

# My Voice . . .

By Susan Kramer

In November, I shared with you some of the lessons that life has been teaching me lately in the form of a reoccurrence of cancer. It's a journey, really, and in response to so many requests, here's another "traveler's update."

The stack of inspirational books by my bedside is slowly diminishing. I've developed a skimming technique where I search for key words and read paragraphs here or there before committing myself to an entire volume. It's the only way to get through the mountain of information that has come my way since last September when my cancer reoccurred.

What amazes me is how the information that I'm supposed to get eventually sorts itself out and comes to me from several directions. Early on in my journey, Arthur and I decided that we would search out alternative treatments. Conventional medicine, in the voice of my former oncologist, offered only another course of chemotherapy with no guarantees. I'm not ready yet to put my body or my family through that again, so I started reading and talking to friends, searching, searching, searching.

The very first thing I got was an article about a woman who had, against terrible odds, beat cancer in 1990 by following a modified vege-

tarian diet. Her doctor was Nicholas Gonzales in New York City. I read the article and was inspired by her story, but didn't pursue what was then simply a name on a Xerox copy of an old magazine.

Two months go by. Two months of reading, talking, searching, searching, searching. There's a doctor in Texas who has had promising results with a new drug; a retreat in California where Arthur and I could explore a mind-body-spirit approach; the mother of a friend of my daughter who had had great success with a macrobiotic diet.

Finally last week we visited an internist who had been recommended by several sources as a doc who was open to and knowledgeable about alternative choices. I dreaded going in to see one more doctor, to tell my story once again, and to hear one more time that he/she didn't know or believe in anything but the traditional treatment of chemotherapy that I was trying to avoid.

I have found sometimes, that when I'm trying to explain to a new health care professional what exactly it is we're looking for, they look at me as if I'm speaking Martian. In fact, Arthur and I have gotten fairly good at sizing up a new doctor in the first five minutes — kind of like my skimming technique with the books. If I know more about the non-tradi-

tional approaches than Dr. X does — well, lets just say I don't waste his time.

But this doctor was different. He immediately knew what we were there for, and he cut to the chase with very little fanfare. If we were interested in pursuing alternative treatments, there was a doctor in New York City who had had remarkable success. His name was Dr. Gonzales.

Now call me crazy, but I believe in symmetry. Coming full circle is one of my basic life philosophies. Or, as Arthur in fond of quoting, coincidence is just God's way of remaining anonymous. I don't think it was an accident that the first name I read turns out to be one of the more viable choices in my quest for a cure. I'm following my instincts here, but in the end what else do we really have but the instincts that God provides us?

After several unsettling months, reams of reading material, hours of conversations with trusted friends and advisors, we feel we are finally starting on the right path. Maybe not — maybe this will just be another dead end. But every journey starts with a single step, and it feels good to be getting the exercise. ✧

*Susan Kramer*



## Point of View

Each issue of the CJN features an article written by one of three rabbis active in the Charlotte Community.

*This Month:*  
Rabbi Yossi Groner  
Lubavitch of North Carolina

## Jewish Survival of the fittest

Our community has recently completed a demographic study of the Jewish population in Charlotte. The reason for the study is quite obvious, as the community continues to grow, we need to know what it looks like and where it is headed.

Charlotte is fortunate to be a growing community. Two major factors are the main cause of the phenomenal growth. The number of children born each year, (to which we, the Groners, can claim our share, with our ten children, nine of whom were born in Charlotte). Second, the rapid influx of new Jewish families into Charlotte, which has caused our community to more than double in the last fifteen years.

When a community experiences growth, it tends to be confident and optimistic about its future stability. Growth presents the community many new possibilities and opportunities. The problem however is, while we may be over confident, we may not see the various pitfalls and underlying peril hiding behind the nice veneer of our fabulous growth.

If we look to the national scene, we find that many Jewish leaders are very concerned about the decline of the Judaism in America. Books written with titles like *The Vanishing American Jew* (Alan Dershowitz) and *Faith or Fear* (Elliot Abrams) make the case, that unless we take drastic action now we will see a further decline in Jews and Judaism in America.

Both writers point to the lack of quality Jewish life as the main reason for the decline. This is not to be confused with quality of life in general, which is steadily rising. It is the shocking level of Jewish illiteracy we see in our generation, they candidly say, that prevents many Jews from experiencing a meaningful Jewish life.

The above is further illustrated by a humorous but sad tale. A leader was once asked what he thinks is a bigger problem in his community, ignorance or apathy, to which he replied, "I don't know and I don't care!"

Ignorance leads to apathy. In simple terms, the lack of quality education contributes to the fallout of Judaism. Many Jews become uninvolved or simply tune out of religion.

If we are serious about Jewish survival we need to raise a generation that will know what it means to be Jewish and care to maintain it.

In order to reverse the national trend of apathy and assimilation, team effort is required on the part of the community. This effort involves adults, children and community leadership.

We need to place value on Jewish learning, and respect it at least as much as secular academics. As a community, we should provide substantive Jewish learning opportunities for all ages.

We are fortunate that we have the Jewish Day School in Charlotte, which has produced a higher level of learning and involvement in our community. That is only a start. We need to reach out to adults as well as children and furnish them with quality educational programming that will inspire further learning and growth.

We just celebrated the festival of Chanukah. Each night we added a candle. Although we fully observed the mitzvah on the first night with one candle, we must add a second candle on the second night in order to comply with the Chanukah observance. The same is true on each night of Chanukah; we kindle an additional candle each successive night of Chanukah.

The lesson of Chanukah applies to Jewish education as well. Each individual Jewish soul which has been brought closer to Judaism is an additional candle that has been kindled.

Let Charlotte set an example for the rest of the country, by working together as lamp-lighters. We can do so by not being caught up in political whirlwinds. Rather we should look at the issues of education in a pure and practical manner which will only serve to enhance the level of Judaism in the community. ✧

## Community program inspires teens to create endowments

By Susan Jacobs

NEW YORK (JTA) — Philanthropy now begins at the age of B'nai and B'not Mitzvah in a Massachusetts community.

To encourage tzedakah, a recently launched fund-raising program is offering teenagers a way to make donations through small endowment funds.

The program gives young people, "the thrill of being a philanthropist," said Rob Katz, executive director of the Harold Grinspoon Supporting Foundation, one of the cosponsors of the endowment program.

The B'nai Tzedek program, based in Springfield, Mass., enables each participating teenager to set up an endowment fund of \$500.

Teens are asked to designate \$125 of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah gifts for an endowment fund. The Jewish Endowment Foundation of Western Massachusetts, which co-sponsors the program, matches that amount and the Grinspoon Foundation contributes \$250.

B'nai Tzedek participants are

required to donate five percent of their endowment funds annually to a local Jewish charity of their choice. They and their parents are encouraged to contribute additional amounts to the principal over time to maintain the fund balance.

About a dozen teens — approximately 25 percent of the B'nai Mitzvah in western Massachusetts — have joined the program since it was launched earlier this year.

B'nai Tzedek is "a way of getting young people excited about Jewish philanthropy and giving through endowments," said Katz. The program is intended to develop a life-long habit of giving tzedakah.

"In the long term, this will help build up endowment foundations," said Katz. "The idea for B'nai Tzedek came from the Jewish Fund for Justice."

Youth Endowment Funds were created by the New York-based fund nearly 12 years ago to enable the family and friends of B'nai or B'not Mitzvah to contribute at least

\$1,000 to establish a fund in the name of the young person.

The young participants choose which organizations fighting poverty that are supported by the Jewish Fund for Justice to give money from their endowments. When they turn 21, the balance is transferred to the fund or converted into a Family Endowment Fund. Some 80 young people are currently participating in the program.

Another organization, Mazon, which supports groups combating hunger, encourages teens to contribute 3 percent of the cost of their Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration to Mazon. Sometimes they choose to donate 10 percent of the money they receive as gifts or ask friends and family to donate to Mazon instead of receiving gifts.

"The significance of meaning of this rite of passage is sometimes lost," said Beth Edelson, associate director of the Jewish Fund for Justice. "Contributions to charitable organizations and community service projects have become a popular way of infusing meaning into the Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies," she added. ✧

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