April e-newsletter

Dear Friends of Kehila Kedosha Janina,

This April 7th, we are honored to join with the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture in an exhibit at the Nassau County Holocaust and Tolerance Museum at Glen Cove specifically created to honor the memory of Greek Jews. As the repository for the history of Jews from Ioannina Greece, we are especially honored that our story will be told. Join us on April 7th. If you haven't RSVP’d, do so now: 516-571-8040.

Photos are part of a series of photographs taken by a German paratrooper in Ioannina on March 25, 1944.
This newsletter, our 63rd, will, as always, cover news regarding Kehila Kedosha Janina and news concerning Greek Jewry. We hope you find our newsletter interesting. Your feedback is of utmost importance to us. If you missed previous issues, they can be accessed on our website (www.kkjjsm.org).

We now reach over 5000 households worldwide, with our community of 'friends' continually growing with each newsletter. If you know others who wish to be part of this ever-growing network, please have them contact us at kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net.

As always, you are all invited to attend our Saturday morning Shabbat services. Just give our Shamas, Sol Kofinas, a heads up (papusoup@mindspring.com) so we are sure that our Kiddush (traditional Greek Jewish Kosher foods) is sufficient. If you wish to sponsor a Kiddush for a special occasion or an Adara, contact Sol.

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Passings

We mourn the passing of Alice Shear, daughter of Albert and Julia Sapporta Shear on February 25, 2013. We thank Sarah Honan Crocker for the following epitaph that appeared in the Richmond Times-Dispatch on February 26, 2013:

SHEAR, Alice Lewis, 93, passed on Monday, February 25, 2013. Mrs. Shear was a lifetime member of Temple Beth-EL. She volunteered in the early days of St. Mary's Hospital as a Pink Lady. She was fiercely independent and very proud of it and of her Greek heritage. She was a devoted wife and mother. She is preceded in death by her husband, Herbert W. Shear. She is survived by her sons, Eric W. Shear and Albert L. Shear and his wife, Claudia S. Shear.

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We mourn the passing of Murray Vitoulis, son of Hyman Vitoulis. His cousin, Sarah Crocker sent us this information.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Deena Lafazan, wife of Benson, son of Leon and Dinah Yomtov-Lafazan. We send our deepest condolences to Benson and his family, daughters, Brooke and Ilyana and Granddaughter Eva Rose Weingarten. Deena's funeral was Monday, March 25th, the eve of Pesach, precluding Shiva because of the holiday.

Along with our fellow Greek Americans we, in the Greek Jewish world here in the United States, mourn the passing of Andrew Athens.

"On March 14, 2013 — Andrew A. Athens passed away in his sleep early this morning at his home in Chicago, Illinois at the age of 91.
In addition to his extraordinary success as a major steel industry magnate of the mid-western United States, as Chairman of Metron Steel, and as the cherished head of a close and loving family — made up of his wife of 67 years, Louise, son Paul (and his wife Kellee) and daughter Jacqueline (and her husband Alex) and their four grandchildren (Andrew (and wife Linci), Alexa, James Paul, and Matthew) — Andy epitomized what is best about Hellenism and Orthodoxy. Virtually all who knew Andy found his intelligence, sincerity, charm and dedication to his family, his heritage and his country unsurpassed. Without exaggeration, Andy Athens’ accomplishments for Hellenism and Orthodoxy are incomparable.

He was widely seen as the unquestionable leader of the millions of Greeks living outside of Greece. This stemmed mostly from his being the first and longest tenured President of the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE). As well, he is well-known for singlehandedly creating health clinics in the Hellenic areas of the Republics of Albania, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. Medical experts estimate that these clinics saved the lives of many thousands of patients, who would otherwise have had no high quality medical treatment....

Born in Chicago, Illinois in 1922, Andy spent his early years there. He left college, against his father’s wishes, to defend America and the free world against Hitler’s Axis Forces. Andy explained that he was simply following his father’s example, a man who left the safety of America to return to Greece to fight in the Balkan wars where he was wounded. Following Andy’s fighting in North Africa and while leading troops to a rendezvous in Belgium, Andy asked for directions at the home of a lovely Belgium girl named Louise. This young army-boxing champion returned on his motorcycle the next day, began dating Louise and was married within that year. They were happily married for 67 years.

Simchas
We join with family and friends to congratulate Esther Mollengarden on her 90th birthday. Xronia Polla kai ola kala.

Δικοί Μας, Μας Μεστρούς (Our Own) Come Home

Morris Abraham and grandson Daniel Jedell
Visitors continue to flock to Kehila Kedosha Janina

On March 3, 2013, Kehila Kedosha Janina stopped to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Ioannina becoming part of Modern Greece. We were honored with the presence of the Consul of Greece in New York, Vangelis Kyriokopoulos and friends, old and new, of Kehila Kedosha Janina. It was interesting to note that we were the only organization in New York (to our knowledge) that commemorated this event. Which only goes to show you that, in a world where we can choose our nationality, religion and ethnicity, we choose to be American, Jewish and Greek.
Come see our exhibit on the 100th anniversary of Ioannina

Free Ioannina 1913

March 30th: Celebrating the Lower East Side

We had an excellent turnout for Eric Ferrara and Nina Howe's presentation on the Lower East Side on March 30th.
Upcoming Museum Events

Sunday, April 14th

Join us as we commemorate Yom HaShoah at Kehila Kedosha Janina. Services and lighting of candles will start at 1:00 pm, followed by a special presentation by our Museum founder, Isaac Dostis and the showing of his moving documentary on the lost second synagogue in Ioannina.

Refreshments served. Open to general public. For those unable to attend, we will be selling copies of the DVD at $20 plus shipping and handling of $4. Send checks made out to Kehila Kedosha Janina to One Hanson Place, Huntington NY 11743. For questions, call 516-456-9336
News From the Lower East Side

Breaking: Norfolk Street Synagogue Withdraws Demolition Application www.thelodownny.com
The Lo-Down has learned this morning that the leadership of Beth Hamedrash Hagadol has decided, at least for the moment, to drop its bid to demolish the synagogue’s historic home at 60 Norfolk St.

Kehila Kedosha Janina welcomes the proposal for a "Lower East Side History Month" and looks forward to being a part of future events.
"Few neighborhoods, at least in this country, can match the Lower East Side’s rich history. Now there’s an effort to celebrate that legacy with an annual Lower East Side History Month. Earlier this week, Tamara Greenfield of Fourth Arts Block and Ryan Gilliam of Downtown Art led a conversation with quite a few neighborhood non-profits about the idea.

In an email announcing the plan they stated:

We propose that “Lower East Side History Month” take place annually in May beginning in 2014. Participants could include a diverse group of community-based groups and individual artists participating through a variety of public events, exhibits, tours, and learning opportunities. Groups could include museums, theaters, community gardens, parks, galleries, settlement houses, schools, historic preservation organizations, small businesses, and others based on the LES. Individual artists could participate in partnership with an organization. Already existing programming (such as ongoing exhibits, neighborhood tours) are welcome, but we encourage organizations to consider offering special programming during the month.

Historic photos of Lower East Side

There’s going to be a steering committee to shape the proposal. If you’re interested in learning more of joining the project, send an email to info@fabnyc.org.”

Lower East Side Preservation Initiative (L.E.S.P.I)

The Landmarks Preservation Commission has scheduled a hearing April 2 on a proposal to protect the Seward Park Library, 192 East Broadway. Based on a preliminary agenda the item will be heard at 9:40 a.m. Members of the public are invited to offer testimony.
The 1909, 5-story limestone Renaissance-inspired building was one of 67 branch libraries funded by industrialist Andrew Carnegie. The item is not expected to be controversial. You may have seen a New York Times piece the other day touching on a plan to sell property in Brooklyn controlled by the Public Library as a way of raising desperately needed funds; the libraries there would be torn down by developers and rebuilt.

There’s no sign of this type of move on the Lower East Side, but preservationists have definitely taken note of the developments in Brooklyn. Another neighborhood branch, the 1903 Chatham Square Library, lacks historic protection.

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Upcoming Events New York City

SMYRNA: THE DESTRUCTION OF A COSMOPOLITAN CITY, 1900-1922 will be playing at the QUAD CINEMA in NYC from April 5th-18th.

PROTEUS, INC. and NY’s QUADCINEMA present

SMYRNA:
THE DESTRUCTION OF A COSMOPOLITAN CITY (1900-1922)
OPENS Friday, APRIL 5 – 18
QUADCINEMA / 34 West 13th St / www.quadcinema.com
Writer/Director: Maria Iliou
Historical consultant: Alexander Kitroeff
Music: Nikos Platyrachos
Editing: Aliki Panagi
Cinematography: Allen Moore

Friday, April 5, 7PM
Q&A with filmmaker Maria Iliou and historical consultant Alexander Kitroeff

Screenings from April 5–18
1PM, 3PM, 5PM, 7PM, 9:30PM
Additional weekend screening at 11 AM

Special group screenings upon request
Every day at 11 AM through May

Synopsis: In this biography of a city, award-winning filmmaker Maria Iliou and historical consultant Alexander Kitroeff tell the story of Iliou’s ancestral home, the port of Smyrna (now Izmir) which grew on the Aegean coast of the Ottoman Empire into a thriving, international center of culture, commerce and tolerance, only, literally, to be reduced to ashes in eight days, in
1922, by the flames of nationalism which raged in the aftermath of World War I. In layers of measured historical commentary, never before seen film footage and photographs, Iliou and Kitroeff bring this epitome of a cosmopolitan ideal back to its remarkable life. This moving documentary testifies to the best and worst of humanity—an early 20th Century prophecy of the turbulence to come, and a harsh but inspiring warning at the start of the 21st.

Archival photos of Smyrna on Fire

SMYRNA: THE DESTRUCTION OF A COSMOPOLITAN CITY (1900-1922)
OPENS Friday, APRIL 5 – 18

Runtime: 87 minutes / Not rated
QUAD CINEMA  34 West 13th Street / (212) 255-2243 / www.quadcinema@aol.com
Book tickets by selecting a date from the “showing on” dropdown menu:

OFFICIAL WEBSITE: www.smyrnadocumentary.org
SEE STILLS: www.flickr.com/photos/smyrna_a_film_by_maria_iliou/ WATCH TRAILER:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9XkFCBZtOs

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Romaniote Jews Now Presented at The National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia

In our March 2013 e-newsletter, we celebrated that Daniel Weisberg (grandson of Rabbi Jessula Levy of Blessed Memory) had donated the family megillah used by Rabbi Levy to the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia but, unfortunately, had incorrectly denoted the name of the Museum. This led to a lovely correspondence with the Museum in Philadelphia and, hopefully, to a future extended exhibit on Romaniote Jews.

"Marcia,

It was a pleasure speaking with you earlier today. The National Museum of American Jewish History is very excited to exhibit the megillah donated by Daniel Weisberg. I’ve attached images of the megillah as well as the label we installed with it. It is currently in our Curatorial center case on our first floor (included in the free admission to our first floor exhibition space and Museum store and café). I would love to continue our discussion about artifacts Kehila Kedosha Janina might be willing to lend to the Museum so we can continue to add the Romaniote story to our exhibition.
Sincerely,
Shira

Shira Goldstein
Exhibitions Coordinator
National Museum of American Jewish History
101 S. Independence Mall East
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Megillah Esther of Esther Cantos Levy (circa 1897)

Greek Independence Day Celebrated throughout the United States

This year, Greek Independence Day in New York will be celebrated on April 7th. While we understand the difficulty of coordinating a massive parade in New York, we lament the fact that the date chosen is Yom HaShoah, thereby making it impossible for Greek Jews to share in the Greek Independence Day Parade. In addition, the commemoration at the Nassau County Holocaust and Tolerance Museum in Glen Cove on April 7th at 2:00 in honor of the memory of Greek Jews lost in the Holocaust will miss the presence of representatives from the Greek government due to the conflict with the parade.

Celebrations elsewhere in the United States:

Philadelphia

Chicago

CELEBRATE GREEK INDEPENDENCE!
Join the National Hellenic Museum and UIC Professor Dean Kostantaras for a presentation on Greek Independence Sunday
News From Greece

There was a somber atmosphere at Greece’s annual Independence Day parade on March 25 due to worries about the consequences of the banking crisis in Cyprus.

Greek villagers block Golden Dawn food handout on Thassos

"Villagers on the Greek island of Thassos have prevented the nationalist Golden Dawn party from handing out free food and other basic goods. To Vima newspaper said residents of Potamia did not let Golden Dawn members unload their truck and forced them to leave, shouting they were not welcome.

Golden Dawn, an anti-immigration party, has staged several "charity" food distributions for poor Greeks. The party has 18 seats in the 300-strong Greek parliament. One of the most right-wing parties in Europe, it is accused of anti-immigrant attacks, but denies violent activity."
To Vima says the anti-Golden Dawn protest in Potamia was organized by the cultural center, local football team and some other residents. Thassos is in the northern Aegean Sea, near the coast of Thrace. Earlier Golden Dawn had distributed food in the village of Limenaria, but few had accepted the charity, the report said. Last year Golden Dawn took advantage of public anger over the financial crisis, boosting its membership. Last August party activists distributed food to Greeks in central Athens - but obliged recipients to show their identity papers, to prove their Greek citizenship."

Note: Thassos is a beautiful island in the northern Aegean with great beaches and traditional villages. I have visited Thassos many times and it is one of my favorite Greek islands. Now, I have another reason to revisit; to thank the people of Thassos for their true humanity.

News From Jewish Greece

Thessaloniki

In a series of moving events, Thessaloniki and the world stopped to remember the 70th anniversary of the first transports to leave Salonika on March 15, 1943.

World Jewish leaders to show support for Greek Jews at upcoming events in Thessaloniki

08 March 2013

NEW YORK / BRUSSELS - The World Jewish Congress (WJC), headed by Ronald S. Lauder, will be holding a special meeting of its Executive Committee in the Greek city of Thessaloniki on Sunday, 17 March 2013, which will coincide with a series of events marking the 70th anniversary of the first deportation of Thessaloniki Jews to Auschwitz (15-17 March 2013).

The gathering is a part of WJC efforts to show support to small and vulnerable Jewish communities. Greek Jews are currently adversely affected by the country’s deep economic problems and by the rise of the extremist Golden Dawn movement whose leaders openly deny the Holocaust.

In a series of events organized by the Thessaloniki Jewish community, Jewish leaders from around the world and Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras will be present, and WJC President Ronald S. Lauder will give one of the keynote addresses. The WJC Executive will hear from Greek Jewish leaders and experts, and it will discuss measures to combat rising anti-Semitism and extremism in Europe.

We thank the following people for sending us these moving images of the march in Thessaloniki: Paul Hagouel and Hella Kounio Matalon. Both are children of survivors from the concentration camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau and both actively and passionately work to ensure that the memory of what happened will stay alive and that their relatives will not have suffered and died in vain.
Greek Jews share a special birthright in Israel

Rekindling the Jewish flame in young Greeks

While their community at home was commemorating the 70th anniversary of Nazi deportations, 37 young Greek Jews were making a different kind of history - as members of the first Taglit Birthright tour of Israel from their country.

By Judy Maltz

Young Greek Jews on the first Taglit Birthright tour of Israel from Greece, March 2013.

When the Nazis began deporting the Jews of Greece to extermination camps, Etty Leon’s grandparents and great-grandparents fled Thessaloniki for Skopelos. On this small island in the Aegean Sea, they were given shelter by a local family that had for many years supplied their soap factory in Thessaloniki with olive oil.

Walking through Yad Vashem the other day, the 23-year-old stopped dead in her tracks when she caught sight of a photo of her family’s rescuers in the exhibition devoted to Christians who had saved Jews. “It was a very intense moment,” she recounts.

The reason Leon happened to be in Jerusalem that day, rather than in Thessaloniki, where other members of the Greek Jewish community were marking the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the deportations, was that she was participating in a Taglit-Birthright Israel tour.

It was a Birthright tour with its own special symbolism – the first ever to bring young Jews from Greece to Israel.

Since it was launched 13 years ago, Birthright has brought close to 350,000 young Jewish adults from 62 different countries to Israel on free 10-day trips funded by private philanthropists and the Israeli government. But never once had they come from one of the nearest countries to Israel that still has a significant Jewish population.

It took two enthusiastic young men from Athens with a desire to “reignite the Jewish spirit,” in their words, to change that and to get the ball rolling so that this group of young Greeks would be able to stake claim to what has become almost a rite of passage for their peers across the Jewish Diaspora.
"We'd been on a trip to Argentina, where we met some Jewish kids who told us that they had been on Birthright, and we decided that we needed to do it as well," recalls Alberto Namias, 24. After he and a friend, Mike Matsas, were elected to head the Jewish youth group of Athens a year ago they immediately began working with Jewish Agency envoys in Greece to organize the trip.

"This was an important way for us to reconnect with Israel and the Jewish world, since our demographics in Greece are pretty bad," explains Matsas. Indeed, the Jewish community of Greece, which was 77,000 strong before World War II, today barely numbers 5,000. Matsas estimates that the pool of potential Birthrighters in the country – young adults aged 18 to 30 – is only about 500-600.

The 37 participants in this first group come mainly from Athens, with a sprinkling from Thessaloniki, Larissa and Volos. Mostly in their early 20s, some are still college students while others have begun working full-time.

They're a close-knit bunch, quite a number of them related either by blood or by friendships that in some cases date back to their pre-teen, Hebrew-school days.

The descendants of a once-thriving Jewish community that lost a larger share of its population than any other during the Holocaust, each of these Birthright participants has a remarkable tale to tell about how his or her family survived.

That explains why, when asked, most say their visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and museum has been by far the most memorable part of their trip up to now.

It's a bit chilly on this, the penultimate day of their whirlwind tour of Israel, as they follow their guide around the Old City of Jaffa, the sound of waves crashing against the shore in the background.

"It reminds me a lot of Greece," says 19-year-old Yvoni Ouziel, an Athenian here on her first trip to Israel. "The climate is very similar, and so are the people. They're very warm – not like in England."

It's been a while since Deliacia Sefina, a college student from Thessaloniki, came here before starting high school. "This time, though, I feel a real connection to the place, maybe because I'm older now," she says.

For Netta Schechet, one of the group’s Israeli chaperones, this is also a new experience. "Until now, I've only worked with Birthright groups from the United States," she notes. "These Greeks are much more similar to the Israelis. They're much less punctual and more laid-back. They're also more curious and introspective than the Americans – maybe because this is all new to them."

After a 10-minute bus ride they reach their next stop: Independence Hall on Rothschild Boulevard, the former residence of Tel Aviv’s first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, and the place where David Ben-Gurion recited Israel’s Declaration of Independence.

It’s time for a group photo, and the participants sit themselves down on the steps of the building, as Namias and Matsas pull out of their bags the Israeli and Greek flags they keep handy for these situations.
Eran, their guide, proceeds to point out that not only the building behind them but also the street before them hold great significance. “This is where Israel’s big social protest movement began two summer ago,” he explains, describing how hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to protest the high cost of living.

“Is this supposed to make us want to come to Israel?” asks one of the Greek Birthrighters, only half-jokingly. “You don’t have to come to Tel Aviv,” responds Eran. “Move to the south – it’s much cheaper there.”

Immigration – or at least more long-term Israel experiences – is definitely something many of them are considering. A week before landing in Israel the group met with a delegation of representatives from Israeli colleges and universities who came to Athens to try to interest them in the possibility of continuing their studies in Israel.

After their tour of Independence Hall they were scheduled to meet, at their request, with representatives from Masa, a joint project of the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency that offers study, community service and internship programs for young adults in Israel.

The sorry state of the Greek economy has no doubt been a factor, as has rising support for the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party, which won 7 percent of the national vote in the last election.

“Things are not yet dangerous in Greece, but they’re a little uncomfortable,” acknowledge Matsas, the only member of the group who wore a kippa. And no, he doesn’t cover his head back home in Athens. “It would draw too much attention,” he explains.


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International News of Interest to Greek Jews

"UMD Calls on Bulgaria to Apologize for Deporting Macedonian Jews to Their Deaths During WWII

Sunday, 10 March 2013 13:38

The United Macedonian Diaspora (UMD) commemorates with great sadness the 70th anniversary of Bulgaria’s mass deportation of virtually all of Macedonia’s Jewish community to its death during World War II.

UMD calls on the Bulgarian government to recognize publicly that, as a direct result of Bulgaria’s fascist government’s collaboration with Nazi Germany, 7,144 Macedonian Jews were deported to the Nazi extermination camps of Treblinka in occupied Poland. Furthermore, UMD strongly urges the Bulgarian government to issue a long overdue official apology to the Macedonian Jewish community.

Ceremony in Skopje
March 11, 2013
Nazi Germany’s wartime ally, Bulgaria, occupied Macedonia in 1941. It then passed decrees requiring Macedonian Jews to cease trade and commerce as well as to transfer ownership of their assets to Bulgaria. Jews were barred from certain parts of towns and forced into ghettos. On March 11, 1943, Bulgarian armed forces arrested Jews of Bitola and Shtip and transported them to Skopje’s Monopol tobacco factory, where they were incarcerated along with Skopje’s Jews, for deportation to the Nazi death camps of Treblinka in occupied Poland. Some 7,200 were crowded into Monopol without adequate food, water, and sanitation. Random violence by Bulgarian guards was rampant; women frequently were raped. A few Jews managed to escape. Some 165 physicians and foreign citizens were released.

In a series of deportations beginning on March 22, Bulgarian guards jammed 7,144 Macedonian Jews into Bulgarian cattle cars, accompanying them to Lapovo, Yugoslavia, for transfer to the Nazis. After an inhumane six-day journey, the Macedonian Jews arrived at Treblinka, and nearly all were immediately murdered in its gas chambers.

In December 1944, only about 50 survivors remained to reconstitute the Macedonian Jewish community. Most of them had escaped into Italian-governed territories or joined the organized antifascist partisan movement, fighting alongside non-Jews against the Nazis.

Following Macedonia’s independence in 1991, the Macedonian government recognized Judaism as one of the official religions in its constitution – the only country outside of Israel to do so. Though Macedonia’s Jewish community today has only about 200 members, this tight-knit group has been working together to revive Jewish traditions, Jewish identity and Jewish life. They built a synagogue, the Bet Yaakov Synagogue, which was the first to be built in the Balkans since the end of World War II.

The Macedonian government created the Macedonian Holocaust Fund, to which it allocated approximately $18.5M, to build an eternal memorial to the Jews murdered during the Holocaust. In March 2011, the Holocaust Memorial Center of the Jews from Macedonia was officially opened in Skopje. It represents one of four largest Holocaust memorial centers and museums, of its kind, in the world, after Washington, D.C., Berlin, and Jerusalem.

UMD reiterates its call on the Bulgarian government to recognize the country’s historical role in aiding and abetting the Holocaust. As a member of NATO and the European Union, modern-day Bulgaria must come to terms with its tragic past and officially apologize to the Macedonian Jewish community."

Shalom to one and all!

Gershon Harris
Hatzor Haglilit, Israel

Yom Hashoah – Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day

This year, "Yom Hashoah" – Israel's official day of remembrance for the victims and heroes of the Holocaust – the 28th of Nissan - will fall on April 8th. And while no one can deny the importance of having such a day of mourning and memory for 6 million of our people who were brutally and
ruthlessly murdered by the Nazi monster, some may be surprised to discover the controversy surrounding the Hebrew date of this day of remembrance.

Yom HaShoah was officially established in 1953, with the original government proposal being to hold Yom HaShoah on the actual anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, which occurred on the 14th of Nisan – the night of the Pesah Seder, 5703 (April 19, 1943). However, fierce objections from across the political spectrum against setting an official day of mourning on the first day of Pesah itself forced the government to move the date. It was therefore decided to move the day to the 27th of Nisan, which was after the holiday, but close enough to the original date.

Still, the act of setting any kind of official day of mourning during the month of Nissan is problematic from a Jewish religious perspective, since in Jewish tradition Nissan is the month of spring, the Pesah holiday and the joy of redemption, with even routine penitential prayers being suspended for the entire month. So Israel's religious establishment was not pleased with the government's decision. Nonetheless, the powerful counterargument was that, Jewish tradition notwithstanding, the Jews who organized the Warsaw ghetto uprising felt that the time to take action had come, despite it being the Seder night, and it is only fitting that the date be set a date as close as possible to the actual event. Thus, the 28th of Nissan (beginning the night before) is the official Israeli Yom Hashoah, and since no cardinal principle of Jewish law is violated, by and large all have come to accept and honor the day, and all official government ceremonies held at Yad Vashem and other sites around the country include invocations and participation of Israel's Chief Rabbis and other religious officials. And no matter where one stands on this issue, I don't think there is anyone who is not touched and even amazed at the fact that when sirens are sounded for two minutes in Israel nationwide at 10:00 on Yom Hashoah, people cease all action and stand silently at attention wherever they are, including cars stopping and drivers emerging from them—even on highways—as the entire country comes to a standstill to pay silent tribute to the memory of the martyrs.

Still, in order to give expression to perhaps more appropriate timing and as a possible official alternative date, the late Prime Minister Menahem Begin suggested making the 9th of Av Israel's Yom Hashoah, since it is a major fast day commemorating a plethora of Jewish tragedies, and especially the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem. Though Begin's idea was never implemented, many Jews do include memorials for victims of the Holocaust in their prayers and ceremonies.

And The Israeli Chief Rabbinate actually set the "first" Yom Hashoah only some six months after Israel's founding, on the 10th of Tevet. This is another fast day marking the beginning of the Babylonian conquest of Israel leading up to the destruction of the First Temple, and the Rabbinate declared this day as the "Yom HaKaddish Haklali" – the day of the general Kaddish (prayer for the dead). The intention was to set aside a significant and appropriate day in the Jewish calendar as a universal date for saying Kaddish for victims of the Holocaust whose actual dates of death are largely unknown, as well as those who left no survivors at all. And though the official Yom Hashoah in many ways replaced this day, the 10th of Tevet is still kept as a universal day of Kaddish, as well as being used by many Israeli schools and institutions to study and learn more about the Holocaust in all its horror and facets.

News of Interest to All

A very special piece on the memories of holidays. We thank Linda Matza Silverman for passing this on to us.
Andree Aelion Brooks
I am standing at my white kitchen counter feeding sticky ingredients into a food mixer: clumps of dates, walnut pieces from a cellophane packet, slices of Granny Smith apples, teaspoons of honey, clouds of cinnamon, splashes of orange juice.

At my side is a handwritten recipe, scribbled on a curled sheet of lined and yellowed paper, torn from the kind of exercise book reminiscent of a first-grade primer. My grandmother Estrea Aelion, originally brought the recipe with her in the 1900s from Salonika in northern Greece to Paris and to London, where I was born and raised.

Even though it wasn’t written down for years afterward, it became as much of a family heirloom as the hand-driven Singer sewing machine she also brought along. Finally, just two years ago, it was painstakingly committed to paper by her daughter, my 85-year-old aunt, even though her hand was already shaking from Parkinson’s.

Each year, I make up a large batch about three weeks before Passover. I then divide it and send a portion each in a small plastic container to my daughter in Seattle, my son in Singapore and my granddaughter at college in San Francisco—a modern way of keeping a family tradition alive. The tradition of sending the finished product to family members was started by my grandmother toward the end of her life, when even she began to realize that all the family might never gather in one place again, at least on a regular basis.

The recipe would never have been acceptable for a commercial cookbook because it makes assumptions about the reader’s knowledge that we avoid today—measuring ingredients in “pinches” or “boxes” instead of more clearly definable ounces or cups. I have personally learned to overcome this flaw by using the taste test; a taste that, when it’s right, sends me hurtling back 50 years.

“Haroset de Pasech” is the title of this particular recipe, using an equally homemade approach toward spelling that could imply poor French or Ladino with a touch of transliterated Hebrew—the combination folk language of Sefardim from a region that, today, embraces not only northern Greece but parts of Turkey and the Balkan republics, too.

Our particular haroset, which symbolizes the bitterness of the Israelite suffering in Egypt, is only one of a number of traditions that a handful of us struggle to maintain as a touchstone to a fading past. This despite our rational brain knowing that most of these special foods, rituals and even the language itself may die out with us—its final generation.

While our group of Jews remained in a variety of Mediterranean lands following the expulsions from Spain and Portugal at the end of the 15th century, much that had been borne out of a hostile Iberian Peninsula remained intact: the ballads our ancestors had sung, the Moorish dishes they had cooked, the language they spoke along with their Spanish-sounding family names.

It was the second scattering, early in the 20th century, that dealt the deathblow to that culture. We became too small to regroup in meaningful numbers in this country, as the East European Jews have done. How many times in recent years have I had to explain that we are not artifacts from dusty history books. A few of us are still around, following traditions already being taught as if they were extinct.

We are doubtless not alone. This has surely happened to countless other “niche” minorities over the centuries, for whom the melting pot became more like a lethal brew. Thus, for me, this
kitchen moment—a prelude to our broader Passover celebrations that will begin just days from now—stirs a mixture of sorts. A churning of emotions that course through my veins each and every time I repeat the process: recipe as ritual, cooking as comfort, struggling in its death-defying dance to bind me to a continuum that helps validate my place and my identity even though the link grows weaker by the year.

So it is as a source of comfort that I conjure up the sight of my nona, my grandmother, at her ceramic mixing bowl, doing what I am doing as if she were standing right next to me right now. She would probably look astonished to see me mixing and stirring by hand just the way she did. For I was never particularly interested in such “old-fashioned” pursuits—that is, before I became a grandmother too.

Perhaps, just perhaps, it will be my two granddaughters who will care.

Better to believe it will happen, in order to enjoy this quiet moment in my sun-dappled kitchen.

Haroset from Greece
Makes enough for at least 15-20 people at a Seder table—maybe even more.

1-2 pounds fresh dates, pitted, or 2 boxes pitted dates
3/4 pound raisins
1-2 pounds shelled, toasted walnuts
2 large Granny Smith apples, peeled and sliced
3 teaspoons cinnamon
Grated rind of one lemon
1/2-3/4 cup fresh orange juice (or 3 fresh oranges and scoop out pulp with juice)
2 tablespoons medium or sweet sherry

To Toast Walnuts:
Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Turn off. Place and scatter walnuts in shallow baking pan. Leave in oven for about a half hour. Cut dates into small pieces and take out stones (if not already pitted). Place in mixing bowl, along with the raisins, soften by soaking in boiling water for about 15 minutes. Drain well and squeeze free of water. Take skin off apples and cut into slices.

Place walnuts in food processor and mix until they have crumbled almost into a powder. In small amounts, slowly add dates, raisins, apples, orange juices (little at first), sherry, cinnamon. The combination should end up as a very thick paste. If it is too dry, add a little more orange juice.
If it is too thin add a few more walnuts, along with raisins or dates. Warning: the ratio of dates to walnuts should be about equal. Leave at room temperature for about a day to ferment.

France has emptied the museums of paintings stolen by the Nazis

"France returns seven tables that had been stolen from their Jewish owners during the Second World War. Then the Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda had spread into Europe and forced many Jews to leave either their property or sell precious relics to have the money to flee to another continent.

The seven tables are meant for the art space that Adolf Hitler wanted to build in the Austrian city of Linz.

The French Minister of Culture Orel Filipeti welcomed yesterday in Paris the American Thomas Selntorf to hand over six of the paintings, including works by the Venetian Baroque painters of the 18th century, Alessandro Long, Sebastiano Ricci, Gaspar Nitsiani.

French Culture Minister Aurelie Filippetti returned six stolen paintings to American heir Thomas Selldorff at Tuesday's ceremony. (Michel Euler/AP)

The paintings belonged to the collection of his grandfather Richard Nauman and were exposed to the Louvre and other museums of France, along with 2,000 other artifacts that were stolen or illegally seized at the time.

At the end of the war, when Hitler had died and Europe was rebuilding, many artifacts were found in unclaimed treasures and hundreds of thousands were considered to belong to French so found their place in several museums.

The story of the illicit acquisition of Jewish property by the French Vichy government that collaborated with the Nazis presented in an exhibition at the Museum of Jewish History - Holocaust Memorial in Marais in Paris.

The spokesman for the National Museums of France Sonia Bruno said last month that the 100,000 treasures stolen in France during the period 1940-44 have returned several thousand Jewish families.

The identification and verification procedures delayed the return of the remaining works, but the French government yesterday's ceremony in 82chrono Jewish offspring expresses the continuity of this "return to the true owner."
The seventh panel, "Termination" of Dutchman Pieter van Yad Ash, was stolen by officers of the Gestapo in Prague in 1939 by a Jewish banker, Joseph Wiener, who died in a concentration camp. After the war, the panel considered that it belonged to a French citizen and mistakenly sent to Paris. For years I was in the Louvre, by mid 2000, the descendants of the Wiener identified electronically and began the recovery process. The then French Prime Minister Francois Quarreler gave the green light to return to the family.
