

August 8, 2017

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman
President
Yeshiva University
500 West 185th Street, Room 723
New York, NY 10033

Dear President Berman:

Congratulations on your recent appointment to the Office of President of Yeshiva University. I wish for you great success and a long and rewarding experience in your new position.

I write to you today with the best of intentions for our alma mater and with a few suggestions that will take a person with the heart of a lion to perhaps even entertain let alone to implement. Your name, Ari, and knowing of some of your accomplishments in and on behalf of the institution that is Yeshiva University and for the Jewish Community at large, leads me to believe that the thoughts I am sharing with you now will be welcomed warmly and considered fully even if they may appear, at first blush, to be bordering on, if not actually, outrageous. I will admit that my thinking and my ways are many times “out of the box” but, the results that I get are often quite wonderful; and wondering and wonderful is what I am always about.

Rabbi, if the sheer physical weight of this “letter” is making you wish you could just skip to the “good part” and, later, when you have the time, you can come back here to see what all the “fuss” is about, then I invite you to turn to the first paragraph on Page 33 right now and read from there to the end. You could actually do that at any time if you choose to “plow on” right now. I just wanted to give you that option and, in light of the importance of my mission, I wanted you to have the idea being presented fully in your grasp, even if the support I feel it requires to be appreciated is tabled for the time being.

When I was a grade school student on my way to what was then referred to as Junior High School, there was a talk delivered by one of the head teachers or the new principal or a guidance councilor who impressed upon us that education was broad based and that they wanted us to become exposed to and involved in the many areas of knowledge and not just to become “educated splinters.” I still ... no, I always remember that phrase “educated splinter” and the admonishment we received for us not to become one.

Yeshiva was amazingly special to and for me. It welcomed me even though I came to the school as a second year high school student with not the most impressive grades, the slimmest of backgrounds in Yehadus, very little strength in the Hebrew language; Biblical or Modern, and only the thinnest support at

home for customs and practices usually considered to be basic requirements for those looking to migrate into a highly structured way of life such as is maintained at Yeshiva.

Everyone at YU helped me right from the get-go; even before that. I promise you, while I was “taking” the MTA entrance examination in Lamport Auditorium, the then Bursar, Mr. Abrams, z”l, stopped next to my chair and asked me in his very heavy European accent, “Vell Mister Kopf, how are you doing on dis exam?” and I answered, “Truthfully, Mr. Abrams, I don’t know one answer to one question on this test.” And Mr. Abrams calmed me down by saying, “Vell, don’t worry Mister Kopf because in your case ve are just going to mark dee kfeshtons.”

I was getting into MTA no matter what. Who knew? And, later, when I was looking at what my senior year Jewish studies would be and REITS was not really going to be an option and TI was really not right for me either, Rabbi Weinbach, z”l, the Principal of MTA, came up with a solution that had to be the most unique answer to the seemingly impossible question that was facing him, and, in doing so, he further proved just how welcoming Yeshiva as an institution was to me, and, perhaps how valuable I was to it, and his unconventional thinking taught me in a very special way to think in the broadest possible way rather than to just try to “make something work;” which is what I call the “Cinderella method; i.e. “I’ll make it fit!”

I want to also credit my father and my teacher Harold Kopf, z”l, for having provided the most amazing example of “thinking out of the box” that any young person could have ever wanted. My father was the man who invented the Guard-Rite Window Guard, which saved scores of kids from falling out of windows, for which he was awarded the Louis and Conger Award for Safety in 1950, the Davis Adjustable Loom that “zillions” of kids used to make potholders and, apparently still do, as well as a whole stable of action oriented games that help teach the rules and strategies of each one to “kids” of all ages. He may have been too soft hearted and far too open to “sharpshooters” who might have taken advantage of him on the “business” side of the ledger, but he was very special none the less.

The then emerging division in Yeshiva College called JSP, the Jewish Studies Program, which was headed by Rabbi Morris Besdin, z”l, was what Rabbi Weinbach came up with as the solution to how I would be continuing my Jewish Studies in my senior year of high school. This was a very bold move in those days; 1963. High school was high school and college was college. To place a young man, even one who was living and interacting as part of a very dynamic community that had young men of a wide range of ages, in a college class when everyone knew that that young man was still in “high school” was breaking all kinds of rules; social and otherwise. But it worked. I had overcome a number of hurdles and climbed a number of mountains that probably identified me to Rabbi Weinbach as a boy who could “play the part” and handle the situation even if I

was being thrown into the deep end of the proverbial pool and was still learning how to swim.

I was a kid who came from a public school on Long Island and from a Conservative Synagogue. I had no friends in MTA when I arrived there except for my cousin Shep, Shepard Melzer, z"l, who had been graduated from HILI, the Hebrew Institute of Long Island, and was a sophomore at YC when I transferred to MTA. He was tremendously supportive and always there for me when and if I ever needed him. Through Shep, it was that much easier for me to bridge the gap from HS to college. But, it was a guy in one of my JSP classes, who invited me to go to a Fencing Team practice with him that demonstrated just how much I had been accepted by my college "classmates" and who, in introducing me to Lorand Marcel, z"l, the Sabre Coach and to Coach Arthur Tauber, z"l, the Head Fencing Team Coach; a man who became both my teacher and a life-long friend, and a person who changed my life in ways too numerous to mention, that the man I became was launched.

Any concern that there might have been a "backlash" for me on the high school side of the equation as Yeshiva University was put to rest when I decided to run for office of the General Organization, which you will recall was how we referred to the MTA student government. I lacked the Yeshiva Katanah "heritage" advantage that those who went to Yeshivas before MTA all had, but my up close and personal way of getting to know people gave me a certain broad based support that tended to even things out for me. But, I believe the campaign speech I delivered before the entire student body, almost the entire school really, since the greater part of the faculty, save for the "rabbaiem" who taught the morning religious classes, and all of the administrators, were in attendance, was what won the race for me. I remember the beginning and the ending of my presentation:

The beginning went this way: "Dead! The GO is NOT dead. But, it is slowly dieing."

The ending was: "Do not scorn and do not scoff. Vote advancement. Vote Drew Kopf."

I was elected Vice President of the Student Government.

Amazing.

After considering what Rabbi Weinbach did in this regard, by his allowing me and convincing his college administrator counterparts and colleagues to allow me to attend "college" while I was still in high school, will make what I am going to be proposing for your consideration will, or perhaps I should say might make sense. Rabbi Weinbach was one creative and solid thinker and a man of definitive action all at once.

Let me stop for a moment and share something with you that I share with close friends; why I went to MTA and, more importantly, why I stayed.

In the Hebrew School of the then Wantagh Jewish Center, a certain teacher, who I knew only as Mr. Benjamini (pronounced: Benyamini), was my instructor in a post-bar mitzvah class that I took. He failed to follow the standard curriculum and taught, instead, Chumash and Rashi with a “real” Chumash with Rashi script and no English translation. No big deal for you. But, something I had never seen before. I became completely hooked. When he was not back the next year I was directed to the Hebrew High School held in the evening at a synagogue in Rockville Center and I stayed a while but was miserable. The teacher in Rockville Center used the “Silverman” linear translation without Rashi script and he was “one step ahead of the class.” I could not live like that. The Principal of the Hebrew School at my home synagogue, Mr. Havivi, directed me to MTA.

Why I stayed is also pretty private but also important in relationship to what I want to share with you. I applied to MTA wanting to study Chumash and Rashi, but, in time, my desire was upgraded; I wanted to become a rabbi. But, somewhere in my transitional time from high school to college, perhaps in my freshman year in college, one of my rabbis, and for the life of me, I can not recall which one it was, had a heart-to-heart talk with me and explained that in his opinion my wanting to be a rabbi was a mistake. He felt that I was just far too sensitive a fellow to go into that field. He also noted how difficult it is for a Kohain to serve as a pulpit rabbi, with the various issues connected to death. I was not concerned about the Kohain aspect of the possibility of being a rabbi, since my introduction to some of what being a Kohain really involved was the first time I Duchaned. It was in the Bais HaMedresh in the Main Building on the YU campus in Washington Heights, and I was being coached and taken literally by the hand by one of my JSP teachers, Rabbi Steven Riskin, who positioned me with him on one side of me and with Rabbi Lessin, z”l, the Bochain, on the other side and, as I am told they say in Brooklyn, “FAHGETABOUTIT.” Just exactly like what happened in Mr. Benjamini’s Chumash class; I was hooked.

But, the rabbi who counseled me to give up on the idea of becoming a rabbi; and it is important to know that to me being a pulpit rabbi was what being a rabbi entailed and being any other type of rabbi would just not have done; but, that rabbi, I am convinced, saved my life. I know a ton of men who became pulpit rabbis and knowing now what they did and do, I can tell you I would never have survived.

I have the greatest respect for the profession and do all I am able to do to support their very important work when I am involved in a shul or if I am approached to help in some way, but, surely, that rabbi, whose name I can not remember, saved my life.

In the year 2000, I vacationed in France and visited every museum in Paris; when you go to Paris it is what you do. At the Rodin Museum a certain display showed a piece of his sculpture and included a number of his very rough sketches that were apparently his plan for the sculpted piece we were observing. I could never paint like the artists in all the museums we had been visiting and I could never sculpt like Rodin, but those rough sketches; that I could do. I returned home from France and have been drawing and painting ever since.

Actually, I should fill in a blank here that will make the painting I do read more clearly. After YU, I went to Columbia University for the summer for six credits that I needed to complete my degree from YU. I had been very ill during the last semester at YU and though I was allowed to walk down the aisle with my class during graduation I needed those six credits. I took them in acting and, while I was there, I applied to graduate schools of theater and got accepted by all of the schools to which I had applied; Columbia, Hofstra and Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. I applied and opted for Ohio University on the advice of a visiting professor from that school, Dr. Arthur Wagner, z"l, who was one of my acting teachers at Columbia that summer. He said Columbia was eclipsing its graduate of theater into the English Department, which would make my degree worth a lot less in the world of academia. I believed him. Hofstra was not a performance oriented program at the time; i.e. it did not offer an MFA Degree, which is what I wanted. It offered a Master of Arts in theater history and criticism, which for me was more "about" theater than the actual "doing" of theater.

I finished a year at Ohio University and, when Professor Wagner unexpectedly transferred to Temple University in Philadelphia, I applied there and was accepted. Oddly, Professor Wagner, who I had considered to be my "mentor," ended up not even being on my thesis committee. For my thesis production, I directed a play by Arthur Laurents, z"l, since I had directed one of his plays while I was an undergraduate at Yeshiva College. The play I directed at Yeshiva College was "Home of the Brave," which was originally written about a Jewish protagonist but which was changed to a Black protagonist when made into a movie. My thesis was to be focused on my direction and producing his play "A Clearing in the Woods," which had been on Broadway but was produced "differently" than Mr. Laurents had wanted it to be done. I knew this because he granted me a personal interview the transcript of which became a very important part of my written thesis. I tell you Rabbi Berman, I could not make this up.

I was awarded a Master of Fine Arts in Theater Directing from Temple University and my degree was paid for by the National Jewish Welfare Board that had recruited me while I was in Athens, Ohio, when a representative of the NJWB, whose name I do not recall, and the Program Director of the Columbus Jewish Center, in Columbus, Ohio, Howard Banchefsky, came to the campus in search of potential staff persons to serve in JCCs in areas other than social group work; i.e. non-Master of Social Work degree candidates.

At the completion of my degree, I moved to Columbus to serve as their Cultural Arts Director. Combining my expertise in the theater and my love of Yehadus worked out very well for me in that type of work. I worked in the Jewish Community Center field off and on until 1988 when I decided to launch my own business, which was completely away from the arts. I put much of my involvement in theater and in combining it with things of a Jewish nature on the proverbial back burner.

Working with actors, authors, set designers, costume designers, choreographers, and the many other creative people in and surrounding a theatre production – and in my time I have directed everything from puppet shows to full scale operas and musical comedies; even radio plays, all of which were ways of my creating art that embodied my message that underlies almost everything that I do: “You can be better than you are.”

So, when I came back from Paris in the year 2000 and started to paint, it was my way of getting back to my creative and expressive roots and, from a different perspective, it was a way for me to get back to my life long route in terms of my chosen pathway of life.

When you were deciding on accepting the offer to become the next president of Yeshiva University, you may have taken some time to read through the Masmid Year Books from the beginning until now in order to get quick review of where things started, how they got to where they are and who it was who got us here. When I was a Freshman or a Sophomore in the college, I moved to the Old Dorm in the Main Building where I found a complete set of Masmids and I read through them and came across the 1940 Masmid and learned that a stage set from the Broadway show “Yellow Jack,” a play by Sidney Howard that had opened in 1934 in the Martin Beck Theatre, was first moved to Yeshiva and used in one of the college’s apparently pretty polished and extensive theatrical productions before being trucked to New Jersey where the sets of Broadway shows were burned in compliance with union contract agreements under which the sets had been made. The “stop over” at Yeshiva College was surely an unauthorized one but it apparently did happen.

My own study of the Masmid of the 1940’s taught me that the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society had been something else at that time and I, in the 1960s, saw the YCDS as all but defunct. There were small skits like Purim Shpeels that the students would write themselves. I recall a phrase or a lyric from a song from a show dealing with assimilation, which was then and, of course, still is today, a major topic of concern in the Jewish community. The lyric went like this: “ ... assimilation of the whole Jewish Nation ...” Productions were intended for Yeshiva College student audience; full of “inside jokes” and with no detectable degree of sophistication. It was just a lot of fun. There was no “drama” in the Dramatics Society. There was no faculty advisor as such. There may have been one but there was no evidence of one in the product that was produced. I believe

there was a budget line in the college student government for the Dramatics Society, but that was all.

I took every drama or theater related course in the English Department and anything that even touched on “performance” in the speech area. One class had the students “put on” a scene from a play; it might have been from “Antigone” by Sophocles. It was the first piece I ever directed. I got an overwhelming feeling seeing and hearing my “understanding” of the scene and how I thought it ought to be “done” come alive right in front of me. In a similar way as when I would pour over a “pasook” in the Chumash and the Rashi, “lehavdeel,” I was hooked again. That scene led to a class project that had us “put on” Harold Pinter’s play “The Dumb Waiter,” which has just two characters. The class production had us split up the play into four parts, which allowed each of four students to direct a part of the play, to serve as stage manager for another and to act in it when the others took their turns at directing and stage managing.

Once the class was over, I thought the play was worthy of being seen by others than just those in our class and a few invited guests who came to see us “do” it in Lamport Auditorium. I took over the directing of the play, which was really pretty much set since we had already “put on” the entire play. But, I cleaned it up, took one of the parts and Shelly Kurtz, who was, as I recall, a year ahead of me in school, took the other part, and I offered it to various organizations and we took the production “on the road to The White Shul in Far Rockaway, where Rabbi Rackman, z”l, was the pulpit rabbi, and to NCSY for their upstate New York based conclave, and we, the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society and I, were, after a twenty year hiatus, in business again.

That “road” experience was transformative. It turned me into a theatre director and showed me my new “route” in life. The Yeshiva College Dramatics Society still had no faculty advisor, but I then put the wheels in motion to produce the Arthur Laurents, z”l, play entitled “Home of the Brave.” My initial plan was to put it on in Lamport Auditorium, where our class production of “The Dumb Waiter” had been performed as a one performance special invitation only production, and, where, in the 1940s, the Dramatics Society plays had been presented. But, there was new “thinking” in the leadership at Yeshiva University in the 1960s, which was not, perhaps, as supportive of their through line of action. At least that is how it felt. I met with an administrator who told me that since Lamport Auditorium was used for High Holiday services, it would be “pas nicht” to allow an activity that is somehow antithetical to religious services such as a theatrical production, to be presented in that venue.

Who was I to disagree? I just wanted to direct my next play. But, now, there was no venue that lent itself to a proscenium style production and there were no budgeted funds for renting a school auditorium or the like. I thrashed about for some guidance in this seemingly impossible situation and found Mr. Frederrick Stover, who was a set designer for WABC TV down town, and who invited me to

meet with him at his office and gave me a crash course in set design, lighting design and some strategies that allowed me to use Room 501 in Furst Hall, which is a large meeting room, as a thrust stage or theatre in three-quarters, much like the Arena Stage in Washington, DC or at the stage at Lincoln Center 's Vivian Beaumont Theatre in New York City.

Room 501 Furst Hall was not used for religious services, so I was given the "Go Ahead" to produce the show there. It was not until years later, when I was in graduate school, that I learned that for an undergraduate student to direct a college dramatic presentation was "absolutely" unheard of ... except at Yeshiva College. Only at Yeshiva College could that have happened. For me, it was perfect timing. And, I did not know any worse or any better. To me, what I was doing was absolutely normal.

"Home of the Brave" was a smash hit and I received wonderful letters from faculty members, administrators and people in the community who had heard of the show or seen our posters and bought tickets.

The next year, my junior year, I directed Arthur Miller's "Incident at Vichy" in the same thrust theatre in Room 501 in Furst Hall and, again, was greeted with accolades, letters of praise, buzz and applause that I still feel when I reread some of those letters and look at some of the photographs of that show in my scrapbook.

If you did read through the Masmids, you would have come across the shows I had directed and would have learned of my involvement as President of the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society until I became ill and actually came pretty close to death with a bleeding ulcer. Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center's Dr. Edward Baldwin Self, z"l, performed a subtotal gastrectomy and the young men from Yeshiva College made sure that I had a minyan each Shabbas even though I was on the 14th (read: 13th) floor. There was a steady stream of visitors from school while I was recuperating in the hospital, which meant a great deal to me.

My last year at Yeshiva as a student had been greatly effected by that bleeding ulcer. I had already made what would be probably labeled as a "command decision" to lean away from my position as one of the starting saber fencers for Coach Tauber on the YC Fencing Team in favor of "taking" what might be considered a "full time position" as President of the YCDS. Of course, I was still enrolled college courses and looking at masters programs in theater when I took ill. That is really understating what really happened. But, the real story is difficult for me to even remember and harder still to write about it to you.

Earlier on the day that I took ill, I had learned that one of my MTA classmates, who had also been a roommate of mine, Moses "Moshe" Markowitz from Mexico City, Mexico, who had chosen to go to college in California, had been murdered

in what was said to have been a drug related attack of retribution. May his memory be for a blessing.

I was devastated by the news of my friend's death and I hardly knew to whom I could turn for help in dealing with it. My cousin Shep was in Law School at Columbia University and it would have been hard to reach him right away. This was way before cell phones or course.

I called Tamy Simon, who was a student at Barnard College, and who was in her apartment when I tried her number. She told me to come right over. I had known Tamy since my senior year in high school when Coach Tauber invited (read: let) me accompany the College Fencing Team on its trip to Boston, MA for its annual match against another "college under Jewish auspices," Brandies University. The team members were housed by local families; home hospitality, and I was hosted by Rabbi and Mrs. Isaac Simon, z"l. Rabbi Simon was a "rebbe" at the Maimonides School in Brookline, MA. Their daughter, Tamy, was my unofficial hostess, who had me join her and some of her friends at a local bowling alley. Oh, and not what they called "big ball" either, which is the bowling with which I was familiar, but "duck pin" and "candle pin" bowling, which is very different; they leave the "dead wood" and you have to "work with it" with your second and even a third ball. You live and you learn. Tamy and I have remained friends, though with long hiatuses, even until today.

The funny thing that I had not ever put together until recently was that one of my "friends" at Yeshiva was a very close and dear friend of Tamy and her entire family and that they were at one another's homes all the time.

One day, when I was first on my own at YU as a new student in MTA, I went to "Parker's," which was the dining hall and the restaurant in the basement of the Rubin Hall dormitory and which was open to the public, I was carrying my lunch tray and looking for a nice table to enjoy my lunch when I spotted an older gentleman eating lunch alone, so, I asked if I might join him. He graciously invited me to do so. While we ate lunch, he asked me all about myself, my family, my brothers, my sisters, my mother and father, how I liked MTA, what I was studying, if I was comfortable as a new dormitory student, and where I went for Shabbas each week. I did not get a chance to learn much about my lunch companion at that meeting, but, some time later, when I pointed him out to a couple of my classmates, I learned that my "old lunch buddy" was a heavy hitter at Yeshiva; they told me he was called "The Rav."

The Rav, z"l, and I would meet like that on a very occasional basis; but, he would always stop me if we saw each other on campus. He always referred to me by name; my Hebrew name actually, Dov Kopf, and would ask a few questions to keep up on my progress.

Only recently, I learned that The Rav had started the Maimonides School in Brookline, which was where Rabbi Simon, Tamy's father, was a faculty member and that the Simons and the Soloveichiks were as close as close could be.

Tamy was wonderful. I got to her place and was in tears about Moshe Markowitz. She calmed me down and, then, noticed that I did not look well. She told me that she was going to put me in a cab and send me home; i.e. to my dorm room, so I could get some rest. I remember telling her that I really did not have the kind of money for a taxi cab and she told me that she was going to pay for it and that was it. In doing so, she very well may have saved my life. I got to my dormitory too late to use the usual entrance and had to enter through the tunnel on the south side of the building, which was completely cut off from the rest of the world. I climbed up the four or five flights and entered the dormitory hallway before I collapsed onto the hallway floor.

I was found lying in a pool of blood. The ambulance took me to Jewish Memorial Hospital where I was stabilized and I called my father and told him to get me out of there. Jewish Memorial Hospital had a terrible reputation at that time. My father drove in from Long Island and took me to Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center. And, you know the rest.

The Yeshiva College Dramatics Society and the Fencing Team could no longer be in my "wheelhouse" while I was convalescing. I stayed for some time at my Aunt Mildred and Uncle Ruby Melzer's home in Far Rockaway for some time. May their memories be for a blessing. They were my cousin Shep's parents and were able to provide a calm environment with no stress, which was something I would have not been able to find at home with four siblings and the nature of my home. It was just the way it was and, according to the doctor, I needed a peaceful place to stay until I was stronger and had healed substantially. Really, that was the end of my remembrances of my on-campus life at Yeshiva. I did walk down the aisle with my classmates and was given the Speech and Drama Award by the English and Speech Department. I really do not think there was a Speech Department but the award was given to me and my class gave me an "Appreciation" presentation piece, which I have near me on my desk at my office and which does bring back fond memories of my time at YU. I was so financially strapped that I could not afford to buy a copy of the Masmid or a class ring. But, some how, the members of my graduating class made both happen for me as well.

While I was recuperating, a speech teacher, Mr. Anthony Beukas, who, at the time, was still "Mr" took over the directing responsibilities for the Dramatics Society. My choices for plays usually leaned towards serious and message-rich dramas, where others opted for musicals that involved more students and perhaps appealed to a wider segment of the available audience. Hey. There are two drama masks and each has its place. Years later, I returned to YU to attend a play in the "Garage" theater at the 13th anniversary of Mr. or perhaps by then

Dr. Beukas' reign as Faculty Advisor; or some such thing. It should not have been the 13th anniversary of the YCDS since we know it began sometime back in the 1940s at least. But, I came there as a kind of "honored" guest and got to see a photograph of me and Shelly Kurtz from "The Dumb Waiter" hanging in a kind of historical retrospective display of where things all began. And, then, some years later, there was a show I attended at the Soloveichik school building that had become the YCDS Theater. That was a wonderful thing to behold. From a time when I was not permitted to "purchase" anything related to producing plays; I was only allowed to rent except for things like theatrical makeup, to then, where the Dramatics Society had its own theater in its own building; amazing indeed.

And, still, years later, in the 1980s, while I was serving as the Cultural Arts Director of the Suffolk YM and YWHA - JCC in Commack, NY, on Long Island, the new Program Director of the Y by the name of Joel Block, MSW, stuck his head in my office doorway in a way of introducing himself and said, "You are Drew Kopf!" I smiled and said, "Correct." And, I waited for him to introduce himself to me, but, instead, he said, "No. You don't understand. You. You are DREW KOPF!" I said, "Yes. I know. But, ..." And he cut me off and said again just about the same thing but this time in super slow motion, "You. YOU. You are Drew Kopf."

He finally calmed down and, after telling me his name, he told me that he, like me, was a graduate of Yeshiva College and had also been involved in the Dramatics Society and, in his senior year, was chosen to be President of the Society. He explained that the legacy that I had left at YU was such that everything that was ever done in the way of the YCDS productions were weighed considered and ranked in light of the things that had been done by me and my contemporaries before anything sophisticated had been put in place to produce the later shows. He said that to him, meeting me was like meeting a legend.

I had no idea how revered the work I had done while President of the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society had become. There was something driving me when I was producing and directing the plays we put on. But, personal self-aggrandizement was not in the mix. Audience applause is certainly a driving force. Receiving favorable critical reviews in publications or in letters from audience members is extremely gratifying. But, it was something else that was in my mind at every step of the way.

My motivation at all times while working on producing a play was two-fold. One; was to some how create what I hoped the audience would accept as reality, even though I always knew that the slightest thing could snap the audience out of the reality that we had been trying to create, which would make it that much more difficult to "pull" them back into that reality we were creating on stage, and, for the briefest period of time, to leave their actual reality behind. And, Two; but, always the more important motivation, was to convey the author's message in hopes of reaching deeply into the very "soul" of each person who might experience the

play, to where they would better receive the message and to make some kind of personal commitment to go forward in their own life somewhat differently in light of what they would have witnessed on stage; even to the point where, in some instances, being in the audience at one of my plays might be a life altering experience that a person might hold as a treasured memory for the rest of their life.

Lofty aspirations and goals; yes. But, to do what I was doing any other way with any less of a commitment would be, for me, as the lyric in the song from “Babe in Arms” goes, would be “the self-deception that believes the lie” But, in this endeavor and worse, it would be without the reward of being “in love again.”

In a different way, the sport of fencing gave me the same kind of feeling and rewards that directing plays did. When I taught classes in Public Speaking, there were similar rewards. I have been told that there are people who are so fearful of speaking before a group that they would rather die. That is pretty powerful stuff.

If I could help people overcome their fears and grow to a point to where they could speak without notes in front of any size group and feel comfortable, I know that I would have touched them positively for the rest of their life. The feeling from that is unbeatable for me. Students in Public Speaking classes or in Interpersonal Communications classes and members of my fencing teams at the different colleges, at which I taught, took away from our time together life lessons that they would be able to bring to bare in almost every aspect of their lives. Being able to do that for people is gratifying to me in ways that are beyond description.

And, rarely, what I did in this way was small. At one point, when I was living in the Poughkeepsie, NY area, I was teaching and coaching fencing for Dutchess County Community College, New Paltz State College, Vassar College, Bard College, Columbia-Greene Community College, the IBM Country Club in Poughkeepsie, and teaching Public Speaking, Acting, Play Production, and a special non-credit course at Marist College in Poughkeepsie to help students who were only marginally acceptable from an academic standpoint to be students at the college. My objective in that special course was to enable these students to survive in college while making the difficult transition from living at home and attending high school to living on a college campus and having to keep up with college level course work and their wide-ranging and numerous requirements in a timely way while still participating in college life and certain extra curricular activities; in some instances being members of a varsity sports team. My course was like “boot camp” for college kids. It was a very special course indeed and amazingly gratifying to me to know just how important the work I was doing for those young people was and would be depending on the level of my effectiveness.

At that time in my life, I had a dozen balls in the air at the same time. I sold fencing equipment made by the company owned by the Fencing Maestro Giorgio Santelli, z"l, in New York City. My students wanted certain pieces of equipment and it was not like it is today with the ease of the Internet. I was directing operas for the Mid-Hudson Opera Theater in Poughkeepsie, coaching fencing teams; I even created what might be called an amalgamated or a hybrid team of fencers made up of students from three different schools, very different schools actually, a community college; Dutchess, a State University College, New Paltz, and an elite private college; Vassar. This conglomerate team fenced against some great collegiate teams that would normally not be in "the same league" as any one of the schools in our special group. The regular intercollegiate schedules are set years in advance. But, we were able to offer teams in certain NCAA categories "sparring" options with talented and capable athletes while having no effect on their relationships with the other NCAA rivals or the NCAA rules.

We fenced some great teams including the team coached by the famous French fencing master Jean Jacques Gillet at Cornell University in Binghamton New York, the super elite team at the United States Military Academy at West Point, where, by the way, the Athletic Director was and may still be paid under the budget line "Master of the Sword" which dates back to the beginning of the academy when the only "sports" that were taught were boxing, riding and fencing. We also fenced against the team coached by my own coaches Arthur Tauber and Laurand Marcel, z"l, the Saber Coach, at Yeshiva College. Our matches did not count on our opponents' records and all we needed to take care of was getting to and from the venues. The referees, who are called directors and our meals, were provided by the hosting teams. The whole experience was what we might call "under the radar" but, none the less enriching and memorable for all concerned. I am ever thankful for my former colleagues in the National Fencing Coaches Association for their kind cooperation and for all they shared with my fencers and me at that time.

I was writing and publishing a newsletter about fencing, which I thought might eventually be on par with ones I had seen for tennis. Fencing was, and perhaps still is, rather an elitist game usually found at upscale colleges or at fancy athletic clubs such as the New York Athletic Club in New York City. Very few high schools offered fencing. When I was at Vassar College, the school was just going co-ed and we took our "women's team" to Wellesley, which was all girls. It was a terrific time. But, it demonstrated the "exclusivity" of the "game" of fencing. There was a time when I could name a pretty long list of famous people who were or who had been fencers in their day. But, in doing so, it also pointed to how the chances for "regular" people to experience fencing, let alone becoming fencers, was almost nil.

I had some particularly unusual and unexpected support from the leadership at Dutchess County Community College. One day, when having lunch in the school

cafeteria, I noticed the President of the School Dr. John Connolly, who you will know these days as the "Connolly" in Castle-Connolly, the publishers of The Top Doctors in America. I introduced myself to him but he said he knew who I was and that I taught in Dick Skimmon's Athletic Department and he invited me to join him for lunch. I did and while we exchanged pleasantries he asked if there was anything he could do to help me. I told him there was. I said that he could challenge the entire academic community to fence against him. He told me that he did not know how to fence. I told him that he was sitting across the table from the Fencing Coach. Dr. Connolly was known to be a very strong tennis player, so I knew he could make a good fencer. We held what we called "Zorro Day," which we publicized widely on campus and had a terrific response from all quarters. The arrangement was that if you beat the President he would donate \$5.00 to the President's Discretionary Fund and if the President beat you, you would donate \$2.00 to that fund. That was at a time when \$5.00 was a goodly sum of money. I had taken a few weeks to coach Dr. Connolly and he was very successful on "Zorro Day." He fenced against colleagues on the faculty, who brought their own "cheering squads" of teachers, and students, maintenance men, other administrators, cooks in the cafeteria and members of the campus security force. Any and all were welcome. He gave me a "Dutchess County Community College" Club Tie as a token of his appreciation, which I treasured for years.

Later, with the support of Dr. Connolly and, of course, the Director of the Physical Education Department, Mr. Richard Skimmon, Dutchess County Community College took fencing to a region wide level by sponsoring an open competition that we called "The Big Sword Fight," which was held at Dutchess County Community College in the main gymnasium and attracted fencers from all over the Greater New York Metropolitan Area including nearby New Jersey, Connecticut and even up to Albany, who came to fence as individuals in any or all the three weapons, Foil, Sabre and Epée, and to compete for the trophies, which we had made out of old fencing masks striped of their padding to where just the metal mesh face protectors and the wire head clasp remained, that were beyond safe use but which we spray painted either Gold, Silver or Bronze and mounted on wooden posts that we painted black and had nice plaques made for each one detailing what weapon they represented, the date and place and the name of the fencer who won at The Big Sword Fight.

The Big Sword Fight was different than the usual US Fencing Association and NCAA competitions. It was an elimination contest in groups of 6 fencers in round robin format until the finals which we made head-to-head like in tennis, wrestling or boxing. It was not a sanctioned event by any organized body, so we could make our own rules. The finals were spectacular events in and of themselves. We were able to darken the entire gymnasium in favor of using the school's theater lighting instruments which we had hung in the rafters of the gymnasium all carefully trained on the central fencing strip and in such a way as not to dazzle the fencers' vision but to provide the audience with the absolute best possible view of fencing matches that perhaps had ever been seen. To the rest of the

world of fencing, The Big Sword Fight did not count. But, to all who saw it and, especially to those who fenced in it, The Big Sword Fight was the best fencing event bar none.

“The Empire State Games,” which was like the Olympic Games of New York State, and which had just begun a year prior, was held at the State University of New York at Syracuse and fencing was one of the sports included in the games. I encouraged my students to participate and, because I was not considered a “professional fencer” even though I was teaching the sport in colleges and coaching various teams, I was permitted to compete as well. The qualifiers for our region of the state were held in Mamaroneck if I remember correctly and the Assistant Superintendent of Public Schools, Dr. Calvert Schlick, who was also the coach of the Mamaroneck High School Fencing team, had always been encouraging and supportive of my efforts to help build the sport of fencing. Dr Schlick was a man of extremely wide interests, great talents and as smooth as silk in dealing with people. Oh, and he was an extremely effective and capable Sabre fencer. I remember his office was in an old elementary school. But, his office was not one of the original offices in that old building, but one of the classrooms with a view of Long Island Sound. His desk and immediate work area were very well equipped and organized; backed up with a display of his fencing trophies that seemingly did not quit, then, nearby, a more than comfortable conversation pit with couches and arm chairs enough for a number of participants; and, then, closer to the nearly floor to ceiling windows so popular in the late 1890’s which may well have been when the school now an administrative building was built, he had a full sized drafting table and all the necessary tools where one could see that plans of all kinds were developed.

Dr. Schlick’s secretary and support staff were located in the next classroom and between the two rooms was a supply closet, through which Dr. Schlick’s visitors would pass before entering his “work” space. There was just no way that a visitor to this Administrator par excellence could continue to be upset or angry when surrounded by his more than welcoming and ingratiating décor. Troubles just had to melt away. He was that thoughtful and supportive of all those who came into his orbit. I must admit that I model many things that I do and with which I surround myself on what I believe Cal Schlick would have done. He was the one who invited me to join the National Fencing Coaches Association and insisted that I fence in the Empire State games, which he did as well. We both qualified for the “Games” in Syracuse and, in Syracuse, we both made it to the finals, which guaranteed each of us a “Bronze” medal since the format was that the round robin of six fencers would yield one winner, one second place and four “third” place who would each receive a Bronze medal. I participated in the USFA National Championships later that year at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, but my results and efforts at the Empire State games are what got me as high as the sky.

Teaching on the adjunct faculty for many may be a part time “gig” for the money paid and to keep one’s hand in the game. The maximum number of credits one could teach and still be considered “adjunct” was twelve at that time in the New York State University System. That was the credit load I taught and was happy to do so, since it allowed me to do the many things I wanted to do where being a full time instructor would almost surely have precluded my being able to so. But, for me, to the extent that the culture of the school or the organization encourages it, I tend to immerse myself in its campus life. If there are events or activities that interest me, I attend. If I am invited to march in the graduation ceremonies with the others on the faculty, I felt honored to do so.

Similarly, I get to know the members of the faculty, if they are open to that. One colleague at Dutchess County Community College was Professor Steve Press, who had been in the original Broadway cast of “The Diary of Anne Frank” adapted from her diary by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. He played the part of her love interest Peter Van Daan. Steve taught Speech classes and was head of that department when I was teaching Public Speaking and Fencing there. He had written a play entitled “We Need Another Man” under a grant from the Schubert Foundation. The odd thing about his play was that even though it had been published in the prestigious special edition of the Modern International Drama the magazine of contemporary international drama in translation by the Max Reinhardt Archive at the State University of New York at Binghamton in October 1973, it had not been produced.

I thought we could take advantage of my connections in the Jewish Community Center field to put on “We Need Another Man” in New York City where we could do the show more easily as an official Actors Equity Showcase, which is one of the special “contracts” made available by Actors Equity, the professional actors union, that gives new plays a chance to be mounted in order to “showcase” the plays themselves for potential investors to see it, the actors who perform in them and the other professionals connected with the productions including the directors, the set designers, the costume designers and the lighting designers.

My plan was to use my production company, Holiday Entertainment Company, which I had modeled after the “shows” put on by “professional actors” in the movie “Holiday Inn” directed by Mark Sandrich and starring Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire with music by Irving Berlin, who wrote twelve songs specifically for the film, the best being “White Christmas.” A little farm in Connecticut is turned into an inn, which was to be open only on holidays. If it was a holiday of any magnitude, it would be open; Lincoln’s Birthday even. And, when it was open, they would put on a show. They called it “Holiday Inn,” which became the title of the movie and inspired the name of the hotel chain. I got contracts to put on plays at city and county parks, at camp grounds in schools, churches and community centers. Holiday Entertainment Company had its own costume designer, its own set designer, its own lighting technician, a stage crew, actors and singer/actors on a production-y-production basis and everything was

portable and adaptable to all sorts of situations that might exist and have to be used as a performance space.

It worked out very well. The Educational Alliance in downtown New York City hosted our Equity Showcase and, since we were required to limit the number of tickets we could “sell” or distribute to perhaps ninety-nine per performance, even though there were a number of building support columns located throughout the audience area of the Educational Alliance’s “theater,” they would not affect our show. The show certainly served the needs and objectives of the Educational Alliance since it is a Jewish organization related to the 92nd Street Y going back to 1889. The play had a Jewish theme, which checked off boxes for the Educational Alliance, for Steve Press, for the actors we cast in it, for me as the director and, of course, for the audience members who saw it.

To my knowledge, the play was not produced again. It is hard to say why. But, the almost daily round trip for me to New York City from Poughkeepsie for several weeks was exemplary of just how far I was and, really, still am prepared to go to do something that I feel is worthy of such effort; i.e. is that important.

I often wonder about the nature of the relationships that form when theater productions are mounted; everyone connected with the “show” becomes, often times, like “family” and then disbands, at least to my knowledge, rarely do people stay in close contact with one another. I suppose it is just the nature of the beast.

My work with Steve Press in mounting his “prize-winning” play as an Actors Equity Showcase production was as close as I have ever gotten to directing a full professional play; i.e. with all Actors Equity actors; in New York City, and as well comported as could be given our shoestring budget.

There was a time when I was starting my business, The Mat King, and before the term “networking” had been used to mean searching for business opportunities at business oriented meetings, that I attended a weekly breakfast meeting called “LIMBA,” which stands for “Long Island Mid-Suffolk Business Action,” and was sponsored by the Long Island Business News, a business related publication focused on Nassau and Suffolk Counties and the businesses located there. The meetings were held at the Holiday Inn near the Town of Islip’s MacArthur Airport in Ronkonkoma and were hosted by Dr. Victor P. Meskill, who was the President of Dowling College in Oakdale. The meetings always featured an interesting speaker, who Dr. Meskill would introduce and, after a brief talk by the speaker, Dr. Meskill would conduct a “Q and A” with an interaction on the part of those in attendance. (I should point out that I taught Public Speaking on the adjunct faculty of Dowling College for a while as I did for Suffolk County Community College, Five Town College while it was located in Seaford and Saint Joseph’s College at their branch in Patchogue on Long Island and where I lived at the time).

The speaker at one of the LIMBA breakfast meetings who comes to mind was the newly appointed president of a local law school. He was introduced in a glowing way by Dr. Meskill telling of how the new president had been a professor of law at a major law school in California, and then became head of a department at a law school in St. Louis, Missouri, and then served as president of another law school in Chicago before being appointed to be president of this local Long Island law school. Dr. Meskill ended the extremely impressive list of the institutions at which our guest speaker had served by saying, "Apparently, the man just can not hold a job."

The laughter was instantaneous, loud and long. And, now I find myself writing to you and feeling it important for me to demonstrate for you what made my dear mother, Shirley Kopf, z"l, describe me as a Renaissance Man and mean exactly that.

My seventy plus years have been ones of wide ranging, multifaceted, one-of-a-kind community-wide and life encouraging endeavors in the arts, in business, in education, in sports, in the study of Torah, in community service, to where Victor Meskil might say again, "Drew Kopf apparently has trouble holding a job." But, my mother would, in a nice way, correct Dr. Meskill by telling him that "My son Drew is a Renaissance Man."

My supervisor at the Suffolk YM & YWHA – Jewish Community Center was the Executive Director Helaine Strauss, who once said to me, "Drew, you are a man of fabulous ideas. But, always remember, execution is everything." I do always remember her having shared that with me and, while I was on her staff, the work I did was always done at the highest level. I identified and recruited two men, first as volunteers in the Cultural Arts area as program participants, and then as members of the Cultural Arts Committee and, later, as members of the Board of Directors of the Suffolk Y and, eventually, as presidents of the Suffolk Y Board of Directors. I had been taught way back by Howard Banchefsky at the Columbus Jewish Center, that our job as members of the staff of the Jewish Center was to serve as a kind of filter looking to identify those who need help in some way and directing them to where they can get that assistance, and to seek out those in the community who could become leaders of the community and to recruit them to serve in such capacities while learning to advance in that way towards wider and wider capabilities and greater and great levels of responsibilities.

With Helaine Strauss's encouragement and support, I broadened the theater program at the Suffolk Y to include an experimental play producing arm that utilized what had been, when the Y building was a junior high school, one of the industrial shop classrooms, which was much larger than a regular classroom, and which had a particularly high ceiling with exposed metal beams. We were able to use the room during the day as a meeting room and for a wide range of activities with an uninterrupted programming area. At one end of the room, hidden behind what amounted to a portable folding room divider, we stored all

the set pieces and theater related equipment that would be set up in the middle of the room on taped floor markings so that the room was never out of service even while a show was in rehearsal or in production.

The show we did that year was by Gus Weill of Louisiana entitled "Rosenfeld's War" and dealt with how the US Congress, in 1939, dealt with the chance to save 20,000 German children from Hitler's madness. After we produced it, the 92nd Street Y, which had dispatched staff members to see our production, decided to mount it as well. I took it as a kind of "pat on the back" for what we had done in finding the play and for giving it an audience to help advance Mr. Weill's message. I think we did Helaine Strauss proud. Execution is everything.

That experience led me to envision a play production company on the order of my "Holiday Entertainment Company" of a few years earlier that I had created in the Mid-Hudson area with musical theater and opera of a general nature and done, as mentioned earlier, on holidays. This new venture would create shows that could be presented "in the round" or in proscenium situations as traveling theater, but with a focus on Jewish history, the Jewish ethic or Jewish culture. I called it "The Jewish Star Theater." I intended it to be both as an ecumenical outreach effort and as a way to reach unaffiliated Jews to help fill in some gaps for them and to encourage their reconnecting with their roots.

My initial effort was going to be based on funding from the New York State Council on the Arts for which I had applied and which I did receive. But, when I weighed the funding against the task at hand, I saw that it would not work. I returned the funding to the Council and decided that I needed a better and more dependable source of funding to make the idea work. It was then that a friend's father, who was a long-term business man, suggested that I start my own business selling industrial floor mats and that I call my business "The Mat King." My thought was to sell mats and generate sufficient monies to underwrite the programs of "The Jewish Star Theater." My own naivety combined with my sales abilities learned in my days selling the World Book Encyclopedia, yielded nice results; the sales efforts of "The Mat King" were working. What I did not figure on was actually liking what I was doing since I was just doing it to fund The Jewish Star Theater. It was not until I started missing my activities in the arts after my vacation trip to Paris and started to paint, that I realized that The Mat King, had become enough for me.

Did I mention that I sold the World Book Encyclopedia door-to-door for Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, which was headquartered in Chicago, Illinois? I had been serving as the Adult Activities Director on the Rhode Island Jewish Community Center in Providence, Rhode Island. I had been hired by the Executive Director, Dr. Bernard Carp, who was a nationally known leader in the Jewish Communal field, and who was interested in helping to put his brand new multimillion dollar building on the map. I helped him do just that by flying a "torch" from Israel into the TF Green Airport in Warwick, Rhode Island, where it was met

by a field of long distance runners representing every educational institution in the State of Rhode Island wearing uniforms sporting their school colors and with a blue ribbon emblazoned with "Rhode Island Jewish Community Center," across their chests, which served to unify the group which ran through the streets carrying the burning torch with a police escort through the towns of Warwick and Cranston and then into Providence to the new Rhode Island Jewish Community Center, which is located across the street from the Brown University Football Stadium, where the Governor of Rhode Island, Frank Licht, z"l, landed in his helicopter and walked across the street to greet the runners and help take the burning torch up on a scaffolding to light a fifteen foot tall metal Chanukah menorah, which had been made by a volunteer member of the JCC, a holocaust survivor who owned a junk yard and used Volkswagen hubcaps as the holders of the oil that would burn in the menorah for the entire eight days of Chanukah.

And what did that amazing program The Chanukah Torch Run, cost the new RIJCC and Dr. Carp's budget? Nothing. Everything was donated. The JCC's new multimillion dollar building, which was still in its first year and this program, landed on the front page of every newspaper in New England let alone Rhode Island. Dr. Carp knew that I was very theatrical in orientation when he hired me. I had come to Dr. Carp's attention because my predecessor at the Columbus Jewish Center, who had moved to the Minneapolis JCC to become their Cultural Arts Director grew to regret his decision to do so since the Guthrie Theater was the main focus in that area when it came to theater and back in Columbus, he was the BMOC; the Big Man On Campus. I found out about his desire (read: plan) to return to Columbus when his friends (read: compatriots) back in Columbus started doing "weird things" that were trying to make me look bad and I smelled a rat. So, I called him up and confronted him about what was happening. He was very surprised but also very forthcoming. I recalled that he had been a director for Television, which was then still in its infancy and he had been doing quite well until he took ill due to the stress for which that field was well known. He took the position in the Columbus JC as a way to stay connected to the "theater" but, hopefully, without the level of stress that had gotten to him. I explained that I would gladly step aside to make his life better but that I needed help in finding a new position. He told he would do everything he could to help me.

Minutes after we hung up, I was called into Mayer Rosenfeld's office, who was the Executive Director of the Columbus JC. He told me he was aware of what was "going on" and that he would do absolutely everything he could to make my finding a new position happen quickly and well. He told me to stop doing anything related to the Columbus JC and to focus exclusively on finding myself a new position.

Mr. Rosenfeld knew I was the "real article" since even in the face of a history of big hits produced and directed by my predecessor, who was known to "do everything" including pulling the curtain rather than allowing it to be messed up

by someone else, I had opened the Columbus JC's theatrical season with a show such as they had never seen before and probably never would again. I had brought them a "Jewish oriented play," which in itself was a rarity in that venue at that time, but I felt that doing so was part of my mission and I thought it should be part of the mission of the organization, a Jewish Community Center, as well. The play was one I had produced and directed while I was in the Masters of Fine Arts Degree program in Ohio University in Athens Ohio, just 75 miles southeast of Columbus. The Hillel House on Campus was headed by a Lubavitcha rabbi from Canada, who got behind my idea for producing a play that would depict life in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe before the Great War; World War I. My school assignment was to put on a "scene" but I did not know from "scenes" I only knew about producing entire plays. So, in the time that others in the MFA Directing program worked on "scenes" from plays, I produced entire plays. The play first produced for the Hillel House and later at the Columbus JC was "The World of Shalom Aleichem" by Arnold Perl, which had been on Broadway briefly but done, apparently, in a very presentational style. That is to say, if angels were called for, angels were presented. It was a literal as could be.

My approach was what would be labeled, certainly in those days, as "experimental." At the university, it was well received, but there was not much of an audience for it in that locale, which was what we could call "red neck" territory. Athens is located in the backwoods of Southeastern Ohio where Jews were, and maybe still be thought, to have "horns." I am not kidding.

But, in Columbus, there was a much more cosmopolitan population; nothing like New York City of course, but, still, far more open to new things. And, in my way of "staging" "The World of Shalom Aleichem" there was a great need for being able to accept new thinking. Mind you, there was nothing at all outlandish or shocking. Everything was based in and on reality; no slight of hand or theater magic. But, oh my goodness, does it ever work.

When the audience arrives at the theater, the actors, who are dressed in the garb of Eastern European Jewish "shtettel" inhabitants circa 1880s, greet the audience members as if these people were paying a visit to or even passing through their town. Therefore, these "shtettel-ites" see these "visitors" to their village as potential customers for what they are selling; such as knick-knacks, woven goods and crafts made by the senior citizens who live in the Senior Adult Home next door to the Jewish Center, baked goods like hot rolls and fresh butter, books, lemonade, socks and the like. There is also a coterie of individuals who are not so much "selling" things, but who are still interested in interacting with the visitors like the town rabbi and a woman, who could read your fortune right in the palm of your hand. The actors took the theater tickets from ticket holders and directed those who wanted to purchase tickets to the show to the box office in the lobby. The actors also ushered audience members into the theater, handed them the "program," which was actually printed on both sides of a large paper bag; the kind with large rope-like handles on top – no kidding – but, the actors did not

show the audience members to their “seats” because there were no seats. If you wanted a seat the actors would go and get a folding chair for you, which had been leaning against the walls of the auditorium. The actors, as a troupe, would create a kind of “audience-in-the-round” with the folding chairs, benches, and various cushions that some of the younger audience members might use to sit “comfortably” on the floor. Using various “crowd control” techniques the actors would usher the audience in to the auditorium and, then, seemingly out of nowhere, the play would begin. The stories would get told by the actors who “acted” them out. They, the village members, would know the words and what to say by heart. After all, they grew up with these stories. At intermission, the actors or village members would start selling their wears again and, after the intermission, the host actor would announce that they would now be telling the next and last story, “Gymnasium;” “The High School” in memory of Shalom Aleichem.

At the end of the performance, while the actors were about to take their bows, which was done ensemble, and, perhaps, because they were located literally right next to the audience members, it was very usual for members of the audience to stand up and hug an actor rather than just applauding them by just clapping hands. The entire gathering rapidly would become a “hug-fest” and the only way the event would come to an end would be when the actors would withdraw from the room one at a time in a very natural way, leaving the audience members to “step back” into the reality of the world and leave “The World of Shalom Aleichem” in their memories; perhaps for the rest of their lives.

If the play was just that, it would have been and was, ground breaking in Columbus, Ohio. I called the genre “theater of involvement” but my way of “involving” the audience is much more “honest” approach than what others would do and call “theater of involvement.” Others would allow the audience to get comfortable in their seats in the theater and, then, have the actors come down off of the stage and drag audience members out of their chairs and shout something like “Come on baby let’s make it.” I label that as ridiculous. My way is much more effective and “involves” absolutely everyone who comes to the theater to “see” the show. Anyone who ever saw “The World of Shalom Aleichem” that way – my way – loved it. We took it to the Methodist Theological Seminary in Delaware, Ohio as an ecumenical outreach and they absolutely loved it. It was so funny (odd) to have a Methodist person say that the “father” in the play was exactly like his own father.

I produced “The World of Shalom Aleichem” years later in Poughkeepsie, New York at Shomre Israel Synagogue with the support of Rabbi Morris Bekritski, z”l, who was the father of a classmate of mine at Yeshiva College. Rabbi Bekritski was a ground breaking kind of man as well. He founded the Portland Maine Hebrew Day School, which was later renamed Levey Day School, which is Maine’s only Jewish Day School.

I remember a Passover Seder at the Bekretiski's home in Poughkeepsie. It was the most Orthodox oriented Seder I had ever attended. It was a non-stop learning and singing evening and I recall walking home at 2 AM when the Seder had ended. My Seders, the ones that I lead are rarely attended by those of Orthodox leanings. My Seders reach out to people in attendance to participate and learn on a far broader scale than what one might normally expect the Seder to encompass. I see the Seder as perhaps my one chance to make an impression on my guests in a way that will, hopefully, touch them positively for the rest of their life.

And, that is what really drives me. I just love it; doing it; making it work; grasping the author's idea and putting it on its feet; or solving an unsolvable problem and launching the enterprise that will make the solution a reality to the benefit of all.

When I look back on my life; at what I have done and at what I am doing now, it always amazes me at how it all fits together.

So, when I returned home from my Paris vacation in the year 2000 and started to paint, I was reconnecting to the feelings I used to get from directing plays where I "painted" with people; the actors, costumes, set pieces, lighting effects, the script, sometimes with the authors, through interviews or correspondences, always with their words; all in an effort to "put on a play" for people ... and, as it happens, I got invited to a Bar Mitzvah. Up until then, when I was invited to a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, I used to give the Bar or Bat Mitzvah youngster a few hundred dollars. I would attend the Saturday morning services, on rare occasions the Saturday evening services, and on even more rare instances, a Monday or Thursday morning service and observe the youngsters "mastery" of the Torah reading and, on Shabbas morning, of the Haftara, and on occasion, rarely really, listen to the short talk, really a short "read" about the Torah portion he or she had chanted, but more of a thank you note to those in his family and to the clergy and his or her teachers who had helped get them ready for this time in their lives. It was "indeed" their big day.

I always found the whole thing perfunctory and made to be a bigger deal than it was. Bar Mitzvah is big; a person now being responsible for performing mitzvahs on their own. That is a big deal. But, that is not being celebrated in the big deal Bar Mitzvah to which I am referring. My attendance and my "check" were "rubber stamping" the process; agreeing that this is what it is or is supposed to be. There have been emerging at times in various synagogues what might be called mitzvah projects that a Bar or Bat Mitzvah youngster would support or in which they might actually participate as part of the "process" of their becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah; i.e. a son or daughter of the commandment. But, again, for me, it was more part of the process that was being "acted out" but not much more than a check list item that the youngster could then say he or she had done, but with no more of a goal than to be able to list it on their "big day," with no real commitment to do good on a continuing and ongoing basis. It is all just for show.

I should point out that the large majority of Bar and Bar Mitzvahs to which I have been and still am invited are of the Conservative Jewish persuasion. So, as someone once put it, they are more often 90% bar and only 10% mitzvah. They are all well intended but there is a great deal of hoopla and next to nothing in the way of Limud Torah; the study of Torah.

When I was invited to one of my nephew's Bar Mitzvahs in about the year 2000, I took it upon myself to add to the monetary gift he would receive from me by reading through the Sedrah of the week and the accompanying Haftara and listing all the symbols mentioned in them. I spelled out certain particular words that embodied what was going on in the Sedrah or parts of verses that would be easily recognizable and created images and incorporated those images into a painting, which I had professionally framed and then presented to my nephew as part of my gift to him.

I thought it might be hung in his room at home. But, it was hung in the dining room and has been there for nearly eighteen years. I have continued to create such paintings and, over the years, have added a Biblical commentary; first, just a few paragraphs that pointed out why certain images were included in the painting. But, the written commentaries have evolved into multi-paginal compositions where I try to combine two approaches; one, what I refer to as the "Rashi" approach, where individual words and phrases get clarified and expounded upon and, the second, in the way of how a pulpit rabbi might select a particular phrase or verse in the Sedrah and build a message for the congregation to consider. I endeavor to that for the entire Sedrah; an exhaustive approach to, hopefully, squeeze every single drop out of the Sedrah with some kind of overarching message that anyone reading it might appreciate and, again, hopefully, take for themselves as a way of making their own life that much more meaningful by working it into the way they approach things they do from then and onward.

Again, my message in almost everything I do, "You can be better than you are." The written piece that accompanies one of my Sedrah Paintings gets put in a report folder and placed in a pouch specially made for it on the back of the framed Sedrah Painting. It is my hope that it is a Bar Mitzvah gift that lasts a lifetime. The check that I give a Bar or Bat Mitzvah youngster is in and out of his or her home in no time. My Sedrah Paintings have proven to have much greater staying power. Example: I got a call from a youngster six years after his Bar Mitzvah. He told me his college roommate came home with him and read the Biblical commentary on the back of the Sedrah Painting I had given him. His roommate then asked if he had read the piece and, when he was told that he had read it when he became a Bar Mitzvah, his friend told him that he ought to read it again, which he did right then and there and that after reading it he was so moved that he immediately called to thank me for it again. What kind of Bar Mitzvah gift does that?

I jokingly tell people that based on how long it takes me to write one of my Biblical commentaries and how long it takes me to create one of my Sedrah Painting and on how many I have completed so far that I should complete the entire Torah by the time I am a hundred and forty-six years old.

Granted, my target audience is not usually a youngster with a Hebrew Day School background, but the truth is that the Orthodox youngsters who have received my Sedrah Paintings seem to find them as important as those kids with far less depth of a Torah base.

There was even one gentleman who was a dear friend who was of the Orthodox persuasion and who was going to be chanting his Haftara to mark his 70th birthday. So, as is now my custom, I made him a Sedrah Painting and wrote a Biblical commentary to accompany it and gave it to him as a way of acknowledging what he was doing and the importance of doing mitzvahs in one's life. Upon receiving the Sedrah Painting and the Biblical commentary he was immediately reduced to tears. He was so moved.

I frankly do not think there are many who come from a better perspective and have been exposed to Torah as I have been at Yeshiva University in its high school and in its college, but who was raised in a far less Talmud Torah oriented home, who could create these Sedrah Paintings and write the Biblical commentaries, such as I do, without making it into something that targets a completely different audience.

I created a website for my art work in general so that I can share what I have done with others and so that I can look at the pieces myself when I am away from home or from my office. I do not paint for a living but there are those who have purchased what are called giclée copies of my work, which are high density computer scans of a painting or a photograph and then reproduced using archival inks on either watercolor paper or canvas depending on the original works of art.

Nowadays, I mostly know the grand parents of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah youngsters so, typically, I will give the original painting to the Bar or Bat Mitzvah and give smaller giclée copies to both sets of grandparents of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. I sent out an e-mail to my fellow members on the YUHS Centennial Committee recently before one of the Shabbasos for which I had created a Sedrah Painting with a hyperlink to the page on my website that shows the painting and has the Biblical commentary and a special link to a PDF version of that commentary, which is usually easier to read than the on-line version. I got back some wonderful encouragement one for perhaps one of the busiest retired guys on the list; Professor Alan Dershowitz, BTA Class of 1955, who not only acknowledged the piece I had sent, but who had taken the time to look up the painting I had made for his own Bar Mitzvah Sedrah, which I had made for one of

my nieces a number of years ago, and he was kind enough to say he liked it very much.

I believe, with my Sedrah Paintings and their accompanying Biblical commentaries, I have developed something that, in a small way perhaps, can serve as a retention element that helps or can help keep Jewish teenagers from drifting away from their roots, which has become a common occurrence in the Conservative movement in particular.

Witness the lack of commitment to what had been “Line in the Sand” Jewish values, such as rabbis not performing intermarriages. As much as the rabbis may try to disguise what they are doing as not actually performing intermarriages, the people in their congregations are taking it as being exactly what they are doing. These Jewish Community leaders have placed themselves on a “slippery slope” in their well intentioned battle to retain their flocks. They are allowing the whimpering of “marginal” followers to move them away from the Covenantal Relationship established by Abraham with the Lord and renewed generation-by-generation until today. This is not new. It has happened throughout the history of the Jewish People. It is this type of thing that led to the destruction of the Holy Temples and to the Jewish People being expelled from the Holy Land. This latest drifting away from traditional Judaism is a continuation of what we saw in the 1950’s when the Jewish community began to migrate from the city to the suburbs where cars were a must and where synagogues were usually not in easy walking distance from their members’ homes.

So, what did the Conservative Judaism rabbinical leadership do? They gave anyone who was “forced” to drive or ride to synagogue on the Sabbath a “hetter” or a “waiver” or “dispensation” to do so. The rabbis stressed that this “hetter” was not to be “interpreted” to allow driving on the Sabbath in general and that only driving to and from synagogue was permitted. Of course, the result was the complete degradation of Sabbath observance. The same thing happened with the use of microphones and loudspeaker systems in synagogues on the Sabbath. The rabbis gave a “hetter” for the use of microphones so long as they were turned on prior to the Sabbath, that their controls were not adjusted during the Sabbath and that anyone using the microphone just allowed his or her voice to be “captured” by it and that they did not touch it in any way to adjust it for example to allow someone else who is shorter or taller to “speak or sing” into it more easily. The microphones were only to be used “passively” on the Sabbath or on holidays. Of course, the people, including the clergy themselves, made short shrift of the limitations to the “hetter” concerning the use of the loudspeaker systems on the Sabbath to where, in one fell swoop congregants and clerical leadership as well extended the “hetter” to where it could read as follows: “Anything goes.”

I know. Who is this guy Drew Kopf to be critical of those who are on the frontlines of Jewish education and Jewish communal preservation? You are right. But, that

does not make me wrong in the way I am reading what is going on and, frankly, has been since I was a kid. It is what made Mr. Benjamini's class in Chumash and Rashi launch me into the stratosphere and live, from then on, in two worlds like nobody else I know.

Wherever I have lived, I connected with the Jewish community and did what I could to help support certain basics, such as helping to make sure there was a daily minyan so that those who needed to say Kaddish, the traditional memorial prayer for the dead, could do so with the requisite ten men. I started a Bible study group at one synagogue, which is still meeting now, several years after I left the area and relocated to New York City. At that same Long Island synagogue, during the summer, I delivered a Shabbas morning Devar Torah dealing with two of my favorite topics; "Tisha B'Av" and "Shabbas Nachamu." I have written extensively on both. Shabbas Nachamu was my Bar Mitzvah Sedrah.

I am a member of the Mid-Island Y JCC in Plainview where I played full court basketball at 6:00AM Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday mornings until the death of my mother at the age of 96 in November of 2016 and, in stead, have been swimming there and have been playing golf at various courses on Long Island.

My friend Henry Levy, who is the owner and publisher of the Jewish Post, invites me to write for his newspaper from time-to-time, which I do: Broadway and Off-Broadway play reviews, restaurant reviews and articles dealing with speakers at various embassies in New York City when it in some ways might deal with Israel or the Jewish People. I wrote an article about my Sedrah Paintings in the way of an introduction. I also wrote an article that covered the 20th anniversary of the Rav's Yartzeit and the way it was marked by Yeshiva University with the various speakers and what they presented to those in attendance. I included a "side bar" article dealing with Nathan Lamport, z"l, because the main gathering and lectures were held in Lamport Auditorium, but when I would ask people, "Who was Nathan Lamport?" they did not have a clue. So, it seemed that letting people know who Nathan Lamport was, particularly at the very auspicious time as memorializing the Rav, was very much the thing to do.

I wrote and self-published a book in 1980 titled "The Midgets from Cincinnati" which was back when the word "midgets" was sill politically correct. It is a book of humor that has been made available in PDF format on line at no charge. (I invite you to download and read it and, I hope, it lightens you day). The forward to "The Midgets from Cincinnati" was written by a friend of mine when I was living in Providence, Rhode Island, Burton L. Fischman, Professor (now emeritus) at Bryant University in Rhode Island.

I have been very fortunate. My life has in no way been a free ride, but, having been able to do the things I have done never fails to amaze me. Every step of the way, despite some very deep personal losses and much pain, I have always

been involved in creating things that give me great pleasure in and of themselves.

Last year, I received an e-mail from MTA informing me of the death of one of my classmates. I remembered his name and tried to put him into clearer focus. I opened my copy of our high school yearbook and looked him up. As I read his name and the brief few lines written about him by the teenaged editors so many years ago, I noticed the Hebrew verse following that description. I reflected on how difficult it is for me, still, to translate such a stand alone verse from the Torah, the Writings and the Prophets without at least a dictionary at hand.

I flashed back to my days at MTA and remembered that I had glossed over (read: skipped) the verse selected by the editors for me just as I was about to do with regard to the verse in my late classmate's article. I started wondering what the verse they had selected for me actually was and I turned the pages until I got to the listing and photograph of me. You know the drill. This time, I went to the books and looked up the verse. Kohelless, Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3 Verse 22: "I have seen that nothing is right unless a man enjoys his creations."

You have got to be kidding me! How could the boys – teenagers – who were the editors of our year book have known to select that verse, of all the verses there are in Tanach, to describe me as they did. Ok, you can say this verse can apply to everyone. But, hold it right there. This verse describes me exactly; day-by-day, moment-by-moment, for my entire life. I took the next day to sketch out and paint a piece that now hangs in my office so that I can see it when I look up from my computer screen. It is what I refer to as a "Pasook" or Verse painting and contains the verse in Hebrew and in English and has a dozen or so pictorial references to some of the things I have enjoyed doing.

A few years ago, an acquaintance of mine at the Mid-Island Y JC, who had been working for a toy manufacturer as their financial guru and who was teaching MBA courses at Columbia University, began discussing the idea of his "owning" his own business. I suggested that I engage him as an independent consultant, since he had his own "consulting" company through which he offered business support services and guidance to businesses, while he weighed the idea of "eventually" assuming ownership of my business according to an agreement that we would draft based on his working with and for my organization.

We maintained that "relationship" for eight months with some "advances" made in our company's computing capabilities regarding the maintaining of prices on our website and in our computer accounting program as well as some work done with some of our clients. His interest, overall, was more on the "technical" side of things. Interacting with potential clients was very limited and, since his familiarity with the length and breath of our product offerings remained limited to what ever he might pick up by happenstance rather than through any kind of organized or concerted effort on his part to study the products in anticipation of potential

needs, he really did not gain a full appreciation of the power of what he might be, someday, owning.

If a client needed help in solving a problem with one of our products, he was not able to advise authoritatively; that is he could not say what would and would not work. The best he could say was, "It might work." There are companies that offer products that we sell and do so by saying just that, "It might work." When we work with clients, it is our belief that there are too many downside risks in that kind of "selling." Before we offer a solution, we will do everything we can to know that an application, such as the one being considered for the product, will absolutely work.

However, it was not until my wife Andrea suggested that I ask "Joe" if he was "happy" that I took any step towards seeing where the last eight months had brought us in terms of whether he was ready or if he was even leaning towards taking our "relationship" to the next level; i.e. to develop a succession plan document between us.

When I asked Joe if he was happy, he told me he was not. I probably would have done whatever I could have to help him be happy, but instead, I asked him if he was not happy then why are you still here? He told me I was right and in a couple of weeks he had moved on. We can still touch base regarding things he had done in the computer area or other business related issues, but that rarely comes up any more.

What I learned from that experience was that we (read: I) needed a better succession plan. Nobody can buy my business, which sells so many different products, without having a deep knowledge and appreciation of this wide-ranging knowledge bank. Even other companies that only carry a narrow band of products on our much larger menu would struggle to "digest" the scope of our company's capabilities.

Knowing that no one in my family wanted to take over my company, an idea came to mind, which I actually presented to Michael Strauss, who was, then, the Associate Dean of the Sy Sims School of Business. My idea was to provide Yeshiva College and the Sy Sims School of Business with a real-life practical training ground for its students much as the Einstein Medical School uses the hospital to which it is connected, to allow its students and residents to work in real-life situations. My company would then engage paid student interns from the undergraduate colleges at Yeshiva University to work in areas that would provide them with business related experiences that would, hopefully, be helpful to them should they be interested in pursuing careers in business after being graduated.

My company would also offer positions to Sy Sims School of Business graduate school level students in leadership capacities within the company with each graduating student training his or her replacement from the next year's roster of

students. Such students might serve as “interim” Chief Financial Officer, “interim” Chief Operating Officer, “interim” Chief Executive Officer, which would enable them to speak “from experience” and authoritatively about their responsibilities, accomplishments, mountains climbed, changes made while interviewing for a new position with another company. Professor Strauss liked the idea but, when we presented it to the Development Director at that time, we were told that such “donations” to the University would be sold for whatever financial gains that could be realized and that was all. I recall that the school was still “smarting” from the Bernard Madoff scandal, which had been devastating to the institution in many ways.

When I was an undergraduate student at Yeshiva College, had a work-study job at “Parkers” driving to the Einstein Medical College in the Bronx to deliver Kosher sandwiches to the vending machines on that campus. With my company located on, or very near-by, the Main Campus of Yeshiva University, an undergraduate student, who was interested in computer programming, might have a work-study job building and maintaining the five thousand five hundred plus pages of my company’s Internet website. (No kidding. You read that right. 5,500+ pages).

When my idea for developing an on-campus corporate experience center got rebuffed by the development department, I started thinking of another way to develop a means of identifying an appropriate and willing protégé who could become my successor as the driving force behind and leader of my company. For some reason, I started wondering if I was alone in this dilemma. Most small businesses with which I come in contact are restaurants, automobile repair shops or little retail operations that would be typically sold by business brokers to those who may or may not have experience in running such businesses, or who think they could learn how to do so before they would fail completely. My customers are, more often than not, mega-companies, government agencies such as the United States Marine Corps, where succession is not a problem on the scale that it is for a small business trying to look and be like a big one, such as mine. Anyone taking over my company would have to master a myriad of product application limitations and capabilities before they could feel comfortable and secure in the role as president or owner. I wondered if I was alone in this situation or whether there was someone or some organization that was “out there” providing a way to address this problem of succession.

I started at the top. I contacted the US Small Business Administration in Washington, DC and learned a lot. I learned that in my age bracket, at that time, there were one million five hundred thousand people who owned small business in the United States and the average number of employees in those businesses was twenty. That translated to thirty million jobs depending on owners of companies who are, now at least, staring at eighty years of age as their next big birthday celebration. With some research, I learned that the vast majority of these businesses owners have kids who are not at all planning to take over their

parent's businesses. The succession plans for the vast majority of these companies can be summed up in one phrase: "I'm gonna work until I die."

To say the least, that is not a healthy approach to running a company where the job security of one's employees is just this side of meaningless. If nothing is done soon enough, there will be a "bloodbath" in our country resulting from tens of millions of people losing their jobs as the owners of "Baby Boomer" owned small businesses either close down their operations because they are just too old or no longer able to run them and have no one to take them over, or, because they "worked until they died." This is very very serious. The clock is ticking. If anyone thinks ESOPs, employee ownership programs, can "save the day," from what I understand, there are about eight thousand of them in total. So, unfortunately, ESOPs are not the answer to what is an enormous and very much an immediate problem.

My father often said that if you are looking for a solution to a problem, turn around and you might find it standing there waiting for you. Everything seemed to come together in my mind. There are literally millions of older guys and gals like me who own businesses with no durable succession plans in place. MBA programs like the Sy Sims School of Business are offering MBAs in Entrepreneurism, because finding positions in big companies for MBAs is not what it had been just a few years or a decade ago. There are hundreds of thousands of service men and women coming out of Afghanistan and retiring from our armed services and being encouraged to start their own businesses by the Veterans Administration and others. That is not even to mention the millions of young people who may have entrepreneurial feelings but were not fortunate enough to have been born into a family that owns a "family" business. No one is saying anything about having young people take over older guys businesses. Even the SBA, the Small Business Administration seems to "avoid" that subject. When I searched for "succession" on the SBA website all I got as a result was the word "success."

I put it all together and came up with The National Protégé Enterprise.

I told you I think big. The National Protégé Enterprise (NPE) is a "dating service" on the order of eHarmony.com, Jdate.com and match.com, to name just a few, but with its target audiences being older guys and gals who own small business that are making money and entrepreneurial "wannabes" who are open-minded about becoming a protégé in one of those small businesses leading towards succeeding the current owner of that business according to a formal agreement that would be struck by lawyers on both sides of the equation and with optional "support" services made available by the NPE. The NPE website, smallbusinessnextstep.com, is "a work in progress" as this letter is being drafted. Even though I am what might be considered on the "down stroke" of my career, my feeling is that there is a need and that, while it is seemingly unimportant to the rest of the marketplace, the right thing to do is to do what I am able to do to

launch the NPE and, hopefully, attract the needed funding to bring it to full strength. If the NPE is at all successful, there will, according to my nineteen page business plan, a need for a staff that would eventually fill the entirety of Furst Hall, as an example, with fulltime staff.

My new and improved plan is to donate my company, The Mat King, as part of a “charitable remainder trust” to a foundation that I will create for the purpose of supporting the good works of Yeshiva University and other such organizations that create, foster and maintain a Renaissance Man Resource Center according to guidelines and requisites that will be delineated and provided by the foundation and modified from time-to-time as the breath and scope and of the Renaissance Man Resource Center concept evolves.

The financial pieces would work as before. While I and my wife are alive, the monies I normally receive as either pay or profits from my company would continue to come to me. The company would be staffed as much as possible by Yeshiva students of undergraduate or graduate level depending on the nature of the positions that need to be filled. After my wife and I are no longer alive, the monies normally directed to me or to her as my inheritor would be directed to the foundation, which would donate them to Yeshiva University to offset the requirements needed to support the Renaissance Man Resource Center.

Similarly, the National Protégé Enterprise which is currently part of a second corporation also owned by me, will look for appropriate small businesses that are in need of a protégé but which might be interested in donating their company to the foundation as part of their own “charitable remainder trust” to provide additional work-study opportunities to Yeshiva students and to lock into place eventual funding streams to join the one from my company. I estimate that if each company we recruit to be part of the foundation in the same way is a contributor of an average of \$100,000.00 per year and, if we can eventually have a consortium of ten or a dozen such companies, the foundation would eventually be directing a million dollars to Yeshiva University to support its good work and the Renaissance Man Resource Center on an annual basis in perpetuity.

The NPE is as yet undetermined with regard to whether it will have additional owners or if it will remain solely my own. If it is “its own animal” with significant investors and my role, as founder, is respectful but not to where I could donate it as I intend to do with my current company, then whatever monies that would be directed to me from it would be eventually added to those monies that are to be directed to the foundation for the same purposes; i.e. to be redirected to support the Renaissance Man Resource Center and other good works of Yeshiva University.

The Renaissance Man Resource Center is something I believe is needed for Yeshiva University to help distinguish it from every other institution, whether those institutions be ones of higher learning or, frankly, of any focus or type at all.

To my knowledge, a person who might be described as a “Renaissance Man” is and has always been entirely on his or her own. There is absolutely no support system anywhere for what such unusual people, who are perhaps some of the most creative and interesting one might ever meet, can turn for assistance or even to just talk about their work.

The Renaissance Man Resource Center will not be a degree granting program. It will be open to anyone who is involved in a project or projects and is seeking guidance, or is looking for a way or ways to move their work forward, or for help in prioritizing or, really, anything at all. If the Renaissance Man Resource Center is able to make helpful referrals, it will do so. The Renaissance Man Resource Center is to be there to facilitate worthy endeavors in any way that it is able to do so.

When do we learn of the accomplishments of a Renaissance person? More often than not, not until after they are gone. How much more could such unusually creative people do to improve the world in which we all live had they any kind of dependable assistance and encouragement? That is a good question. But, really, it is impossible to know unless we try.

The Renaissance Man Resource Center, as I envision it, will be a resource “without walls.” It will be. Like Father Abraham’s tent, open on all four sides to any and all persons without restrictions but, also, with no promises. It will function on a “best effort” basis and maintain the tenets and teachings of Yahadus without forcing them on anyone but, still, in respectful observance of same.

Is there anything out there in the world like this? I dare say there is not. Is the Renaissance Man Resource Center anywhere near as important as any of the wonderful and extremely successful educational programs and schools within Yeshiva University? We will only know how important the Renaissance Man Resource Center may ever be if and when you and the leadership of Yeshiva University take the plunge and allow it to have a home and to function as it is intended to do.

When my father was in the process of inventing the Gard-Rite Window Guard, for which he was awarded US Patent Number 2,459,884 filed on April 19, 1948, when I was almost 19 months old, and which was sold widely in the New York Metropolitan area at some pretty big and prestigious stores such as Bloomingdales, until his company failed, it might have been very much appreciated if there had been a Renaissance Man Resource Center for him to have turned for guidance and support. His mother, my Grandmother, Rebecca Woolf Kopf, z”l, who was surely doing what she thought was the right thing, directed him or suggested that he work with a relative of hers, who, somehow, took advantage of my father on the “business” end of the business, and, from what I understand, ruined what was on its way to becoming a wonderful and highly profitable endeavor.

From a strictly monetary point of view, it was certainly a shame that Gard-Rite Window Guards ended as it did. But, it is much more disheartening, tragic, really, when one reflects on the bitter consequences that resulted because my father's affordable and "casement-window-friendly" window guard product that had prevented so many kids from falling out of apartment windows that my father was awarded the Lewis and Conger Award for Safety in 1950, was no longer available on the market and, as a result, far too many little kids, who might have been saved by the Gard-Rite Window Guard had it been there to protect them, died from falling out of unprotected windows. We still have kids falling out of windows to their death even though it is now a law that windows must have fall protection guards on them. If there had been a Renaissance Man Resource Center there for Harold Kopf, his Gard-Rite Window Guards might still be in production and saving kids today.

The Renaissance Man Resource Center would hopefully have provided inventors, like my father, with a neutral third party resource that might have guided him in a different direction when it came to structuring and running his company. Instead, he was at the mercy of the "circumstances" and "resources" at hand; with all due respect to my Grandmother. Looking at the potential value of what I am proposing in the Renaissance Man Resource Center in this way, where there might be times when people's lives could well depend on having such a special institution at the ready, means even more to me now, as I work feverishly and long to hopefully gain your support and approval towards allowing the Renaissance Man Resource Center to come into existence.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of this endeavor, at least from my personal point of view, is that my parents lived on 183rd and Broadway

What are the downside risks for you in adopting the idea of the Renaissance Man Resource Center idea presented herein? Granted, the Renaissance Man Resource Center is different than anything that a university, any university, is known to do. It is way beyond a "think tank," which might well be included in a university roster of programs. But, it might have "think tank" elements or aspects in how it functions along with people to help in ways of all kinds, and, at no fee. The entire program will be funded as described earlier; through the monies flowing from the foundation funded, primarily, by companies proven to generate profits but dedicated to the not-for-profit objectives of the foundation and in the charitable remainder trusts that tie them to it.

Further, along the same line of thinking, it will be the policy of the Renaissance Man Resource Center to offer to "replicate itself" at any other university, college, or any institution or organization that is prepared to meet certain basic standards and, we will do so, at no charge save for any incidental expenses should they become necessary such as round trip travel to and from the new location, and any similar related expenses.

We do anticipate a need for a “legal” component with procedures and documents required for certain situations such as “non-disclosure agreements” or “hold harmless agreements” so that everyone feels and is protected; including the University and its representatives.

Is this Renaissance Man Resource Center something that will be reported in the “laundry list” of accomplishments of what has been “going on” at Yeshiva University lately? I frankly doubt it, unless we just say, “Oh, and then there is the Renaissance Man Resource Center.” There may be new books, TV, or plays, or films, or musical productions, or inventions, or, really, almost anything we can imagine, and we may want to brag about such accomplishments. But, somehow, I envision this as a more subdued effort and service with collegiality as a key component. The idea, as presented, is designed to be completely self-supporting but with the all important guidelines and leadership coming from Yeshiva University. That, in itself is big. But, the potential from what could eventually be a worldwide presence with Renaissance Man Resource Centers in universities everywhere, is, to me, mind-boggling, but correct and, about time.

Is the Renaissance Man Resource Center program going to make a big splash in the public relations department for Yeshiva University? Perhaps it could. But, I get the feeling that what is needed with this very unconventional and, perhaps even delicate and vulnerable initiative is quiet reserve.

You may ask, “What kind of space will the Renaissance Man Resource Center require?” I see it mainly as an office on the order of what Dr. Calvert Schlick carved out for his operation in Mamaroneck. The office should be located on or near to the Yeshiva University Main Campus and needs to be spacious, well endowed with a renaissance man’s tools and welcomingly comfortable for meetings that may be needed for staff and clients alike; such as counseling plenary sessions.

It may also be a good idea to have the National Protégé Enterprise main offices located nearby as well, since, at least while I am still active in them, it would be well for them to be near to where I live, which is on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. I would like very much to be a pivotal part of the Renaissance Man Resource Center until such time as I am unable to do so. It is my desire to serve as a resource to the renaissance persons the organization would be serving. I would also want to be able to use the Center itself in support of my own projects.

Is what I am proposing worth the thirty plus pages it has taken me to present it? In some ways, it seems that if something like this concept was needed, it would have been done already. Perhaps we, I, you, should just let it be thought of as an idea; but not act upon it. But, then, as it has evolved in my own life, how so many special people have touched me, guided me, inspired me to think and from where this idea has come and where it might well go.

When I sat down with Dr. Connolly for lunch in the cafeteria at Dutchess County Community College and he asked me if he could help me in any way and I told him he could challenge the entire academic community in Fencing, I am sure he was as shocked as you must be in even being presented with the proposal to launch the Renaissance Man Resource Center Movement at Yeshiva University. But, in the same way that President Connolly weighed and considered my proposal and judged it to be worthy, I believe the time has come for a center or centers in support of the “rare birds” in our world who are often referred to with the phrase Shirley Kopf used in describing me, a Renaissance Man, and, in all earnestness, I believe it is dearly needed, and, in the way Rabbi Weinbach could see exactly what to do to accommodate my thirst for a Jewish education even in the face of potential and well intended opposition, the absolute perfect place and culture in which the initial Renaissance Man Resource Center has the greatest chance to survive and thrive is at our alma mater; Yeshiva University.

Thank you for reading and considering my proposal. Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss it. I will do whatever I am able to help you with regard to it or anything else you may feel would benefit from my attention. I wish you all the best in your important new position and look forward to hearing from and to have the pleasure of meeting you.

Respectfully,

Drew Kopf
MTA 1964
YC 1968

Yeshiva University
The Renaissance Man Resource Center
Resource Positions

The Shepard Wayne Melzer Memorial Chair in Gaucho “Getting the Job Done” Stick-to-it-iveness.

The Professor Burton L. Fischman Chair in Creative Communication.

The Rabbi David Weinbach Chair of “Out-of-the-Box” Creativity

The Gabriel and Dora Spero Memorial Chair in International Entrepreneurial Flights of Fancy

The Augusta “Goldie” Spero Schwartz Chair in Grand Design

The Louis L. Schwartz Memorial Chair in Adaptability to the American Way of Life

The Shirley Florence Schwartz Kopf Memorial Chair in “You Can Be Better Than You Are” Interpersonal Encouragement

The Harold Kopf Memorial Chair in Universal Problem Solving and Invention Development

The Drew Geoffrey Kopf Chair of Renaissance Thinking