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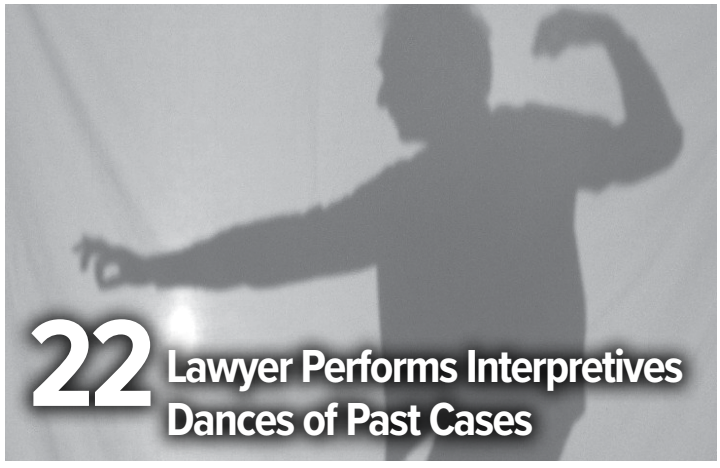

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90-plus Jewish Boys Become Men on Their Bar Mitzvah Days

David Solis, center, with his family on his bar mitzvah day
Courtesy of Pam Goodman

Jerry Weiner and David Solis go through the process a second time

JARRAD SAFFREN | JE STAFF

Huntington Valley resident Jerry Weiner and Jenkintown's David Solis are 92 and 95, respectively.

Yet by the end of spring, both men will become bar mitzvahs for a second time.

Weiner will celebrate his second bar mitzvah on the 80th anniversary of his first: May 7 at Ohev Shalom of Bucks County in Richboro. Solis became a man again on March 12 at Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park.

Weiner found religion again after his wife Evelyn and son Larry died within months of each other during the first year of the pandemic. He began attending Zoom services every night at Ohev Shalom, where his grandsons had gone through their own bar mitzvah processes. Around the same time, he found his original bar mitzvah certificate and

a light went on in his head.

"I'm leaning in," he said. "I've developed a closeness to Judaism."

Solis decided to resume his Hebrew study because "it was just something I wanted to do," he said. He lives in what he describes as "an old folks' home," and he spends much of his time in his room.

"Doing nothing," he said. "You don't feel very worthwhile."

But Solis certainly felt worthwhile on the day of his ceremony.

About 10 or 12 family members came to Elkins Park to support their patriarch, including Solis' two sons, his daughter-in-law and one of his grandsons. His girlfriend Reeta Goodman and her daughter Pam Goodman were also in attendance.

Pam Goodman, who is Jewish, called Solis' effort and performance on the bimah inspiring.

"He did a really good job," she said. "It's not the age that counts. It's the heart and effort you put into it."

After the service, the family went out for lunch at the Drake Tavern in Jenkintown. Dr. Andrew Solis, David's son, said younger brother Rob Solis drove from Connecticut for the event.

"It was a great day, and it was fun because we had members of my family, members of his girlfriend's family," Andrew Solis said. "It was a nice family gathering."

The bar mitzvah, according to Andrew Solis, was also not just something to do. The Solis family history in the United States dates to Colonial times. The doctor's sons were the

Jerry Weiner with his wife Evelyn

Courtesy of Debbi Katz

David Solis and his girlfriend Reeta Goodman

Courtesy of Pam Goodman

10th generation of boys in the family to become men in America through bar mitzvahs.

David Solis faced some antisemitism as a kid. As Pam Goodman explained, he still remembers other kids refusing to play with him because he was Jewish.

"He believes the continuation of Jewish life is important," Andrew Solis said.

Jerry Weiner always believed the same thing, but he grew to believe it more intensely after the deaths of his wife and son.

The Weiners were married for 68 years and their lives were "intertwined," Weiner said.

"We did everything together," he added.

That included caring for their son, who had Down's syndrome and lived with his parents until moving into a group home at the age of 60. So, after his wife and son died, Weiner was suddenly alone.

But when he started going to services on Zoom, he rediscovered a part of himself. He was a member of a different synagogue, Beth Chaim on Street Road, for 35 years. But he never joined another one after it closed, only attending services on High Holidays.

That was until the fall of 2020 when the Ohev Shalom members welcomed him with open arms. Weiner joined for services every night and became friendly with the other members on Zoom. When

“I respect it. It’s commitment. I think back to my bar mitzvah. It was hard. It was a lot of work.”

ERIC KATZ

A Weiner family dinner

Courtesy of Debbi Katz

Ohev Shalom reopened in 2021, he started going in person, too.

"It was a blessing," Weiner said.

And it's a nightly ritual that he keeps to this day.

He likes the feeling of looking forward to services each night. Weiner only missed one in the past year-and-a-half: for his grandson's wedding in Washington, D.C.

"It gives me an inner peace, a closeness to my religion, a closeness to God," he said. "I look forward to talking to the people there."

When Weiner looks back on his first bar mitzvah, he sees it as a stepping stone. He became a man that day according to Jewish law, and it pushed him to work toward actually becoming one.

Now he sees his second bar mitzvah similarly.

"It's a fundamental part of my Jewish upbringing and learning, and that compelled me to continue on," Weiner said.

At 92, he wants to enjoy his remaining years with his son, his daughter and their spouses. He also wants to enjoy them with his new synagogue family.

"The good Lord is giving me years and, whatever years I have left, I want to make the most of them," he said.

Most of those people, as well as Weiner's grandsons from California and D.C., respectively, will be in attendance at the May 7 bar mitzvah. A luncheon will follow at the synagogue, and there will be an intimate dinner that evening with the family.

But it's not just going to be Weiner's day. It's going to be his late wife and late son's day, too. For his bar mitzvah project, Weiner raised almost $2 million to build a sports complex and a playground in Northampton Municipal Park.

The complex will be for special-needs athletes, and the playground will be wheelchair accessible. A bench in the outfield will honor Evelyn Weiner and Larry Weiner.

"My mom was my dad's guiding light," said Debbi Katz, Weiner's daughter.

Both Katz and her son, Eric, also said it's very much in character for Weiner to go all out like this. He did it during his career as a pharmacist, as a father and as a husband, and now as a 92-year-old bar mitzvah boy.

"I respect it. It's commitment," Eric Katz said. "I think back to my bar mitzvah. It was hard. It was a lot of work." JE

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Photo by Jerry Hark

Artist Diane Hark Continues to Paint, Teach

The former she has always done; the latter she picked up later in life

JARRAD SAFFREN | STAFF WRITER

Ten or 15 years ago, Diane Hark started teaching watercolor painting at nursing homes in South Jersey and Philadelphia.

She drove there, gave everyone materials and paper and taught for two hours. Over time, the Jewish artist added 20 to 30 nursing homes to her regular rotation.

Hark, then in her late 60s, had showcased her watercolor paintings in local galleries for decades. But the professional artist had yet to try and pass on what she had learned.

As it turned out, she really enjoyed it.

And she's been teaching ever since. After the pandemic broke out in 2020, she shifted her operation to Zoom.

"I never thought I would teach," Hark said. "I never thought I would've wanted to."

The painter teaches four classes a week. She has her own Zoom account and keeps her own Excel spreadsheets.

"She's running her own business," daughter Lisa Hark said. "I'm incredibly impressed with what she's doing."

Hark's students say she has a way of clarifying the artistic process.

First and foremost, Hark tells her students to look carefully at their canvasses, according to Cynthia Saltzman, a Hark student and Wynnewood resident. Then, once they start painting, she repeats a key question.

"Where is the light coming from?" Saltzman said.

That question can also be asked in another, more literal, way, she said.

A painting Diane Hark completed of her grandchildren.
Courtesy of Diane Hark

"What are you trying to accentuate?" Saltzman said.

For example, is it the tree or the bridge? Whichever one it is, you need to make it stand out on the canvas.

It must be the figurative center, even if it's not literally in the center. It must be the light.

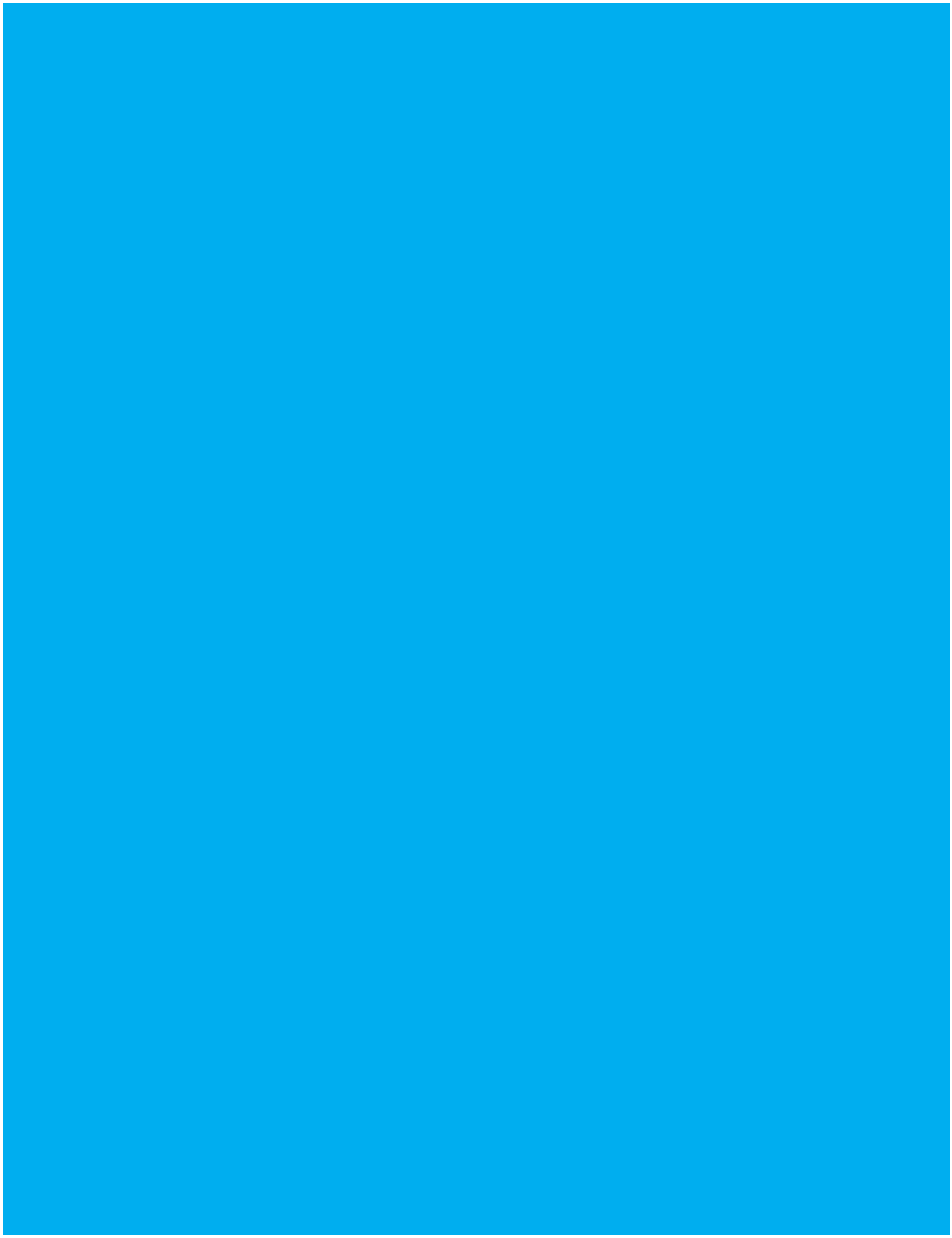
"What she's doing is really breaking down the steps you need to use in order to see like an artist," Saltzman said.

Saltzman tries to start a painting in a Tuesday class and finish it by Friday. When she started taking classes with Hark, she often had too many competing subjects.

But now, Saltzman is fairly skilled. She's proud of her paintings of Golda Meir, of candles and an etrog and of various still-life landscapes. She sends her family members her new painting via email each Friday.

"When you're new to something and you're a student, it's almost like you're a child," Saltzman said. "She's able to put us at ease and say to us, 'This is not easy. You need to realize that as you're working through this.'"

Another student, Abby Horowitz, said Hark takes the time to go around to each student during class to offer comments. Her suggestions often do not seem consequential at the time — until the students finish their paintings and see the difference.



A recent Diane Hark painting of Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy Courtesy of Diane Hark

Horowitz gave her parents a couple of the paintings she completed in Hark's classes; now they're framed in their house. One is of a platter of fruit. The other is a boathouse with some rowboats.

"By the end of the class, you've painted it," Horowitz said of Hark's suggestions. "It completely changes the painting."

Hark developed her instincts over a lifetime of making the art that she teaches about; but she had the artistic gene even before she started learning, she explained.

When Hark cooks, she does not follow a recipe. She does it her way. She takes the same free-flowing approach to gardening, designing clothes and making flower arrangements.

Hark's sister makes fun of her because she can't follow a recipe. But it's just who she is.

"You're born an artist," Hark said. "I certainly couldn't be an accountant."

But when your own kids are born, you have to become more than what you are and, after having four children,

the artist put them first. She was a stay-at-home mom who taught her children how to cook, stay organized and be productive, according to Lisa Hark.

All the kids, Lisa and her younger brothers David, Richard and Jeffrey, grew up to do well for themselves, Lisa Hark said. Today, the family includes 11 grandchildren, and they all still gather in Margate, New Jersey, every summer.

"We're very capable children," Lisa Hark added.

But even while staying at home, the artist wasn't. She kept painting and painting, and then coordinated with local institutions, like the Cosmopolitan Club of Philadelphia, the Woodmere Art Museum and the Philadelphia Sketch Club, to put up galleries of her work.

Stay-at-home mom is not a fair classification of Hark's role, as she continued working professionally throughout her children's young lives. But her favorite paintings remain the ones of her family. There's one of the grandchildren standing together in the ocean, arms around each other, water washing up against their ankles. There are also the 11 individual portraits that Hark crafted as Chanukah presents for her grandkids.

Her kids and grandkids even sometimes depend on their matriarch to enliven their offices and homes. Lisa Hark has a house full of her mother's paintings, according to Diane Hark. Hark's granddaughter, Jamie Finkelstein, also has several paintings in her home, of the beach, of a scene from Israel, of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and of Philadelphia City Hall.

Yet none of the artist's paintings stand out quite like the ones that her whole family sees every summer down the shore. The kitchen and living room in their Margate house are filled with creations from when the grandkids were young, according to Finkelstein. There are rainbows, an ice cream cone and a portrait of the Margate Yacht Club.

"They spark joy," Finkelstein said.

For Hark, now 83, they also give her a sense of peace. Much like her teaching, Hark's living, breathing paintings make her believe that her work will outlast her.

"It comes down to sharing your life experience. That's what it's all about," the artist said. "It's that connection. That unbroken connection. L'dor v'dor." JE

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PAINTER CREATES A CENTURY'S WORTH OF ART

SASHA ROGELBERG | STAFF WRITER

Philip Cohn and his studio

Photos by

Ninety-eight-year-old artist Philip Cohn has a rotund gray and white cat that loves to walk figure-eights around his legs and walker.

The beloved companion with the French name for cat — Minette — is more than just a friend to Cohn; she's all-encompassing of his values as a painter.

"There's a Japanese saying: If you want art, look at your cat," Cohn said. "Every position is a work of art."

The inspiration Cohn draws from for his paintings are likewise infinite.

Cohn's house, shared with his niece Marlene Kalick, is filled with more than 500 pieces of his impressionist artwork, with paintings assembled on the walls like Tetris pieces, barely any paint from the walls to be seen.

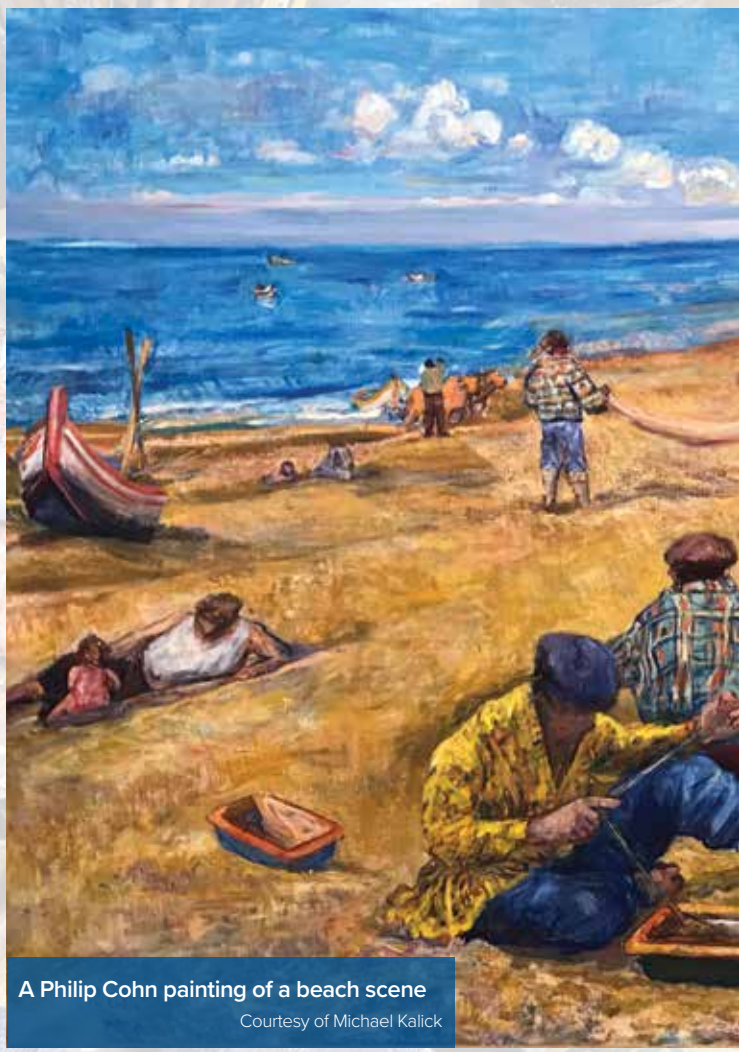
Some paintings are of Italian beach scenes filled with imaginary subjects (including an elusive house cat crouched near a rock), a dormant Mount Vesuvius lying in the background; another shows colorful clowns dancing in the streets of Philadelphia during the Mummers Parade of New Year's Days past, before COVID took the raucous event down a couple of notches.

Cohn was inspired by the French, Dutch and Italian impressionist scene of the late 19th century and was afforded the privilege of seeing the painting of his heroes — Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cezanne, Camille Pissarro — in person decades before. His own art has clear impressionist influences: bold brush strokes and colors that create dazzling effects of light.

It was Cohn's enduring love of painting that attracted the attention of Old City Jewish Art Center Director Rabbi Zalman Wircberg. The art center's April exhibit, "A Lifetime of Impression," spotlighted Cohn's works, and a few pieces remain in the space's permanent collection.

Cohn reminded Wircberg of something OCJAC neighbor Larry Becker of Larry Becker Contemporary Art once said: The sign of an artist is someone who is compelled to create something every day.

"He's not taking a day off. He's not sitting and contemplating. He's creating," Wircberg said.



A Philip Cohn painting of a beach scene

Courtesy of Michael Kalick

Sasha Rogelberg

Every morning, Cohn climbs the stairs of his home and paints in his studio for 3-4 hours. Cohn's artistic practice was particularly fitting for OCJAC's April exhibit, which spanned Passover and, according to Wircberg, should therefore encompass an idea from the holiday.

"Every day, we're leaving our *Mitzrayim*, our limitations, our boundaries, our comfort zones," Wircberg said.

According to Wircberg, Cohn is an artist who pushed his boundaries to become the prolific painter behind the exhibit.

A Philip Cohn painting of the Philadelphia Mummers Parade
Courtesy of Michael Kalick

The son of immigrants — his father from Russia and his mother from Poland — Cohn had a long journey to becoming a painter.

His family settled in Vineland, New Jersey, and Cohn was born in 1923, the youngest of five sons. Though Vineland was home to several Jewish farm settlements at the time, his father worked several factory jobs.

As his brothers grew older and moved to Philadelphia, visiting the city became a romantic idea to Cohn, who escaped into the worlds of "Flash Gordon" and "Tarzan," copying panels from his favorite comics, his foray into art.

"I always drew, even before I went to art school," Cohn said.

As Cohn came of age, the World War II draft thwarted any desire to move to the city or pursue art more seriously, though he balanced military duties and figure drawing during his couple of years serving.

When the war ended, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or GI Bill, opened doors for Cohn, who opted to remain in Europe. He began his formal art education in Shrivenham, England, at an Army-established college campus two hours from London.

Cohn visited the National Gallery on most weekends, where he came face-to-face with paintings by Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt, a limitless well of inspiration for him, despite the lean collection of the museum after the war.

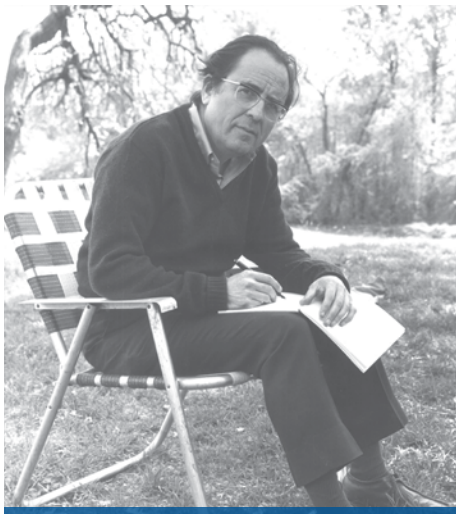
"You look at something for a while, and you want to do something," Cohn said.

His art education continued in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where the GI Bill continued to buoy him. Cohn was awarded $90 per month during his time at PAFA, and he was able to afford art supplies and rent for a studio apartment.

By 1947, Cohn began submitting materials to local competitions and was accepted into the Barnes Foundation, where Albert Barnes noticed Cohn's talent and briefly mentored him.

His brother Bernie sponsored a trip to Florence, Italy, where Cohn stayed for a year, traveling from city to city and finding lodging at an Italian boarding house.

Still, upon his return to Philadelphia, Cohn couldn't sustain himself as an artist. He worked night shifts at Mid-City Press in the 1950s (which then printed the Jewish Exponent), so he would



In the 1960s, Philip Cohn's art was featured heavily at the Chestnut Hill Gallery. Courtesy of Michael Kalick

be able to not only afford his apartment and supplies, but so he could capture scenes for his paintings during the day.

In the 1960s, Cohn had his works shown in the Chestnut Hill Gallery, then the Hahn Gallery, which helped him stabilize his income as an artist.

After meeting his second wife Collette, who was from Paris, while at a community dance, the couple spent years traveling around Europe and were married for 42 years until her death in 2017.

Much has changed since Cohn's heyday as an artist. The pandemic limited where he could go to people-watch. Cohn has since adapted; he does pastel portraits of friends who stop by and paints from his dozens of sketchbooks littered across his studio, pages filled with landscapes from his days of traveling.

Cohn considers himself a "lucky guy."

"He is a lucky and blessed person to have been married to the love of his life and be fulfilled with his love of art, family and travel," nephew Michael Kalick said. "He views life through the eyes of an artist."

Cohn's studio is crammed with stacked paintings and jars of brushes, hats and knickknacks, with only a small window in the corner providing the room's natural light. It looks down at the street, with the view interrupted by an ugly telephone wire.

When Cohn looks out of it, though, he sees untapped potential, yet another scene to be painted.

"Nature is endless," Cohn said. "It's endless! It will never stop ... There's no question of running out of material."

Cohn's art, some available for purchase, can be viewed at philipcohnartist.com. JE

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Appeal and Applause

Lawyer Performs Interpretives Dances of Past Cases

SASHA ROGELBERG | STAFF WRITER

For Jonathan Stein, combining law and dance wasn't the joining of two incongruous practices.

A lawyer at Community Legal Services, which provides legal counsel to low-income individuals in Philadelphia, for 50 years and a student of modern dance for almost as long, Stein has long believed that dance is the combination of body and mind. It's the perfect format with which to share his career accomplishments to the greater community.

In April, Stein performed an interpretive dance to a poetic adaptation — written by formerly Philadelphia-based poet CAConrad — of three cases he argued during his half-century run at CLS as part of Rehearsing Philadelphia, a performance art project by Drexel University and the Curtis School of Music.

The 25-minute dance, "27 ONWARD: Dancing in the Revolution," had Stein undulating his arms, lunging forward and back and spinning around furniture at his old CLS office space for 12 performances, a combination of improvised and scripted movement.

In one performance, Stein ducked behind a chair, removed his threadbare dancing shoes falling off his feet and continued the dance in socks.

As he moved, a speaker system sounded a narration of Stein's three cases in poetry: Two of which, regarding immigration and medical assistance to disabled children, respectively, made it to the Supreme Court, where Stein first argued at age 27. The third dealt with racist housing policies from the Frank Rizzo era.

"When you hear Jonathan talk about these cases, you begin to imagine the positive, life-changing impact he has had on millions of lives," Conrad said. "In the text, I differentiate

Jonathan Stein developed an interest in modern dance in the 1970s and '80s when he was in his 30s. Courtesy of Jonathan Stein

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Jonathan Stein performs "27 ONWARD: Dancing in the Revolution" at the Community Legal Services office as part of Rehearsing Philadelphia

Screenshots of John Thornton's documentary "Jonathan Stein, Onward in Law and Dance"

between 'forward' and 'onward.' 'Forward' means to move in the direction you are facing, but 'onward' means to move forward in a continuous motion, never resting, always ready for what is to be done next."

Stein and Conrad were partnered with each other for the project as part of Rehearsing Philadelphia's solo modules, which connected an artist with a professional from one of five of Philadelphia's "power centers."

Stein, the "professional" was paired with Conrad, the artist, who interviewed Stein for five hours to eventually come up with their eight-page script. It was Conrad's first time collaborating with a dancer.

"He is 78 years old, and he dances in ways that I cannot imagine doing at 56," Conrad said.

To prepare for the performances, Stein completed months of aerobic and strength training, yoga and Pilates.

But the performance was, of course, more than 50 years in the making.

A law degree at the University of Pennsylvania brought Stein, a Jewish Brooklynite, to Philadelphia after he completed a bachelor's at Columbia University.

He matriculated in 1964 and, inspired by the civil rights movement, took Penn's first poverty law course on law and income insecurity.

"Law, essentially, has historically been about enforcing power and wealth, and not about redistribution of income with social justice," Stein said.

Federal anti-poverty laws passed in the 1960s helped launch the legal aid movement that not only provided legal services to those who could not afford it, but also tackled poverty as a systemic issue, using litigation and class action lawsuits to bring appeals to the supreme court and work to pass more progressive legislation.

Following summers working at the legal services department of Mobilization for Youth in New York and a year at the London School of Economics after receiving his law degree, Stein returned to Philadelphia as a lawyer at the newly formed CLS in 1968.

At the time, CLS was looking to hire fresh and young lawyers; to create systemic change, they wanted to disrupt the old boy's club of lawyers.

"I just felt this was such an extraordinary place to work and still is for younger people here in the city," Stein said. "It allowed me to do so many things; it was very supportive."

Though Stein gained credibility as a lawyer at a young age after arguing in front of the Supreme Court, he continued to pursue cases close to his heart throughout his career.

In 2010, he became focused on immigration and welfare, particularly the lack of availability of Supplemental Security Income, or SSI, which served a similar role as Social Security. During the '90s, many Jewish Russian refugees needed SSI but could not get it.

"The biggest hit was taken by noncitizens, immigrants who could no longer get SSI, even though they were disabled or elderly and poor — which are the criteria for SSI benefits — and there was a tiny sliver of eligibility for immigrants who were asylees or refugees," Stein said.

Stein, along with a now-95-year-old Holocaust survivor, led a class-action law suit to address the lack of SSI availability. Though they did not successfully change the Social Security Act provision, they settled, and the two still keep in touch.

As Stein became a more seasoned lawyer, he developed a curiosity for the modern dance movement that emerged in the '70s and '80s. He was always a lover of culture and arts and his wife Judy Bernstein, whom he married in 1965, was an art historian and curator at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art.

Stein was particularly enamored with contact improvisation,

Jonathan Stein (center) at the 1963 March on Washington at age 19

Courtesy of Jonathan Stein

a variety of modern dance that involves shifting weight, rolling with and oftentimes carrying another person. He called it a form of "organized play."

"I found these really wonderful people who were dancers, choreographers and teachers," Stein said. "And they were fascinating people, artists who I had not known before."

Though Stein still serves as counsel at CLS, his years as a lawyer are likely over, but he feels his time as a dancer, or at least an appreciator of dance, is plentiful.

In 2011, he started thINKingDANCE.net, an online journal where he and other artists publish pieces on the dance world. He's written 30-40 pieces in the past 10 years.

Stein enjoys writing about the ephemerality of dance and, in that spirit, he doesn't think too hard about pursuing other opportunities to dance. He trusts he'll stumble upon them when the time is right.

"I just maintain an openness to opportunities," he said. JE

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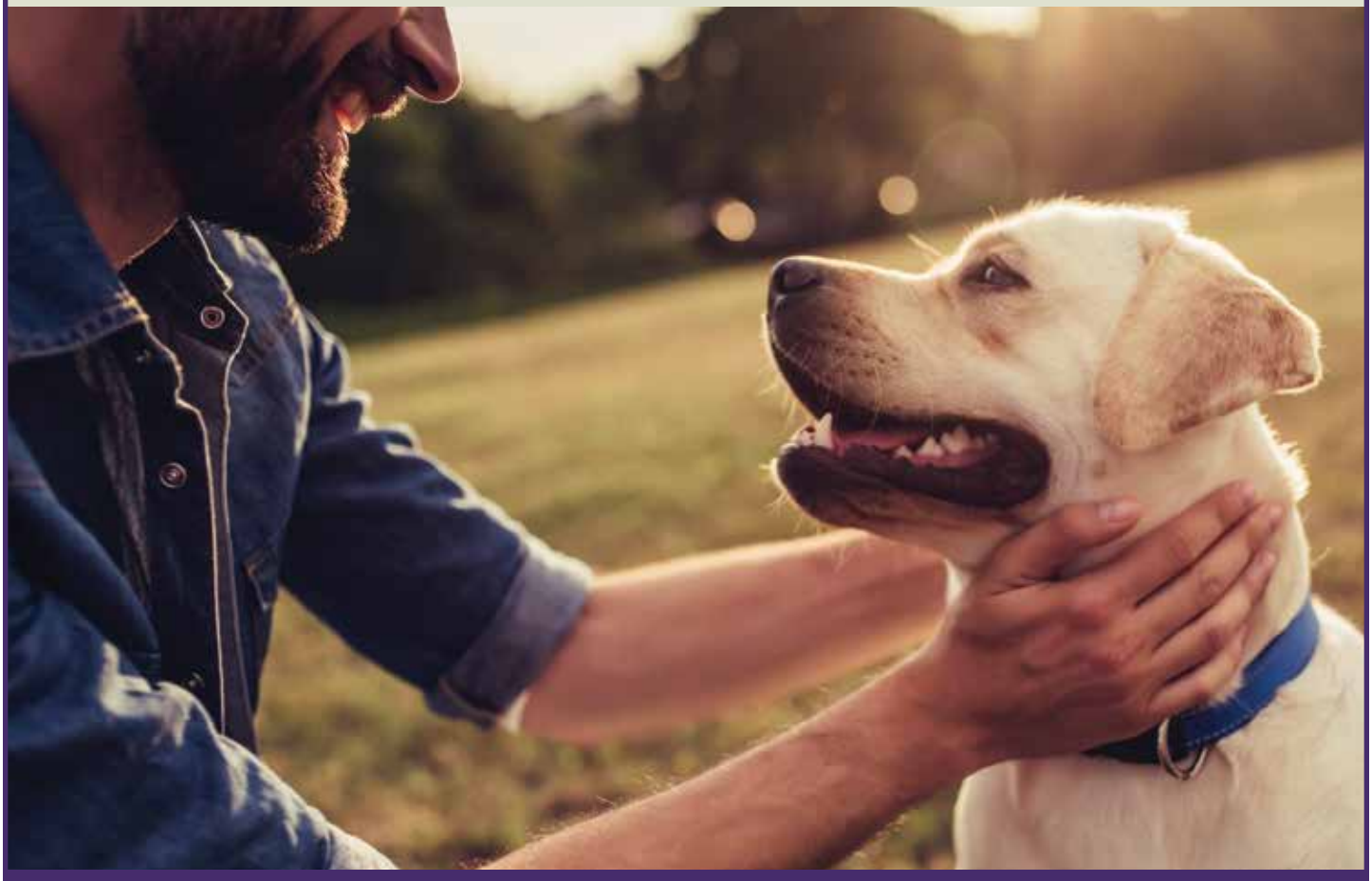

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