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The Real Meaning of “Supportive Community”

We all tend to take our community and support systems for granted...until they fall away or we can't access them. During the recent pandemic shutdown, many older adults were suddenly left to their own devices.

It certainly raises a question for the future: would you rather be alone in your home to fend for yourself, or live in a full-service community?

When we asked our residents how they experienced the shutdown and what “supportive community” meant to them, they most often spoke about “being in this together...never alone.” We captured their comments in a short video on **www.BeaumontRetirement.com** - everything from mask-wearing and our on-campus medical team, to having gourmet meals delivered to their doorstep.

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**Inspiring others is Barbara
Mishkin's mission.**

PHOTO BY KEITY MITCHELL

Age Just One of Many Numbers for Barbara Mishkin

JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF

Barbara Mishkin looks at the clock in the middle of an interview. It is 3:32 in the afternoon. This is meaningful. “I’m a numbers person,” she explained. “And I always feel my angels are looking after me. 3:33 is a very special time. I just want you to know that.”

Another number that’s important to Mishkin: 75. She recently reached that milestone, but the 75-year-old who splits her time between an Upper Gwynedd 55-plus community and Florida said that she feels 40. Another twist: Mishkin feels that she started her second life when she turned 50. What’s more, a medium once told Mishkin that she had spent 200 revolutions around the sun as a “line worker for God.”

Perhaps the answer is that Mishkin, who is retired, is ageless; maybe she’s 40, and maybe she’s just passed the two-century mark. It’s not entirely clear. What’s abundantly obvious is that her energy for The Inspiration Project, an artistic undertaking that started as a nice idea and has grown into an in-demand service requiring a team of volunteers, is based on an ageless principle: It feels good to do things for other people.

“Why am I so engrossed in gratitude and inspiring people?” Mishkin asked rhetorically. “Because I’m just doing it for them! And then I, secondarily, get so much.”

With The Inspiration Project, a nonprofit she started in 2016, Mishkin sends her original artwork and reproductions to tired spirits in need of a lift.

Residents at the Abramson Center for Jewish Life and Federation Housing have received Mishkin cards, reproductions of her original paintings and photographs embossed with stirring sentiments (“Life is a New Journey Every Day”; “Positive Mind, Positive Vibes, Positive Life”). So have homeless Philadelphians, children used to going without and others served by Samaritan’s Purse. She’s created artwork for the Special Olympics and Wesley Enhanced Living.

Local nursing homes clamor for Mishkin’s output, which ranges from wallet-sized squares to 8-by-11-inch works ready for a frame. Well over 16,000 frames have been prepared by Mishkin and a rotating volunteer staff of 12. Her painting style and photographic interests have changed and changed again, as her husband, Nelson Mishkin, can attest, but many have the look of outsider art — odd figures and geometric shapes mixed with more traditional brushstrokes; on top of the photographs and more abstract work are words that are just, well, nice to remember some times. Her own inspiration can come from something as simple as a fallen leaf.

Mishkin’s project includes a Facebook page, where her daily musings are shared with hundreds of followers, many of whom actively interact with her. For those who aren’t on Facebook, she’ll send a daily email with the same content. The day before Thanksgiving, she sent an illustrated poem that she’d come across to me individually, and then sent another a few days later.

“I gravitated towards this when I found it because of the

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MISHKIN

Continued from Page 7

dragonfly on the top right, which I usually go to," she explained. "It is considered my spirit animal inspirationally according to spiritual traditions."

Mishkin, for her deeply felt connection to art and soul matters, wasn't particularly invested in either growing up. There was music in her Oxford Circle home, kept by her mother, a homemaker, and her father, a pharmacist, but not the bursts of color that have come to characterize her life. Mishkin recalls a teacher telling her mother than she might consider sending her daughter to art school, but the idea was quashed.

"It wasn't even thought of," she said.

Instead, she went into education, studying at Temple University, and spent a long career working with the elderly in various capacities (she put them to work then, too, placing them in volunteer positions). Just about the only constant through that time was her husband, to whom she's been married for 54 years.

Nelson Mishkin, who is indisputably 77, saw his wife grasping for a creative expression after her retirement, but he said, she'd always found an outlet before, brush in hand or not. Everything from her demeanor to the way she decorated the house was an expression of her creativity.

When she started sketching more and more, graduating to acrylic painting and birdhouse decoration, he knew she'd found something special. A few years ago, as his wife sought to do something more meaningful than painting for herself, Nelson Mishkin knew she'd figure out something.

When his wife turned to him one morning with an epiphany — the one that would become The Inspiration Project — he was hardly surprised.

"She was always looking to help other people, and do things for other people, to bring joy to them," Nelson Mishkin said.

Betty Organt, a friend of Barbara Mishkin, has her paintings and photos all over her home. When a friend of Organt's was feeling down, Organt sent her a Mishkin; Organt's friend called to let her know that the card was now a daily fixture — a source of uplift propped up on her desk. It was hardly a surprise to Organt, a former teacher who met Mishkin through their active adult community and was drawn into her circle of volunteers.

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“Why am I so engrossed in gratitude and inspiring people? Because I’m just doing it for them! And then I, secondarily, get so much.”

BARBARA MISHKIN



▲ “Ladies Who Lunch,” by Barbara Mishkin COURTESY OF BARBARA MISHKIN

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A sampling of Mishkin
cards.

COURTESY OF
BARBARA MISHKIN

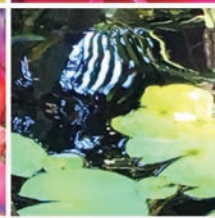


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“Barbara has a big heart,” Organt said. “She’s so welcoming.” Mishkin is writing a book these days and, whether she’s 75 or not, the only thing that worries her is that she won’t have enough years left to do everything that she wants to do. That 2020 put a pause on her ability to have volunteers in her home can feel constraining.

“But I feel God is always with me,” she said, “and how He started me with this project — I know it sounds crazy, but I never felt that before.” •

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Judi Lawrence Had to Reinvent Her Life — and It Worked

JESSE BERNSTEIN | JE STAFF



▲ Judith Lawrence in her office at Center City Notary

PHOTOS BY JANE WILLIG

Judith Lawrence — Judi to her friends, Judith to her clients (until they become her friends) — knows that her mother would hate this. Her father, too.

They wouldn't have been able to stand the recklessness of it, the trapeze-without-a-net act that their daughter embraced, and with such enthusiasm. Lawrence — who said, "I don't do age for anything or anyone" — can only imagine the fit they would have thrown about her later-in-life career change, the result of a surprise layoff from a job she loved. But Lawrence can't blame them; they were "Depression people," as she said.

In the meantime, the opportunity that Lawrence was given by losing her job, which resulted in her owning a successful notary business called Center City Notary, has been a dream.

"I knew, as soon as I started, that this was for me, that I had never done anything so exciting or so challenging," Lawrence said.

Those aren't sentiments typically ascribed to the experience of notarizing forms for pre-nuptial agreements, adoption and making aliyah.

SEE LAWRENCE | Page 12



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LAWRENCE

Continued from Page 11

But Lawrence, who is a one-woman show working out of a 14th-floor office at Broad and Sansom streets, knows that she's not just a one-stop shop for rubber stamps. She's been given a shot to do something she'd never thought she'd do — run her own outfit — and it's working. Not bad for the lady who didn't know what she was doing when she got started, as Lawrence said.

Born in Camden, New Jersey, Lawrence spent a year in college before beginning to work as a legal secretary in Philadelphia. She was a sponge, and learned as much as she could in the halls of powerful law firms.

She started with Zarwin Baum, and then worked for a lawyer named Alan Fellheimer, by Lawrence's account a tough guy to work for who nonetheless taught her how to be successful in business and law. She spent time at Ballard Spahr LLP, WolfBlock and Montgomery McCracken Walker & Rhoads, a period of her life that she describes as her matriculation at the College of Law Firms.

That she was single and without children worked to her advantage, and she moved up, taking on greater responsibilities, making connections at other big firms and sitting on firm-wide committees where her opinion was sought, and valued. It was a time when working hard and working longer hours, she believed, meant that they'd keep on moving you up. She felt safe in her job.

Linda Mitchell, who worked with Lawrence as a paralegal, found her to be kind, generous and spirited; she was a hard worker that their office superiors turned to frequently, and she was fun, too.



▲ Judith Lawrence has adapted to the pandemic.



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“I knew, as soon as I started, that this was for me, that I had never done anything so exciting or so challenging.”

JUDITH LAWRENCE

“She would always go the extra mile,” Mitchell recalls.

On a beautiful May day, Lawrence was let go from her job at Montgomery McCracken. It was a total shock, especially for someone with such a stable employment history. The summer that followed was a dark, miserable time.

Still emerging from the fog, Lawrence called a notary for a personal matter, whom she paid \$100. Lawrence watched \$100 walk out the door. Why couldn’t she do that? She’d done it for the law firms she’d worked at; why couldn’t she do that again, but on her own?

She drew up a business card that day. Two weeks later, she made \$150 for a mortgage signing. After a brief interregnum running a small firm called NotaryService100, a friend told Lawrence she should talk a man who owned an outfit called Center City Notary.

When Lawrence arrived that day, Center City Notary saw that records were scattered, and little had been digitized, probably

SEE LAWRENCE | Page 14

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LAWRENCE

Continued from Page 11

because there wasn't a computer in the office. Soon after hiring her, the 84-year-old owner told Lawrence that he wanted her to buy the business, and make it her own. She was nervous, but agreed and, in 2015, Lawrence took over Center City Notary, peering out over the city from her office in the Land Title building.

After bringing the office into the new millennium, Lawrence got to work expanding the range of services.

Sally Mitlas, entertainer and owner of Mitlas Productions, got to know Lawrence through Center City Notary a few years ago, and was impressed with her drive and her personal story.

"She's a people person," Mitlas said. "This kind of job is perfect for her. She

"This is the year when people really found out what they're made of, including myself."

loves interacting with people and she loves helping people."

Once she realized her personal reinvention had been a success, she wanted to share the message that making a life change could be an incredible experience. She co-wrote a book in 2013 about how to start a notary business, and started the Lawrence Institute for Notaries, where she and lawyer Art Werner provide educational services to would-be notaries.

It was important for her to give back in other areas of her life — she's a supporter of Alex's Lemonade Stand, the American Cancer Society and other charitable groups as well.

Lawrence has adjusted to the pandemic, putting up plexiglass in the office and offering as many virtual services as she can. Shaken from normalcy, she's responded exactly how you'd expect.

"This is the year when people really found out what they're made of," Lawrence said. "Including myself." •

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Rivian Marcus Publishes Book of Chaplain Wisdom at 91

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Rivian Marcus knows it's never too late to publish your first book. After all, she published hers at 91.

"I woke up in the middle of the night, went to my desk and sat and wrote it in one sitting," she said of "Life Is A Four-Letter Word: It Takes The Alphabet To Live It," which she published on Amazon in March.

For every letter of the alphabet, Marcus writes words of wisdom to live by. A stands for "Accept reality," B for "Be wary of easy fixes" and C for "Cancel negative thoughts." Her daughter-in-law, Tara Marcus, illustrated and designed the book.

"Negative thoughts bring negative situations into your life. We are like magnets, attracting what we give off," Marcus said.

Marcus is an avid reader — she goes through a book a day on her e-reader app — but this is her first venture into writing. Her self-help book is based on topics she spoke about frequently during her years as a para-chaplain.



Is A Four-Letter Word

&

It Takes The Alphabet To Live It



by Rivian Marcus

COURTESY OF TARA MARCUS

The former interior decorator became a para-chaplain after surviving cancer in her early 80s. Her mother and sister both succumbed to the disease at younger ages, and her recovery seemed like nothing short of a miracle.

She took a three-year course and said she and her cohort were taught to be helpful to people in need. It harkened back to what she was taught by her mother at an early age.

Marcus grew up in South Philadelphia during the height of the Great Depression, and can vividly recall the sight of people coming into her parents' bakery with food stamps from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs.

“Age creeps up on you when you’re not ready for it. When you’re in good health, I suggest at the end of the book, get around and see what’s available, get a lot of information, visit institutions and read up on it and keep it for your children, so when you’re in need of that kind of help they have that information.”

RIVIAN MARCUS

When they came to the counter for rolls and loaves, her mother would always sneak a few cookies into their bags.

“I remember her saying, ‘Even when you’re hungry, you wish you had something sweet to eat,’” Marcus said.

One day, during a visit to a hospital near Wynnewood, Marcus encountered a weeping man in his mid-30s.

“I said, ‘What can I do for you?’ And he said to me, ‘I just found out I’m HIV-positive. And I’m a married man. And not only am I responsible to my wife, but I look after my father, too. What am I going to do?’”

She held his hand.

“I said, ‘You must pray and ask God to help you find strength to face your reality. And there is help for the disease. Seek that help. Be there for your family,’” she recalled.

She conducted Friday morning services, seders, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services while living in Boca Raton, Florida. She even conducted a seder in the middle of the ocean while aboard a cruise ship carrying 3,000 passengers.

She recalled that people stuck around afterward to tell her how much they had enjoyed it. The last man in the room spoke

SEE MARCUS | Page 18



The advertisement features a close-up photograph of an elderly man with white hair, wearing clear swimming goggles on his forehead and holding a white towel over his face. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a swimming pool with a wooden deck and a building in the distance. In the top left corner of the image, there are several logos: a small 'CARE' logo, a Facebook icon, a house icon, a wheelchair icon, a circular logo with a leaf, and the text 'Quality Living LeadingAge PA'. Overlaid on the bottom left of the image is the text 'i am' in a blue box, followed by 'just getting started' in large, white, italicized font. At the bottom of the image, there is a purple banner with the text 'To learn more, call 215-999-3619 or visit RydalPark.org'. To the right of the image, there is a purple sidebar with white text. It starts with 'There are many pages in a long, rich life. What will you be inspired to do next?' followed by 'Maybe you'll find time for a new approach to fitness, enhance your woodworking skills, take a class. Or just appreciate the convenience of a walk to the store.' Then it says 'Whatever your next chapter brings, you can open up the time and space for it here, in a community that supports your goals every step of the way.' At the bottom of the sidebar, it says 'Rydal Park' in a large, white, serif font, with 'a human good community' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. At the very bottom of the sidebar, there is a blue banner with the text '...to be continued' in white, italicized font.

There are many pages in a long, rich life. What will you be inspired to do next?

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Lorri Bernstein
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MARCUS

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with a heavy accent and told her that he had survived a concentration camp. He added that he had vowed he would never walk into a synagogue again after what he had experienced, but was inspired by her service to return to prayer.

"I was left speechless and in tears," she said.

Now, Marcus is the only Jew in her Catholic nursing home, St. Mary's Center for Rehabilitation & Healthcare, where she moved after suffering a broken hip. She misses being around other Jewish people and conducting services, but she has attracted a group of friends during her residency at the Cherry Hill, New Jersey, facility.

She frequently visits other residents, although she is confined to her section of the building during the pandemic.

Elizabeth Pellerin struck up a friendship with Marcus while visiting her mother.

"I will forever be grateful to have met Rivian. When my mother lived at St. Mary's, Rivian would wheel herself down to Mom's room at the end of the hallway each night to check in on her and make sure she was comfortable. Despite the situation Rivian has found herself to be in, she always looks out for others," Pellerin said.

Students at a local yeshiva, Foxman Torah Institute, heard about the Jewish woman staying at the Catholic nursing home and decided to visit.

"Let me tell you, until the pandemic, every Friday, sometimes Thursday and Friday, anywhere from two to eight young men would come to see me," she said. "I would have cookies and cashews, and we always sang a song before they left."

The boys are still in touch, although they can't visit her in her building.



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COURTESY OF TARA MARCUS

"I will forever be grateful to have met Rivian...Despite the situation Rivian has found herself to be in, she always looks out for others."

ELIZABETH PELLERIN

"One came to the window when I was on the first floor and sang and played a song. He writes Jewish music," she said.

The boys ask for her blessing when they visit her, and they're not the only ones.

"After a while, I had three priests who were residents here who asked me to come and bless them. And the young priest who is doing services now came to see me and ask for my blessing when he was taking a group to Israel," she said.

Marcus suffered a small stroke in November, but has no intention of slowing down. She fills her days with reading, writing, playing Scrabble on her tablet and phoning friends and family.

She is working on another book of wisdom, "Getting Old is Not a Hot Fudge Sundae." The volume, aimed at the elderly and their children, will address the challenges of aging through stories of her own lived experience, including when she broke her hip and ended up in a poor-quality rehabilitation center.

"I found out there was another one not very far away, that was a hundred percent better, but not knowing about it, I couldn't request it," she said.

"Age creeps up on you when you're not ready for it. When you're in good health, I suggest at the end of the book, get around and see what's available, get a lot of information, visit institutions and read up on it and keep it for your children, so when you're in need of that kind of help they have that information," she added. •

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Rabbi Pens Memoir About Her Journey to the Rabbinate

SOPHIE PANZER | JE STAFF

Rabbi Lynnda Targan didn't get into rabbinical school on her first try.

"When I tried to find out why not, I was told the admissions committee didn't 'image' me as a rabbi," she said.

Targan, 72, was later accepted and ordained at the Academy for Jewish Religion in Riverdale, New York, in 2003, but continued to hear versions of this comment throughout her career. She turned these experiences into the title of her book, "Funny, You Don't Look Like a Rabbi: A Memoir of Unorthodox Transformation," which came out in April from White River Press.

The memoir narrates her path to the rabbinate, which involved entering rabbinical school at age 50 after a career as a communications professional. As a young girl, she was inspired by Rabbi Amy Eilberg, the first female rabbi ordained in the Conservative movement, when she heard her speak at Temple Sinai in Dresher.

"She was a scholar, she was very poised, very charming and very Jewishly educated, and for a fleeting moment I thought, 'Wow, that would be really something,'" she said.

She didn't see it as a possibility for herself at the time. After



▲ Rabbi Lynnda Targan

PHOTO COURTESY OF LYNDA TARGAN

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“I didn’t really have much of a background until I got to rabbinical school, so I felt kind of insecure about going and studying with people who were much more informed than I was.”

RABBI LYNDA TARGAN

her parents’ divorce, her family didn’t have the money to send her to Hebrew school or Jewish summer camps.

She pursued Jewish education in her adulthood, taking Hebrew lessons at Gratz College and traveling to Israel. She began to seriously consider becoming a rabbi during a talk with her husband, Larry Targan, about what would happen if he died.

She maintained she would never remarry, but he said she would either find a rabbi to be with or become one herself. The idea stuck with her, and she decided to pursue her dream.

Even though her kids were grown and out of the house, embarking on this career path wasn’t easy. Since she had no formal Jewish education growing up, Targan earned master’s degrees in Jewish liberal studies and Jewish communal studies from Gratz College to set the foundation for rabbinical school. Even when she was accepted, she worried about how she would measure up.

“I didn’t really have much of a background until I got to rabbinical school, so I felt kind of insecure about going and studying with people who were much more informed than I was,” she said.

She started rabbinical school sick after her doctor found a tumor in her salivary gland, but it didn’t slow her down; she took five to seven classes a semester and commuted to school in New York from Philadelphia.

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TARGAN

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commuting, it was important to her to make time for her family and friends. After all, she couldn't support her community without also supporting the people she loved. Her two adult children saw how hard she worked and were on board.

"They already thought I was a nerd, so this just went along with the rest of it," she said. "They were always supportive."

Other people expressed concern that she was starting rabbinical school at an older age.

"A lot of people said to me, 'Oh my God, you're going to rabbinical school at 50? Well, you'll probably be 55 or close to 55 when you'll be ordained!' And here I am," she said.

For Targan, it was well worth the effort.

"If I had listened to people and thought, 'Oh my God, I'll be 55,' I wouldn't have been able to be a rabbi for the past 17 and a half years. So I've had the honor to be a rabbi beyond everyone's expectations," she said.

She began her community rabbinic career conducting outreach to interfaith couples and converts to Judaism at the 92nd Street Y and teaching graduate courses in the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School at Gratz College.

These days, her rabbinate consists mainly of public speaking (on Zoom)



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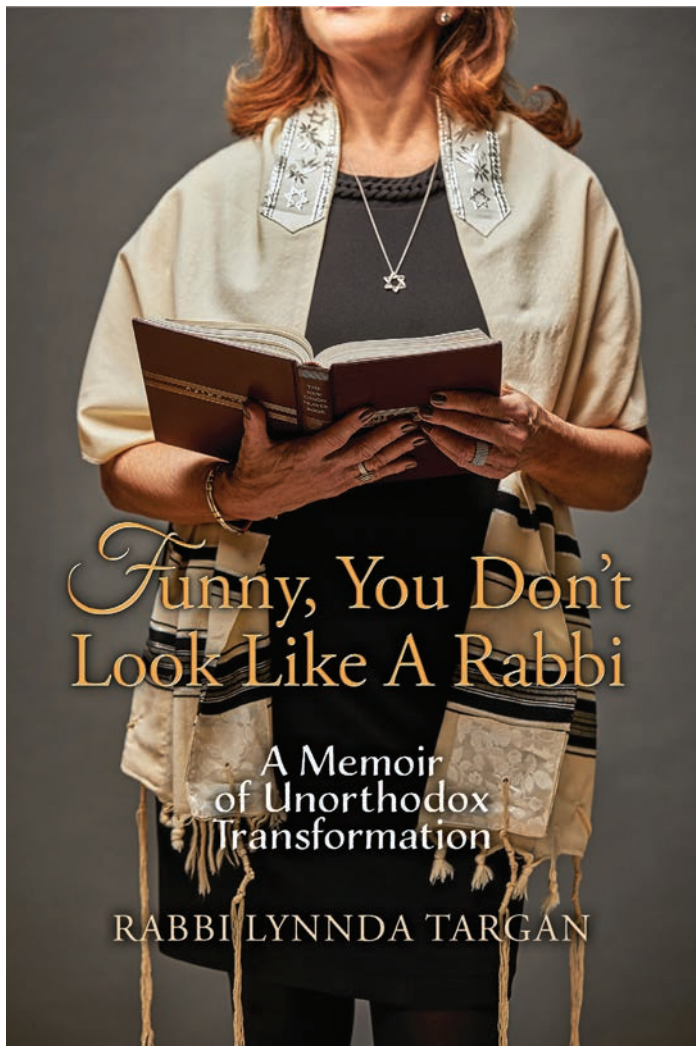


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▲ **Rabbi Lynnda Targan** PHOTO BY LARRY TARGAN



“A lot of people said to me, ‘Oh my God, you’re going to rabbinical school at 50? Well, you’ll probably be 55 or close to 55 when you’ll be ordained!’ And here I am.”

RABBI LYNNDA TARGAN

and officiating lifecycle events. She co-founded the Women’s Midrash Institute, which provides a setting for participants to study Jewish texts in the context of feminist inquiry. She is also the facilitator of a Mussar group that she has met with weekly for almost three years. The participants discuss how to be the best version of themselves in keeping with the traditions of the Jewish spiritual practice that gives concrete instructions on how to live a meaningful and ethical life.

Targan is active in several local and national Jewish organizations. She is a member of the executive board of Women of Vision, a division of Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia’s

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TARGAN

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Women's Philanthropy, and a member of the New York Board of Rabbis and the Board of Rabbis of Greater Philadelphia. She is also a member of the National Council of Jewish Women.

Before she became a rabbi, Targan was a journalist (she had her own column in the Jewish Exponent for several years), a writer and owner of her public relations business, LT Communications. Writing continues to be an important part of her spiritual life in the form of services, poetry, meditations and her memoir.

One of Targan's main messages in her

"If you have something that you want to do, go for it. Listen to the voice that you have inside of you."

RABBI LYNND A TARGAN

book is to encourage people to follow their dreams, no matter what stage of life they happen to be in.

"If you have something that you want to do, go for it. Listen to the voice that you have inside of you, or what we say is the 'still small voice' that we hear about in the Book of Kings," she said.

"And this is a very good time to listen to that voice because we're in house, maybe, we're working virtually, maybe, and we maybe have more time to be contemplative, meditative and consider what our next steps will be," she continued.

She also doesn't want people to judge themselves or others too harshly.

"Just because you like fashion doesn't mean that you're not smart, that you can't be a scholar," she said. "Not looking like a rabbi is saying to people, 'Don't put me in a box, don't judge me by what's on the outside, because it's what's inside that matters.'" •

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