



## Transforming Grief Into Beauty

Art educator Sharon Dvora sends this report of an art project done in Ashland, Oregon:

Our Bnei Mitzvah students are participating in a national project called Remember Us. Each student has taken on the mitzvah of remembering a child who died in the Holocaust. Together, we created a ritual act of remembrance so that our grief could be transformed into beauty. The students read Psalm 23 and interpreted the comforting words of this prayer through color and shape by creating abstract watercolor Painted Prayers. We placed the names of each child we are remembering on a yahrzeit candle and set up a display of our candles and paintings for the Yom Hashoah service. The students lit candles, recited prayers and spoke the names of those they remember. Through these acts of setting sacred intention, creating a ritual ceremony, and speaking the names of those we remember, the bnei mitzvah students have taken an active role in the redemption of the world. May the work and beauty of their hands and voices bring blessing to them and to their families.

### Remember Us Project and Painted Prayer Curriculum

Curriculum integrating Watercolor Paintings and a Yom Hashoah Candle-lighting Ceremony

#### In The Classroom

**Preparation:** Copies of Psalm 23, copies of the candle-lighting ceremony readings.

**Materials:** yahrzeit candles, black construction paper, glue sticks, one copy of each child's name and information, liquid watercolor paints, brushes, watercolor paper.

**Resource:** Painted Prayers by Jody Uttal, tallfellow/everypicture press,

los angeles, 2002. Full-color images and book available at [www.painted-prayers.com](http://www.painted-prayers.com).

**Instruction:** Introduce students to the Remember Us Project and give each bnei mitzvah student the profile of the child they will be remembering. Have each student read aloud the name and information of the child they will remember.

- Have each student paste black paper and the name of their child onto a yahrzeit candle.
- Read Psalm 23 together. Show the students examples of 'painted prayers' abstract watercolor paintings that express an idea or image found in a prayer.
- Encourage students to use shape and color to express some of the images and concepts expressed in Psalm 23.
- Have brushes, watercolor paints and paper available for students to explore and create their 'painted prayers'.
- Practice the candlelighting ceremony with students-assign parts to each student and practice reading the names and profiles of the children they are remembering.
- When the paintings are dry, mount them onto colored construction paper and then onto black tag board to create an accordion-fold display for the ceremony.

### Yom Hashoah Service and Candlelight Ceremony

The painted prayers which the students created are displayed on a table at the front of the room. Candles with the names of each child remembered are lined up in front of the artwork. As a song or chant is performed, the bnei mitzvah students each hold a tapered candle and proceed down the aisle towards the front of the room. One by one, each student lights a

yahrzeit candle for the child whom they are remembering.

1st reader: *Opening prayer: We know that God is in this place, and we ask the Holy One to surround us, to hear our prayers and to keep this space sacred.*

2nd reader: *Prayer of intention: We each light a candle of remembrance for a Jewish child who perished in the holocaust before they reached the age of Bar or Bat Mitzvah. We ask Adonai to embrace each of these remembered children in love and to assist these souls on their path towards peace.*

Each student reads: *I will remember...and the name of the child they are remembering, along with where that child died and how old they were. The students read alternately from PSALM 23.*

This visual art curriculum was developed by Sharon Dvora, Jewish ritual artist and art educator in Ashland, Oregon. Twelve bnei mitzvah students from Havurah Shir Hadash and Temple Emek Shalom participated in the Remembrance Project and the Yom Hashoah Candlelighting Ceremony.

1st reader: *Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd: I have everything that I need.*

2nd reader: *You guide me to lie down in green pastures. You lead me beside still waters. You refresh my soul.*

3rd reader: *You guide me on the path of righteousness, so that I may serve You with love.*

4th reader: *Though I walk through the darkest valley and stand in the shadow of death, I am not afraid. For I know You are always with me.*

5th reader: *You spread a full table before me, even in times of great pain — you feast me with your abundance.*

6th reader: *You honor me like a queen — anointing my head with sweet oil, filling my cup to the brim.*

7th reader: *Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*

8th reader: *And I will live in Your radiance — forever and ever.*

Final reader: *Closing prayer: We thank You, Holy One, for this act of remembrance. May all the souls that we remember tonight — find peace in the world to come — and may their memory be a blessing. ■*

# News from Remember Us

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Two  
programs for  
educators

Fall  
2006



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

## Status of the Remember Us Project

**Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project** offers an invitation to children who are preparing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah to connect with the memories of children who were lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah.

The Project works with all denominations. Congregations across the country and around the world are participating.

**3,224 Children in 118 congregations have accepted the invitation to remember individual children as they are being called to the Torah. Countries now include the United States, Australia, Israel, and England.**

## Customized Certificates Available

The Remember Us Project offers certificates acknowledging that children have stepped up to the act of memory, and become what we call Guardians of Memory. The certificates are available on request; a form is included in the Parent Guide. There is no cost, and donations usually accompany requests. We can now provide certificates customized with a synagogue's name and logo. This service was begun at the request of an Orthodox synagogue in Sydney, Australia.

Please contact the Remember Us Project if you would like to provide customized certificates to your students. We will send you a PDF file and instructions for making the individual imprints.



## How the Remember Us Project Started

Gesher Calmenson, founder of the Remember Us Project, writes: The idea for Remember Us grew out of a moment of spiritual and emotional release and understanding. I was a Jewish Family Education Fellow, studying in a three-year professional development program. In February 2001 we made a study trip to Israel. One of our stops was Yad Vashem.

We waited outside the grounds for a while. This was my first visit, and I had no idea what to expect. The bus rolled into the facility, and stopped in front of what seemed a dramatic and unusual portal, a deep vertical cut into the hillside. In front of us a gleaming gravel path led into the monument. We gathered at this entrance and our leader told us we would be starting our tour at the Valley of the Communities, a memorial grotto dedicated to the towns and villages that vanished during the Shoah.

We entered into a maze-like, almost surreal world. The walls stretched 30 feet up above us, overwhelming. We were walking in channels cut deep into the earth, through narrow byways leading into plaza-like openings. The white gravel paths shone in the sunlight. Everywhere around us tall grey concrete panels as high as the walls listed the names of the lost communities, in Hebrew, Polish, and English. It was unthinkable—all those people, their lives, relationships, dreams, homes gone. I walked along moving from sunlight to shade, trying to let the monument speak, trying to not to grasp at the experience, struggling inside myself not to reduce it to something knowable, rational, explainable.

Then, in an instant, the awful wound of the Holocaust that I had unknowingly turned away from my whole life was revealed. My heart was breaking and breaking open.

Later that day I began to sense how my life has been shaped by distancing myself from the tragedy. On reflection, I could see that the shadow of this event falls on all Jewish lives, whether or not it is consciously

experienced. As an educator I could see that possibly we were passing on the wound to our children.

It is not enough to tell the story. Here is an opportunity to face the Holocaust as an opportunity for redemptive action. Children need an empowering, life-affirming place to stand when they encounter the Holocaust, a way to integrate it into a positive sense of self. It can't be allowed to disappear from view and become a hidden abyss. The Remember Us Project was started in response to that need. ■

## A Remembrance Dvar Torah

We received this excerpt from a dvar Torah by a bat mitzvah in Michigan. She was subsequently interviewed by Bnai Brith Radio about her participation in the Remember Us Project. The complete audio interview is available on the Remember Us web site.

“In the big picture, I know that I have so many blessings in life—and I am so fortunate to have what I have—my family, friends, community, and my ability to practice Judaism as I choose. That is why I want to link my Bat Mitzvah with Ryvka, a young girl who was lost in the Holocaust. Ryvka was a four-year-old Russian Jewish girl who died during the Holocaust before she had a chance to show God what kind of Jew she could become. Ryvka's time was too short. It is now my honor to make the most of my time and do the things that she would have liked to do, but could not. It is important to remember things like that and think about them once in a while. Maybe we can stop such horrible things like that from happening in the future if we keep people like Ryvka in our minds.”



Lili Anna Klein, 1999, 50" x 32", acrylic on wood panel, with quotations from Jane Eyre.

## Faces of Friends

Author and artist Julie Baer ([www.juliebaer.com](http://www.juliebaer.com)) has developed an educational experience that can connect children in a beautiful and personal way to children lost in the Holocaust. Julie paints portraits of children who were lost in the Holocaust. She writes: "My task is to build a bridge over the vast, immobilizing sea of horror, grief, and denial that paralyzes us in the face of violence, through the ritual of memorial, the faith in eternity, and the power of friendship itself. . . . I have frequently explored memorial as a healing medium for grief, both in paintings and in children's books. I began the souls series, faces of children who lost their lives in the Holocaust, as a personal ritual of mourning, springing initially from a place of loss. Over three years the early products of the simple and painful exercise of bearing witness (the most I could offer initially) slowly began maturing, becoming, ultimately, glorifications of the eternal force of energy and love which is a soul, which is growth itself. Which cannot be lost. . . . When I look at each painting now, after studying a face for an intensive period while striving for a likeness, I feel I am seeing a lifelong friend; this is the healing experience I want to share. . . . It's true: we can't bring

## A Prayer for Responsibility for Children

This prayer was included in the bat mitzvah book of a participant in the Remember Us Project.

We pray for children who put chocolate fingers everywhere, who like to be tickled, who stomp in puddles and ruin their new pants, who sneak popsicles before supper, who erase holes in math workbooks, who can never find their shoes . . .

And we pray for those who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire, who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers, who never "counted potatoes," who are born in places in which we wouldn't be caught dead, who never go to the circus, who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions, who sleep with the dog and buy goldfish, who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money, who cover themselves with Band-aids and sing off key, who squeeze toothpaste all over the sink, who slurp their soup.

And we pray for those who never get dessert, who have no safe blanket to drag behind them, who watch their parents

watch them die, who can't find any bread to steal, who don't have any rooms to clean up, whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser, whose monsters are real . . .

We pray for children who spend all their allowance before Tuesday, who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick their food, who like ghost stories, who shove dirty clothes under the bed and never rinse out the tub, who love visits from the tooth fairy, who don't like to be kissed in front of the school bus, who squirm in church or temple and scream in the phone . . .

And we pray for those whose nightmares come in the daytime, who will eat anything, who have never seen a dentist, who aren't spoiled by anybody, who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep, who live and move and have no being.

We pray for children who want to be carried and for those who must, for those we never give up on and for those who will grab the hand of anyone kind enough to offer it.

Hear our cries, Adonai, and listen to our prayers. Amen.

—Ina J. Hughs

these little souls back their lives. But we can make friends with a face."

## A writing project for children

Julie is now working with schools on a writing project in which children of today can make a connection with the portraits and photos of children who were lost. She provides the images and guidelines for a writing exercise. Teachers can submit the children's writings to Julie for possible inclusion in a book. Also, each school can itself decide to make a presentation of the images and writings for its own community. For more complete information, contact Julie through her web site. ■



## Remember Us

The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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