



# THE OLIVE PRESS

BY RHODA GOLDMAN PLAZA

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December has arrived. As we approach the darkest days of the annual solar cycle, our mood quiets, and we light candles and build bonfires. The metaphor of light filling the darkness enters our thoughts. We reflect on how to be a hopeful voice, a comforter and how to gather the shards of light from the corners of the cosmos to make a healing whole. We reach out to family, share seasonal rituals. And we remember that this is temporary, that we can kindle the light and be a shield against darkness. That perhaps, by the simple act of being a joyful friend, we can bring warmth and light to others. We invite you to explore this theme for the last issue of the 2024 Olive Press. Bring the light.

Allison Rodman  
*Director of Sales & Marketing*



Comments welcome  
*Email: [AllisonR@rgplaza.org](mailto:AllisonR@rgplaza.org)*

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## **The Most Important Thing**

*by Julia Fehrenbacher*

I am making a home inside myself. A shelter  
of kindness where everything  
is forgiven, everything allowed — quiet patch  
of sunlight to stretch out without hurry,  
where all that has been banished  
and buried is welcomed, spoken, listened to—released.

A fiercely friendly place I can claim as my very own.

I am throwing arms open  
to the whole of myself—especially the fearful,  
fault-finding, falling apart, unfinished parts, knowing  
every seed and weed, every drop  
of rain, has made the soil richer.

I will light a candle, pour a hot cup of tea, gather  
around the warmth of my own blazing fire. I will howl  
if I want to, knowing this flame can burn through  
any perceived problem, any prescribed perfectionism,  
any lying limitation, every heavy thing.

I am making a home inside myself  
where grace blooms in grand and glorious  
abundance, a shelter of kindness that grows  
all the truest things.

I whisper hallelujah to the friendly  
sky. Watch now as I burst into blossom.

Poem contributed by Peggy O'Brien, Resident Services  
Thank you to Jacques Marchand and Linda Knab for editorial support

## Leon Starkman

**L**eon Starkman was born and raised in Chicago. He attended the University of Illinois, where he obtained his medical degree and became a General Surgeon. He was a Captain in the Medical Corps during the Korean war; he and his wife moved to Rhoda Goldman Plaza in 2018; they live on the Terrace.

When asked what inspires him most, Leon didn't hesitate for a moment. He said "LOVE". Sixty-three years ago he married Elaine, the love of his life, and his delight in their union has not diminished. He said, "I have a woman who is beautiful, talented, compassionate, she cares for her family and all the people around her—she is my guiding light. Elaine is a published poet with six books to her credit."



Leon's commitment to his faith is central as well.

Taking a break from his career, Leon and Elaine moved with their four children to Israel, where they lived on a kibbutz for three years. During that time the sense of community and freedom he experienced was profound.

It is his deep faith and love of family that illuminates Leon's life. When asked what motivates him on a daily basis he said, "The day starts with the sunrise – that says it all!"



## Shining Bright: The Spirit of Compassion at RGP

**A**s we embrace the season of Chanukah, a time to celebrate light and miracles, Rhoda Goldman Plaza is reminded of the importance of shining our own light within our community. Chanukah, with its timeless message of hope and resilience, calls us to reflect on the ways we illuminate the lives of those around us.

The menorah, glowing with each candle, symbolizes the power of even the smallest light to push back darkness. At Rhoda Goldman Plaza, we see this spirit in action every day—whether it's through the compassionate care provided by our staff, the warm connections between our residents, or the support from families. Each of us plays a vital role in creating a community where kindness, understanding, and positivity shine brightly.

This Chanukah let's come together to celebrate not only the holiday's traditions, but also the light we each bring into the world. As we light the menorah, let us remember that our collective efforts—big and small—are what make Rhoda Goldman Plaza a truly radiant place to call home. Together, we will continue to shine, inspiring hope, unity, and joy.



Peggy O'Brien  
*Resident Services*



Miki Lamm, MSW  
*Associate Director, Seniors at Home*



## **Illuminating Lives Through Being and Doing**

**W**hen we light the candles at our Erev Shabbat Service, we recite: “As these candles give light to all who behold them, may we, by our lives, give light to all who behold us.”

It is important to note that giving light to this world can come from our being, as well as our doing. Certainly you have had people in your life whose way of being lit the way for you. Perhaps they gave you courage, a belief in yourself and your worth, or encouraged you when your energy was low.

For example, I think back to Bea Robin, z”l, who lived here at Rhoda Goldman Plaza. When I encountered her, she would place her hands on my arms, look deeply into my eyes, and say, “You are precious just the way you are.” Her very being reflected the worth of each person she encountered. Such an inspiration!



**Art by Rabbi Me'irah Iliinsky**

When I think of the people who have illumined my path, I make an effort to remember one special quality they exhibited, I try to incorporate that quality into my own life. Which is like one candle that can light other flames, its own flame is not diminished, but rather multiplied. In this season of darkness, let us strive to be multipliers of light.

Blessings, Rabbi Me'irah



Rabbi Me'irah Iliinsky  
*Community Rabbi, Rhoda Goldman Plaza*

## **Lighting the Way: Selfless Acts That Strengthen Our Community**

Residents are the heart of the activity program, and as much as I enjoy planning and facilitating various events, some of the most special occasions are the activities created for residents by residents.

It is wonderful when residents come to me with an idea for an activity and a desire to be actively engaged in our community. Some examples of this are Carl Kerwick, who has been leading a weekly exercise class for almost 7 years! Or Don Wiepert, who leads a meditation group, and Bonnie Shai-kun who is gathering the troops to start Onegs (a joyous gathering that takes place after Shabbat).

But even more, I want to shine light on those residents who do

selfless acts for other residents, such as Len Sperry, who reads aloud to another resident who can no longer see well enough to read, or Jim Pallari who, during the Shupin Social Club Sing-a-Long, went to find a resident whom he knew would enjoy the event but might not remember to come on her own. All these acts, big and small, are what bring light into our community.



**Don with his meditation bowls**



Emma Davis, LMFT  
*Director of Programming*

## Sharing the Radiance: How We Spread Joy and Kindness

**Jack:** “The Jewish word *Shalem* means “whole” and at this time we should look at our relationships with people and look at the whole of each person to understand them.”

**Paulette:** “Seeing the joy in others and in life and expressing it. Give a greeting, give a smile, say hello.”

**Phylis:** “I stay in the light and find joy when I shape my plants.”

**Betty B:** “Shine your light in the morning and take it with you through the day into the night.”

**Herlinda:** “Open your heart and mind to people to shine.”

**Sylvia:** “Be involved, pay attention. It is wonderful to share.”

**Shu Fen:** “Be happy and do things for others.”

**Kathleen:** “You owe it to your neighbor to be friendly.”

**Ruthie:** “If you love someone, tell them.”

**Marguerite:** “Being in the light can simply be a cup of coffee in the cafe.”

**Eileen:** “For me being in the light is going to Grandparent’s Day at Brandeis High School.”

**Charlotte:** “My 2 and half year-old great grandson lights up my life. He is joy.”



## Chanukah’s Light in Every Bite

Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, is celebrated with a variety of special foods, many of which are deep-fried to symbolize the miracle of the oil that lasted eight days. The most iconic food is latkes, crispy potato pancakes typically served with applesauce or sour cream. Another beloved treat is sufganiyot, jelly-filled doughnuts, which are also fried and dusted with powdered sugar. These foods commemorate the oil used in the re-dedication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In addition to this, some families enjoy kugel, a sweet or savory noodle pudding, and other dishes like brisket, dairy foods, and roasted vegetables.



The preparation of traditional Chanukah dishes passes down history, culture, and stories from one generation to the next. This continuity keeps the “light” of Jewish heritage burning brightly, even in the modern world.



Roberto Pellegrino  
Food and Beverage Director

We are lighting celebratory candles and saying a loud **Toda Raba!** To all of you who voted for RGP as “Your Favorite Jewish Retirement Residence” for the J.’s annual survey of Jewish services and professionals.

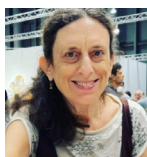


As of Nov 15th, it is official. We are delighted to be deemed by The J. readers as the best Jewish Senior Living 2024 in the four regions of the Bay Area.

*RGP Art Gallery established 2019, specializing in San Francisco Bay Area artists, founded to enliven resident life.*



**Hemingway's Garden, 2023, Ink, color pencil and watercolor**



## “Coast to Coast”

Artist, Caroline Blum

(daughter of residents John & Kathy Blum)

**Ongoing exhibit open to the public**  
**January 12–March 26, 2025**

**Artist Reception | Sunday, January 12 | 2–4 p.m.**

**Location: 2180 Post Street, 1st floor**

**Serving Food + Drinks**

**Artist Talk | Tuesday, January 14 | 10:30 a.m.**

**RSVP for Artist Reception & Artist Talk:**

**Allison 415.345.5072 | [AllisonR@rgplaza.org](mailto:AllisonR@rgplaza.org)**

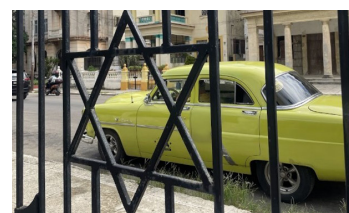
## Cuban Resilience and Generosity

On November 1st, I arrived at the Centro Hebreo Sefaradi de Cuba to meet coordinator Samuel Zagovalov, and found a large Synagogue with a Malpasos dance rehearsal in full swing. As the majority of Havana’s Jewish population has emigrated, the Center holds Shabbat in a much smaller alternate space. Samuel soon arrived on his bicycle, and I handed off donations of medications, incontinence supplies, reading glasses, a walker, and more. Prior to traveling to Cuba, I did not understand just how difficult these items are to find there.

Most jobs in Cuba are affiliated with the State and have very low pay (doctors only make about \$50 per month)—and monthly food “rations” do not provide enough calories for basic survival. Cubans therefore survive via “busqueda” AKA side hustles. It is virtually impossible to find medications in government pharmacies as they are all sold on the black market. I spoke with Cubans who even needed to purchase their own sterile gloves prior to a surgery.



**Adrienne and Samuel, in Cuba**



**Gate to synagogue in Cuba**

The standard pension for Cuban retirees is only about \$12.70 per month—so how do they survive? They rely on neighbors, remittances from family overseas, or help from agencies like the Centro Sefaradi – and Samuel Zagovalov. In this Chanukah season, I am so inspired by the resiliency, creativity, and joy of the Cuban people that shines on through difficult times.



Adrienne Fair, MSN, RN

**Director of Health Services**





**Wish them a Happy Birthday!**



**Betty, 101**

## December Birthdays

### *Residents*

8	Rennie L.	17	Paula S.
9	Betty S.	19	Connie M.
16	Shu Fen C.	22	Dorothy C.
16	Lydia W.M.	31	John B.

### *Staff*

2	Hubai L.	20	William G.
2	Mer A.	22	Derrick N.
8	Nguyen T.	23	Calvin N.
12	Donnabelle D.	27	Cuong D.
13	Isabel E.	27	Elizabeth
18	Judith S.		

## **Youlian Jiang**

**B**orn into a large family with six siblings Youlian began her journey from Guangdong, China, to the United States, a testament to perseverance and hope. At 50, she left her home to build a better life. Starting fresh in a new country wasn't easy, but Youlian embraced the opportunity with determination, starting as a dishwasher at Rhoda Goldman Plaza. Recognizing her dedication, the team promoted her from pantry cook to hot cook—a role she has excelled in for nine years.

Cooking at RGP means more than preparing meals; it's about creating joy and connection. The relationships she has built with coworkers and residents are a source of pride and joy for her.



Language barriers have been her greatest challenge, but she uses a translation app to overcome them. Her resourcefulness reflects her unwavering commitment to learning and evolving. Youlian's journey is a reminder that being a light doesn't require grand gestures. It's found in showing up every day, embracing challenges, and creating positivity in the lives of those around her. By building a new life in the United States and forming lasting relationships, Youlian has shown how a single person can brighten even the most daunting path. Let her story encourage us all to shine our lights wherever we are, in big ways and small.



**Danielle Bennett**  
*Office Manager*



Activities Coordinator, Tallulah with Phylis and Jane at the SkyStar Wheel located at Pier 39



David enjoying a ride on the SkyStar Wheel



Betty and Judith, Flower Arranging workshop



Priscilla enjoying ice cream at RGP Café



Guest speaker, Jim Van Buskirk



Shining a light on our amazing over-night staff who care for RGP residents



Dorothy and Allen at Rhoda Goldman Plaza





**Residents enjoy outing at India Basin Park**



**Jim looking off in the distance at India Basin Park**



**Jane captures scenic view at India Basin Park**



**Anita and Herlinda enjoying time together**



**Jim and David at De Young Museum outing**



**Judith at De Young Museum**



**Jewish Baby Network visits RGP!**



**Barbara and volunteer Ari, playing Rumicube**



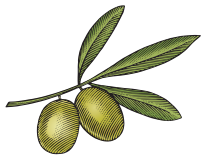
**Residents having fun with the Jewish Folk Chorus**

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rgplaza.org

A DIVISION OF JEWISH FAMILY  
AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

RCFE #385600125



RHODA  
GOLDMAN  
PLAZA



See You at The Plaza!

Bagel Brunch, Tour and Concert

Once a month, munch and meet with residents, from 11:30 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Sunday | December 22  
Performance by, Mark Levy:  
“Oy Chanukah”

Sunday | January 22  
Robert Howard & Keisuke  
Nakagoshi; Cello & Piano

Sunday | February 23  
Jewish Folk Chorus

Limited Seating | RSVP: [AllisonR@rgplaza.org](mailto:AllisonR@rgplaza.org) | Tel: 415-345-5072