

2021 - 95th Anniversary

Journal

In Honor Of
Cantor
George Lindenblatt
Elaine Lindenblatt

Astoria Center of Israel



From the Rabbi

Dear friends!

Kohelet teaches us that “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” This deeply serious reminder is in actuality a very joyous and encouraging piece of wisdom. Every moment of life happens, and our task is to both invest in and derive from each of them good meaning, lessons, and direction. Some of these moments carry bitter-sweet emotions, which, as Naomi Shemer wrote, “We ask God to watch over and preserve.” This now is such a moment for Cantor George and Elaine Lindenblatt, for their family, for their many friends and congregants, for our synagogue, and for me.

Some junctions on the road and some changes in phases of life are, I suppose, naturally bittersweet. But I trust that for the Lindenblatts, this emotion will be far outweighed and outlasted by the

sheer sweetness and the great memories of their fifty years at ACI.

My family shared many enjoyable times with the Lindenblatts – Judy’s *cholent* (a favorite of the Cantor’s) in the *Sukkah* at our home every year; my ping pong matches with Elaine; Noa and Ella and Noam splashing together in the water as small children, with Ayelet and Eitan ensuring their safety and fun; Ben singing *kadsheinu* with me on the *bimah* at ACI; their grandchildren’s *b’not mitzvah* and baby naming ceremonies during *Shabbat* Services in *shul*; and so much more. These are among the sweet and lasting memories for us.

Eliana (Elaine) and Shalom (Cantor George) brought their good names to ACI long ago, and reminded so many over the years of what they were all about. Together, as their Hebrew names convey, they heard God answer them and bring them peace. Thusly did they help lead and share themselves with many in their congregational family.

The Psalmist said, "I will sing of the steadfast love of Adonai forever." The Cantor did this for 50 years at ACI, but the Psalmist's words also serve to remind him to make certain that by the continuation of his very life he shall keep on singing that sacred song. So too, with the synagogue's recent revival and thriving, shall it keep singing Judaism's sacred song – something which will surely bring George and Elaine great joy, as ACI continues to fulfil the Psalmist's vision: "Blessed are those who dwell in Your house, ever singing Your praise!"

This jubilee celebration for Cantor George and Elaine celebrates 50 years. Some *gematria* calculations of the number 50 are found in the Hebrew words כל, בחיך, בכחך, and ביובל – it is my deep and sincere wish for them at this juncture in their lives, with this Jubilee (ביובל) celebration, that as they move to the next phase of their lives (בחיך), that their lives be girded by great strength (בכחך), and that all (כל) in their lives always be blessed.

To paraphrase a well-known Jewish blessing: שתחיו ותהנו לאורך שנים – May you live and enjoy for many good years ahead!

Bivracha,

Rabbi Jonathan Pearl, Ph.D.



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About Our Honorees: Cantor George Lindenblatt

George Lindenblatt's history spans two continents and a world of diverse experiences. Born in Budapest on the eve of World War II, he is one of the few cantors who can say they were raised in an Orthodox family, trained at a Reform cantorial school, and are serving a Conservative synagogue. With this wide background, he has been able to reach out, with heart, to a wide spectrum of people within the Jewish community. As many at ACI know, he is not only a voice of prayer on the bimah but a trusted counselor.

For George and his two brothers, with the Nazi invasion of Hungary all vestiges of childhood vanished. After his father Jenő was sent to a labor camp, his mother Piroška scrambled to keep her sons alive, hiding in place after place to evade deportation. The war ended, with Russian communism replacing fascism, and schools reopened – but religion was banned. Jewish children were attacked by antisemitic classmates in the schoolyard – where George, defending his brothers in often bloody encounters, became known as Caesar – a nickname that has stuck. When Jenő's grocery store was nationalized by the government, he and Piroška took to selling her precious hand-sewn artifacts on street corners.

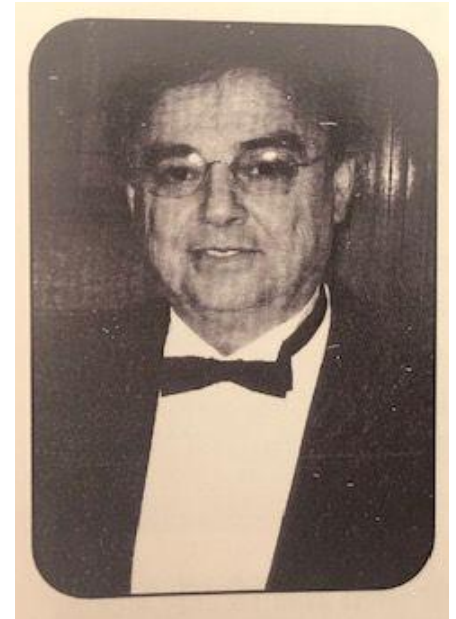
George found a refuge from all this in sports: as a teen he was named to the National Jr. Water Polo Team and competed throughout the Iron Curtain. In 1956, as the Hungarian Revolution was crushed by Russian tanks, with the borders briefly penetrable though dangerous, George and his brothers, one by one, escaped the country. Last came Piroška and Jenő, with a fourth son born in 1946. The Lindenblatts are considered unique in that the basic family unit survived and made it to the West.

Reuniting with his family in New York in 1959, George earned a Bachelor of Sacred Music degree and cantorial investiture from Hebrew Union College. After stints at a few area synagogues, Cantor George arrived at the Astoria Center of Israel in 1971, accompanied by his wife Elaine and daughters Eve, age 2, and Suzanne, 1-month old. The family has since grown to include a third daughter, Nicole, born in 1977, now married to Paul Kahn; Suzanne's husband Boaz Gilad and children Noa, Ella, and Ben; and Eve's husband John Nasetti and children Daniella and Frankie.

In 1990 Cantor George, with Elaine and their girls, returned to Budapest for the dedication of a war memorial, in the courtyard of the Doheny Synagogue, to the 600,000 Hungarian Jews who perished in the Holocaust – among them many relatives. One major stone bears the inscription of George's grandfather, a leader of the Jewish Underground who disappeared in the last days of the war. Several subsequent trips back always included seeing relatives and visiting cemeteries. The latest visit, in summer 2019, was as Honored Guest of the European Maccabee Games there.

In addition to his cantorial career, George has worked in a successful family business, opened by his brother Robert in 1963. He is still an avid sportsman – American A.A.U. Champion in water polo, multi-time member of the U.S. Maccabee Team to Israel where he also conducted services for the entire American delegation, and a 60-year member of the New York Athletic Club.

Says Cantor George, "I had the best teacher in the world here at ACI: Cantor Richard Cohn," who he remembers as gifted and demanding and the epitome of Old World *hazzanut*. "He was not only a wonderful mentor to me, but an amazing administrator of ACI. And I have met some beautiful people here over the years, made friendships that I hope will continue, and memories that will stay with me and my family. For that, I thank all of you, and wish the Astoria Center of Israel a bright future."



About Our Honorees: Elaine Freed Lindenblatt



Elaine Freed was also born on the eve of World War II, but in a vastly different setting: the small town of Southfields, in Orange County, NY. Family lore has it that at the age of 3, when her father took her along to her sister's second-grade classroom, she stood on a table and sang "Don't Fence Me In."

That incident hinted at Elaine's future school years, which included a free-wheeling affinity for the English language – from competing at annual American Legion oratorical contests to writing and delivering her high school salutatory. At Syracuse University, where she earned a B.A. in English, Elaine wrote sorority skits and was an editor on the *Daily Orange*, covering cultural events. With a master's degree from Columbia University Teachers College, Elaine next focused on her students' writing as a high school English teacher on Long Island.

One summer evening, home for the weekend to see her family, Elaine went to Friday evening services at the Monroe Temple. Standing on the bimah was a cantorial student named George Lindenblatt.

Moving to suburban Rockland County, NY, after their marriage, Elaine continued her love affair with writing through a variety of outlets, including the creation of a greeting card company offering poems to order, and as a licensed real estate agent composing tempting descriptions of homes. Her proudest achievement, she says, as president of her B'nai B'rith Women chapter, was running a goods & services auction – with each item described as a song title in the catalogue – which raised record funds for the BBW Children's Home in Israel.

Exploring many genres of writing, Elaine is a published poet and author of over fifty articles in Hudson Valley newspapers. In her free time (*What free time?*), she likes to curl up with a good book – preferably one of her three unpublished novels. What has gotten published, to great acclaim, is her book *Stop at the Red Apple*, a full-length memoir on her family's restaurant, the Red Apple Rest (SUNY Press, 2014). This launched Elaine on yet another career, creating hundreds of lecture events coast to coast for delighted audiences – the first of which was here at ACI right after the book appeared. It has also given Cantor George a new title, that of Official Book Schlepper. She is starting work on a volume spanning two continents and six generations of George's family, from ritual artist Aryeh Steinberger to the present.

It is Elaine's career as an editor, however, that predates and has outlasted all other jobs. Although her editing and proofreading work has run the gamut from newsletters in summer camp to full-time editor of psychotherapy books, she has this to say:

"No editorship has lasted as long, or given me as much satisfaction, as the one here at the Astoria Center. Because there are no better congregants, no better people to work with, or for, than right here. The years have flown by, unbelievably nearly forty of them for me as editor, some of the faces have changed, but your wonderful ACI welcome has stayed intact. The ACI Bulletin, as well, has undergone many changes to arrive at its current streamlined version – as last published 11/2020 – designed to entertain as well as inform. With Cantor Cohn's impeccable work as a role model, I have striven to keep it valid and timely. Despite the catastrophic events of the past year, I trust that we as a congregation will come back even stronger and ready to carry on and enhance the wonderful legacy of our near-century as an historic religious landmark."

I can't imagine the pulpit of the Astoria Center of Israel without the presence of Cantor George Lindenblatt. He has graced that position for a half century. George has inspired multitudes even as he has inspired me both by his renditions of our liturgy and by the *menschlichkeit* that has characterized his entire life.

George and Elaine have been dear friends to Miryom and me, not only for the 14 years I served as rabbi of the synagogue, but for our entire lives. We've shared each other's happy and sad moments. We've amplified our mutual joys and minimized the pain of life's inevitable heartbreaks.

Our two sets of children were born while I was in Astoria. I'll never forget how they would take naps and play in my apartment on Crescent Street on the High Holy Days. When George's girls would climb up and down the pulpit during services, it made me feel less guilty when my kids did the same thing.

I also got to know both George and Elaine's extended families. I'll never forget the friendship I developed with Elaine's dad, Reuben Freed. He was a legend in his own time and he modeled the American Jew at his very best.

Thanks to Elaine, the printed Bulletin was always done stylistically and in superb taste. It received national recognition as one of the best synagogue publications in the country.

George, the gentle, kind, and respectful way you interacted with your beautiful and wonderful predecessor, Cantor Richard

Cohn, is one of the most wonderful recollections I have about life in Astoria. On Saturday mornings, you would go to his house, have a cup of coffee – or maybe, as George would put it, “a glassila tea,” – and then bring him to synagogue. There is no greater mitzvah in Judaism than honoring the older generations, and no one ever did it better than George Lindenblatt!



I also think every member of the synagogue sooner or later got a camera through George from the Cambridge Camera Exchange.

What good times George and I shared at the New York Athletic Club! George is an outstanding athlete who is not far below the level required for Olympic competition.

George and Elaine, your active tenure at the Astoria Center of Israel may be ending; but I know that our close friendship will continue for as long as breath pulsates within me.

May your lives together endure as a benediction to all those lucky people who have the good fortune to have their lives touched by yours.

Rabbi Alvin Kass

מוֹדִים

*We celebrate each of you,
our extended family at ACI,
and thank you
for fifty memorable years!*

Cantor George & Elaine Lindenblatt

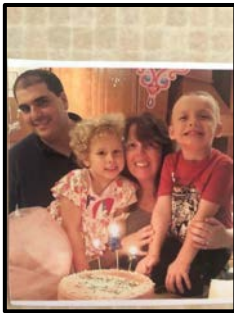
***Eve, John, Daniella & Frankie
Suzanne, Boaz, Noa, Ella & Ben
Nicole & Paul***

The Lindenblatts:



From the ACI 1979 Journal,
honoring Cantor George & Elaine

The family has grown...



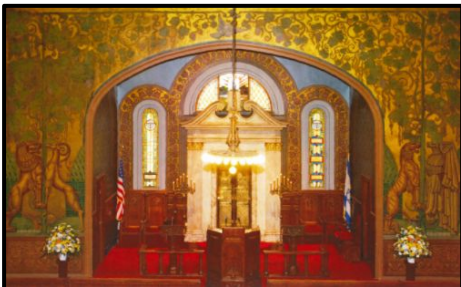
Nasettis



Gilads



Kahns



The Cantor's words remembering
Cantor Cohn from the 2016
Journal:

"When I arrived at the Center in 1971, Cantor Richard Cohn had been here for thirty years. After he retired from the pulpit, he stayed on another ten years as synagogue administrator. To this day, the room outside the small chapel is known as Cantor Cohn's office. What can I say, he was probably the last person to know where everything in the place was. And with him in charge, everything was in its place.

I had been to cantorial school, but



Cantors Cohn & Lindenblatt -1971

it was Cantor Cohn who taught me how to be a *chazzan*. He taught me by example. His high standards, his knowledge of the liturgy, his Old-World love of *chazzanut* – he sang from the heart. He was my role model, and my friend. His daughters Ruth and Susan can tell you I drank many a glass of tea at their kitchen table, when I picked him up on *Shabbos* mornings.

All of us who knew Cantor Cohn continue to feel his presence through the active participation of his daughter. Susan Cohn has inherited



her father's devotion to ACI, tireless organizational skills, and attention to detail, which she exhibits in all her roles including current *Yortzeit* chair.

As far as a role model, Richard and Hanna Cohn had five daughters. When Elaine & I had our third daughter, Nicole, after Eve and Suzanne, several congregants said, "Only two more to go." Well, it took a few years and a new generation to get to five girls and beyond, but we think it was worth the wait, with the advent of Noa, Ella, Ben, Daniella, and Frankie."

Through the Years at ACI



Shomrim Service at ACI, 1971

Cantor Richard Cohn, Rabbi Alvin Kass,
NYC Police Commissioner Patrick V. Murphy & Cantor George Lindenblatt



Sydelle Diner & Susan Cohn,
editors supreme



Cantor George with Rabbis Spivack and Kass



Ba'alot Mitzvah Class, 2011

Elaine's reflections from 2011:

"Sharing Ba'alot Mitzvah only a few weeks ago with seven women of extraordinary commitment has been a wonderful experience for me.

They have, individually and collectively, done so much for the Center – and now done so much to further their own spiritual growth.

It is a journey that has no end in sight, and I am honored to be numbered among them. I thank you for tonight's tribute, which speaks to what is at the core of ACI: a vibrant and living Judaism."





Cantor George and Elaine with their grandkids at Ella's bat mitzvah at ACI

IN MEMORIAM

*No longer among us,
always in our hearts...*

OUR BELOVED FAMILY

***Reuben & Ethel
Freed***



***Jenö & Piroska
Lindenblatt***

Neal Willinger

Herbert Freed

Joseph Scherzer

Morton Marshak

Evelyn Freed Marshak

Steven Freed

*George & Elaine Freed Lindenblatt
Marilyn Freed Scherzer*

Services, Celebrations, Education, Special Events

*I*t has been quite a two years at ACI since our prior Journal! For the first nine months of that time, we had our usual wonderful gatherings, events, services, and education within the ACI synagogue. Then in March 2020, when COVID-19 closed things down for nearly the next year-and-a-half, we gathered in a new way... *online* – yet maintaining our sense of togetherness, inspiration, Judaism, learning, and caring. Through ongoing Shabbat and holiday services creatively devised and led by Rabbi Pearl in a variety of innovative formats, and a panoply of technical marvels (via his tech team Ayelet Pearl and Stephanie Luxenberg) – our congregation stayed resilient, cohesive, uplifted, and strengthened by one another. Thank you to everyone who has helped make that happen. Below are some highlights of ACI activities of the past two years, both pre- and post-COVID:

Shabbat & Holidays

- Weekly Shabbat and holiday services, musical and meaningful.
- Build-a-Sukkah pizza party and Sukkot Shabbat Luncheon at Rabbi's home.
- Chanukah Party with latkes, crafts, singing, dancing, and loads of fun.
- Lunch-'N-Learns, including Tu Bishvat kiddush where we learned about the New Year of Trees and enjoyed *Tu Bishvat Food Challenge* dishes with the holiday's seven species.
- MASKIT/Family Shabbat Service – highlighting the children, families, and teachers of ACI's youth education program, as they shared their insights and accomplishments.
- Purim Megillah reading extravaganza, stepping into King Achashverosh's royal theatre – surrounded by congregant-created art panels and treated to a hilarious interactive Purim *shpiel*.
- Purim Carnival full of fun, festivities, face-painting, hamantaschen, the Shushan Speakeasy, activity booths, and crafts.

- *Mishloach Manot* – An old Purim tradition became a new fund-raiser at ACI, with beautiful and tasty goody bags distributed to all members.
- Shabbat-Across-America – Joining in the annual worldwide celebration of Shabbat, at our community Friday night dinner and musical service/Kabbalat Shabbat with guest musicians, followed the next day by ACI's famed *Jewish Jeopardy!*
- Havdalah *LIVE!*: Saturday evening series – to usher out Shabbat at havdalah ceremony, then fun activity like pie-making, candle-making, children's crafts.

Classes/Ongoing Learning

- Lunch-'N-Learns
- Team Torah
- Conversion Class
- Hebrew reading, writing, and conversation class
- Torah blessings learning and brush-up sessions
- MASKIT Youth Education Program, including expanded programs

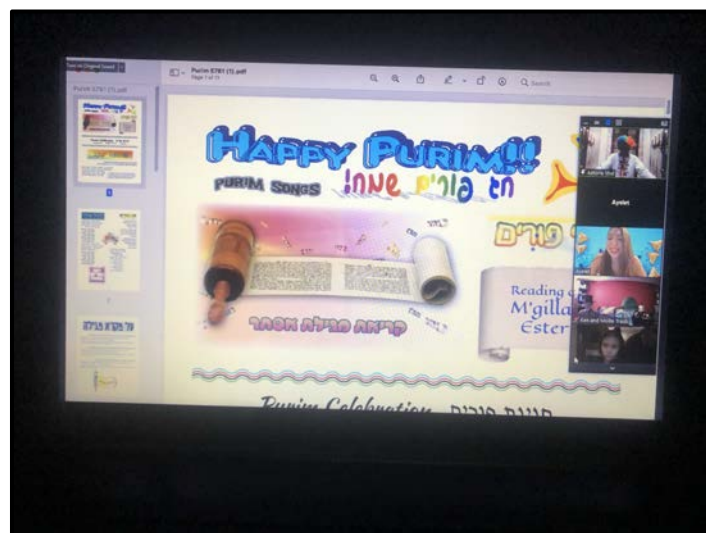
Special Events

- Congregational trip to the Bernard Museum in Manhattan, where ACI members received a private, curator-led tour of the Yad Exhibit of Torah pointers.
- ACI contingent at Celebrate Israel Parade on 5th Avenue.
- 2019 Journal Service honoring Iris Apfel, Sydelle Diner, Stephanie Luxenberg, and Irene Sprung.
- MASKIT trip to BoroPark hand-made matzah factory.
- Life-cycle events shared together at ACI.
- ACI's sanctuary was part of St. Peter's Church 9/11 Interfaith Remembrance Ceremony, when Rabbi Pearl's annual talk at the event was filmed at ACI, as the ceremony went viral this year.
- Blood Drives, now held every other month.
- Food Drives in tandem with City Harvest.



Dancing around the Torah scrolls at an outdoor Simchat Torah celebration in Astoria Park, 2020

A Brief Look at ACI Online



Online Purim megillah reading, fun, and festivities, 2021

- **Holiday services and events** online combined with livestreaming, Zoom, pre-recorded segments, and ACI's fun learning videos (i.e. Sukkah-building, *chametz* searching, etc.). We had a Passover Mini-Seder, a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, interactive Purim Megillah reading with break-out activities afterwards, 'Live From the Sukkah,' Chanukah, and *Shanah Tovah* online greetings and community singing, and much more. While socially distancing, we even managed to gather together for some celebrations: dancing with the Torah scrolls for Simchat Torah in Astoria Park, Chanukah candle-lighting and Tu Bishvat planting in front of ACI, *tashlich* by the East River, and in-person pickups for High Holy Day *machzorim* and Purim *mishloach manot*.

- **Celebrating Shabbat** each week was enlivened by a variety of formats, as we gathered virtually round the Shabbat table Friday nights, had interactive Torah readings and *aliyot*, schmoozed at Zoom kiddushes, shared milestones through the new tradition of a “Virtual Sponsored Kiddush,” were challenged by the Question of the Week and Torah Tease, and concluded Shabbat at *havdalah* with study and song. Special events at Shabbat services included a bat mitzvah, a conversion welcoming ceremony, and special MASKIT presentations.



MASKIT students receiving their end-of-year certificates at a “drive-by” ceremony, spring 2020



MASKIT kiddush and celebration at Astoria Park, spring 2021

- **MASKIT** education continued online with its regular classes and programs, including an online “Open House.” End-of-School Year celebrations were augmented by a “Drive-by Certificate Ceremony” in front of ACI and a festive kiddush and celebration in Astoria Park.

– Submitted by *Judith Schloss Markowitz* and *Judith Pearl*, Events/Outreach Co-Chairs



“Live from the Sukkah” – Tech team sets up in the Sukkah at Rabbi Pearl’s home to livestream the holiday service



Planting for Tu Bishvat – the New Year of trees



In costume while picking up mishloach manot for Purim



Rabbi Pearl leads the children in Chanukah candle-lighting on the outside steps of ACI



A Place to Belong, For 95 Years *and Counting!*

Welcome to the oldest, and only, egalitarian Conservative synagogue in Western Queens – the Astoria Center of Israel.

- Experience our distinctive and meaningful services, filled with both traditional and contemporary prayer, music, and learning.
- Participate in our many educational, cultural, and social activities for all ages and backgrounds.
- Mark all your Jewish life's significant moments – joyous and otherwise – in a most meaningful way with a most caring community.
- Meet our wonderful congregational family. Join us where history meets the future: our synagogue, on the National Register of Historic Places, is undergoing an exciting revitalization.
- Visit our website, speak to our clergy and members, or come to one of our services and events. Like thousands of others over the past 95 years – 50 with Cantor George & Elaine Lindenblatt – you will find new friends and a spiritual home at the Astoria Center of Israel.

Astoria Center of Israel