

## **Beth El Synagogue Jewish Book Festival Author Bios**



### **Yousef Bashir**

Yousef Bashir is a Palestinian-American from the Gaza Strip, the son of Khalil Bashir a highly respected educator. Still suffering the effects of a near catastrophic injury at the hands of an anonymous IDF soldier, Yousef made his way to the United States where he earned a BA in International Affairs from Northeastern University and an MA in Co-existence and Conflict from Brandeis University. Now living in Washington DC Bashir has worked on Capitol Hill and served as a member of the Palestinian Diplomatic Delegation to the United States. Yousef is an accomplished author, a vigorous advocate, of Israeli-Palestinian peace and much sought-after public speaker



### **Jeremy Benstein**

Dr. Jeremy Benstein is an educator, author, and Hebrew lover. He holds a BA in linguistics from Harvard, a master's degree in Judaic studies from the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem, and a PhD in cultural anthropology from the Hebrew University. Raised in Toledo, Ohio, he lives in Zichron Yaakov, Israel with his wife, five children, two cats, and many books.



### **Marcia Berneger**

Marcia Berneger is a retired teacher who lives with her husband and three crazy dogs. She taught both first and second grade, as well as special education. She currently teaches Torah school, in addition to her volunteer work in classrooms, libraries, and with various fundraisers. She lives in San Diego.



### **Jaime Bernstein**

Jamie Bernstein is an author, broadcaster, filmmaker and concert narrator. In addition to writing articles and concert narrations, Jamie travels extensively, speaking about music as well as about her father, Leonard Bernstein. Jamie's film documentary, *Crescendo: the Power of Music*, is viewable on iTunes.



### **Aimee Ginsburg Bikel**

Aimee Ginsburg Bikel is an American-Israeli writer, journalist, and public speaker. A veteran of the IDF and a graduate of Hebrew University, she was an award-winning journalist and radio broadcaster in Israel before becoming the first full time Israeli correspondent in India, a post she held for 15 years. She is the director of the Theodore Bikel Legacy Project, which she founded after her husband's passing in 2015. Theodore Bikel was an admired Hollywood Broadway and Television actor, folk singer, musician, composer, and political activist. He appeared in numerous movies and TV programs, co-founded the Newport Folk Festival, and starred more than any actor to-date as Tevye in the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. Bikel received an Academy Award Nomination and star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



### **Jenna Blum**

Jenna Blum is the *New York Times* and #1 international bestselling author of novels *Those Who Save Us* (Harcourt 2004) and *The Stormchasers* (Dutton 2010); novella "The Lucky One" in the post-war anthology *Grand Central* (Penguin 2014); and audio course "The Author At Work: The Art of Writing Fiction" (Recorded Books 2014). She is one of Oprah's Top 30 Women Writers. Jenna earned a B.A. at Kenyon College and an M.A. in Creative Writing at Boston University where she taught Creative and Communications Writing for 5 years, and was editor of *AGNI Literary Magazine*. Jenna has taught fiction and novel workshops for Boston's Grub Street Writers for over 20 years. She interviewed Holocaust survivors for Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Foundation, and works currently with Facing History. Jenna is a national and international public speaker. She is based in Boston where she is working on her 4th novel.



### **Meg Waite Clayton**

Meg Waite Clayton is the Langum-Prize honored, *New York Times* bestselling author of seven novels, and 100+ essays in major newspapers and magazines, often on the subjects of strong women throughout history, and the challenges women face. She holds degrees in history and psychology from the University of Michigan, and is an Order of the Coif graduate of its law school.



### **Mark Cohen**

Mark Cohen is a writer and speaker specializing in the Jewish American scene, from the pop culture comedy of Allan Sherman to the novels of Saul Bellow. His articles have appeared in *American Jewish History*, *Saul Bellow Journal*, *History of Photography*, *Modern Judaism*, and *Midstream*, and newspapers such as the *Forward*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Daily News*, and *Newsday*. He is a graduate of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Cohen lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



### **Helen Epstein**

Helen Epstein is a veteran arts journalist and author or translator of ten books of non-fiction including the trilogy *Children of the Holocaust*, *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for Her Mother's History*; and *The Long Half-Lives of Love and Trauma*. Born in Prague, she grew up in New York City. Her reviews and articles have appeared in many newspapers, magazines, and websites.



### **Kirsten Fermaglich**

Kirsten Fermaglich has never changed her name. She teaches history and Jewish Studies at Michigan State University. Along with name changing, she has written about American Holocaust memory and Betty Friedan. She is co-editor of the journal *American Jewish History*. Fermaglich lives in East Lansing, Michigan with her husband Jon, her children, Raphael and Dalia, and their psychotic pitbull Gwenny.



### **Jane Gabin**

A native of New York City, Jane S. Gabin earned her BA at Queens College of the City University of New York and her PhD in English from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As an independent scholar, she has participated in numerous academic conferences and lectured extensively in the United States and abroad, spending considerable time in England and France.



### **Marra B. Gad**

Marra Gad was born in New York and raised in Chicago. She is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and holds an advanced degree in modern Jewish history from Baltimore Hebrew University. Gad currently lives in Los Angeles, where she is an independent film and television producer.

**Rabbi Daniel Greyber**

Daniel Greyber is rabbi at Beth El Synagogue in Durham, NC, author of *Faith Unravels: A Rabbi's Struggle With Grief and God* ([www.faithunravels.com](http://www.faithunravels.com)) and a fellow in cohort VII of the Rabbinic Leadership Initiative at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. Rabbi Greyber served as Team USA Rabbi at the 20<sup>th</sup> World Maccabiah Games in Israel, is a former Jerusalem Fellow at the Mandel Leadership Institute, faculty member at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles and Executive Director of Camp Ramah in California from 2002 - 10. His articles have been featured in a wide range of Jewish publications. For more information, visit [www.rabbigreyber.com](http://www.rabbigreyber.com).

Jewish law defines the mourning process for a parent, spouse, sibling and child. But what happens when we lose someone who does not fit in those categories? In *Forgotten Mourners*, author of *Faith Unravels: A Rabbi's Struggle With Grief and God*, Rabbi Daniel Greyber will recall his own experience of being a forgotten mourner after the death of two close friends and we will explore how we can build communities that acknowledge all who grieve and help them to heal.

**Joy Ladin**

Dr. Joy Ladin is a professor of English and holds the David and Ruth Gottesman Chair in English at Stern College. She received her PhD at Princeton, MFA in creative writing from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and BA from Sarah Lawrence College. A nationally recognized speaker on gender and Jewish identity she has spoken around the country and has been featured on a number of NPR programs most notably, "On Being with Krista Tippett.

**Laura Limonic**

Laura Limonic is an assistant professor of sociology at the College of Old Westbury of the State University of New York. Her research is in the area of contemporary immigration to the United States and the integration trajectories of ethnic and ethno-religious groups.





### **Elaine Orr**

Elaine Neil Orr is a writer of fiction, memoir, and literary criticism. With stories set in Nigeria and the American South, she delves into themes of home, country, and spiritual longing. *Swimming Between Worlds*, her newest, is called by Charles Frazier, “a perceptive and powerful story told with generosity and grace.”

Orr was born in Nigeria to medical missionary parents and spent her growing-up years in the savannahs and rain forests of that country. Her family remained in Nigeria during its civil war. She left West Africa at age sixteen and attended college in Kentucky. She studied creative writing and literature at the University of Louisville before taking her Ph.D. in Literature and Theology at Emory University. She is an award-winning Professor of English at North Carolina State University and serves on the faculty of the low-residency MFA in Writing Program at Spalding University.



**Howard Reich** Howard Reich is the Emmy Award-winning arts critic of the *Chicago Tribune* and the author of six books. These include *Prisoner of Her Past*, about his mother’s unspoken Holocaust childhood which inspired the PBS documentary film of the same name.