

לדור ודור

*From  
Generation  
to Generation*



Westchester  
Reform  
Temple  
1953 - 2018



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Marcy R. Harris

One night last fall, as plans for the Homecoming Weekend took shape, a small group gathered to consider ways to tell the story of the first 65 years of Westchester Reform Temple. We were a multigenerational mix with deep roots at WRT. One by one, we recounted our family's connections to our sacred community.

Though the details differed person to person, the essence of our stories was the same: we, or our parents, or our grandparents, found in Westchester Reform Temple a welcoming spiritual home. Whether we wanted a Jewish education for our children, deeper Jewish connection for ourselves, or a warm and inclusive local Jewish community, we and our family members found all of those things at WRT, and much more.

This WRT Memory Book is a way for all of us, individually and collectively, to tell our family stories. How fitting it is that we do so by sharing our memories of meaningful Jewish moments! In biblical days, the Israelites were instructed to do and remember, and not to forget, God's commandments and our collective history. By heeding those instructions -- by re-enacting God's commandments and retelling our people's story over the millennia -- Judaism has survived and remains a living experience today. Through the pages of this WRT Memory Book, we too, recount special moments in our lives as Jews and pass them on to the next generation.

This book begins with a narrative history of WRT's first 65 years, lovingly told by congregant and novelist Barbara Solomon Josselson, based on historical documents, photographs and other media in the temple's archives.

Next comes a 65-year chronology of milestone moments in our history. The remainder of the book is a compendium of memories written by all of us, the members of WRT. Hillary Fontana, WRT's Communications Manager, designed the book's beautiful layout.

We are deeply grateful for the memories you have shared. Hopefully, they will inspire others to remember, and share, meaningful moments at WRT. We invite everyone in our community to send a memory, of not more than 250 words, to [memories@wrtemple.org](mailto:memories@wrtemple.org). If we receive a sufficient number before July 1, 2018, we will plan to publish a hard copy of this WRT Memory Book prior to the High Holy Days. We hope that as families gather, they can share in the joy of our WRT history and memories.

On behalf of the entire congregation, it is my privilege to thank Barbara, for telling our congregation's story with such grace and wisdom, and Hillary, for illustrating our story and fashioning it elegantly into a keepsake book. I also want to thank Karen Segall, who received and edited the memories in this book, and Linda Schapiro, who assisted with production details. Finally, thanks are due to Bill Blumstein and a team of reviewers who spent countless hours going through the temple's archives to identify the photographs and other historical documents in this book and in the WRT videos prepared for Homecoming Weekend. Everyone's tireless efforts brought this book to life.

I now invite you to read, remember, reflect and enjoy our people's stories!



## Our Beginning

As with so many important things in life, it started with the children.

It was the spring of 1953. The new decade had ushered in a period of optimism and prosperity. The Baby Boom was well underway. The suburbs were on the rise. And with the liberation of the concentration camps almost a decade in the past, a group of eight Jewish couples from lower Westchester came together one April evening to discuss how to help their children understand their heritage.

“We were invited to talk about setting up a way to teach our kids something about what being Jewish was,” said Judy Weinberg. “It was to educate the children.”

In addition to Judy and her husband, Charles, who lived in Hartsdale at the time, the guests at included Vivian and Murray Appel of White Plains; Marjory and Irving Isaac of Tuckahoe; and four Scarsdale couples: Sis and Robert Cohen, Jr., Elizabeth and Myron Linz, Sylvia and Clifford Rich and Jean and Edwin Steiffel. Freda and Dr. Rowland Mindlin, also of Scarsdale, were the hosts.

It was a big idea for this small group – but the group didn’t stay small for long. Word of the new Jewish initiative spread among friends and neighbors. Dr. Mindlin, who was a pediatrician, mentioned it to parents during office visits. By the summer of that year, there was enough interest for the couples to take the next step. With support from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations – the forerunner to the Union for Reform Judaism – they co-signed and distributed a letter to the local Jewish community announcing a larger meeting for mid-summer.

“For some time, the feeling has been expressed that it would be desirable to create a new Liberal Jewish Organization for our area in

# SIXTY-FIVE YEARS YOUNG

*A short take on the still-unfinished  
story of Westchester Reform Temple*

*By Barbara Solomon Josselsohn*

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Westchester County," they wrote. "This movement will be a forward-looking, creative undertaking."

Enthusiasm for the project grew, and so did its scope. "There was talk that you cannot just drop your kids off on a Sunday morning and say, 'Go be Jewish,' and pick them up afterwards and that's the end of the experience," Weinberg added. Consequently, people began to embrace the idea of creating not just a school, but a *congregation*, which would infuse the values and lessons of Judaism into the entire range of family life.

About 50 families attended that summer meeting, which was held at the American Legion Hall (now The Little School) in Scarsdale. Vivian Sulds, one of the attendees, remembered the event as "hot, hot, hot!" adding that in those days there was little air conditioning. "If you wanted air conditioning, you went to a movie," she said.

But "hot" also characterizes some of the group's initial discussions, which centered on goals, principles, and even textbooks. Families came from a diverse range of Jewish backgrounds, with some people more supportive of texts that referred to Zionism or the state of Israel, and others not so much. Even the task of choosing what to call the nascent congregation sparked multiple opinions, with some families wanting a Hebrew phrase and others, English only. Ultimately, the congregation settled on Westchester Reform Temple – a name that connotes simplicity, modernism, and openness even to this day.

Remarkably, the congregation was up and running within weeks, thanks to the willingness of those involved to roll up their sleeves and participate with gusto. "If you were going to join, you were going to have to work for it," Sulds recalled. People who'd never expected to attend weekly Shabbat services were now planning to do so, as a way to support the fledgling institution. Arrangements were made to hold Shabbat and holiday services at nearby churches, and some congregants built a simple ark, which lived in the Weinbergs' basement and was transported via the Weinbergs' station wagon each week to wherever services were held.

WRT's first Erev Rosh Hashanah service took place on September 9, 1953, at the Scarsdale Congregational Church, with subsequent High Holiday services scheduled on the days that followed. The October 1953 Bulletin shows a membership list of 100

PROPERTY OF  
WESTCHESTER REFORM TEMPLE

# BULLETIN

## WESTCHESTER REFORM TEMPLE

Vol. 1 No. 1 Eugene Lipman, Rabbi August 15th 1953

FIRST SERVICES  
of  
WESTCHESTER REFORM TEMPLE  
at  
DYCKMAN HALL  
White Plains Post Road and Heathcote Road, Scarsdale

FRIDAY EVENING - SEPTEMBER 4th - 8:30 P.M.  
Sabbath Eve Service

RABBI EUGENE LIPMAN  
will conduct the service

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WEDNESDAY EVENING - SEPTEMBER 9th - 8:00 P.M.  
Rosh Hashanah Eve Service

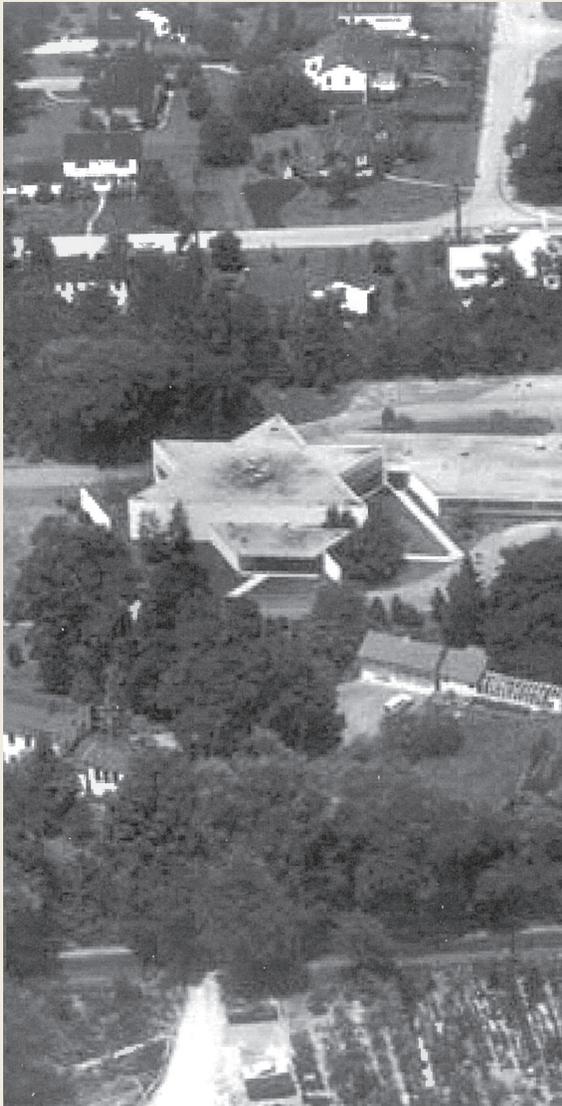
THURSDAY MORNING - SEPTEMBER 10th - 10:00 A.M.  
Rosh Hashanah Morning Service

FRIDAY EVENING - SEPTEMBER 11th - 8:30 P.M.  
Sabbath Eve Service

FRIDAY EVENING - SEPTEMBER 18th - 8:00 P.M.  
Yom Kippur Eve Service

SATURDAY - SEPTEMBER 19th  
Services for Yom Kippur Day will start  
at 10:00 A.M. and continue through the  
day.

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED  
to attend any religious  
service. Enrolled members  
will be given seating pref-  
erence for the Holy Days.



families; the Religious School had 103 children spread out over grades one through seven, along with a small number of Confirmation students who joined the Confirmation class at the JCC of White Plains (now Congregation Kol Ami). Annual dues were set at \$100.

At the helm of the new temple was Rabbi Eugene Lipman, who was brought to Scarsdale with the help of the UAHC. Warm and charismatic, he was also an elegant and inspiring writer, whose thoughts about the promise and ideals of WRT are as relevant today as they were when he penned them some 65 years ago: "The essential virtue of Reform Judaism is our ability to grow and change as our living needs as Reform Jews grow and change," he wrote in one of his earliest letters to congregants. "We must start where we are, building from 'Aleph,' not from some letter in the alphabet that any individual or group of individuals has decided at the outset constitutes the be-all and end-all of Reform Judaism for all of us."

The speed with which the new congregation established its programs and processes during that first fall is truly astonishing. Still, with growth came growing pains. In March of 1954, the long-range planning committee described a serious level of inefficiency, bordering on chaos. Religious services, religious-school classes, adult-education classes, and committee and Board of Trustees meetings were all being held in different locations. Files were scattered, and business was being conducted out of a range of peoples' homes.

The committee concluded, "There is an urgent need for a central, unified facility."

In short, in less than a year, Westchester Reform Temple had evolved from a dream to a spiritual home.

Now it needed a physical one.



## Our Place

With few suitable sites available, finding a permanent home for WRT was no easy feat. Early members recalled that a parcel of land on the west side of the county was briefly considered, but nobody wanted to travel that far for services or to ferry kids to religious school. The temple's leaders also worried whether the congregation could actually finance a purchase, since members were largely young families already carrying large mortgages of their own. But concerns were put to rest at the end of 1954, when the congregation purchased the land on Mamaroneck Road on which the temple now sits.

Hungarian-born and world-renowned architect Marcel Breuer came on board to design the project. He conceived the idea to build the structure in the shape of a Star of David – innovative to be sure, although some joked that it could only be fully appreciated if you were in a helicopter. The points of the star served as classrooms, which was considered an ingenious use of square footage, although overcrowding and noise spillover became problems as the Religious School population grew. Perhaps most significant, the sanctuary was envisioned as an independent space, suggesting the importance of a committed area for worship; in other synagogues, the sanctuary often doubled as a social hall.

Ground was broken in 1957, and two years later the work was complete. The congregation celebrated at a dedication service, with a guest list that included the mayor of Scarsdale and numerous leaders from local churches and synagogues. Importantly, the new building was not just a home for congregants, but also for a range of sacred objects that would eventually make their way to Scarsdale. Among these was a Torah scroll that had been confiscated by the Nazis and was eventually moved to the Westminster Synagogue in London after the war. The "Czech Torah," as it has come to be known, was sent to





WRT on permanent loan, and was dedicated and placed in the ark in a special service in 1967.

But as children outgrow their clothes, congregations sometimes also find themselves bursting at the seams. In the late 1960s, with membership swelling to 600 families, WRT was desperately in need of more space. The initial proposal for expansion met with some resistance from the town, but ultimately a building permit was issued. The new plans provided for such welcome features as eleven permanent classrooms, a library, a youth lounge, and a new sanctuary that would feature stained-glass windows and an electric pipe organ. Ground was broken and construction proceeded once again, although this time with something special: a bag of soil from Israel, which was deposited into the base of the ark. The reconfigured building made its debut in May of 1970.

More classrooms were added in the 1980s – and the next major expansion came in the mid-1990s, when WRT purchased the historic, neighboring Cornell House. The edifice had once been home to Benjamin Cornell, head of Scarsdale’s first Quaker family. Acknowledging its significance, the temple agreed to preserve the façade of the house and confine much of the renovation to the inside. The renovated house eventually became the Center for Jewish Life – and WRT was forever changed from a building to a campus.

With the dawning the new millennium came a new dream for WRT – the planning and unveiling of a progressive, LEED-certified, and truly transformative place of worship, community, and education. The multi-year renovation – which included a new sanctuary, lobby, social hall, classroom wing, contemplative courtyard, and exterior – was a testament to the congregation’s dearly held values. For example, with a nod to the temple’s love for Israel, the sanctuary’s ark was made of olive wood and positioned along the eastern wall. With a nod toward WRT’s love for the earth, the sanctuary was outfitted with a solar-powered ner tamid and multi-paneled windows that would celebrate the colors and textures of nature during every season of the year. With a nod to WRT’s love for education, the building featured a two-story beit midrash, with a spiral staircase that harkens to Jacob’s ladder.

And with a nod to WRT's love for humanity, the sanctuary was constructed with wide aisles and easily navigated ramps, making the bima totally accessible.

The new campus was dedicated in early September of 2009, and the new sanctuary hosted High Holiday services later that month.

In this way, WRT's campus was a marriage of the physical with the spiritual, the contemporary with the everlasting, and the day-to-day with the visionary. Similar to the ancient Jews heading toward Israel, WRT's congregants started as nomads – until they finally reached a place that felt like it had been there all along, just waiting for them to arrive.

And just as those ancient Jews had Moses, so WRT's own story is deeply intertwined with the story of its forward-looking leaders.





## Our Senior Rabbis

Like the fiddler on the roof in that beloved Jewish musical, WRT's early years felt unsettled and precarious. But a series of rabbis kept the new congregation aloft – and steered it with vision and skill through the subsequent decades.

Rabbi Eugene Lipman, who led the synagogue's initial launch, completed his tenure after a year. He was succeeded by WRT's first full-time rabbi, Maurice Schatz, after whom came Rabbi David Greenberg. In 1961, the congregation appointed Interim Rabbi Erwin Herman.

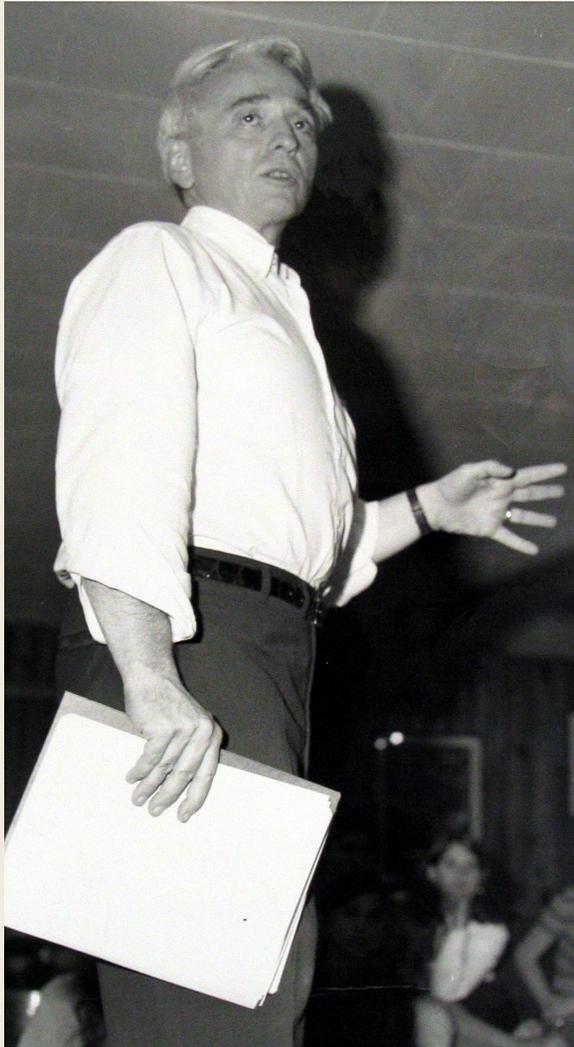
And then came Jack Stern.

Rabbi Stern grew up in Cincinnati hardly expecting a life in the clergy. As a child, he suffered from a serious and unrelenting hip infection that sent him repeatedly to the hospital. "I was going to be a doctor," he recalled. "I was grateful to all the doctors who saved me." But distaste for dissection in ninth-grade zoology – as well as many positive experiences as a religious-school student – spurred him to change his plans. When it came time to enroll in college, he chose a joint program between the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College as a first step toward becoming a rabbi.

"I loved midrash," he said. "I always loved storytelling."

After stints in Great Neck, N.Y., and Westfield, N.J., Rabbi Stern landed at WRT in 1962, where he spent almost three decades as an inspirational and truly beloved spiritual leader. Members admired him for his intellect, his values, his moving sermons, and his unique ability to connect with – and raise up – each and every individual.

"He didn't go out of his way to put on his robe of spirituality – it was there," recalled Vivian Sulds. "It was there whether you met him in the toy store buying a toy for his kid, or you spoke to him after services or you called him up because you wanted to ask a question."



According to Bill Miller, WRT's president from 1989 to 1993, "He would be noted not for his toughness with people...but for the way he tried so hard to make them better."

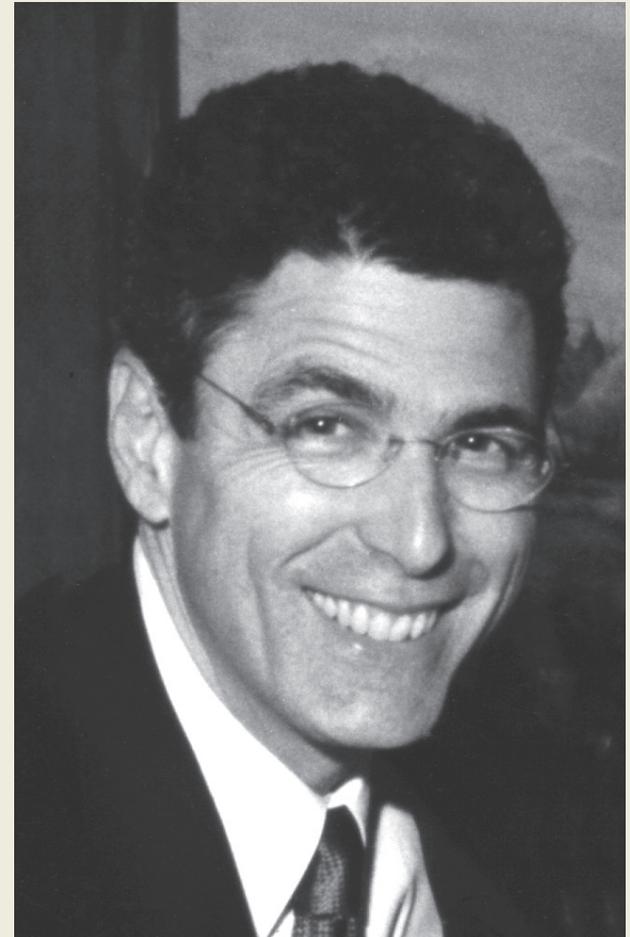
Another hallmark was Rabbi Stern's commitment to social justice, which led him to South Africa to combat apartheid, as well as to Mississippi in 1963, where he marched with icons of the Civil Rights Movement. His devotion to such causes was evident in his Rosh Hashanah address to the congregation in 1986, in which he reflected on the spirit of change that infused the 1960s. "Simply because black people had always sat in the back of the bus did not mean it always had to be that way," he said. "Simply because the President of the United States decided that it was in the best national interest to send troops to a far-off place called Viet Nam to fight in a no-win war did not mean it had to be. Everything in the 1960s was fair game for challenge."

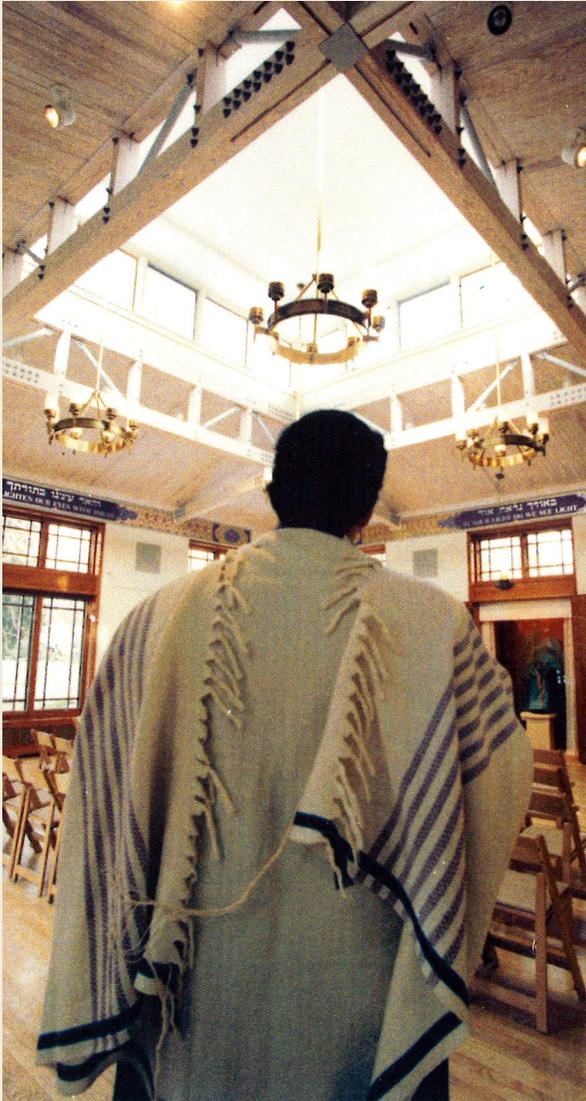
From early on, Rabbi Stern maintained that he would retire at age 65. So as the 1990s began, the congregation confronted the nearly impossible task of choosing a successor. Ruth Frankfurt, a devoted volunteer and head of the religious school for many years, led the search committee. After considering a number of candidates, the group eventually settled on Rick Jacobs, a charismatic young rabbi with a California background, a penchant for modern dance, and a distinctive blend of idealism and humility.

"He was an extremely talented, thoughtful and very spiritual human being," recalled Rosemary Berdon, a member of the search team who would later become president.

Rabbi Jacobs was no stranger to the temple, having served as a rabbinic intern at WRT years earlier. But at the time the search committee approached him, he was happily ensconced in Brooklyn, leading a small congregation housed in a converted brownstone. Miller, whose tenure as president coincided with the search, recalled visiting Rabbi Jacobs' synagogue during the selection process. "The first thing I noticed when we walked in was that there were little cups of wine to greet everyone," he said. "That struck me...it was such a warm feeling." In fact, the practice was so highly regarded that it has since become one of WRT's most cherished rituals as well.

Committee members weren't sure the Brooklyn rabbi would





cotton to a large suburban synagogue such as WRT – but ultimately he accepted the offer. At the search committee’s subsequent meeting, Frankfurt surprised the group with wine and pastries as she conveyed the happy news. “Tonight,” she said, “we can celebrate.”

Rabbi Jacobs joined WRT in 1991, and his 20 years at the helm were marked by gradual yet profound changes. In worship, he ushered in a gentle move toward a more traditionalist approach to Reform Judaism; in education, he urged congregants to become lifelong learners, leading many to become adult b’nei mitzvah; and as an activist, he aimed to rally support to help end the Darfur Genocide in the early 2000s and, later, to forge better ties between Jews and Muslims.

Perhaps most far-reaching, he modeled a new, more encompassing and more committed way of caring for one another, which he would later come to refer to as “audacious hospitality.”

With his reputation as a strong, progressive and tireless leader, it was no surprise that the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest Jewish movement in North America, came calling to tap him as its next president, upon the retirement of Rabbi Eric Yoffie in 2012. In preparing to take his leave, Rabbi Jacobs reflected on his past and looked ahead to the future. “The kinds of bonds that we have formed, the holy work that we have done together, the creative spirit that pervades this sacred community are exceedingly hard to find in this world,” he wrote to the WRT congregation. “While we are so fortunate to live in such a bountiful community, to belong to such a spectacular synagogue, let us not forget that we were put on this earth to work for the greater good. This is the work that summons me to leave...”

“His lessons are everywhere,” Lisa Messinger, then president of WRT, commented in her Bulletin column. “His vision has helped make us one of the most dynamic, conscientious congregations.”

So once again, WRT was in need of a senior rabbi – and while a new committee was convened to look far and wide, this time the search concluded just down the hallway. Rabbi Jonathan Blake, who joined WRT as associate rabbi in 2003, was identified as the best candidate to lead WRT through the challenges and promises ahead. He remains WRT’s senior rabbi to this day.

“We will be welcoming someone we already know and love – an inspired teacher, a fine preacher and a mensch,” Messinger wrote, in announcing the decision.

A graduate of Amherst College who majored in English literature, Rabbi Blake is widely lauded as an insightful interpreter of Torah, an engaging speaker, and a thoughtful and caring pastor. He is also a bit of Renaissance man – a devoted foodie, a wine connoisseur, and a talented singer and musician. Plus, in keeping with the tradition of activism among WRT’s senior clergy, he has been inspired to speak forcefully and eloquently on a range of critical issues of the early 21st Century, including the struggle of Syrian refugees to enter this country, and the need for new measures to address gun violence.

Fittingly for a literature major, Rabbi Blake quoted a line from Shakespeare’s *All’s Well That End’s Well* – “The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together” – in his first Bulletin column as senior rabbi.

“It is the life of sacred Jewish connection that keeps me going,” he wrote. “These moments, woven of life’s mingled yarn – on the Bima, under the Chuppah, in hospital rooms, by the grave – these intimate encounters are where ordinary life touches the numinous.”

In becoming WRT’s fifth full-time senior rabbi, Rabbi Blake assumed leadership of a congregation numbering more than 1,100 households. And with the congregation’s growth came an expansion of the clergy team. The temple’s history includes a lineup of associate rabbis, assistant rabbis, and rabbinic interns, many of whom have gone on to lead congregations of their own.

And then, of course, there were the cantors.





## Our Music



When you consider how integral music is to the everyday life of WRT, it may come as a surprise that the synagogue had no full-time cantor for the first 15 years of its existence. Back in the early days, the responsibility for music fell on the shoulders of the volunteer choir – so there was a critical need for participants. The October 1953 Bulletin included an urgent plea to “all those who can carry a tune” to consider stepping up.

“The more singers we can get, the less burden will be on each volunteer,” the article noted, adding that regular attendance at services was not a requirement for joining up.

Five years into Rabbi Stern’s tenure, the congregation decided to bring a full-time cantor on board. Consequently, Cantor Joseph Boardman joined WRT in 1968. A Fulbright scholar, he had an impressive resume, which included 20 years playing leading roles in operas across Europe. Immediately before joining WRT, he spent eight years as a cantor with Temple Beth-El in Huntington, on Long Island.

Cantor Boardman was regarded as a wonderful choice – dedicated, loyal and caring, as well as highly talented. So it was with mixed feelings that the congregation accepted his retirement after 20 years on the job. As many of WRT’s leaders recalled, Rabbi Stern always planned to retire when he turned 65 – and he suggested it was appropriate for Cantor Boardman do the same. Rosemary Berdon, who was president at the time, convened a search committee, but the members didn’t have to go out in pursuit of Cantor Boardman’s replacement. In fact, WRT’s next cantor, Stephen Merkel, became aware of the opening and came calling on his own.

A native of Winnipeg, Canada, Cantor Merkel was a Julliard-trained baritone, who also had a passion for Yiddish culture and held

a Master's Degree in social work. Berdon described him as "highly strung" when he came to his first audition at WRT, because he was suffering from a bad cold. But when he recovered and returned for a second audition, the committee was bowled over.

"This was a person who knew how to sing," Berdon said. "This was a beautiful voice. This was someone who gave the impression of caring enormously about what he was doing."

But a new cantor was only one of the many musical changes taking place at WRT – and in the whole of Reform Judaism in the latter part of the 20th Century. "There was a different style of music – a Debbie Friedman style," recalled one-time WRT president Bill Miller, referring to the pioneering Jewish singer and songwriter whose beloved songs have become a staple for Jewish institutions. "It goes back to the camp movement in Reform Judaism, which embodies a more rhythmic, melodic, folk style." It was also during this time that organs started to recede in popularity, and pianos and guitars became instruments of choice in many synagogues.

Congregants recalled that Cantor Merkel brought much to WRT, including new melodies, new Yiddish programming, and a refined approach to the choir. "He wasn't just a person who was going to get up on Friday night and sing," Berdon said. Notably, he was a prime force in the congregation's 50th anniversary celebration at Purchase College, bringing in a range of New York City theater and dance professionals to help create a stunning multi-media production.

So it was a heartbreaking moment when Cantor Merkel succumbed to cancer in 2007, at the age of 57. Led by Rabbi Jacobs, the congregation mourned the loss and celebrated Cantor Merkel's life, returning to the sanctuary repeatedly in the days after his funeral to share memories. Ellen Sunness, president of WRT at the time, recalled taking his Yiddish class not long after the death of her mother. "As a teacher, he presented me with the important gift of learning how to turn the sad and hollow feelings that loss brings into feelings of joyful remembrance," she wrote.

It was then time for the congregation to heal and look forward – and to welcome Cantor Jill Abramson as WRT's next senior cantor. A passionate teacher with a soaring voice, a gentle but decisive





personality, and a commitment to social justice, Cantor Abramson came to the East Coast from Chicago, where she had been serving as cantor and director of education at Congregation Sukkat Shalom in Chicago. A citizen of the world, she also lived for a time in Cameroon, taught English in Indonesia, and developed an Israeli-Palestinian teenage choir as part of an international peace program.

“When you talk with Cantor Abramson, you sense immediately not only her depth, both intellectually and spiritually, but also the ease with which she relates to people of all ages and backgrounds,” Rabbi Jacobs wrote, as he introduced her to the congregation in 2007. “We are very blessed, indeed, that she will be leading, teaching and caring for us.”

It didn’t take long for WRT to see Cantor Abramson put her talent for using music to inspire, comfort, and educate into action. In the more than ten years she has spent at WRT, she has lent her voice, her musicianship, and her talents to a range of impactful events – including a major mounting in 2016 of the late Bonia Shur’s masterpiece “The Hallel Psalms,” which featured the voices of Rabbi Blake and WRT’s adult choir. The project was particularly moving for the WRT community, as Cantor Merkel had been a colleague of Shur’s.

In a more popular vein, Cantor Abramson has also been a driving force behind WRT’s annual SummerStage concert, which aims to bring a bit of Tanglewood to the WRT lawn each summer. She also has spearheaded “i-Sing Shabbat,” an interactive Friday night service for families that features projected lyrics to make singing-along easier.

WRT’s musical tradition has come a long way since that first volunteer choir convened in 1953. But the changes in music were only part of the wide-ranging evolution of the temple’s worship practices and services.



## Our Worship

As the old saying goes, put two Jews in a room and you'll wind up with three opinions. Perhaps nowhere has this been more evident than in our sacred spaces, where congregants, clergy, the culture and the wider world intersect to make worship an organic and ever-changing experience.

How did the founding members envision worship at WRT? While the synagogue was conceived as a Reform congregation, there was still discussion and disagreement in the early days about what kind of Reform Judaism it would practice. Attendees at the organizational meeting in the summer of 1953 came from a range of backgrounds, with some raised Orthodox, some Conservative, some Reform, and some with no affiliation at all. Some people were in favor of a strictly "classical" Reform approach, which would entail services primarily conducted in English and a downplaying of ritual observances. Others preferred a more traditional model, with more rituals and more Hebrew. Ultimately the group came down on the side of an approach that leaned toward the traditional, and those preferring the classical model eventually helped establish Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester, in Rye.

During the ensuing years, WRT showed some decisive shifts in worship, as it responded to the influence of its leaders, its growing membership, and trends in Jewish observance. More Hebrew has become evident in services, some long-time members noticed. "There was more traditional observance and more ritual at the end of Jack's tenure," recalled Bill Miller, who served as temple president during the transition from Rabbi Stern to Rabbi Jacobs. By 1991, he said, when Rabbi Jacobs joined the temple, "there was a strong movement back to tradition."





But the changes also included new types of services. Early members recalled that becoming a b'nei mitzvah was not very common among Reform Jews in the earlier part of the 20th Century. However, in the late 1970s, Rabbi Stern began the first adult b'nei mitzvah program, in response to the desire on the part of some members to immerse themselves in a more intensive Jewish experience. In addition, as the temple's religious-school population grew and b'nei mitzvah became more popular – and as the clergy team grew as well, to address the needs of an expanding congregation – the temple began conducting afternoon b'nei mitzvah services in addition to the Shabbat morning ones. (Of course, this introduced a new problem – how to ensure that congregants and guests wore appropriate temple attire during the evening service, and not the elaborate gowns and tuxedos they wanted to wear at the parties that would follow.)

Concern for – indeed, love of – Israel also increased during the 1980s and beyond, and the clergy began leading periodic trips there for congregants. For some members, this reflected a huge change from the 1950s, when congregants often were not nearly as driven to make Israel one of the temple's most cherished priorities.

To many, however, one of the most important shifts has been the gradual move at WRT toward a more participatory atmosphere in the sanctuary, with more opportunities for the congregation to sing, as well as more materials with translations and transliterations. This has made it easier for those who don't understand Hebrew to chant, read aloud, sing, and fully appreciate the worship experience. Members said that a ritual Rabbi Jacobs introduced – that moment early in the service when attendees are encouraged to look around the pews and introduce themselves to people they've not yet met – helps make the large congregation feel a bit more intimate.

What are the effects of all these changes? Charles Weinberg, one of the founding members, waxed thoughtfully on the subject. "The music to which the psalms and prayers were sung in the '20s and '30s is nowhere near what it is today," he said. "You can't freeze everything in the '20s or '30s or '40s and say, 'This is it.'"

"If you don't change with the times, you're lost," he said.

To be sure, thoughtful change is among the hallmarks of WRT. But it's just one of the values that the temple embraces...



## Our Values

In early 1961, WRT was rocked by the news that a 20-year-old male college student had been barred from escorting his date to the Scarsdale Golf Club's annual Christmas Ball because his father was Jewish. The move was condemned by many – including Rev. George Kempself of St. James the Less, who rebuked parishioners supporting the club's decision – and drew national media attention. Ultimately the club changed its policy and opened its doors to all guests. But the event was yet another reminder of the Torah's lesson to welcome the stranger, since Jews have often been strangers themselves.

At WRT, that lesson dovetails with the values of compassion and inclusion, which inform so much of what happens at the temple.

Perhaps the earliest inclusion efforts at WRT revolved around women. During the temple's first days, men headed most of the committees. In fact, when early temple Bulletins referred to women, their first names weren't even used, as in the announcement that "Mr. and Mrs. Chester Ross" would perform the candle lighting on February 15, 1957.

Rosemary Berdon recalled that when she was a vice president of the temple in the early 1980s, she could sit on the bima – but could not to hold a Torah, since Torah scrolls were considered too heavy for women. She spoke up to change that policy, saying, "I don't want to feel like chopped liver. Either I'm a vice president of the congregation and the officers are holding Torahs, or I'm not." She went on to observe she'd carried around her kids when they were young, so she was surely plenty strong.

The next year, and for every year going forward, female officers on the bima proudly held Torahs – and what's more, in 1982, WRT appointed its first female clergy member, associate rabbi Deborah Zecher. Three short years later, Berdon became WRT's first female





president. Also during this time period, WRT began holding bat mitzvah services on Saturday mornings; previously, only bar mitzvah services were held on Saturdays, with bat mitzvah services on Friday nights.

Another proud first came in 2001, when WRT's associate cantor, Angela Warnick Buchdahl was ordained a rabbi. The daughter of a Jewish American father and a Korean Buddhist mother, Rabbi-Cantor Buchdahl was the first Asian American ever to be ordained either a cantor or rabbi in all of North America.

"The face of the Jewish community is changing," she said in an article in the *Scarsdale Inquirer*. "I want to help push people to see that."

Inclusion and compassion have touched other aspects of WRT as well. For example, one of the most controversial issues in the temple's history was the "waiting list" for membership, which held sway during the early decades. The point was to keep numbers low so as not to overtax the clergy or push past the limits of the building or parking lot. Although these were certainly significant considerations, the existence of such a list was anathema to Rabbi Jacobs, because its effect was to exclude. It was during Rabbi Jacobs' first year at WRT that the waiting list was abolished. The new priority was to welcome all who wanted to join the congregation, and to devote resources to addressing whatever problems resulted from the expansion. Reflecting our growing and welcoming community, WRT's membership rolls have grown dramatically over the decades – from 100 households in 1953 to 450 a decade later, to more than 800 in the 1980s to about 1150 today.

Inclusion was also the inspiration behind Rabbi Blake's recent decision to reverse a practice adhered to by previous rabbis, and to begin performing interfaith weddings under certain circumstances. "Here we endeavor to open door as wide as possible for Jewish living," he wrote in a 2013 letter to congregants. "Marrying a non-Jew will not make it easier to live Jewishly, but we can try not to make it harder."

Inclusion has also meant reaching out to adults and children with special needs – whatever those special needs might be. In February of 2010, Susan Wiener, then chair of the temple's Inclusion Committee, spoke passionately on the subject during an event that has become a

staple in WRT's calendar, the Inclusion Shabbat. "I challenge each of us to step out of our comfort zone and reach out to all the members of our community," she said. "Those in mourning, those with disabilities, those who just lost a job...those who are sitting alone at services, those who may be standing alone at the oneg, those who are afraid to come in the front door.

"As Reform Jews, we affirm the importance of inclusion," she added. "Our communities have extended a welcome to individuals and groups who were once permanently outside the camp: intermarried couples, gay men, lesbians, and children born to Jewish fathers but not Jewish mothers. Our efforts toward inclusion are a reflection of our ongoing commitment to *tikkun olam*, repairing the world."

The value of *tikkun olam* (or healing the world) has inspired WRT's congregation and our clergy to speak out in the face of bigotry and discrimination, both locally and in places farther away. Among the most resonant examples are Rabbi Stern's efforts in support of Civil Rights; Rabbi Jacobs' call for action when the Boy Scouts banned an openly gay leader; and most recently, Rabbi Blake's arguments against the 2017 travel ban that appeared designed to keep Muslims out of the United States.

What will inclusion look like tomorrow? Indeed, what will WRT look like tomorrow?





## Our Story

*Five hundred, twenty-five thousand, six hundred minutes...*

So begins the ballad “Seasons of Love” in the 1996 Broadway musical *Rent*, a song that asks how best to measure the years of our lives. In daylights? In sunsets? In laughter? In strife?

Which begs the question: How do we measure our temple’s 65 years of life?

*In strength* – and the way we’ve grown from eight forward-thinking couples to about 1,150 households?

*In bricks and mortar* – and the way we’ve built an expansive campus that reflects our love for the earth, for Israel, for God, for learning, and for one another?

*In impact* – and the way our congregants and clergy have helped heal the world by raising their voices and rolling up their sleeves in support of equality, social justice, and inclusion?

*In reach* – and the way WRT has served as a launching pad for clergy members such as Ken Chasen, now senior rabbi at Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles; Angela Warnick Buchdahl, now senior rabbi at Central Synagogue in New York City; and Rick Jacobs, now president of the Union for Reform Judaism, the largest Jewish movement in North America?

*In people* – and the way we can point to the children who’ve been educated in our Early Childhood Center and Jewish Learning Lab, and the adults who’ve been inspired, healed, and embraced through the worship, study, and celebrations that have take place within our wall – a total that is perhaps almost as vast at the number of stars the patriarch Abraham saw when he looked skyward to envision a new Jewish nation?

Or should we do what that the characters in *Rent* advise – and measure our lives in love?

Our temple is vastly different today from what it looked like in 1953, when eight Jewish couples set out to educate their children about their Jewish heritage. Who would have imagined that by 2018, Westchester Reform Temple would become a leading voice in the Reform Movement, with influence that extends across the United States and beyond? On the other hand, who would have imagined that at age 65, we'd be facing a new scourge of global anti-Semitism, which would demand new ways to keep our congregants safe and secure?

So how will we look in 2083, some 65 years from today? While it's impossible to predict all that will be new, we know what will always stay the same. It's the feeling that founding member Charles Weinberg expressed perfectly when he talked about walking through the doors of WRT.

"I go there, and I'm still welcome," he said. "I feel at home."



# Westchester Reform Temple's First 65 Years

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## 1953

- August** WRT founded.  
Eugene Lipman serves as part-time rabbi.  
Dr. Rowland Mindlin is first president.
- September** First services held in Dyckman Hall, Scarsdale. Later services are held in several area churches.

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## 1954

- January** Under President Clifford H. Rich the Sisterhood and Men's Club are founded.  
One hundred children are in Sunday School.
- August** Maurice H. Schatz is chosen as first full-time rabbi.
- December** The land is purchased where the Temple now stands.

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## 1955

- July** David Greenberg is selected as second full-time rabbi.

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## 1956

- October** Irving Isaac serves as Temple president.

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## 1957

- October** Under President Edwin J. Steefel construction begins on Temple building.

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## 1958

- October** Under President Ulrich Schweitzer construction of Temple is completed.  
The Sanctuary is designed as a Magen David.

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## 1959

- September** Under President Dr. Milton Zaret the Temple is dedicated at a special service.

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## 1961

Erwin Herman serves as interim rabbi.

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## 1962

- September** Jack Stern, Jr. is installed as third full-time rabbi.

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## 1963

- December** Tenth Anniversary Service.  
Tenth Anniversary Ball at Hampshire Country Club.  
Under President Seymour E. Sims, Temple purchases 43 Cohawney Road, Scarsdale as rabbi's residence.

<b>1965</b>	<b>March</b>	Expansion of the Temple is authorized.
	<b>May</b>	Dedication of Czechoslovakian Sefer Torah which is on permanent loan from Westminster Synagogue, London.
<b>1967</b>	<b>February</b>	Peter Rubinstein becomes first rabbinic intern.
<b>1968</b>	<b>August</b>	Joseph Boardman becomes first full-time cantor and music director.
	<b>October</b>	Ground-breaking services for Temple expansion during Irving Berkelhammer's presidency.
<b>1969</b>	<b>April</b>	First Leo Baeck Lecture with Morris Abrams as speaker. Soil from Israel is deposited in base of new Sanctuary Ark by Rabbi Stern.
<b>1970</b>	<b>May</b>	Under President Norman L. Blumstein, the new sanctuary is dedicated at special service. The classroom wing is dedicated in memory of Irving Berkelhammer.
<b>1971</b>	<b>January</b>	Official change from Ashkenazic to Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew.
	<b>March</b>	Stained glass windows designed by Ephraim Weitzman and Czechoslovakian Torah Mantle are dedicated.
	<b>May</b>	Stuart A. Gertman appointed the first assistant rabbi and director of religious education.
	<b>December</b>	Seymour Sims receives the first Men's Club Brotherhood Award for service to community and Temple.
<b>1972</b>	<b>January</b>	First Stephen Sulds Memorial Film Festival.
	<b>March</b>	Dedication of organ. Dedication of Library endowed and furnished by Temple Sisterhood.
	<b>April</b>	Dedication of new Sanctuary doors designed by Betty Goldstein.
<b>1973</b>	<b>May</b>	20th Anniversary Dance at Temple, Roberta Peters soloist. WRT Endowment Trust Fund is begun.
<b>1974</b>	<b>January</b>	First Kenneth B. Corlin Memorial Program for Human Relations in cooperation with Scarsdale Board of Education.
	<b>March</b>	First Scholar-in-Residence Series with Dr. Martin A. Cohen as lecturer.
	<b>April</b>	Dedication of outdoor memorial sculpture.
	<b>September</b>	Dedication of Youth Lounge as gift of Temple Men's Club.
<b>1975</b>	<b>February</b>	Social Action Committee receives Abraham J. Heschel Award of Federation of Jewish Philanthropies for outstanding contribution to aged and impoverished Jews.

<b>1975</b> (continued)	
<b>December</b>	Worship from Gates of Prayer is initiated at Men's Club Sabbath.
<b>1976</b>	
<b>April</b>	Dedication of Memorial Sculpture created by Helen Burtman in Temple Lobby.
<b>June</b>	Rabbi Peter Weintraub selected as second assistant rabbi and director of religious education.
<b>1977</b>	
<b>May</b>	Under President Ralph Wienshienk, Rabbi Stern is honored with life contract.
<b>1978</b>	
<b>June</b>	Year long celebration of Silver Jubilee - under President Alfred Ronald. First Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah at the Temple.
<b>1980</b>	
<b>June</b>	First WRT sponsored Youth Group trip to Israel.
<b>1981</b>	
<b>January</b>	WRT adopts two Vietnamese families.
<b>July</b>	Richard Jacobs begins a year as rabbinic intern at WRT.
<b>1982</b>	
<b>April</b>	Celebration service in honor of Jack and Priscilla Stern's twenty years at WRT.
<b>June</b>	Dedication of the Outdoor Sanctuary under President Joseph Bernstein.
<b>July</b>	Rabbi Deborah Zecher, our third Assistant Rabbi and Director of Education, comes to WRT.
<b>1983</b>	
<b>May</b>	Temple celebrates its 30th anniversary with a Shabbat service and gala dinner dance.
<b>1984</b>	
<b>March</b>	First Jules Bloch Memorial Lecture.
<b>April</b>	Temple inaugurates Shabbat morning Torah study service.
<b>September</b>	Sculpted chupah dedicated in Outdoor Sanctuary.
<b>1985</b>	
<b>September</b>	WRT Parenting Center opens. Susan Cheskin appointed director.
<b>1986</b>	
<b>February</b>	Under President Rosemary Berdon, the Congregation approves the addition of nursery school classrooms to Religious School wing and the renovation and extension of Temple facilities.
<b>April</b>	Congregation begins its ongoing support of Mazon, the Jewish response to world hunger.
<b>December</b>	WRT joins an interfaith coalition to feed and house the homeless of Westchester.
<b>1987</b>	
<b>October</b>	Temple celebrates its 35th anniversary, the completion of its renovation and Jack and Priscilla Stern's 25th anniversary at WRT.

<b>1988</b>		
	<b>June</b>	Cantor Boardman is named Cantor Emeritus.
	<b>July</b>	Stephen Merkel is appointed cantor and music director at WRT.
<b>1989</b>		
	<b>January</b>	Beth Mauser is appointed first full-time executive director at WRT.
	<b>May</b>	First Russian family is adopted.
	<b>July</b>	Congregation welcomes Beth Singer as fourth assistant rabbi.
<b>1991</b>		
	<b>January</b>	Under President William Miller, the Fund for the Generations is established in honor of Rabbi Jack and Priscilla Stern.
	<b>June</b>	Rabbi Jack Stern, Jr. retires and is named Rabbi Emeritus.
	<b>July</b>	The congregation welcomes Rabbi Richard Jacobs as its fourth senior rabbi. Rabbi Beth Singer is appointed associate rabbi.
<b>1992</b>		
	<b>September</b>	WRT welcomes Sharon Halper as full-time director of education.
	<b>July</b>	Congregation begins to use new Gates of Prayer for Shabbat.
	<b>October</b>	Outreach Committee is formed.
<b>1993</b>		
	<b>May</b>	Under President William S. Miller, Temple purchases 257 Mamaroneck Road for expansion purposes. William A. Blumstein becomes Temple President.
	<b>October</b>	The Caring Community is created to care for members during difficult times such as illness and bereavement.
<b>1994</b>		
	<b>January</b>	ARZA membership presented to every B'nai Mitzvah.
	<b>March</b>	WRT selected as participant in Experiment in Congregational Education.
	<b>June</b>	Sorel Goldberg Loeb selected as second Early Childhood Center director.
	<b>September</b>	WRT selected as participant in Gift of Israel Program.
	<b>December</b>	Critical Issues Forum established.
<b>1995</b>		
	<b>January</b>	Bat Mitzvah of Dasha Schevtchenko from WRT's Russian family.
	<b>February</b>	Ann Z. Finkelstein appointed second executive director.
	<b>May</b>	Congregation approves plans for creation of Center for Jewish Life.
	<b>July</b>	Congregation welcomes Rabbi Judith Schindler as fifth assistant rabbi.
	<b>October</b>	First Mitzvah Day
	<b>November</b>	First Emeritus Weekend
<b>1996</b>		
	<b>March</b>	Purchase of 253 Mamaroneck Road.

<b>1996</b> (continued)	
<b>May</b>	Groundbreaking for Center for Jewish Life.
<b>July</b>	Rabbi Jacobs leads congregational trip to Israel.
<b>September</b>	Second day Rosh Hashanah Service held.
<b>1997</b>	
<b>March</b>	WRT Board approves establishment of relationship with Mevasseret Zion in Israel
<b>May</b>	Experiment in Congregational Education Task Force evolves into Education Council. Marjorie L. Miller elected President.
<b>July</b>	Cantor Merkel leads congregants on Eastern European Trip.
<b>October</b>	Dedication of Center for Jewish Life.
<b>November</b>	WRT adopts Mevasseret Zion in Israel as sister congregation.
<b>December</b>	Rabbi Schindler leads congregational trip to Israel and visits Mevasseret Zion.
<b>1998</b>	
<b>April</b>	Gala celebration of Cantor Stephen Merkel's 10th anniversary at WRT. Israeli Fair in honor of the 50th Anniversary of Israel.
<b>July</b>	Congregation engages Rabbi Kenneth Chasen as sixth assistant rabbi. Congregation engages Rabbi Laurie Katz Braun as first assistant rabbi for youth.
<b>September</b>	Family High Holy Day Worship Services initiated.
<b>1999</b>	
<b>January</b>	ECC receives day care license, allowing afternoon sessions for first time.
<b>April</b>	Ruth Frankfurt, beloved teacher of 45 years, is honored on her retirement.
<b>May</b>	Angela Warnick Buchdahl invested as Cantor.
<b>June</b>	JrWRAFTY is created for children in grades 6, 7 and 8.
<b>September</b>	Dual Sabbath Eve Services begun. Family High Holy Day worship services are initiated.
<b>2000</b>	
<b>April</b>	Sorel Goldberg Loeb becomes Director of Education. Marilyn Master named Administrative Director of Education.
<b>June</b>	Phyllis Shankman joins WRT as Director of the Early Childhood Center.
<b>September</b>	Rabbi Jacobs receives ARZA/WORLD UNION North America International Humanitarian Award.
<b>2001</b>	
<b>March</b>	First Women's Seder is held for 120 women.
<b>May</b>	Amy Lemle is elected President of WRT. Angela Warnick Buchdahl is ordained, named Assistant Rabbi/Cantor .
<b>September</b>	Afternoon Havdalah b'nei mitzvah ceremonies are begun.
<b>2002</b>	
<b>February</b>	Greeters Initiative begins for Friday night Shabbat and festival services.
<b>April</b>	WRT sends 100 to National Rally to Support Israel in Washington, D.C.

<b>2002</b> (continued)	
<b>June</b>	Cantor Merkel teaches songleading to progressive congregations in Russia.
<b>July</b>	Religious School Initiative develops proposals to re-invent Religious School with pilot classes beginning in the Fall.
<b>October</b>	Congregation participates in county-wide Synagogue 2000 program to foster sacred community.
<b>2003</b>	
<b>August</b>	Congregation buys house at 11 Saxon Woods Road for campus expansion.
<b>July</b>	Rabbi Jonathan E. Blake joins WRT as seventh associate rabbi.
<b>September</b>	WRT forms partnership with Edward Williams School in Mount Vernon.
<b>2004</b>	
<b>January</b>	Rogers Marvel Architects selected for sanctuary and school design.
<b>April</b>	WRT celebrates 50th Year with theatrical performance The Five Pillars.
<b>June</b>	Sue Tolchin is hired as Early Childhood Director.
<b>July</b>	Yoel Magid begins as third Executive Director.
<b>2005</b>	
<b>February</b>	WRT first welcomes Rabbi Dario Feiguin of Buenos Aires.
<b>May</b>	Ellen Sunness is elected President of WRT.
<b>September</b>	WRT sends truckload of food and clothing to Hurricane Katrina victims.
<b>October</b>	Rabbi Jacobs travels to Chad to meet with Darfur survivors.
<b>2006</b>	
<b>February</b>	Sharing Shabbat celebrates 10th-year anniversary.
<b>August</b>	Cantor Mia Fram Davidson joins WRT's clergy team.
<b>September</b>	Singer-songwriter Debbie Friedman begins year as Artist-in-Residence.
<b>December</b>	Lech Lecha Renewal Campaign is publicly launched.
<b>2007</b>	
<b>February</b>	WRT mourns the passing of Cantor Stephen Merkel z"l. With Men's Club assistance, area homeless men shelter overnight at WRT.
<b>August</b>	Cantor Jill Abramson begins as Senior Cantor, joined by newly-ordained Assistant Cantor Dan Sklar.
<b>November</b>	Green Task Force is created.
<b>2008</b>	
<b>February</b>	WRT mourns the death of Cantor Emeritus Joseph Boardman.
<b>June</b>	WRT bids farewell to long-time accompanist Justin Bischof.
<b>September</b>	Rabbi David Hartman delivers first memorial lecture in remembrance of Rabbi Jacob & Deborah Rubenstein of Young Israel of Scarsdale.
<b>2009</b>	
<b>May</b>	Lisa Messinger is elected President.
<b>July</b>	Rabbi Jacobs brings memorial stones from Israel for new memorial garden.

<b>2009</b> (continued)	
<b>September</b>	Dedication held for new sanctuary and social hall. Jazz pianist & conductor Pete Malinverni hired as music accompanist.
<b>2010</b>	
<b>January</b>	Torah written by congregants is dedicated to Sorel Goldberg Loeb.
<b>May</b>	WRT joins area congregations to help laid off members find new jobs.
<b>November</b>	Taking actions to Stand with Israel is focus of Town Hall meeting
<b>2011</b>	
<b>March</b>	Rabbi Jacobs announces acceptance of Presidency of the URJ.
<b>May</b>	WRT mourns the death of Rabbi Emeritus Jack Stern z"l. Community Visioning Conversations held to assist senior rabbi selection.
<b>June</b>	WRT begins community organizing work with Westchester United.
<b>2012</b>	
<b>January</b>	WRT mourns death of singer-songwriter Debbie Friedman z"l.
<b>May</b>	Rabbi Jonathan E. Blake is installed as Senior Rabbi after national search.
<b>July</b>	Rabbi David Levy becomes assistant rabbi. Rabbi Marcus Burstein is named Acting Associate Rabbi.
<b>2013</b>	
<b>March</b>	WRT's Got Talent features evening of congregational entertainment.
<b>May</b>	Congregants lobby in Albany with Reform Jewish Voice of New York. Helene Gray is elected President.
<b>July</b>	Rabbi Sara Abrams becomes Assistant Rabbi. Alan Halpern begins as fourth Executive Director.
<b>2014</b>	
<b>March</b>	WRT joins other faith institutions in Gun Violence Prevention Shabbat.
<b>June</b>	Project Grad Bag is organized to facilitate reuse of college dorm supplies.
<b>September</b>	Rosh Hashanah Gift of Life bone marrow drive nets 144 new donors.
<b>October</b>	Inaugural Sukkah Slam features food trucks and outdoor live music.
<b>2015</b>	
<b>April</b>	WRT establishes BBYO chapter for Jewish teens.
<b>July</b>	Former cantorial intern Amanda Kleinman is named Assistant Cantor. Eli Kornreich begins as fifth Executive Director.
<b>September</b>	WRT launches Zero Waste Program.
<b>October</b>	iSing Shabbat program debuts for grades 1-4 and their families.
<b>December</b>	WRT is recognized as Exemplar Congregation for its inclusion work.

## 2016

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- February** Family Shabbat weekend retreat held at Camp Eisner.
- June** Adult Choir performs Bonia Shur's "Hallel Psalms."
- July** Rabbi Daniel Reiser named Assistant Rabbi.
- September** New High Holiday prayer book, *Mishkan HaNefesh*, is introduced.
- October** Refugee Resettlement Task Force holds first meeting.

## 2017

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- January** Cantor Abramson selected as AJWS global justice fellow.
- May** Marcy R. Harris is elected President.
- July** Associate Rabbi David Levy is named Jewish Learning Lab Director.
- September** WRT's reimagined religious school opens as Jewish Learning Lab.
- October** Cantor Kleinman introduces 2-year Adult Confirmation program.

## 2018

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- February** Rabbi Blake and Cantor Kleinman lead 24 high school seniors to Israel.
- March** Rabbi Levy wins Young Pioneer Award from Jewish Education Project.
- April** WRT celebrates 65th anniversary with tribute to past, present and future.

# Westchester Reform Temple Presidents



**William S. Miller: 1989-1993**

“For more than 50 years our Synagogue has been the center of my life: a place to pray and learn, and a place to celebrate and mourn. I am grateful “



**William A. Blumstein: 1993-1997**

“Since 1956 WRT is my home, it is the place where I made, nurtured and continue to find a welcoming vibrant evolving community. It is where people, spirituality, and education, come together to form sacred and caring communities, where memories are created and where you find light when all grows dark. WRT is not a place, but a moment, and then another, and another, continuing to build on each other like bricks to create a solid shelter that is yours forever.”



**Marjorie L. Miller: 1997-2001**

“We’ve studied and played  
Worshipped and prayed  
Had sad times and simchas  
Joined in 1957 and happily stayed”



**Amy S. Lemle: 2001-2005**

“WRT is my home because it is where our clergy make my spirits soar through music and words, where I join others in the common bond of social activism through deeds, where the foundational values of our Reform Judaism is true to our history but dynamic and evolving and where every brick, pane of glass and plank of wood honors our tradition with deep meaning. My heart and soul are embedded at WRT.”



**Ellen H. Sunness: 2005-2009**

“WRT is my home because here we are one big extended Jewish family. We share comfort and consolation, inspiration and hope, along with joy and a spirit that moves the soul.”



**Lisa R. Messinger: 2009-2013**

“WRT is my home because my whole life has happened there.”



**Helene K. Gray: 2013-2017**

“...at WRT, the love of Judaism is joyous and energizing. This vibrant community has supported me and my family and so many others along our Jewish journey. I am grateful to dwell here.”

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**Past WRT Presidents, *Deceased*:**

Dr. Rowland L. Mindlin: 1953

Clifford H. Rich: 1953-1955

Irving H. Isaac: 1955-1956

Edwin J. Steefel: 1956-1957

Ulrich Schweitzer: 1957-1959

Dr. Milton Zaret: 1959-1961

Seymour E. Sims: 1961-1965

Irving Berkelhammer: 1965-1969

Norman L. Blumstein: 1969-1973

Ralph Wienshienk: 1973-1977

Alfred Ronald: 1977-1981

Joseph Bernstein: 1981-1985

Rosemary Berdon: 1985-1989

# Memories

## Norman and Karen Alterman

In 1981 we were excited to move from the waiting list to be full members of WRT. We immediately became involved in Temple life. Karen was co-chair of the Religious School Board, serving with several co-chairs. We were proud parents as our daughter became Bat Mitzvah with Rabbi Zecher (the Debbies from A to Z). Proud again as our son had his Bar Mitzvah with Rabbi Stern, singing with Cantor Boardman on the bima. Many years later Karen became an adult Bat Mitzvah.

Liturgical music was always important and we sang with WRT choirs under Cantor Boardman, Cantor Merkel, and Cantor Abramson. Norman served as co-chair of the Music Committee with Dennis Gilbert and assisted the Search Committee for Cantor Abramson.

## Merle and Steve Brenner

We can never forget the words of Rabbi Jack Stern at each Friday night service we attended when our children were younger. We would go to WRT every Friday night after our Shabbat dinner at home. With our busy lives, it was a special time to be together as a family.

Rabbi Stern, with his authoritative manner, taught us how to uphold Jewish values and to incorporate *tikkun olam* into our lives. I remember the rich baritone voice

## Iris Burkat

Oh my goodness - so many memories...

Family trip to Israel with Rabbi Judy, Oliver and Zach at their Confirmation, adult bat mitzvah prep on Cantor Merkel's stool, d'var torah writing with Rabbi Jacobs and

We share many memories of deliberations and meaningful relationships as we each had long terms on the Board of Trustees (not at the same time). Karen remembers the challenges of serving on the Rabbinic Search committee that found Rabbi Jacobs, and at his request, serving as Co-chair of the Outreach Committee first with Chuck Ortner and then with Bette Landes.

Norman spent many years as Editor of the Bulletin before it was all done in house. He spent many Mondays Cooking for Hope and Karen joined him in her retirement.

Thus, we have many memories to choose from. They are all important to us.

of Cantor Boardman. When he started to sing, our little Wendy would dance in the aisle! As Rabbi Stern walked through the congregation holding the Torah, he would always stop by to say "good work Wendy!"

With Jodi, Lauren, and Wendy's Bat Mitzvahs, Weddings, and Baby Namings to follow, Westchester Reform Temple was always a part of our lives. Even after nearly 50 years of membership, WRT remains our second home!!

classmates, Women of the Wall and women's retreats with Cantor Abramson, Henry marching with the Torah, the sanctuary after stressful weeks, months, years...and so much more.

# Memories

## Carly Carlin

I will never forget those anxious moments on the bima the morning of my bat mitzvah, panicking over my deadly fear of public speaking. Cue Rabbi Jacobs, who asked if I was ready to warm up with some pliés. I chuckled and rolled my eyes, knowing we both shared a love of dance. “No, seriously,” he nudged. You all know what happened next. Holding the lectern as our barre, we did a couple of pliés. Then some more. Threw in a few tendus and relevés too. I tried not to think about how ridiculous we looked. But I actually felt better.

Fast forward to confirmation, where everyone was expected to participate in the ceremony. My public speaking anxieties still ran high, and I worried I’d have nothing to contribute. Rabbi Jacobs and Rabbi Blake asked why didn’t I just dance? To which I probably retorted, *Is that allowed? What does that have to do with being Jewish?* They said if dance was the way I could best express myself,

## Pauline Glasgall Camras

Westchester Reform Temple has played many memorable roles for me during my lifetime... from the daughter of a founding family to a continuing congregant.

Looking back in time this is one reason why WRT was born. My mother was attending a PTA meeting at Quaker Ridge School, and she overheard a woman behind her say “the next thing they will want is a Jew church.” This was the impetus for my family becoming one of the founding families of WRT in 1953.

As a child, I attended WRT Sunday School in the basement of The Scarsdale Congregational Church. Rabbi Greenberg was the Senior Rabbi at the time.

then that was not only okay, but uniquely awesome. Unconvinced, I played along. *Okay, but to what song? Does it have to be...you know... “Jewish”?* Rabbi Blake laughed and echoed the WRT philosophy: *it can be whatever YOU think it should be.*

I danced to U2’s *Beautiful Day*, right in the aisle of the old sanctuary. (I didn’t have to give a speech!) Performing in the same space that dancing had relaxed me just a few years before felt intensely spiritual. Enlightened, I realized I had the first inklings of an answer to the question we had been asking ourselves all year: *What does it mean to be Jewish?* I answer much more confidently than I did a decade ago: *Being Jewish means to dance. Being Jewish means to speak beyond words, through movement, action.* I am forever grateful, for WRT has shown me that being Jewish means to just be me.

Rabbi Stern, who was our neighbor, friend and mentor, presided over my marriage, my brother’s Bar Mitzvah and his marriage. Rabbi Stern also officiated at the marriage of my sister and at the baby naming and Bar Mitzvah of my son. Cantor Abramson married my niece and gave love and support to our family.

I was a teacher at the ECC for 15 wonderful years and was blessed to be part of so many children’s lives. It was pure joy.

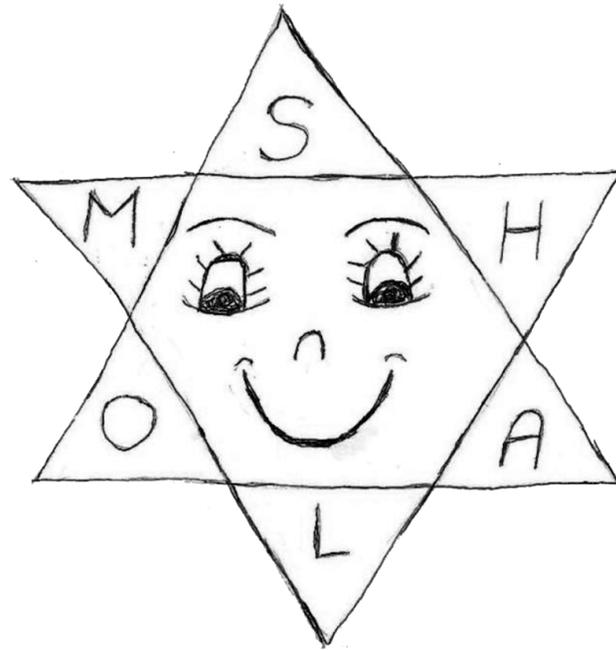
Throughout this 65 year period of my life I have been associated with this wonderful institution called Westchester Reform Temple.

# Memories

## Anne L. Cohen

WRT

When I walk through the doors  
Of WRT  
A feeling of peace  
Comes over me  
Here I've made friendships  
And learned many things  
And treasure all  
This spirituality brings  
Had an adult Bat Mitzvah  
Will have a Confirmation too  
And I would like to say  
Many thanks to you  
My future looks lovely  
As lovely can be  
And I will credit much of it  
To WRT.



## Lisa Eisenstein

It was nearing sundown of Yom Kippur 2009. In all my years of attending High Holiday Services, I had never attended a Neilah Service. I came to temple with my family - Steve, Jacob and Hanna. We entered the new sanctuary which was completely full. The lights dimmed and Rabbi Jacobs lit the Neilah candle holding it up high above his head with his arm outstretched. Members of the congregation began to move up towards the front of the sanctuary, filling the center aisle. Not knowing what would happen next, I took

my kids by their hands and followed up the center aisle. The following few minutes of song and folks swaying arm in arm transported me to a new place. But what left the indelible memory was the sight and sound of Rabbi Jacobs as he extinguished the candle in the cup of wine. The sputtering of the flame could be heard all the way to the back row. This incredible feeling of community and common purpose comes back to me every year. I've never missed a Neilah Service since then.

## Steve Eisenstein

The year was 2006. My son Jacob was 9 and my daughter Hanna was 6. It was mid-October and Rabbi Blake was coming over to our house for dinner. None of us knew Rabbi Blake very well and it was going to be the first time we were spending any time alone with him. Lisa and I were a little nervous as neither of us had ever had the chance to forge any type of real personal relationship with our respective Rabbis growing up on Staten Island and New Jersey. Those Rabbis were more of the old school type where they more often than not spoke “at” you rather than “with” you. This night we were especially interested in our children having a good experience and maybe getting to know the Rabbi a little as we wanted them to really become comfortable at Westchester Reform Temple and not merely view it as a place where you went on the High Holy days or became a Bar/Bat Mitzvah and then faded away. Personally, for me, this seemed a tall order as I could not imagine a real personal relationship with a Rabbi. I had never had one before. At around 6pm Rabbi Blake arrived. He walked into our kitchen and immediately said call me Jonathan. That was my first surprise. Despite his youthful appearance he clearly had an outsized intellect which I presumed meant we would spend the evening talking about Israel and world events.

We all sat down in the family room and I immediately got the inkling that this would be a little different evening then I was anticipating when “Jonathan” asked for a beer and said no need for a glass. I thought “well this might actually be fun”. But things got really interesting when after about 30 minutes of really light and fun conversation Jonathan turned to my children - who were pretty quickly fading into the background as often happens for kids that age when adults get going – and said do you guys play “guitar hero”. They both looked at each other and then at Lisa and Ime with complete shock and said very quietly “Sure”. Jonathan jumped up and said let’s go play. Lisa and I stayed upstairs – but for the next 30 minutes we heard an enormous amount of “hooting and hollering” coming from the basement. After about a half hour – the three of them came bounding up the stairs and Jake loudly declared – “Jonathan killed us --- He’s awesome at Guitar Hero!” Lisa and I knew immediately we found our home. Two B’nei Mitzvah, two confirmations, many life cycle events and countless more dinners with Jonathan later - we could never have anticipated how much WRT and all of the clergy there would become such a big part of our lives.

## Freddie and Martin Finkelstein

Ruth and Will's B'nei Mitzvah (November 27, 1982)



# Memories

## Steven Frankel

For over 40 years WRT has been like a second home. From our first Friday night service when Jack Stern, whom we had not ever met, greeted Mickey and me by our first names, Pam's and Wendy's Bat Mitzvahs, Mickey's various Religious School chairs and various other committees;

weddings of Jill, Pam and Wendy, baby namings (at least six); serving on the board and as an officer, Mickey's adult Bat Mitzvah; three grandchildren Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, and the support I received on Mickey's passing. I look forward to many more years with my WRT family.

## Claudine Gecel

One of our best memories EVER, at WRT, was when we went on the Family Trip To Israel with Rabbi Levy!!!

We went to the DeKarina Chocolate Factory, up in the North, and we all made beautiful candies.

Pictured to the right: Our son, Jason Sabba, quietly having the time of his life. All the rest of the folks are the group we went with, roughly 5-6 families.

Pictured below: Our son, Jason Sabba's Bar Mitzvah, with WRT Clergy and family.



# Memories

## Jim Glucksman

January 5, 1973 was a big day for me, and an even bigger WRT memory. It was the day my father died, and the day I re-engaged with WRT and Judaism. The day started with a phone call at 12:24 a.m. from New Rochelle Hospital informing me and my mother that Jerry, my father, had died. At 3:00 p.m. or so Rabbi Stern was in our living room. He was educating us on funeral rituals. We were helping to write the eulogy.

But let me back up more than two and one-half years, to May 2, 1970. I was probably the first Bar Mitzvah in what's now the Sifrya. I include a picture of me at the Bima. Two days later, I cleaned out my Hebrew School desk, never, I thought, to return. Like many others at that time, I was

disillusioned by organized religion. I was also frustrated by the prevalence of spitballs in our class.

The comeback was almost entirely at the initiative of Rabbi Stern, combined with prodding by a new friend in High School who had the maturity to appreciate the religion. The Rabbi carefully explained the rationale of Jewish death rituals, and engaged my participation in the drafting of the eulogy. I frankly learned more about Judaism during that 30 to 60 minutes than I learned in my last year of Hebrew school.

Truthfully that brought me back to where I am today, an active, engaged Jew and member of WRT. I was curious, interested and comforted greatly by what I learned.



Pictured from left to right: Cantor Joseph Boardman, Rusty (Ruth) Glucksman (remarried after Jerry's death as Bellsey), Rabbi Jack Stern, Jim Glucksman, Jerome Glucksman.



Jim Glucksman (May 2, 1970)

# Memories

## Judy Grosz

Ori Ben-Yishai was an exchange student under the auspices of the UAHC Eisendrath International exchange program living with us for half a year during the fall of 1987. He attended Scarsdale High as a junior along with Maya. Peter was in 8th grade at the Middle School at the time. It was a great experience for our entire family. Ori is a bright warm guy. The life of a high school junior in the U.S. was very different from the life of a high school junior in Israel whose immediate sights were set on going into the army rather than on the pressures of college applications. Philip Nadel was the rabbinic intern at WRT and was the one that Ori was in contact with most often, involving him in programs with students in the Religious School.

We are still close to Ori who is now married and has 2 daughters. In fact, they were at our family seder last Passover. We've visited his family in Haifa on several occasions.

Rabbi Philip Nadel is now Community Rabbi - Head of Education at YOZMA in Modi'in, Israel.



Dinner for our exchange student Ori BenYishai  
Back Row: Ivan Grosz, Phil Nadel, Rabbi Jack Stern, Peter Grosz, Judy Grosz  
Front Row: Maya Grosz, Ori, Rabbi Debbie Zecher

## Marcy and John Harris

Our son, Andrew, liked to do things on his own growing up -- including Bar Mitzvah prep. Since John and I had great confidence in the WRT clergy and tutors, we agreed that as long as Andrew stayed on schedule and worked with the WRT team, we would leave him alone.

To our great pleasure, the Sunday night before his Bar Mitzvah, Andrew agreed to chant his Torah portion for us and read us his d'var Torah. Both were flawless. So it was puzzling when he repeatedly refused to read us the accompanying Haftorah portion, in its English translation. After much prodding, he shared that there were words in the prophet Isaiah's invective about the ways the Israelites had strayed that he simply couldn't utter in a synagogue.

Fortunately for all of us, Andrew was meeting with Cantor Merkel the next day.

After their meeting, Andrew was in great spirits. He had explained the problem to Cantor Merkel, who, as always, knew just what to do. After reading the unutterable language and sizing up the problem, Cantor Merkel had withdrawn a silver pen from his jacket pocket and ceremoniously had placed a large "X" through the offending paragraph. Smiling at a shocked Andrew, he then had pronounced, as from on High, "it's OK, we're Reform." Andrew's Bar Mitzvah remains a beautiful memory, as does Cantor Merkel's kind, elegant and pragmatic solution.

# Memories

## Roni and Gil Mason

Westchester Reform Temple...

There is no other place like it in the world.

We are so grateful to have been part of this special community for the past 36 years. WRT has become a second home for us. When we walk through the doors, we feel supported, cared for and loved. From the greeters at the entrance, to the compassionate and connected clergy, to the kind staff, to the many special congregants- wherever we turn there is a sense of joy and positivity. The Rabbis have been there for us through good and not so good times. Many of our happiest times are connected to WRT. There are so many special memories that are imprinted in our hearts forever - our daughter's Bat Mitzvah,

becoming an adult Bat Mitzvah, watching our daughter become confirmed, the wedding of our children, our first grand-daughter given her name and our grandson's bris. We know there are more special events to come and memories to create. That being said, it is not just the big moments that stay with us. It is the the everyday moments - the thoughtful gestures, birthday phone calls, Friday night services, and many hours of Jewish study that have been just as impactful. We are forever thankful that we found this home away from home.



Bat Mitzvah of Dana Mason in 1990. Pictured left to right: Cantor Benji Schiller, Rabbi Aaron Panken, Rabbi Jack Stern, Dana Mason, Roni Mason and Gil Mason.

Pictured left:  
Wedding of Dana Mason to Brett Forman  
officiated by Rabbi Richard Jacobs.

# Memories

## Lisa Messinger (and Aaron Panken)

Just one of many life cycle memories at WRT!



## William Miller

Some Favorite WRT Memories

A history of WRT going back several decades would be lacking if we omitted mention of several key moments, some unheralded, that I witnessed during my service on the Board of Trustees that brought us to the point where we now thrive, in 2018.

It was, during a Board meeting in the 1970's that Jim Block, a cautious and conservative Trustee, concluded the meeting by suddenly suggesting to the group that WRT consider establishing a "nursery school". The time had come, he noted, and as we looked at Rabbi Stern he emphatically nodded in consent. Thus, the ECC was born.

Later, in the 1980's, the Board deliberated for hours about what to do about the burgeoning and infamous "Waiting List". It bothered many that some of our local families were being denied the opportunity to send their children to the WRT Religious School. Ultimately a compromise solution was reached, known at the time as the "Schnur Plan", a tribute to its author, Trustee Steven Schnur. Future members on the "Waiting List" would now be eligible to enroll their children in the school. Not surprisingly, enrollment in the school suddenly grew sharply.

Fast forward to the 1990's when President Bill Miller received a call one day from Trustee Dr. Ellis Disick. There was a FOR SALE sign on the adjacent property and historical house. Would WRT be interested? I called Rabbi Jacobs immediately, and when he indicated strong interest we began negotiations leading to our purchase of that property and subsequently other property which made possible what we now proudly call our "campus".

The year 2000 brought two WRT families together when long-time members Stephie Singer and Bill Miller were married in the Sanctuary. Rabbis Stern, Jacobs, Chasen and Cantor Merkel participated as did the six young adults from the combined families, all of whom had attended religious school at WRT, and who had benefited from the key moments in our Temple's history as described above.

# Memories

## Francine Osinoff

My husband, Ray, and I, both came from families that were JINOs (Jews in name only). Religion was never a part of our lives. Although Pelham Parkway didn't lack for Jews and temples, Ray never became a bar mitzvah. I attended a makeshift religious school but since my parents were disinterested, I stopped going. Imagine the surprise of both our parents and siblings when early after moving to Scarsdale, we joined a temple.

WRT has been our religious home for over 40 years. Ray and I studied with Rabbi Stern, of blessed memory, and Rabbis Jacobs and Blake. We joined Rabbi Stern's Adult B'nei Mitzvah class. Our sons, Gordon and Robert, became b'nei mitzvah and confirmands. Gordon's twins, Molly and Hannah, followed in his footsteps, and so now is Sarah.

When I retired, I became an active member of our Temple's WRJ chapter. Under Sondra Older's presidency, I helped to create several new initiatives that are still going strong. I was chair of the first Women's Seder, the Women in the Bible Group and the Sukkot celebration (Ushpizot). When I was chair of the nominating committee and we were unable to find anyone to accept the presidency, we created a quartet of Amy Bauman, Judy Grosz, Bette Landes and me.

Over the years our family has spent many joyous moments at WRT. The Temple has been there for other times as well. Last March Rabbi Blake officiated at Ray's funeral service. A very sad and difficult time was made less so by the Rabbi speaking knowingly about him. It was both bittersweet and meaningful.

## Susan and George Parisi

On January 19, 2008, our daughter Julie was being Bat Mitzvah'd. It just so happened that the New York Giants were playing the Green Bay Packers in the NFC Championship game the next day. We asked Rabbi Blake if

he would include a prayer for the Giants sometime during the service, which he happily did. We like to believe that Rabbi Blake's prayer was instrumental in their huge win!

# Memories

## Mike Rahimi and Diane Drew

When our son Drew was 12 or so, he's almost 29 now, Cantor Merkel approached me and asked with whom Drew was studying for his Bar Mitzvah. I told the Cantor that Drew had not yet been assigned a tutor, but that Drew was learning disabled and was going to have trouble memorizing his Parasha and Haftorah. Stephen smiled

and said that he would tutor Drew, and not only would he memorize but that he would chant as well. He also said that he had dyslexia, when he was a child that went undiagnosed. Drew did indeed chant, and grew close to the Cantor during their sessions, Stephen knew when to push, cajole, and be gentle. He was a marvelous teacher.

## Suzanne and Bob Reiffel

The clergy of WRT has always reached in towards us when we reached out for them. From the happiest of moments of weddings and Bat Mitzvahs, baby namings and a Bris for (finally) a boy, to the saddest moments of the deaths of parents, they have always been there.

But one moment in particular stands out. It was a few days before November 3, 2012. Our younger daughter, Alyssa, was to be married and her long-time friend, who had become a cantor, was going to perform the ceremony. However, things were just not going right. Hurricane Sandy almost trapped the bride and her father in New Orleans. She then knocked out power to our house and also the venue for the wedding. The bridal dress and bridesmaid dresses were stuck in lower Manhattan, which was almost inaccessible. The groom was stuck in Pittsburgh and the cantor was stuck in Colorado.

Fortunately, the dresses were retrieved, fitted and pressed and multiple generators, for which the groom's family

brought extra gasoline down from Connecticut, were obtained for both the venue and our house. The groom was able to drive up from Pittsburgh, but there was still no clergy for the wedding.

Once again, we were fortunate beyond belief, because Cantor Abramson saved the day by procuring a magnificent Ketubah and performing the most beautiful wedding, reaching in to us when we reached out to her. For this and other blessed moments, we are eternally grateful.



Cantor Jill Abramson

# Memories

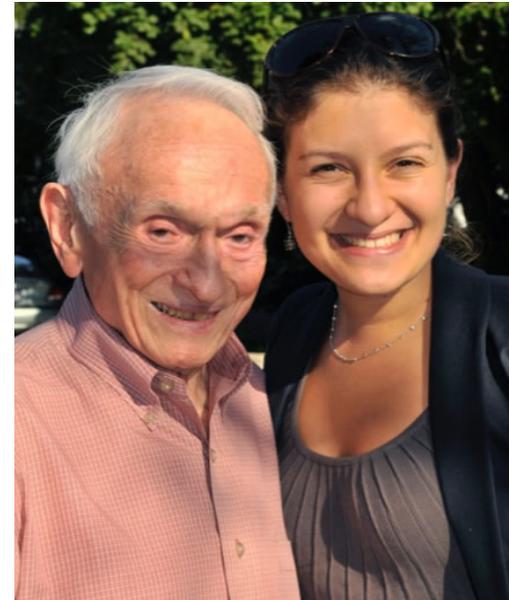
## Linda & Dick Schapiro

Ours is a more somber memory, that of the funeral for Dick's mother, Ruth Schapiro. Rabbi Blake officiated and with only a short meeting as reference was able to give a lovely and fitting tribute to Ruth while consoling our family, most of whom he did not know. We marvel at our

clergy's ability to celebrate with us in one moment and mourn with us in another (even if their hearts are breaking too). We never take for granted that these mere humans guide us through our religious life as well as the large and small moments of our personal lives.

## Nancie Schnur

I am fortunate to have a lifetime of memories at WRT dating back to the late 1950s, but I especially remember the baby naming of our twins in 1987, for it managed to embrace everything that came before it and predicted everything that followed. I still vividly recall Steve and I going up to the Bima with Juliana and David in our arms and proud big sister Elizabeth holding onto each of our free hands. As Rabbi Jack Stern greeted us I was filled with memories of all the lifecycle events he had presided over for our family: our marriage on that same Bima in 1978, my confirmation blessing in 1968, my younger sister Amy receiving her tiny Torah at her kindergarten consecration, and in 1982 the funeral of my beloved, talented young mother, Betty Goldstein, who brought so much of her artistry to WRT, just there where we all now stood in celebration of new life. Those few feet of sacred space held some of our sweetest and saddest memories and now a fourth generation of our family, our grandchildren, has come to call WRT home. Happily, in just a few weeks, one of those long ago baby twins, Juliana, will become a rabbi. Surely Rabbi Jack is smiling! *Le dor'v'dor!*



Rabbi Jack Stern with Juliana Schnur Karol

# Memories

## Ron Schulhof

(congregant and co-chair the zero waste committee with Michelle Sterling)

In August 2015 WRT held its first zero waste event! At the welcome back BBQ congregants reconnected after the summer with good food, great weather and generated NO trash! Shortly after WRT officially launched its zero waste program. We are the first house of worship in Westchester County with such a program. Two and a half years later zero waste is a part of the fabric of WRT. From the preschool kids to adults in Torah study we are doing our part to live our values. WRT's leadership in this area has also paved the way for many other houses of worship, of all faiths, to launch their own zero waste programs. It's been an amazing first two years and we look forward to WRT continuing as an environmental leader.



## Karen and Mark Segall

So many memories:

- Making lasagna with our boys at WRT's first Mitzvah Day and bringing many filled pans to a homeless shelter.
- Watching our son use glue stick all over Cantor Merkel's pristine glass desk as he prepared for his Bar Mitzvah.
- Writing ethical wills for our boys to read at their confirmation retreats. Thinking about what was important to us.
- Watching Rabbi Jacobs speak personal thoughts to our

sons at their confirmations. Words only they could hear and which we sensed would carry great importance for them.

- Praying on the hills outside Jerusalem as we prepared to enter the city with the clergy and fellow congregants.
- Having the clergy guide us through the highs and lows of our family life -- their presence, support and guidance made such a difference.

Our involvement at our WRT Home has added so much to our lives.

## Charlotte Siegel

Twenty-odd years ago, my daughter and I were shopping for wedding venues, hoping to find just the right setting. Celebration was certainly in order, because not only was she marrying a wonderful young man, but his family, like mine, were WRT members of long-standing.

We visited every kind of site, ranging from NY hotels to country clubs, to museums, even to an aquarium, hoping to find the perfect place.

Over a series of weeks, our last visit was to WRT's old sanctuary. As we stood in the back, my daughter said, "You

know, we are doing something sacred, and it just feels right here." I couldn't have agreed more, because WRT was and remains a second home to our family.

A few months later, with recently ordained Rabbi David Stern leading the Service, assisted by his father, our beloved Rabbi Jack Stern and Cantor Stephen Merkel, my daughter and son-in-law exchanged vows.

Special thanks to our founding members, whose dedication, devotion and prescience brought about this holy place.

And Happy Anniversary!

## Steve Siegel

### The Beginnings of the WRT Chai Society

In the winter of 2009, I was talking to a college friend who is a member of a Long Island reform synagogue. She was telling me about a Chai Club they had. It was for people who had been members of their synagogue for 18+ years. She said they had programs throughout the year for their members who were primarily senior citizens. Since the synagogue is in Huntington (a long way from NYC), it was felt that having a Chai Club calendar would give them a focused program for their seniors.

I thought about this and felt it would be a good idea to present to the Board for WRT to establish a Chai Club. I didn't like the name and came up with the name of the Chai Society (a play on the phrase - High Society).

I met with Ellen Sunness and other board members in spring 2009 to describe the idea. I presented the idea with a possibility of having special events for this group throughout the year. The board then consulted with Rabbi Jacobs.

The Board and Rabbi Jacobs agreed that WRT should form a Chai Society. We even started designing a lapel pin of a Chai to be given to members.

Shortly thereafter, I was told that 1. there would be no separate calendar of events for CS members (WRT has a very active calendar of events for every one), and 2. we really didn't need a lapel pin.

Our first event was held at a fall 2009 Friday night service. We had over 200 temple families inducted into the first class of the Chai Society. The event would include a dinner for all of the new inductees. They would then be honored on the Bimah by Rabbi Jacobs at that night's service.

For the first event, I was a one person CS committee who really needed help. At the dinner, Charlotte Siegel and Barbara Moss approached me to volunteer to be on the committee. Their help has been invaluable over the years. We have subsequently added Jane Roberts and Joanne Citrin to our CS committee.

# Memories

## Joan Ross Sorkin

My parents Barbara and Chester Ross were among the original members of WRT in 1953. One of my first memories was at the age of 7 or 8 when we had services upstairs in the Busser Building on Central Ave. What I remember best is sitting in front of Hannah Shmerler and hearing her beautiful voice floating over me, as if it were coming from an angel. Her singing always transported me to a special place in the stratosphere and continued to do so over the years as we moved to the Congregational Church and to our own building at 255 Mamaroneck Ave.

Another special memory was Sunday School at our new WRT building, with its sanctuary in the shape of a six-pointed Jewish star. The classrooms were in the points of the star with a heavy curtain serving as the wall between the class and the sanctuary. Oddly enough, what I



Barbara and Chester Ross

remember most was that The Men's Club was in charge of directing traffic in the parking lot, and how proud I was of my father, Chester Ross, with Phil Meyerson and Gerson Adell out there, rain or shine, being the Temple's "traffic cops." The same three were always busy organizing and acting in the annual Men's Club spoofs, but my sister Alice and I only got to go to the dress rehearsals because we were too young to attend the real shows at night. I can only surmise that those shows were a part of my introduction to the stage that led, decades later, to my life in the theatre.

In the early days my mother Barbara Ross was Sisterhood President and later a Trustee for many years. However, the title she was best known for was "The Bar Mitzvah Lady." Mom organized all the dates for the Bar and Bat Mitzvahs for over ten years during the 1980's and 90s. (could have even started before and extended beyond--it always seemed like forever!) I no longer lived at home, but Mom, in her understated way, would mention some of the "difficulties" of the job. Not only was she inundated with requests for "a single," but occasionally the date requests were based on the schedule of the caterer! And to top it off, there were requests that came by special delivery mail to the house. When she finally retired, the task was taken over by Temple staff. We conjectured that there wasn't another volunteer on the planet who wanted the job of having to say "no" to congregants regarding such a milestone occasion.

# Memories

## Franklin Speiser

As soon as I arrived at the luncheon for developmentally challenged youngsters, I could see it was mayhem. More youngsters than we expected with fewer professional staff from their respective homes. Rabbi Jacobs and a small number of valiant WRT volunteers were all over the place trying to keep our guests occupied with snacks, arts & crafts and whatever they could lay their hands on. I greeted Rabbi Jacobs and said, "This is not working." As he nodded his agreement, I could see the concern in his eyes. My rescued therapy dog Annabelle was in the car as we had just returned from her Sunday morning job at Beth Shalom Nursing Home. I asked the Rabbi if I could bring her in and he quickly gave his approval. Truth be told I was not sure it would work since Annabelle had no experience with children whatsoever. But, as soon as I brought her in, the children, who were able, immediately

## Audrey F. Steuer

My parents, Hilda and Rudolph Forchheimer, joined WRT in 1958 and were actively involved in almost every aspect of the Congregation and WRT became a "home away from home". They remained active well into the 1980's and were role models for Richard and me.

For as long as I attended Religious School (in those days called "Sunday School"), our classrooms were in the starpoints of the Marcel Breuer Magen David structure. Our classrooms were separated from the sanctuary and the other classrooms by thin curtains.

I was the only female student in Hebrew School when I was "pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah" age. At the time, there was no Bat Mitzvah available at WRT. My parents felt that it was imperative that their daughters be sufficiently conversant with Hebrew so that we would be able to follow the prayer book and service anywhere in the world, without regard to familiarity with the vernacular. I did learn the prayers,

surrounded Annabelle on the floor hugging their new friend. We moved those in wheelchairs closer to her so they could share in the treat. Now the amazing thing is that Annabelle was rather aloof. She was a beautiful pedigree Shetland Sheepdog and just seeing her brought joy to many. At the nursing home she only tolerated being petted and never nuzzled anyone. But that day, something entered her soul and she acted in a way I had never seen before or ever saw again. I know it was Rabbi Jacobs who often brought out the best in me and now was doing the same for my treasured companion. Soon after he adopted a rescue dog of his own.



by using clever "prayer cards" on a spiral, but it wasn't fun to be the only girl in the class. Also, this required an extra hour on Sundays and after-school on Tuesdays.

Twenty years after the weekend, which would have been my Bat Mitzvah weekend, I was a participant in the Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah service after three years of study with Rabbi Stern. They were a wonderful three years and I made very good friends while in the class.

My fondest memory is that of Richard's and my wedding on September 9, 1973. The "new" sanctuary was still very new and gorgeous. We had a gloriously sunny day and the sun streaming through the stained glass windows created a special festive glow. Rabbi Stern and Cantor Boardman officiated in a perfect ceremony to which we had added our own touches. We still have warm memories of the sanctuary in which we spent so much of our religious lives, including those of our two children.

# Memories

## **Evelyn Stock**

When my family joined WRT in 1975, I was already very involved in Scarsdale community affairs, and my connection with the Temple remained marginal. Then Rabbi Jacobs came, and everything changed. We met at the Youth Advisory Committee; I was School Board liaison, he was clergy representative. When he became aware that I was a member of WRT, he reeled me in. How could one say no to Rabbi Rick? And I was more than happy with my new relationship with the Temple. When I joined the board, I was sure there were others who would love being more involved. I proposed forming a Committee—called Reducing the Margins. When asked if it were going to be a diet group, it was clear a new name was needed and the Connections Committee was born.

The Committee grew to more than 60 members including former WRT board members, new members, my friends, and those like me who had never become involved. This combination of talent and interests left a lasting mark. Ushers became Greeters with expanded responsibilities. An evening book group began and still exists. A special Shabbat dinner and evening celebrating former board members was a huge success. Catered Friday night dinners in congregants' homes created new connections and friendships. The Connections Committee ended and many of its members went on to be involved in other WRT activities. But those of us who were involved still remember our time of seeking and fostering connections.

## **Roberta and Peter Tomback**

On June 9, 1973, our son, Andrew E. Tomback, had his Bar Mitzvah at Westchester Reform Temple. Rabbi Jack Stern officiated the service and was assisted by Cantor Joseph Boardman. We celebrated with family and friends with a lovely luncheon at the Temple.

We have been members of WRT for almost one-half century. We have watched the Temple and congregation grow and expand by leaps and bounds and have participated in its development.



Rabbi Jack Stern, Andrew E. Tomback, Cantor Joseph Boardman and Peter A. Tomback.

# Memories

## Sue Tolchin

One of my favorite memories at WRT has and continues to be celebrating Shabbat with ECC children, parents and clergy. I love going each week to the Sanctuary with my Shabbat Dinosaur and celebrating with the 3s and 4s singing about a Dinosaur knocking at my door, as well as singing the song, I made a Little Challah. Ten years ago we made a special time for the 2s to also have an extra Friday celebration with Shabbat Dino and me. I am known as Shabbat Sue and each Friday for the past 14 years, I carry my furry friend around and celebrate. This continues to be a fun and meaningful weekly routine.



## Nancy Trager (and Alan, Max and Ella Trager)

Ella Blake Trager was four years old and didn't have a baby naming yet. I guess the truth was we waited for a place to feel like 'home.' We had moved from New York City four months before and with the help of Rabbi Blake and Cantor Abramson, we celebrated one lovely Friday evening service in front of the congregation with Ella receiving a Hebrew Name. Since that time, we have celebrated other milestones with the Temple and anticipate many more to come!



Ella and Max Trager

# Memories

## Dale and Peter Wang

Dale and Peter Wang and family have belonged to WRT for more than 35 years, celebrating bar mitzvahs, confirmations, weddings, funerals and baby namings with the clergy and congregation. But by far the most memorable moments of our participation have been Peter's roles as "Roaster-in-Chief" of countless rabbis, presidents and cantors over these years. Channeling Carnac the Magnificent (from the 1960's Johnny Carson show), Peter (with sidekick Ellis Disick, of blessed memory) incorporated highlights from the terms of Beth Singer, Ken Chasen, Rick Jacobs and others into hilarious routines that brought down the Bimah at several events! In one of his more recent performances, Peter played the Jewish version of host Bruno Tonioli of Dancing with the Stars with celebrity dancer Rabbi Jacobs. How special it is

to have found a community home that is welcoming, able to laugh at itself yet always mindful of its mission to make a significant difference in people's lives. Now that we have attained 'Baby Boomer' status, we value our connections to those who remain committed to assuring continuity of values and traditions in future generations. While we may forever be known as the 'guy who was funny at that event' and the woman who must 'laugh all the time,' we really are a couple and family who has cherished knowing our clergy and leaders as both inspirational thinkers and spiritual guides, but also as the very human and caring individuals with whom we have been privileged to share our lives. We look forward to laughing together for many years to come. Happy 65!



# Memories

## Cheryl H. Waters

August 28, 2011 Stephanie Waters was to marry Philip Glickman at the Water's Edge Resort in Connecticut. Through the week, we were struggling with the news of a storm that was developing. We assumed that the outdoor wedding would require umbrellas and that pictures would be difficult.

Three days before the wedding, the hotel suggested that we should consider canceling because it was likely that Hurricane Irene would cause power to be lost.

We changed our plans to an intimate home wedding in Scarsdale late Saturday evening, so that we could include all those guests who traveled from many countries.

Rabbi Jonathan Blake jumped into action and conducted the service under a makeshift chuppah constructed with four sticks and a tallit. He truly saved the day.

Everyone who attended said it was an intimate and wonderful experience.



# Memories

## Alan and Suzanne Waxenberg

Breaking The Glass, 50 Years Later

We have been members of Westchester Reform Temple for forty five years. Rabbi Jack Stern officiated at our son, Scott's Bar Mitzvah and at the confirmation of both Scott and our daughter, Robin. Our special memory concerning the graciousness of Rabbi Rick Jacobs is, as follows.

In 1958, I, Suzanne Ecker and Alan Waxenberg were married in Pittsburgh at Rodef Shalom Temple by Dr. Solomon B. Freehof, a prominent Reform Rabbi and scholar.

At their first meeting, Alan, from Davenport, Iowa, was informed by Dr. Freehof that he would NOT do the traditional breaking of the glass at the wedding ceremony. Dr. Freehof believed that the breaking of the glass was NOT a happy memory to be followed by shouts of "Mazel Tov", but rather a continued sadness that signified the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

At each wedding, we attended for the next 50 years, whether a Jewish ceremony or a mixed marriage ceremony, the groom broke the glass, followed by shouts of "Mazel Tov" from the assembled guests. Alan believed that he had really missed out on something important at never having participated in this tradition.

Two months before our 50th anniversary, I met with Rabbi Rick Jacobs at Westchester Reform Temple to explain what did NOT take place at our wedding. Rabbi Jacobs was very aware of Rabbi Freehof's views on the breaking of the glass. Then I invited Rabbi Jacobs to conduct the breaking of the glass ceremony, which he did, as a surprise to Alan at our 50th anniversary celebration. And so...Fifty years after our wedding, Alan FINALLY broke the glass and the 100 friends and family in attendance did shout "Mazel Tov" to my very teary and happy groom.



# Memories

## Lois and Bruce Zenkel

From the day, over 55 years ago, that Rabbi Jack Stern came to our house to welcome our young family to the Westchester Reform Temple, it has been a cherished association.

Our relationship with Rabbi Stern as a mentor and counselor to us, and a teacher and guide to our children, is etched in our hearts and minds. Perhaps the outstanding memories of that period are the Bar Mitzvahs of our two sons, Daniel and Gary. Rabbi Stern and Cantor Boardman were thoroughly engaged in this ceremony, as were we, the parents. The thrill of seeing the three generations pass the Torah from grandfather to father to son, this rite of passage from boyhood to manhood can never be forgotten.

Throughout our years at WRT, we have been fortunate to have been led by three outstanding, caring and concerned Rabbi's. Beside Rabbi Stern, Rabbis Rick Jacobs, and Rabbi Jonathan Blake have been with us through celebrations and sadness, weddings - Gary and Suzanne had two Rabbi Sterns presiding, Jack and David - baby namings, funerals, and conversions. There was always an open door to counsel on personal matters or concerns. They made joyous events more joyous, and unbearable ones more bearable.

Our Temple memories will remain with us forever.



Bruce Zenkel, David Schwartz, Rabbi Jack Stern, Gary Zenkel, Cantor Boardman, Rabbi Gertman (1974)