czech family. One day, Adam was walking in the camp with a friend and two shots were fired, killing each of them.



Daniel Pyser with photo of Adam and Helen Ungar, and the Yad Vashem Page of Testimony

Adam was a wonderful child. He was tall and had light coloring like his father. Helen and Adam were close. He played the piano. He was a skier. The family went to temple regularly. The family would spend the holidays with their grandparents who lived an hour away by train. Helen remembers that she and Adam would horseback ride while at their grandparents.

Adam's father moved to the United States in 1948. He settled in New York, where he was an accountant. He remarried and had another son, who lives in the Washington D.C. area. Helen remained in Czechoslovakia with another family until 1954, then came to the United States. She lives in California and has two children. ■

## Sent by a director of youth education:

I want to share this email I just received from the mother of a student who will become Bar Mitzvah in January 2010. He has just started preparing for it. As part of the B'nei Mitzvah orientation program, I introduce the Remember Us Project. On November 10, I held an orientation and this boy decided to participate in the Remember Us Project. Here is what his mother wrote to me:

Josh is enjoying having his "friend," Moshe, in his thoughts. He put the paper introducing Moshe into a frame and set up a little area on his shelf with a book of Jewish thoughts and two Jewish teddy bears (blue and white with Stars of David, given to him by his grandma on Hanukkah in past years). Moshe was only 4 when he was killed so the bears seemed appropriate to Josh. He's hoping that he can move his little setup to the *bimah* during his bar mitzvah.

According to my records, our students have now taken on the mitzvah of remembering 40 children. I am looking forward to expanding that number. ■

# Our Sincere Thanks to These Supporters of the Remember Us Project

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## New Participating Communities since Spring 2008 Newsletter

Remember Us welcomes the following communities who have had children participate in the Project. May they go from strength to strength.

### Canada

*Montreal, Quebec*  
Congregation Dorshei Emet

### Arizona

*Peoria*  
Temple Gan Elohim

*Tempe*  
Temple Emanuel of Tempe

### California

*Beverly Hills*  
Temple Emanuel

*Danville*  
Beth Chaim Congregation

*Kentfield*  
Temple Emanuel

*Lafayette*  
Temple Isaiah

*Los Altos Hills*  
Congregation Beth Am

*Los Angeles*  
Temple Beth Am

*Los Gatos*  
Congregation Beth David

*Oakhurst*  
Temple Beth Israel

*Pacific Palisades*  
Congregation Shir Hadash

*San Mateo*  
Peninsula Temple Beth El

*Stockton*  
Temple Israel

*West Hills*  
Temple Aliyah

### Connecticut

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Temple Shearith Israel

### Florida

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*Longwood*  
Congregation Beth Am

*Miami*  
Beth David Congregation  
Bet Shira Congregation  
Congregation Temple Shalom

*North Miami Beach*  
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*Palm Beach Gardens*  
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*Parkland*  
Congregation Kol Tikvah  
Temple Beth Shmuel, Cuban  
Hebrew Congregation

### Illinois

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Congregation Beth Shalom

*Skokie*  
Congregation Bene Shalom

### Iowa

*Cedar Rapids*  
Temple Judah

### Louisiana

*New Orleans*  
Touro Synagogue

### Maryland

*Bel Air*  
Temple B'nai Or

*Columbia*  
Congregation Beth Shalom

*Gaithersburg*  
Hevrat Shalom Congregation

*Potomac*  
Bnai Tzedek

*Prince Frederick*  
Beit Chaverim

*Silver Spring*  
Adat Shalom

### Massachusetts

*Brookline*  
Congregation Kehillath Israel

*Concord*  
Kerem Shalom

*Chestnut Hill*  
Congregation Mishkan Tefila

*Framingham*  
Temple Beth Sholom

*Marblehead*  
Temple Emanu-el

*New Bedford*  
Tifereth Israel Congregation

*Newton*  
Temple Beth Avodah

*Waltham*  
Temple Beth Israel

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*Bath*  
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*St. Paul*  
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*Morris Plains*  
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*South Orange*  
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*Spray Beach*  
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*Wantagh*  
The Suburban Temple

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