

A photograph of a man and a woman sledding down a snowy hill. The man, in the foreground, is wearing a blue jacket, black pants, and sunglasses, and is smiling. The woman, behind him, is wearing a red jacket, black pants, and sunglasses, and is also smiling. They are both wearing winter boots with snow on the soles. The background shows snow-covered evergreen trees and a building in the distance.

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THEIR SALAD DAYS LONG GONE, REC LEAGUE BASKETBALL PLAYERS PERSEVERE

ANDY GOTLIEB | JE MANAGING EDITOR



Steve Dabrow trudged into the JCC Kaiserman gym on a recent Tuesday night, sat down heavily and let out a groan as he prepared for his upcoming basketball game.

When the 56-year-old Washington Square resident was asked why he continued to play a sport most people his age have quit years earlier, he laughed.

"I've got major issues. That's why I keep playing."

A few minutes later, Dabrow forgot about his age, serving as his team's point guard for all 40 minutes of a hard-fought game that wasn't decided until the final buzzer.

Dabrow was one of more than 40 men ranging in age from their mid-40s to early 60s who popped Advil in advance, strapped on knee and ankle braces, rubbed on the Bengay and tried to turn back time to perform like they did when Presidents Carter and Reagan were in office.

For more than 20 years, the JCC has offered a variety of adult basketball leagues. Leagues for 18-and-up and 35-and-up players have fallen by the wayside — and a 60-and-up league started a year ago was aborted after a single season.

But the 50-and-up league perseveres, even if the number of teams dwindles and the age restrictions are fudged a bit to fill the rosters.

That said, the league has changed.

A decade ago, a majority of the players were Jewish JCC members. Today, the league is largely not Jewish, with Jewish JCC members in short supply. That follows the trend of the weekend pickup games at JCC. Where as many as 40 mostly Jewish members once waited their turn to play pickup games the moment the building opened, today it may take 30 minutes before 10 older guys — few of them Jewish — straggle in to play. For whatever reason, a whole generation of Jewish basketball players (those now in their late 30s and 40s) doesn't play at the JCC.

League organizer Greg Casey, 56, played in the leagues for years before turning to refereeing. He said some people have quit



STEVE DABROW

See Basketball, Page 8

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Basketball

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because of advancing age and injuries, but there's also a perception the league became less enjoyable and more physical, while the camaraderie diminished.

"It was a cohesive unit among the guys and a loyal group," he said.

Still, the games go on — and there are even a few fans who aren't the spouses or children of the players.

"It's fun to see these guys still getting up and down the court," said Tyrone Cook, a gym regular, who stirs the pot with friendly trash talk to some of the players.

Let's take a look at four of the old-school Jewish guys still playing.

Adam Sherman

Never one to lack confidence, Sherman is adept at trash talk, claiming at various times to be the leading scorer in JCC history and also the player who's won the most championships.

The thing is, he may be right. He's also on the reigning champions, an undefeated team in the last league.

Sherman, 53, of Penn Valley, who is the senior partner of Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company's 1847 Financial agency, explained why he still plays.

"I love competition — period," he said. "I can't get this kind of competition any other place."



ADAM SHERMAN

That competitive zest was evident the other night, when an aggressive defender felt the wrath of a few well-timed Sherman shoves the refs missed.

Sherman did note that age has forced him to change his game.

"You become a smarter player when you become older. Everyone in this league is going backward together," he said, adding that he's managed to stay mostly healthy. "I've been very fortunate with minor injuries over the years that haven't kept me from the game that long."

A college player at Gettysburg College, Sherman has passed along his basketball genes to his sons, one of whom plays at Dickinson College, the other at Haverford College. He misses some league games to see his sons in action and was rewarded the other day when one son hit a game-winning buzzer beater.

Marc Edelstein

One of the longest-tenured players at the JCC is also one of the biggest. With wide shoulders to complement a 6-foot-5-inch frame, Edelstein makes his mark as a rebounder and defender.

The 60-year-old Radnor resident, who owns March Inc., a waste equipment sales company, may be one of the older players, but has no intentions of stopping.



MARC EDELSTEIN



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"I enjoy the camaraderie of being on a team, and I don't really enjoy working out alone," Edelstein said, adding that he believes he's won more championships than Sherman. His longtime rival did get the last laugh that night when their teams met, with Sherman's team pulling out a victory.

Like Sherman, he's remained healthy over the years, although a pinkie broken in a pickup game earlier this year required surgery, forcing him to quit one league and miss another. And he now does his best to conserve energy during a game.

"I try to be smart about running up and down the court," he said. So, when will it be time to quit for good?

"When I think people don't want to play with me," said Edelstein, who also still enjoys playing pickup games with his adult son. "I still enjoy it and still fill a role."

Steve Dabrow

Although he's one of the shortest guys in the league, Dabrow is certainly its "Energizer Bunny," as he rarely seems to get tired despite running around more than nearly all players.

He does claim to have gotten slow, which drew a rebuke from yet another longtime player, Greg Goodman, who was standing nearby.

"He's slowed down from 75 to 30 miles per hour," Goodman said. "The good news is that everyone else has slowed to 15."

Dabrow, the owner and CEO of Cheltenham House, a family-owned manufacturer of sauces, condiments and salad dressings, credits the extensive use of a flywheel and occasional runs for his conditioning. But he lives for basketball.

"It's the most-fun sweat you can possibly get," he said.

Bruce Gilbert

A Wisconsin native, the 62-year-old Gilbert has played basketball at the JCC since the early 1990s when a friend recruited him to play. His "career" dates to roughly the time Beatlemania was sweeping America.

"I've been playing competitive basketball since I was about 10 years old. Although I did not play in college, I played high school basketball and I've played in literally thousands of games in various leagues, including the JCC, since then. I love the game. I love the competition. I love the exercise. And I love the camaraderie."

Like the others, the Penn Valley resident — a one-time general counsel for a health care company who now works with startups and is a private investor — has been fortunate in terms of injury.

"I've had some bumps and bruises and maybe a sprained ankle or two over the years. But I've never missed a game because of injury," he said.

Still, Gilbert has changed his game in deference to Father Time.

"I started developing an outside shot when I was in my 20s, which was a good thing, because as I've gotten older, the quickness has diminished and my ability to drive to the hoop has faded, but my outside shot has pretty much stayed with me," he said.

As long as he can move well enough to remain in the flow of the game, Gilbert plans to keep on playing.



BRUCE GILBERT

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Basketball

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“When I can no longer hit the open jumper and can’t keep up with the guys I’m playing with, then I’ll know it’s time to hang up my sneaks — although I can’t imagine a time that I won’t at least play in the backyard with my kids and grandkids,” he said.

And Gilbert is helping the next generation of basketball players, serving as a volunteer coach at John Bartram High School in Southwest Philadelphia.

Head to Head

Like Sherman and Edelstein, Dabrow and Gilbert squared off against each other recently, with Dabrow’s team pulling out a 61-58 win that went down to the final seconds. As might be expected, both players figured into the game’s ending.

Thanks to a couple three-point shots, Dabrow helped his team build a 16-point lead a couple minutes before the end of the first half, but it was all downhill from there.

The team’s defense got sloppy and let the opposition back into the game in the second half. Dabrow and company managed to regain a three-point lead in the final minutes and had the ball with nine seconds left. An inbounds play designed to get the ball down the court to a teammate failed when Dabrow’s pass went long, giving the opposition a chance to tie.

On the final play, Gilbert was able to break free behind the



Adam Sherman (center) sinks free throws in the final seconds to put a close game out of reach. Bruce Gilbert is to the left.

ANDY GOTLIEB

three-point line, but his off-balance shot hit the rim and bounced away. One final shot by a teammate fell short, ending the game.

On this day, Dabrow walked away bruised but victorious, but he, Gilbert, Edelstein and Sherman all could be considered winners as they got their sweat and left uninjured — and ready for the next game. ●

Editor’s note: The author of this article has been known to set a vicious pick or two and be a general nuisance on the court in the above league.

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'I'm 80 — WHAT DO I DO NOW?'

Ed Eisen Believes in Second Acts —
AND Eighth AND Ninth AND 10th ...

LIZ SPIKOL | JE STAFF

This summer, the financial data company SmartAsset released its second annual study on American retirement. Using census microdata on labor force participation between 2010 and 2014 for people aged 40 to 80, the company determined the average retirement age on both state and national levels.

Not much had changed since last year: The lowest average retirement age across 50 states was still 62; the highest was still 65. Nor had the national average age of retirement changed from 63.

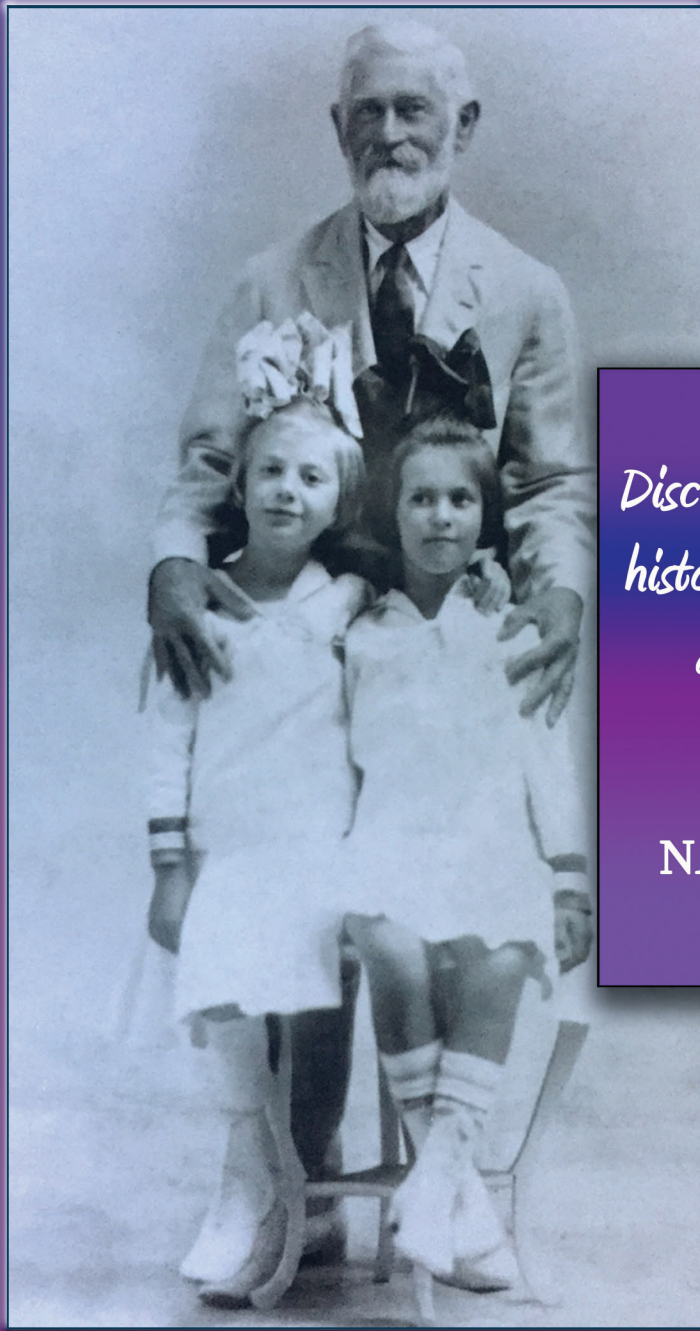
Another fact that's also stayed remarkably stable: the number of people who are part of the labor force after 80. In both years of SmartAsset's study, that number was only 6 percent.

Ed Eisen, it appears, didn't get that memo.

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PHOTO OF ED EISEN BY BOB KRAVITZ

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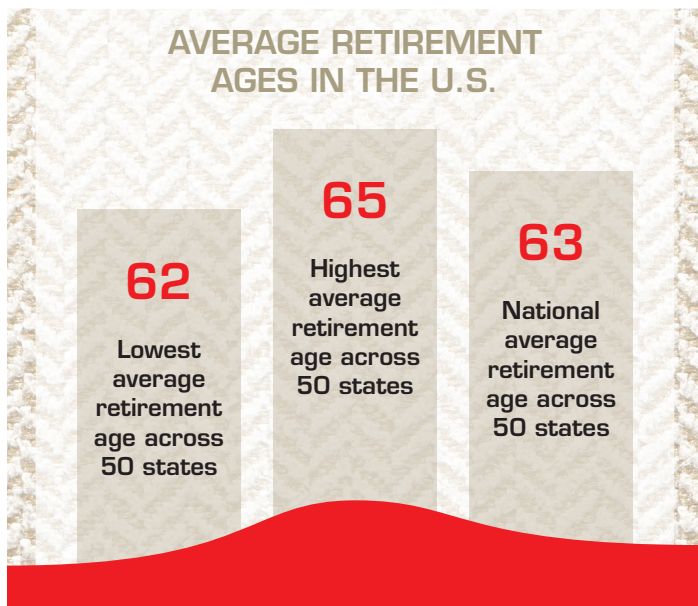
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Eisen

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At 80, the Jenkintown resident is still going strong, busier than ever with work that reflects the words on his license plate: "GIVE-BAK."

"I've had 17 careers," said the unceasingly energetic Eisen, who was born in Brooklyn and grew up

As a child, little Eddie didn't dream of changing hats so often. Instead, he was utterly sure of his path: He wanted to be a broadcaster.



in Camden and West Philadelphia. "I've been a journalist at three major metros, author, public relations consultant, script writer, DJ, talk-show host, TV producer, video producer, entrepreneur, advertising executive, marketing professional, adjunct professor, voice-over talent, ESL teacher, memoir-writing

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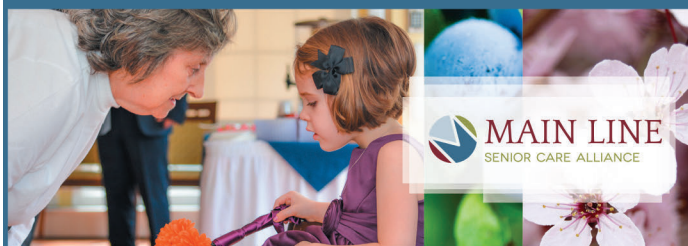
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Ed Eisen presenting his talk "A Reporter's Front Row Seat to History."

coach, career consultant and motivational speaker." Later, he added another one: "memory-loss consultant." That last one is a job he started in his 70s.

As a child, little Eddie didn't dream of changing hats so often. Instead, he was utterly sure of his path: He wanted to be a broadcaster — just like the radio announcers he heard when he listened to *Superman* and *The Lone Ranger*. He even created his own cardboard radio station out of milk boxes.

"It wasn't until much later, when I went into broadcasting, that I found out it wasn't the business for me," Eisen said. "I was canned more frequently than I worked."

Despite a voice that even today has a broadcaster's rich timbre, Eisen — an undeniably voluble fellow — thinks maybe he talked too much for broadcasting.

"Diarrhea of the mouth, I guess it was. You could say it almost ended my career."

But Eisen has a kind of superhuman resilience, turning each unexpected fork in the road into a personal red-carpet runway. In this case, the demise of one career led to his finding his bliss as a journalist.

"That's the one career that has always defined me and that I miss to this day," he said. "Journalism — that was for me."

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Eisen

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He began as a copy boy at *The Philadelphia Daily News* and worked for six years at the old *Ft. Lauderdale News*. Locally, he worked as a writer at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Philadelphia Bulletin*. In summing up his journalistic career, he said, "I made a hell of a lot of people angry."

When the *Bulletin* went out of business in the early '80s, Eisen found himself again at a career crossroads. It was at this point that he got what he says was the worst advice of his life — from his own father.

"It was the same thing he told me when I was 18," Eisen recalls of his father, who worked for a cleaning company. "He said, 'Eddie, why don't you go into the cleaning business? You'll make a



"Pop ... I'm a writer. I'm a journalist. I don't want to mop floors."

— Ed Eisen

lot of money. You'll have a life.' I said the same thing to him at 18 and in 1982: 'Pop, you don't understand. I'm a writer. I'm a journalist. I don't want to mop floors.'"

So the then-48-year-old took a job at *The Atlantic City Press* as a copy editor. He hated being behind the scenes, but wasn't planning to leave — until one Saturday night, three months after he started, when his boss called him in for a talk.

"I'm sorry, Ed," the boss told him. "You didn't make it."

The reason for Eisen's dismissal? His failure to master the new computer system.

The boss did have kind parting words, though: "I'm sure you'll find something else in life that you'll do well with."

"Boy, was I down," Eisen recalled. "The thing that defined me, the thing I had been most passionate about — being a journalist — it just ended. I was depressed."

The depression lasted three days. Then he got up, pulled the dusty Smith-Corona typewriter from under the bed, and got to work.

"I had a wife and four kids and the roof was leaking."

The PR firm Eisen then launched, Eisen & Associates, lasted 28 years, until he "retired" in 2010. Of course, he didn't really retire. Instead, he reinvented himself again — this time as something like a spirit guide for people moving through post-retirement.

He started at nursing homes and retirement facilities, and then broadened his reach to libraries, universities, synagogues and churches. He has a whole slate of programs, many of which he refers to as "this thing I do."

"There's this thing I do called 'A Reporter's Front-Row Seat to History,' where I talk about the people I've met, like Mother Teresa and two popes, Joe Frazier, Jackie Gleason," he said. "Then I've got another talk called 'New Year Equals New Job.' I do a quiz show called 'Can You Top This?' I do a thing called 'I'm 80 — What Do I Do Now?' I do a thing called 'Confessions of a Philadelphia Spin Doctor,' which is based on my book. I do 'The Pope's Jewish PR Guy and Other Tales: How Ed Eisen Said No to the Mafia and Lived.' I do a thing called 'From Caterpillar to Butterfly: How You, Too, Can Change.'"

His most popular program these days is probably the one about current events.

"Some of these people in these retirement homes are told, 'You don't talk about politics. You don't talk about religion. You don't talk about these controversial things.'"

That's not Eisen's style.

"I do a thing called 'Sound Off,' where we debate the big issues in the news. For one hour we talk about Donald Trump and the presidency and what it means for America. We talk about what it means to be a Muslim. We talk about issues that are frowned upon to talk about at the dinner table. It's sort of like Anderson Cooper and Bill O'Reilly combined. They just love it."

Another much-loved program is the one he does for people with Alzheimer's and dementia, in which he plays music from the '30s, '40s and '50s, and passes around an old Quaker oatmeal box that's filled with written prompts: "Can you remember the last time you sat around a radio listening to it?" "Tell the story of how you met your spouse." "What was the happiest day of your life?" "What would it take to make you very happy today?"

If workshop attendees can't find an answer, Eisen — not surprisingly — answers the questions himself.

All of Eisen's activity these days is motivated by the same desire: to enrich the lives of others.

"You've got to make yourself happy by making other people happy," he said. It's an impulse he probably got from his mother.

"My mother was from Latvia. We were poor. But she would have a stranger come into the house on the Sabbath every Friday night. That was my mom's way of giving back."

He and his wife have passed the giving torch on to their kids: Daughters Stacy and Gwen both work in the health care industry, while son Seth recently wrote a play inspired by work he did as a caretaker for an elderly man. (Eisen's other son, Steve, died of cancer at 33.)

"I'm having a ball, I really am," Eisen says of his 18th — or is it 19th? — act. "People look at me, and they don't believe that I'm 80."

So is that the takeaway? Is that the point?

"The point," said Eisen, "is that there's always hope, and the sun will come out tomorrow." ●

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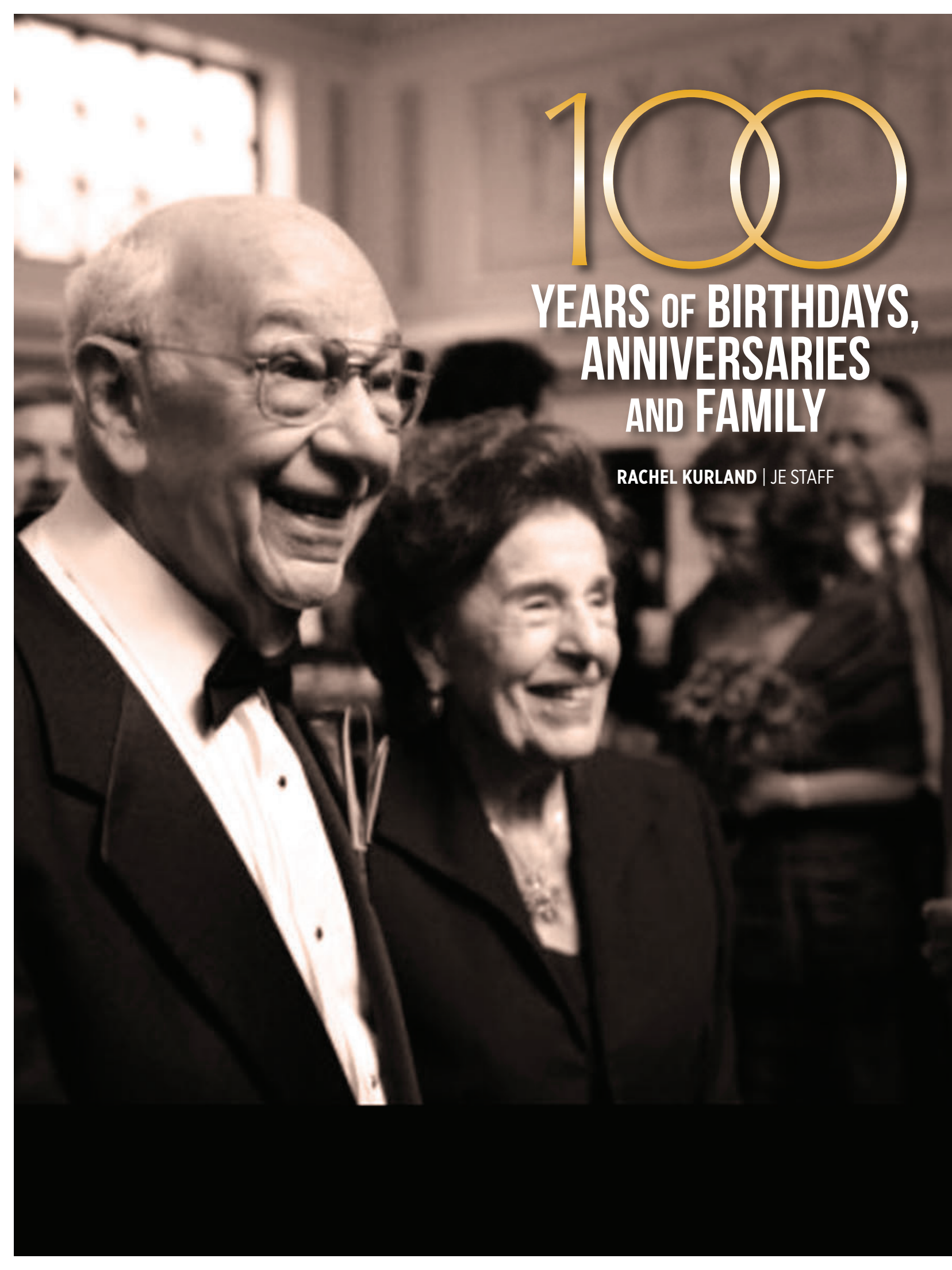
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YEARS OF BIRTHDAYS, ANNIVERSARIES AND FAMILY

RACHEL KURLAND | JE STAFF

There are 525,600 minutes in a year. Throughout their marriage, Norman and Eleanor Rothstein have shared more than 39 million minutes together. That's 76 years — or a combined 200 years of life.

The couple celebrated their 76th wedding anniversary in August. Norman turns 100 on Dec. 18, and Eleanor will blow out her 100 candles (well, figuratively) on April 18, 2017.

The Rothsteins were born and raised in Philadelphia and have two daughters, three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Granddaughter Renee Rubenstein said the family is incredibly close. Sometimes they joke, "Wouldn't it be funny if after all this time you got divorced?"

LET'S START AT THE VERY BEGINNING

Norman was friendly with Eleanor's brother at Temple University and became close with her through him.

"It didn't take me long to realize she's the kind of girl that I was interested in," Norman recalled. "And within a month or so, we understood each other."

See 100, Page 20



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Continued from Page 19

TIPS FOR A LONG AND HAPPY MARRIAGE

So what's the secret to a successful marriage?

"Listening to each other and never getting mad," Norman said. "You can get irritated, but never get mad. And never let a day go by in which whatever causes a particular problem that day, always smooth it out and forget about it.

"We have a great amount of love and respect for each other. Whatever happens, I always forget about it and so does she within a few minutes because it's done and over."

"We understand each other very well and we communicate very well, don't we dear?" Eleanor added.

"Oh yes," Norman responded enthusiastically. "No secrets, no bad days, no bad incidents or points of disagreement. It's discussed and done with within a half an hour."

TWO PEAS IN A POD

Norman and Eleanor have always done everything together — "all our lives, always," Norman quickly added.

They've vacationed and traveled together, including about 11 cruises.

For 20 years, they owned a condo in Aruba. But one of their favorite trips was to Israel.

"I'll never forget when we landed in Israel. I, in particular, have a feeling of 'I'm home and these are my people,'" Norman remembered. "It was a wonderful feeling and I've always tried to impress this on my children, my grandchildren, to try to go to Israel, and they have."

WE ARE FAMILY

Although they have 24-hour care at their Jenkintown apartment, family members still visit almost every day in different shifts.

"We have a lot of family coming over all the time," Norman said. "We have a very close and loving family. They never forget about calling us all the time. Hardly a day goes by that they don't call or come and visit. We see them all the time."

See 100, Page 22



NORMAN AND ELEANOR ROTHSTEIN



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100

Continued from Page 20

They're both so proud of their family, noting that several of them have gone on to become doctors or business leaders.

A lot of support for their marriage comes from their family, which Norman said means a lot to him.

And after all these years, he said he and Eleanor both have "complete faith with each other."

"Nothing comes between our love, nothing at all. There are no bad moments, no bad times."

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

"All the incidents that have happened in my life and her life — the children, grandchildren, their growth and development, and the development of business ventures — all in all, it was a great trip down memory lane," Norman recalled.

As for their upcoming birthdays, they hope for just a quiet evening at home, not making a big deal of it because it can become overwhelming with so many family members chatting and schmoozing in tight corners.

"I know what's going to happen. Each one of the children and grandchildren will come separately or only with their family," Norman predicted.

LOOKING BEYOND 100 YEARS

After nearly 100 years, what does Norman hope for the future?

"Just to get up in the morning," he joked.

Humor aside, Norman did have some advice for the younger generation about getting older.

"Have patience with each other. If anything is wrong, talk about it and forget about the arguments" — and do what's right, he added.

"My whole life has really been wrapped around family. We're so proud of our family — three doctors in the family, another going to dental school, the others in business ventures. The whole family has done well, which gives me a great amount of satisfaction because I've found that now that I'm pretty well set in life, I'm at peace with myself."

He continued that they're not too concerned for their family in the future because they know they are going to do great things.

"Love, understanding, patience — what else is in life? I guess we're pretty lucky." ●

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Old Rabbis NOT Fading Away

JON MARKS | JE STAFF

While old soldiers may just fade away, old rabbis are finding retirement is merely the start of the next chapter in their busy lives.

Now that they no longer have to worry on a regular basis about what words of wisdom they need to inspire their former congregants, especially during times of crisis, they've discovered a different world.

It's a world where, in many cases, their everyday lives — due to the commitment it takes that goes well beyond the bimah — have often had to take a back seat to until now.

But no longer.

Now they can read that book they never quite had time to finish. Or write that short story that's been in the back of their minds. Or teach. Or attend the theater. Or learn to cook. Or do nonprofit work for a public service agency. Or simply get away somewhere and relax, an option seldom available when so many depend on you.

The main thing retired rabbis universally say is that it helps to have some kind of plan.

"I've read a number of books about retiring clergy, which I found helpful," said Gary Gans, rabbi emeritus of Congregation Beth Tikvah in Marlton, N.J., who, among other things, is spending the holidays as the rabbi on a cruise ship. "They all spoke about being creative and finding positive outlets.

"I am doing exactly that. I'm a licensed family therapist with a doctorate. So I'll be doing some of that. I'm also on the board at Crescent Memorial Park cemetery and a chaplain in the Evesham Township Police Department. I'm going to lectures I couldn't make before and auditing a class in social work at Rutgers-Camden.

"And I'm also a genealogist. I was able to attend a conference last year in Seattle and previously in Jerusalem."

Gans' hectic life is typical of his colleagues, who've discovered new passions once they stepped away from the pulpit.



GARY GANS

[See Rabbis, Page 24](#)



Rabbis

Continued from Page 23

For Elliot Strom, rabbi emeritus at Shir Ami in Newtown, it's cooking. He's become a bit of an amateur chef after taking classes at Sur La Table in New York City, where he and his wife, Susan, have an apartment.

For George Stern, it's working in social justice in the nonprofit world, where he was director of an interfaith group in Mount Airy for years until funding cutbacks led to its demise. And, like many of his rabbinical counterparts, he spends time with his grandchildren.

For Robert Layman, it's both teaching and taking courses at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Temple University's Center City campus. Lately, he's taught a class on Israel and the Jewish world, essentially a current

events course. He's also taken classes in the arts, history, politics and languages, and he's learning a little Russian and polishing up on his high school French.

"They have a variety of courses and a membership of around 1,300," said the 84-year-old Layman, the former regional director of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, after being rabbi at Beth Tikvah B'nai Jeshurun in Erdenheim for 14 years. "Most of the

people are in their 70s and 80s. A few are in their 90s."

Layman's other pursuit has been working with the Rabbinical Assembly, which has a division for retired rabbis and holds an annual convention. He served as president in 2009 and 2010, and



ROBERT LAYMAN



Elliot Strom and George Simon.

has kept up with them since.

Closer to home, he's involved with the weekly lunch-and-learn sessions at Congregation Adath Jeshurun in Elkins Park. He also teaches adult education at Congregation Beth Shalom and gives D'Var Torah periodically.

"One problem many retiring rabbis face is they can't let go," Layman said. "Early in my rabbinate, I followed someone who'd been there for 40 years. He didn't want to retire but had to and was bitter about that.

"You have to let go and let someone else take over. You also have to plan to be active. The worst affliction for anyone is to be idle. I'm in good health, and I've maintained that by being active."

While Layman stayed active remaining close to home, Simeon Maslin has done it by splitting time, spending a good chunk of it at his new summer retreat in Maine, where he's not only developed a new set of friends but found a job.



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"I was pretty confident I'd have things to do," said the 85-year-old Maslin, who retired from Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park in 1999. "I like to write. I've written three books and published 108 articles.

"But I sort of stumbled into something that's made life interesting and pleasant over the past 19 years. I bought a retirement place in Brunswick, Maine, near Bowdoin College and made friends with lot of faculty at Bowdoin.

"They asked me to serve as their rabbi for the High Holidays there. There's about 100 to 125 students and 25 to 30 faculty who attend. And what happened after that was I started a Shabbat morning *chavurah* using their facilities, and I sort of became the town rabbi.

"Our lives in Maine have become very rich because of that."

According to Maslin, who's been the rabbi on a number of cruises and will soon set sail for New Zealand and Australia, being a rabbi can't be the only thing in your life.

"You have to have some outside interest other than the rabbinate," said Maslin, who, in his early years, was rabbi on the island of Curaçao, where he helped merge the Sephardic synagogue considered the oldest in the Western hemisphere with a new one. "If all you have is the rabbinate and you retire, there's not much for you to do.

"The book I just finished, *Uncle Sol's Women*, is my first novel. It's been percolating in my mind for years. But I had no time as a rabbi to do that kind of serious writing."

See Rabbis, Page 26



Retired Rabbi Simeon Maslin in Maine.

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Rabbis

Continued from Page 25

Neither did Elliot Strom while at Shir Ami. In fact, whenever he sat down to work on *Rabbi, Run*, a takeoff on the popular John Updike novel, something got in his way.

"I wanted to finish my book," Strom said. "It was a dozen years in the making, but I never had time to finish it to my satisfaction. It's a story about a rabbi who's literally a runner. But he's also running away from things, from congregational life. From the role of the rabbi and his family."

Besides writing, Strom's done his share of reading.

"I've had time to read for pleasure," said the 65-year-old Strom, who retired in 2015. "Before, everything I read had a purpose or I was getting ready to teach a course."

And he and his wife have become fixtures on the New York theater and museum circuit. Then there's the man who prepared a special Valentine's dinner for his wife this past year and who loves to cook short ribs — kosher, of course.

"We've had this place in New York for four to five years, but we couldn't do as much as we wanted until now," Strom said. Now we go up there every other week. We like serious drama — off-Broadway — which gives us lots to talk about after the play.

"But we've seen *Hamilton*, too."

But for all those pursuits, they'll still tell you don't stop being a rabbi simply because you don't have a place to preach.

"I love going back to synagogue and doing things at Shir Ami," said Strom, who helped the congregation celebrate its 40th birthday Dec. 2. "I love being in the building."

"And I still get to do all about the things about the rabbinate I

love — weddings, funerals, et cetera — and still have time to pursue other things. I get to have my cake and eat it, too."

Meanwhile, Gans, who claims his 40-year marriage to Reconstructionist Rabbi Ilene Schneider is the second-longest in the world among rabbinic couples, is working on a murder mystery in which the heroine is a South Jersey female rabbi. But that didn't keep him from recently conducting services in Boston.

"We're so used to being busy in our lives we can't imagine stopping and going to the rocking chair," he laughed. "I'm not ready for that."

Neither is Maslin, who'll never forget the chain of events surrounding a cruise he took to Iceland — on 9/11.

"We were just off Iceland and the captain the ship asked me to conduct a service," Maslin said. "I was the only clergyman onboard. At that time, we knew very little. People were upset, so I just did a general service of hope. Maybe 50 to 60 people showed up."

"But when others heard we'd had a service they went to the captain, and I did another one for several hundred people. And when we docked at Iceland, all the flags were at half staff."

Not every rabbi — active or retired — has such a story to tell. But each of them surely has had some moment when they gained a true appreciation for how special and unique their jobs and lives have been.

While their careers may be winding down, they're not about to fade away. ●

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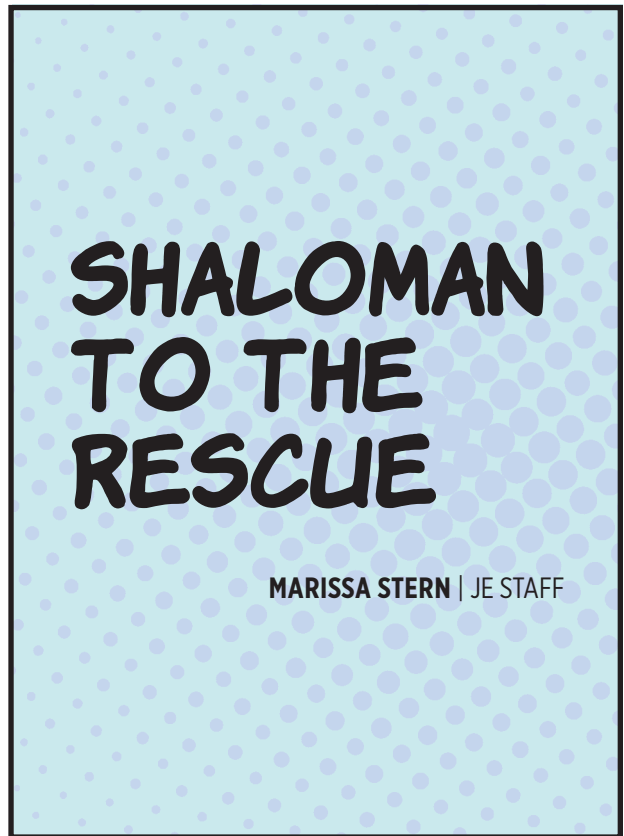
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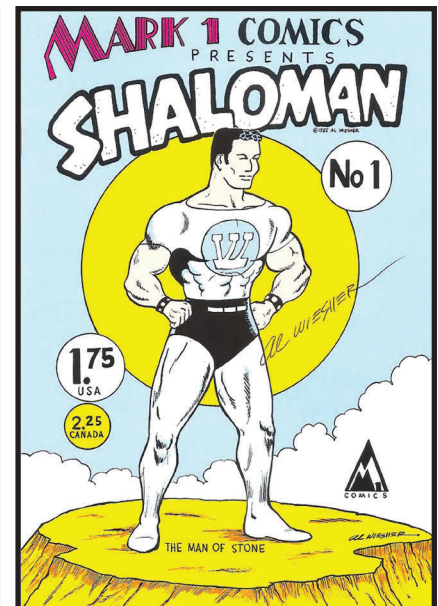
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While theaters have been inundated with superhero movies in the past few years (looking at you, Avengers), there is one superhero that is missing. No, not Squirrel Girl. Rather, one specific superhero who didn't exist until 1988.

When Al Wiesner was growing up in the Parkside neighborhood of West Philadelphia, he spent his days reading comic books and noticed something that stuck with him until much later in life: There were few Jewish superheroes.

Wiesner, 86, and his friends passed the time reading Superman comics after they debuted in 1938 and later got into Batman and Spiderman and all the other men — all of whom were written by Jewish men.

See Shaloman, Page 28



Shaloman

Continued from Page 27

"I noticed all the comic books that were out, or at least most of them, had Jewish authors, but nothing in the story itself was Jewish in its entirety," Wiesner recalled. So he took matters into his own hands. Cape optional.

First, he created a set of stories featuring the Y-Guys after reading Stan Lee's (or Stan Lieber's) *X-Men*.

"*X-Men* was very popular, and I thought, 'How can I make it Jewish?'" said Wiesner, who belongs to Ohev Shalom of Bucks County. "After X comes Y, and the Y is for the YMHA where young Jewish boys grew up. So I came up with Y-Guys, as opposed to X-Men, and they were boys that had different mutant powers and they lived at the Y."

He even met Lee at one point and gave him a copy of *Y-Guys*.

By 1983, after serving in the Air Force and spending 45 years as a women's hairdresser in Oxford Circle, Wiesner was still thinking about the lack of Jewish superheroes.

"I had said to my wife, 'I really would like to get back to my artwork.'" The time seemed right given Israel's place in the world. "With Israel becoming a country and a powerful country for its size, I felt that now people could envision a Jewish superhero that has strength as well as intelligence."

After a few exchanges with a DIY comics place in Norristown, Wiesner started on the first of 42 issues that would feature his Jewish superhero: the Man of Stone, or Shaloman. He formed his own comic book publishing company, Mark 1 Comics, named for his son, and Shaloman debuted in 1988.



AL WIESNER

Wiesner created an origin story for Shaloman: A trio of men in Israel named Justice, Equity and Wisdom (or JEW) sheared the top off of a mountain with lightning and turned it into the Hebrew letter *shin*, the first letter of *shalom*.

"Something the 'regular' world wanted and the Jewish world wanted was peace," he said.

Though he was inspired by Superman's story and powers, "I wasn't going to make [Shaloman] a man of steel," Wiesner said, "but I thought I could make him a man of stone because stone is permanent and stone is here to stay."

After looking at the letter *shin*, Wiesner noticed the top of the letter looked almost like a man flexing his muscles, which informed Shaloman's transformation from stone to man.

And when there's trouble afoot, one just yells "oy vey!" and Shaloman transforms from stone and comes to save the day.

Of course, Shaloman isn't without his weaknesses. After all, "stories are boring when nothing in the world can stop them or hurt them and there's no vulnerability to the superhero," Wiesner said.

So when the three wise men took the lightning and created the *shin* out of the mountaintop, the pieces that "flew every which way" became shinite, similar to Superman's kryptonite. When Shaloman gets too close, they drain his strength.

Wiesner took cues from the radio shows he listened to growing up and used them to create adventure stories for the Shaloman, as well as using Jewish narratives he'd learned.

There are many Shaloman stories modeled after holidays. One

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story takes place on a ship called Bondage and basically follows the Passover narrative; another, based on Purim, takes a musical approach as the rock King Swear (echoing the name King Ahasuerus) wants to find a rock queen, and Esther and her uncle Morty and a character modeled after Haman come into play.

In a Chanukah story, Shaloman is able to defeat terrorists by luring them out of hiding by shooting flares — one of which lasts eight minutes instead of one.

"I try to work in Jewish things with adventure stories and make it interesting," Wiesner said. "Even someone with knowledge of Jewish history would have a jump."

Shaloman battles terrorists and other villains — including a clone of himself created by the evil Dr. Traif in the first issue.

He later introduced other characters like Shalomboy, aka Yoni, who — after being injured in a terrorist bus explosion — receives a bionic arm and leg at Hadassah Hospital and gets his own superpowers.

Writing the comic has even earned Wiesner a trip to Israel.

When he wanted to create a Shaloman story set there, Wiesner sought advertising from a travel company in New Jersey. When they learned he hadn't been to Israel, the company chipped in to place advertisements as well as pay for half of a trip to Israel for Wiesner so he could see it for himself.



His "crowning glory" came when he created a Shaloman story about the Holocaust, for which he interviewed survivors. In the story, Shaloman takes a Holocaust denier back in time so he can see the atrocities for himself.

Through the years of creating Shaloman and writing the comics, Wiesner has met some of his own heroes.

Ray Bradbury once praised him for being able to have a character go back in time without changing events in the future, breaking Bradbury's golden rule of science fiction: no time travel.

In 2010, Wiesner was honored at the San Diego Comic Con with the Inkpot Award, given annually to recognize achievements in "worlds of comics, science fiction/fantasy, film, television, animation, and fandom services." He was seated next to Jerry Robinson, the comic book artist known for his work on Batman, and nearby Nathan Fillion of *Castle* and Stan Freberg.

"It was a wonderful time, and the best part is they paid for all of it," Wiesner said with a laugh.

He's participated in other cons, such as Wizard World

See *Shaloman*, Page 30

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A resident since 2012, 'Captain' Ron Cohen adds to community life at Plush Mills by sharing his love of music, boating, and science. He serves on the Resident Council and conducts Shabbat services.

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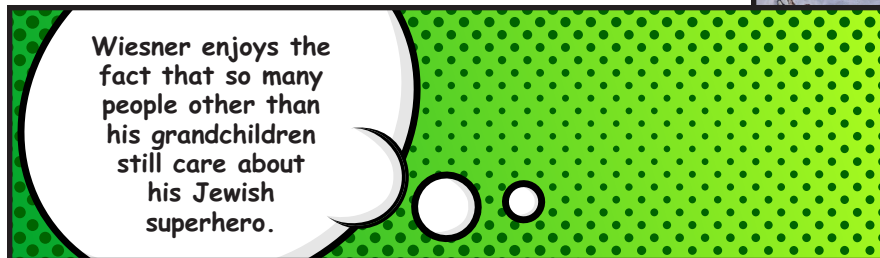
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Philadelphia this past summer along with Joshua Stulman, creator of Israeli Defense Comics. Wiesner is working with him on writing another Shaloman story for IDC.

While the new story will run at about seven or eight pages as opposed to the 32-page stories he previously did, it will be Wiesner's first return to Shaloman since 2012.

"If you had asked me when I first created this comic book, 'How many would you do?' I would have said, 'I don't know, three or four,'" he said. "But in all these years, I came up with all these other ones."

He's proud that he was able to achieve his dream of creating a



Jewish superhero and is happy his stories still resonate.

Full collections of Shaloman comics are housed at the library in Hebrew Union College, Ohio State University and in some synagogue Judaica stores.

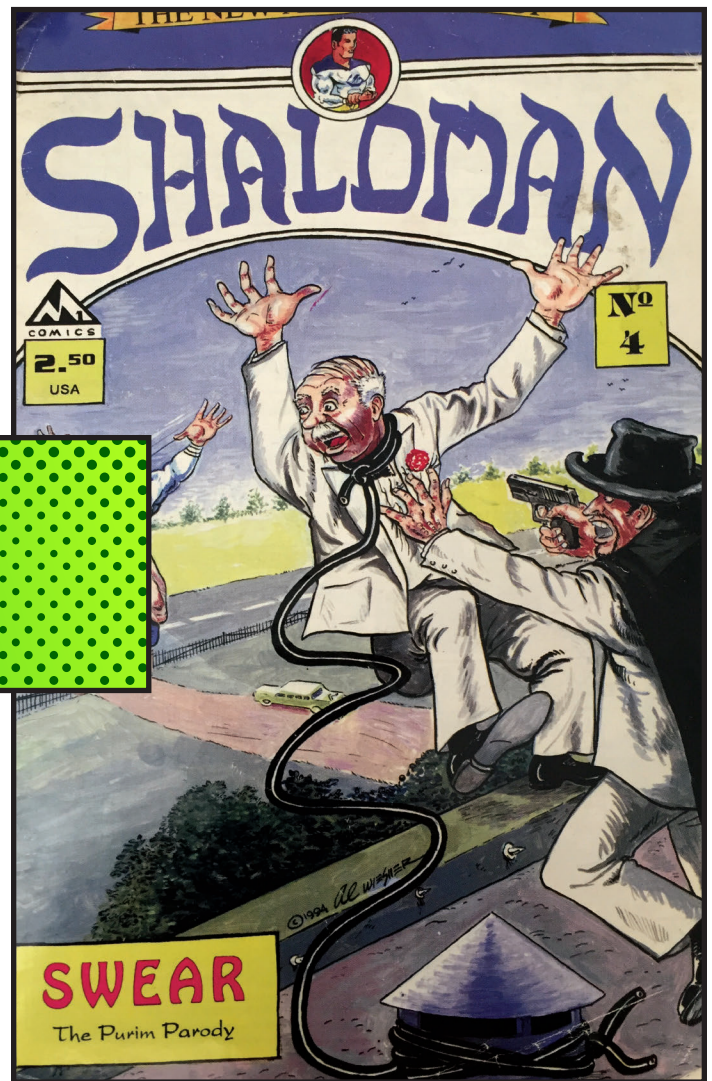
Shaloman's biggest fans may be Wiesner's grandchildren.

"They look forward to it when I give them each a copy when it comes out," he said.

But Wiesner enjoys the fact that so many people and kids other than his grandchildren still care about his Jewish superhero.

"I hope that they get an interesting story of something I've created and managed to keep within the realm of Jewish heritage," he said. •

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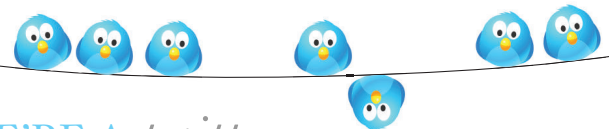
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