

## A Bar Mitzvah for Irving

By Irving Bienstock

Irving Bienstock, a Holocaust survivor who speaks at the Butterfly Project workshops, continues his story, started in last month's edition of this paper:

I was born in 1926, on the 3rd day of the Hebrew month of Tamuz. My Bar Mitzvah was scheduled for the Shabbat of June 24, 1939. I attended *cheder* for my Hebrew education in Dortmund, Germany in the fall of 1938 where I started to learn about the laws pertaining to putting on tefillin. My parents were busy with their own preparations such as creating a special tablecloth for our dining room table and ordering the fabric for my Bar Mitzvah suit. It all came to a halt on September 28, 1938, when my father had to flee to Belgium to avoid arrest by the Gestapo. My schooling came to an end on November 9 after Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass.

On January 15, 1939, my mother put me on a train to Holland, where I wound up in a Children's Home in Wijk an Zee. Miraculously, I was reunited with

my younger sister, Sylvia, and we stayed there for three months. I was then sent to the Burger Weeshuis, the municipal orphanage in Amsterdam, which housed other Jewish children who had arrived there via the Kindertransport.

After I had been there a week, I asked the Director, Zuster Van Der Elsacker, if I could go the synagogue on Saturday. When I lived in Germany, I always went to shul on Shabbat with my father. The answer was "yes." Along with a member of the staff, I joined three boys my age on a walk to the main Ashkenazi Synagogue in Amsterdam. After that Shabbat, we were allowed to attend weekly, now without escort. On my second Shabbat, I approached the Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam and told him I had a problem: I was to have a Bar Mitzvah on June 24 and I would like to have my Bar Mitzvah on that day. The Rabbi was very kind and sympathetic, and told me not to worry. He scheduled my Bar Mitzvah and sent a teacher to the Burger



Irving's Bar Mitzvah certificate.

Weeshuis to teach me what I needed to know. The teacher, Mr. Mansbach, came and taught me to read the minimum lines required from the Torah since our time was limited.

I was fortunate to have others help make my Bar Mitzvah possible. Mevrau (Mrs.) Wijssmuler, a Dutch lady, used to visit us at the orphanage. Although she was not Jewish, both she and her husband were very good to us. One day she came and took me out and bought me a new suit for my Bar Mitz-

vah, complete with knickerbocker pants. My aunt, through marriage, had a sister who lived in Amsterdam whose name was Insdorf. Mrs. Insdorf invited me to spend my Bar Mitzvah Shabbat at their house, and we all went to the synagogue together. My sister, who now lived in the Jewish Hospital of Amsterdam (because of her diabetes) was also able to attend.

At my Bar Mitzvah, I was called to the Torah where I read a portion from the Sedra Chukas (Chukat). The Rabbi made a wonderful speech about me. After Hagbah and Gelilah, I was given the honor of placing the silver crown and breast plate on the Torah. At the end of the services, I went to the Insdorfs for a Shabbat meal. That evening, I returned to the Burger Weeshuis and my sister Sylvia went back to the hospital.

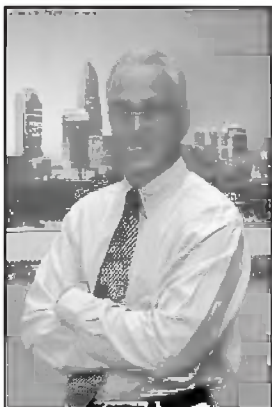
I received some wonderful and unexpected presents. On Sunday, I returned to the synagogue where I was presented with my Bar Mitzvah certificate. It now hangs on the wall of our dining room. The Moses family, who owned a Jewish bookstore in Amsterdam,

gave me a pair of Tefillin, a Sidur, and a Chumash, which I still have. My Grandmother, who had been deported to Poland on September 28, 1938, sent me a Tefillin bag. These were all wonderful, kind people. The Insdorf family, my Aunt, along with my Grandmother, all perished in the Holocaust. I do not know what happened to the Rabbi or Mrs. Wijssmuller. Nor do I know what happened to the many other good people who helped me. I do know that I will always be grateful to them for their many kindnesses and for making my Bar Mitzvah possible.

For more information about, to schedule participation in, or to volunteer at a Butterfly Project workshop, please contact Dana Kapustin, Butterfly Project Coordinator at butterflyproject@charlotte.or or 704-944-6833. ☆



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## Sharing Her Love of Performing Arts With The LJCC

By Lauren Abeles

Many of you have seen the energetic red haired woman walking around Shalom Park. She is often leading young children in a song or directing a group of people in a play. Sometimes she is performing, singing the "Star Spangled Banner" at an event or in a musical at a theater in town. Her name is Susan Cherin Gundersheim and she is the Visual and Performing Arts Director at the Levine Jewish Community Center.

Susan's experience in theatre started very early, as her mother Carol Courtman Cherin was an opera singer, and then a voice teacher, so she grew up listening to her mom sing and seeing her on stage. She was in her first play at camp, and as a child, she sang in choirs, took dance classes and was in many shows. By the time she was 15, she was directing and teaching children. She went on to major in Theatre at Northwestern University, where she met her husband Stephen, who was her dance partner in a show. After graduating, she moved to LA where she did film, TV and commercial work, and performed, directed and taught for a children's theater company.

After Susan and Stephen were married, they moved to Arizona where Susan taught at a Performing Arts High School. Then they moved to Massachusetts, started having kids and Susan developed a program for Performing Arts at the local high school.

In 2006, Stephen accepted a job as a Theater Professor at Winthrop University and they arrived in Charlotte, with their three children, Hannah, Rebecca, and Doron. Soon after her family joined the LJCC, Susan began to teach a few theatre classes and then the idea for the musical "Seussical" was born. Thirty-five people were in that first show in



Susan Gundersheim

2007 which sold 400 tickets. There were entire families that performed together. Susan directed "Seussical," but as the program grew, the LJCC brought Stephen in to direct and choreograph, while Susan musical directed. The theatre program at the LJCC has grown tremendously. This past winter there were 72 people in "Fiddler on the Roof," and 2,000 tickets were sold. In August of 2012, due to the growth of the programs, the LJCC brought Susan on full time as the Director of Visual and Performing Arts.

"Susan brought a new level of professionalism to the J," said Anna Gunsher, Division Director, Family Life Services. "Her talents and warmth are a huge asset to our community."

In addition to the big musical in December, the children have their own show in March. The show is a theme based revue with poetry and songs and the children invited write their own pieces. Susan gets emotional every year at the auditions, seeing how much the kids have grown. "Some of the kids come to me in 2nd grade with very little confidence in themselves. They learn to sing and perform, but they also learn they can conquer something they are afraid of. More important than what they

learn about performing is what they learn about themselves and about life," said Susan. This year, after the staff trip to Israel, Susan taught the song "True Colors" to a group of Ethiopian children in an after school program (Maksam) in Hadera via skype and incorporated the footage of them singing into the finale of the show, so that our children performed on stage alongside the children from Israel. The cast and audience were able to raise \$500 the weekend of the show, by selling artwork by the kids from Israel and collecting donations, to support the performing arts programs at the Maksam. The artwork is still on sale at the front desk.

The Teen show is new this year. A handful of these kids have been with Susan since they were little and now there is a large enough group of them to have their own show, and they are joined by an additional 12 teens who are brand new to the LJCC, who came to do this particular musical, which is coming up May 31 and June 1.

The theater program at the J is unique because we have placement auditions, not entrance auditions, so anyone who has the desire to be on stage can be part of the show. Other programs don't offer this unless they are part of a class. Also unique is that 2nd graders and 75 year olds can be in a show together. "We are proud to offer this experience, and these priorities truly represent the inclusive philosophy of the J," said Susan.

(Continued on page 24)



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