



# JCS Shalom Bayit

## Shalom Bayit Newsletter

Volume II, Issue 3

February 2010

Dear Friends and Supporter of Shalom Bayit,

Welcome to Volume II, Issue 3 of the Shalom Bayit Newsletter. It is our hope that by keeping you informed on a bi-monthly basis of the activities of this program, you will understand the ways in which we provide those in our community who are involved in unhealthy and toxic relationships with invaluable assistance. Equally important, we give you glimpses into the personal grief suffered by the victims and the sometimes permanent damage that their children experience. And finally, we want you to understand how we spend the funds that you so generously provide in the hope that you will continue to support our program's events and activities.

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**SHALOM BAYIT HOTLINE 305 576-1818**

**Winter Educational Event**

**Sunday Evening, January 10, 2010:**

The volunteers and staff of Shalom Bayit worked hard to create the Winter Educational Event which was comprised of two sessions. The first, held on Sunday evening, targeted the general public, particularly parents, and the second was reserved for mental health professionals, including teachers, psychologists, social workers, rabbis and others held the next morning. Our speaker, the renowned Dr. David Pelcovitz focused on the effects on children who grow up in a home where domestic violence occurs.

Although the weather was about as uncooperative as it could possibly be, we were pleased with the turnout. People are beginning to realize what a serious problem domestic abuse is in our community, city and state, and their attendance at this event was proof that it is becoming clear that something needs to be done. Holding events such as this one with a speaker who is a well-known expert in his field is step one toward getting the word out and raising the consciousness of the community.

In his gentle way, Dr. Pelcovitz started to speak, peppering his talk with stories -- personal, Talmudic and just apropos. His thesis was that children who grow up in homes characterized by domestic violence are affected in a way all too similar to the way some soldiers returning from a tour of duty in the battlefield. Yes, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and for this reason, their treatment must be very careful and considered. He told of a study in which parents who either indulged themselves or experienced domestic violence in the home were asked if they thought their children were aware of their behavior. All responded absolutely not, with one even commenting, "We wait until they are asleep." When their teenaged children were asked, their response was positive; each and every one of the teens was aware. The younger children act out the awareness in the way they play, in their drawings and in the way they react to frustration.

Dr. Pelcovitz's talk was followed by a presentation to a woman who was finishing the Shalom Bayit program. The young woman has two young sons, who were present to watch their mom receive the award. The older boy, a ten-year-old, asked our coordinator, Lynne Lichtman, if he might be permitted to speak. After receiving permission, the young boy ascended the podium and talked about his mom. "She saved our lives," he said, referring to his brother and himself. After a series of complimentary comments about his mom, he must have thought he wasn't quite doing her justice in the discipline department because he then assured us that she did make them do their homework. You can read more about this topic below in **Myth of the Month: There Is No Life after Domestic Violence.**

*Monday Morning, January 11, 2010*



The Mental Health Professionals in our community participated in a seminar with Dr. David Pelcovitz, a nationally recognized expert in the area of clinical work with children and adolescents who are victims of abuse and trauma. More than seventy-five professionals gathered at Temple Beth Sholom on Miami Beach to learn with Dr. Pelcovitz, and we were rewarded with a stimulating, informative and inspiring morning.

Dr. Pelcovitz is the developer of a program called SPARKS which stresses the skills children and teens need to deal with, and heal from abuse. The "4 Cs" that the program focuses on are: Coping, Creating Awareness (mindfulness), Connections and Creating Meaning. He made us aware of the significance for the child in the relationship between developing a connection with a caring individual and the development of resilience. He gave as an example the moving story of a professional he recently met at a conference. This person, as a young teenager was witness to his mother's death at the hands of his father. He ran away and spent several years living in shelters. He finally entered a shelter where he said he heard the four most important words in his life, "Hi, how are you?" from someone (the shelter director) who he instinctively knew meant them. He developed a relationship with this man, who later helped him to get into a good school. He eventually went on to attend two Ivy League schools for his undergraduate work and medical school and became a noted physician. Dr. Pelcovitz used narratives like this one to enhance his presentation, and made the research material come to life. He provided the group with a wealth of information that will be useful for their clinical work. We all came away with concrete suggestions and motivation to continue to work to improve the lives of children and adolescents in our community.

Judith Lieber  
Vice-President  
Behavioral Health Division  
Jewish Community Services

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Myth of the Month  
There Is No Life After Abuse

The myth we are addressing this month is that there is no life after abuse. Once an abused person, you are always a victim. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Followers of this column will already be aware that domestic abuse occurs in epidemic proportions in our country, city and community. It happens mostly to women, but men can also be victims. It can occur as physical abuse and battery or as mental, verbal or financial abuse. Domestic abuse does not only hurt the abused, it also hurts the abuser and damages any family directly involved with the victim, especially children. It is color blind and strikes regardless of age, sex, religion, education, financial or social standing.

It is easy for an individual on the outside of domestic violence to look in and say, "Why does this person stay in that situation?" If it were me, I would leave." Sometimes, the choice to leave is more frightening than the choice to remain. We all know what occurs in a domestic violence situation: the abuse, the trauma, the danger and the fear. What about after? After the police, the divorce, the physical healing, what happens to the victims and their families?

There are as many answers to this question as there are women who are victims of this crime. Life after abuse is different for each individual and though the damage done by abuse never completely heals, it is part of our individual growth process. Although it might seem like abuse will dominate life forever, this is rarely true. Over time and with help, it becomes a small part of the persona, together with the many other experiences that shape a life.

Yes, there is life after abuse, when the pain and confusion will fade but the healing is a process that requires time, patience, skilled counseling and commitment to evolve completely.

While avoiding an abusive relationship a second time cannot be guaranteed, there are useful suggestions to help rebuilding a life after abuse. During daily activities is the time to become reacquainted with the self and concentrate on doing the things that were impossible while in the presence of the abuser. Many "survivors" speak of the joy of rediscovering themselves and of being able to shape their future in ways they thought would be impossible for them.

JCS has contributed to the healing process of the clients in our Shalom Bayit program both in concrete ways and through creating support systems for the individuals and their families.

This work is both costly and time-consuming. It can only be done as a collaborative community effort, but the rewards are immeasurable as was recently demonstrated by the young son of one of our program graduates. This young man stood in front of a group of adults and thanked his mother for working so hard to save his and his little

brother's lives. He declared to his mom and to everyone else in the room how proud he was of her for making a new life for all of them with the help of JCS Shalom Bayit.

Lynne Lichtman  
Coordinator  
Shalom Bayit Program

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## The Pleasure of your Company . .

Some of Shalom Bayit's earliest supporters attended a breakfast held at the home of Caren Brod. The event brought together Shalom Bayit staff members and JCS (Jewish Community Services) officers as well as volunteers who met to exchange ideas about how to proceed to secure the future of Shalom Bayit. In the photograph at the right are Judith Lieber, Vice-President, Behavioral Health Division, JCS; Caren Brod, who graciously welcomed us to her home; Gladys Mezrahi, co-chair of Shalom Bayit; and Shelley Niceley Groff, Chair-Elect of the Board of Directors of Jewish Community Services.



**At Caren Brod's Home: Judith Lieber, Caren Brod, Gladys Mezrahi and Shelley Niceley Groff.**

We have made good headway establishing the name of Shalom Bayit as a program where Jewish women suffering with the many problems domestic abuse causes can go for comprehensive assistance. Our program of educational events, talks for teens in middle and high schools and to women's groups, parlor meetings, newsletters and the plaques found in so many of the restrooms in Jewish institutions have brought us many clients who otherwise would have nowhere to turn for help.

However, our economic growth has not kept up with client growth. There are many reasons for this, the problems of the economy not being the least of them, but we decided to focus on what we can do in the future rather than rehash the past. You will see some of the results of our brainstorming session elsewhere in this newsletter as well as in letters and notices of events which you will be receiving shortly. Our two major goals are to bring in immediate funds and to develop long-term plans that will ensure that Shalom Bayit will continue to serve the community for as long as the victims of abuse and their children need our help. If you wish to make a donation, please click on the appropriate place near the logo above. If you can help us work on developing a strong financial future for Shalom Bayit, please call our Coordinator, Lynne Lichtman, at 305 933-9820.

Harlee Berger  
Communications Chair

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Coming this Spring!

Shalom Bayit in conjunction with the Alper JCC, is happy to announce that during the week of May 10th, we will bring the author of the critically-acclaimed debut novel, *The Murderer's Daughter*, to South Dade to speak about her book. Randy Susan Meyer has worked for years with batterers, domestic violence victims and at-risk youth impacted by family violence. Her personal experiences make her work truly informed and true to life.

Her novel begins with a young girl named Lulu finding her mother dead and her sister wounded at the hands of her alcoholic father, who has failed at killing himself after attacking the family. The book then follows Lulu and her sister over the next 30 years of their lives and details how the sisters eventually confront the tragedy that happened all those years ago.

Randy is an informed and engaging speaker and we hope that we have a strong turn-out to hear her discuss her book as well as her experiences in dealing with domestic abuse victims. Watch for a flyer with all the details as we get closer to May 2010.

In addition to Randy's visit to Miami, we are planning numerous parlor meetings in neighborhoods around Miami so that we can continue to reach out into the community and find new volunteers.

The first goal of Shalom Bayit is to help victims of domestic abuse and

their children to find safety, to regain health and to find a way back to a stable and joyous life. The second is to increase awareness and to educate the community about domestic abuse. We hope that with our upcoming events we are able to reach new people in the community and successfully meet our goals.

Bonnie Weinberger

Development Consultant

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### Book Review: *The Space between Us* by Thrity Umrigar

Last week I read a novel by Thrity Umrigar called *The Space between Us*, which defines the relationship of a middle-class woman in Bombay (as the book continues to call Mumbai) and the servant who has worked for her for some 20 years. As the book tells us, one need not be wealthy to employ a servant in India; labor is cheap. Although their circumstances put them worlds apart -- Sera is an educated, sophisticated woman, while Bhimah is poverty-stricken and illiterate -- they share a common problem, which is why this book is being reviewed in the *Shalom Bayit Newsletter*. Each woman has dealt with a husband who is violent and abusive. Counter-intuitive as it may seem, the fact is that domestic abuse cuts across all strata of American demographics. I would imagine that the middle and upper classes of Indian society would assert that abuse among their classes doesn't exist either, although among the lower classes, of course, it does. The middle class husband in this novel, handsome, educated, intelligent and powerful, portrays the classic example of the abuser and his behavior follows the acknowledged pattern of the abuser, which I will describe later. The lower class man, Bhima's husband, might engender a bit of sympathy because of the circumstances surrounding his morphing from a loving and devoted husband into a drunken abuser, but as we all know, beating up on his wife never solved any man's problems.

Sera and Feroz (his name makes me think of "ferocious," which he is) were not young when they married. Each had been looking for some years for precisely the perfect partner. Each was good-looking, self-assured, competent, cultured and respected within the community.

They are both members of the Parsi community, a group which follows the Zoroastrian religion. The Parsis came to India from Iran several hundred years ago and remained there. They assimilated to some degree, but retained their religion (the bulk of Indians are Hindus) as well as their culture and traditions. They prefer their children to marry from within the Parsi community and maintain a certain insularity from the rest of Indian society. They tend to be comfortable to well-to-do, if not wealthy, put great emphasis on education and are very family-oriented. As I read these details about the Parsis, I thought of how much they resemble the Jewish community in so many ways. So, you can imagine the shame Sera carried as she kept secret the fact that Feroz often used her as a punching bag.

The following characteristics of their relationship made them typical of couples with the problem of domestic violence. Although Sera was a self-confident and accomplished woman with a responsible career prior to her marriage to Feroz, she immediately left her job at his behest to stay at home and . . . do what? In her case, staying home meant spending hour upon hour with a mother-in-law from hell into whose home she had moved with her new husband. She spent her days waiting for Feroz to return home for dinner, but he was always too tired to go out, and thus she was forced to spend her evenings with Banu as well as the unending days. After his first few minor outbursts of temper, she started to watch him very carefully, trying to discern what it was that *she was doing* that caused Feroz such terrifying fits of anger. She wore long-sleeved clothing to cover the bruises on her arms, and sometimes she would stay in bed for several days while her face healed from the last beating. She never told anyone, she didn't leave him, she didn't even threaten to leave if the behavior didn't stop. The only one who really knew was Bhimah, as Sera languished in her mother-in-law's home having no contact with her beloved parents, friends or social activities.

Bhimah's marriage started out quite fortuitously. Both she and her husband, Gopal, worked hard, loved each other and enjoyed the time they spent together and had high hopes for the future of their daughter and son. They too saw education as the way out of poverty. All went well until Gopal was injured in an industrial accident on the job and lost three fingers. While he was in the hospital, a conniving "accountant," an emissary from his employer, tricked Bhimah into signing an agreement which basically invalidated all their rights to compensation from the employer. She did so in ignorance because she could not read the long, closely-written document that was thrust in her face as she rode to the hospital, and she was completely ignorant of business practices. When Gopal regained consciousness and learned what she had done, the whole miserable affair -- from start to finish -- became Bhima's fault. And thus began Gopal's alcoholism which evolved into chronic unemployment,

irresponsibility and domestic violence.

The three secondary characters which set the plot in motion are Maya, Bhima's granddaughter who lives with her in a dirty, one-room hut in the worst slum of Bombay. Both her parents, Bhima's daughter and son-in-law, died of AIDS when Maya was very young, and so Bhima raised the child who is currently attending college under Sera's sponsorship. Sera's daughter, Dinaz, and her son-in-law, Viraf, reside with her, and the young couple are expecting a child, whom Sera sees as her reason for living and her hope for the future.

At the beginning of the novel, Bhima has just discovered that her college-girl granddaughter is pregnant. Maya refuses to divulge the name of the father, but later gives Bhima the name of a fellow student, which sends Bhima on a wild-goose chase with the intention of convincing the supposed father to marry her granddaughter. Maya refuses to furnish the name of the real father, and Bhima plans with Sera and her son-in-law, Viraf, to arrange for an abortion. As the edges of their lives begin to fray, both women sustain their hopes in the future through their grandchildren. But when the actual father of Maya's child is revealed, everything unravels quickly.

Sadly, there is an abundance of domestic abuse in many of its forms in this book. Some of the abusers are textbook cases while others have mitigating (but not exculpatory) factors. The women too exhibit varying responses to the abusive behavior, though unfortunately, none has the courage to stand up and take steps either to stop it or to leave the situation. For those of us who work to eliminate domestic abuse of all kind, this novel is an interesting study of its dynamics in a society other than our own. The trials suffered by the abused are similar, but the resources to help them apparently haven't even been thought about yet in the Indian culture. It means that Shalom Bayit and programs like it have a long way to go before we reach our ultimate goal of eliminating domestic abuse from the repertoire of acceptable behavior in all cultures and in all societies.

Harlee Berger  
Communications Chair

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