

## Looking For Rose, continued from page 18

pictures of him as a child along with pictures of her grandchildren. We never once spoke of Rose, who I now know had died just around that time. I don't know if Aunt Gert knew that her older sister Rose had passed away.

One afternoon Aunt Gert and I had a singular conversation about Joey and Paul Robeson that has stuck with me as a memory with underlying meaning. Aunt Gert had a small record album collection including show tunes, Frank Sinatra records, a few operas, and one recording that stood out, Paul Robeson's, "Ballad for Americans." Written in 1939 and first performed in 1940, Ballad for Americans was memorably the anthem of both the Communist Party and the Republican Party presidential nominating conventions of that year. "I'm just an Irish, Negro, Jewish, Italian, French and English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Polish, Scotch, Hungarian, Swedish, Finnish, Canadian, Greek and Turk and Czech and double-Czech American," Robeson sings in his deep voice. Aunt Gert explained the album's presence among her other records, "That was Joey's record, he loved it." Did he think of Rose when he listened to it, dreaming that Robeson's vision of a potential America could heal his terrible loss? As I pulled that record out of the stack, was Aunt Gert thinking of Rose, perhaps on the verge of telling me the family stories I most longed — and dreaded — to hear?

The month Paul Robeson first sang "Ballad for Americans" on the radio, November 1940, Lorraine Hansberry's father Carl won his suit in the United States Supreme Court to move south of Washington Park. *The Chicago Defender* announced the victory with a three inch headline, "HANSBERRY DECISION OPENS 500 NEW HOMES TO RACE."

But even with his financial successes in real estate (he was known as "the Kitchenette

King") and the victory in the Supreme Court, Carl Hansberry came to believe that racism in the United States was too deeply entrenched to change within his lifetime and by 1946, he determined to move his family to Mexico. While he was in Mexico finding a house for his family, he died of a brain aneurysm. He was only 51 years old and his daughter, Lorraine, attributed the stroke to the constant pressures of being a Black man in the United States.

Lorraine's first published poem, "Flag from a Kitchenette Window," appeared in the leftist publication *Masses and Mainstream*. I read it as her literary conversation with Gwendolyn Brooks and her striving, patriotic father: "The three-colored banner raised to some / Anonymous freedom, we decide / And on the memorial day hang it / From our window and let it beat the / Steamy jimcrow airs"

As I write this in 2021, across the 80-year span between 1941 and now, I see the gathering, urgent concerns of the Jewish community and the Black community cascading into separate, unconnected silos. Whether or not individuals had political or religious outlooks that crossed ethnic borders, daily struggles were segregated. Finding and keeping a job or a place to live or experiencing the dignity of putting on a uniform to represent your country, the nature of each of these for white Jews was different from the experiences of African Americans. For the very few interracial couples like my Aunt Rose and Mr. A, troubles could be neither fully shared, nor separately siloed. Rose and Mr. A did not settle in Chicago for very long. Their move there in the late 1930s was in the heart of the Great Migration, but the Great Migration's transition from rural south to urban north does not describe their uncommon journey's end. ■

## Poetry held close in 2020

*Provisions: Poems Held Close in a Time of Crisis*, edited by Claire Schwartz and Nathan Goldman, published by Jewish Currents, 2021. Reviewed by Hannah Davis

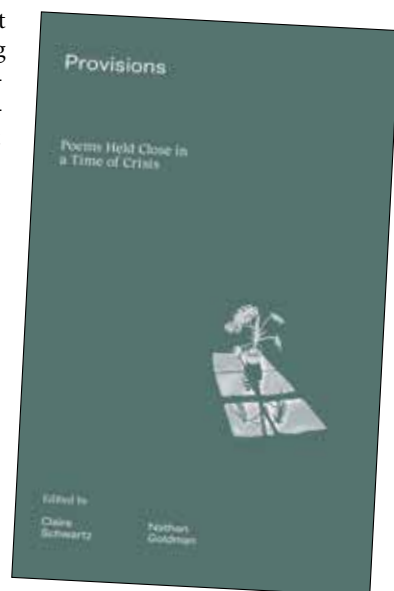
"Provisions: Poems Held Close in a Time of Crisis" was a biweekly column in *Jewish Currents* that ran from April 3–July 20, 2020. "Conceived as a way of sharing and reflecting on poems held close as we confronted the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pieces took on new forms after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police triggered a global uprising against anti-Black racism." *Jewish Currents* collected the columns and published them as a beautiful, thoughtful, accessible book.

The poems and commentary span a broad range of topics: from a priestess from the 23rd century BCE praying to her god from exile, to a depiction of two Black boys during riots in New York in 1967, to a modern song of queer domestic love and joy. There were poems that challenged the reader or offered comfort, poems of nostalgia and grief, poems about friendship or solitude or trauma or celebration. The commentaries felt like a friend giving a personal recommendation: why the contributors connected to each piece and how they found it relevant to this year of history-in-the-making.

Eric Garner made an appearance in the book, in "A Small Needful Fact" by Ross Gay. The poem made the rounds after Garner was murdered by police, memorializing his life and his work for the Parks and Rec Horticultural De-

partment, putting plants in the ground which likely even now "continue to grow, continue / to do what such plants do": housing "small and necessary creatures," beautifying our environment, and "making it easier / for us to breathe." A small reminder that Eric Garner accomplished more in his life than just dying, and should be remembered as such, even as we work for a world where deaths like his never happen.

Claire Schwartz, the editor of *Jewish Currents*, reflected on what it means to live life fully, to live for a future you will never see and to still consider the work worthwhile. Her selection, "On Living," by the Turkish poet Nâzim Hikmet, tells us that "Living is no laughing matter: / you must take it seriously, / so much so and to such a degree" that you would die for people you don't know, plant



## Federation annual campaign sustains community

Rachel Wall, special to the WJN

With the allocations process in full swing, the Jewish Federation of Greater Ann Arbor is pleased that the community has collectively raised more than \$1.16 million to enrich Jewish life in greater Ann Arbor, Israel, and around the world through the 2021 Annual Community Campaign. This total represents contributions from more than 600 community members.

The Annual Community Campaign is how members of the local community take care of one another here in Washtenaw County and around the world. In partnership with its beneficiary organizations, the campaign enables Federation to help build and sustain the local and worldwide Jewish community through programming, initiatives, social services, and partnerships with both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

Each year, organizations that serve the Jewish community complete an annual written and oral request to Federation for funds to support their operations. These funds are allocated from the Annual Community Campaign and allow the organizations to focus on carrying out their vital missions in the community instead of on time-consuming fundraising efforts throughout the year. The Allocations Committee, made up of volunteer community members, reviews these requests and makes allocations recommendations to Federation's Board of Directors. The process takes place throughout April and May.

As with many aspects of life over the last year, the 2021 campaign has looked very different from other years'. Planning for the early stages of the campaign in spring and summer 2020 was filled with uncertainty. There have been no large-scale events at which to hug old friends and shake hands with new acquaintances.

Instead, this year has offered new opportunities. In December, the Jewish Young Professionals group held a Virtual 5K "Hanukkah Hustle," which included participants from across the

country and a socially distanced meetup at Nichols Arboretum. In February, the virtual Main Event cabaret starring Tovah Feldshuh and Ari Axelrod welcomed over 400 attendees for an evening of digital togetherness and phenomenally talented singing and storytelling. In these times of isolation, Federation has maintained its commitment to providing and inspiring philanthropic leadership and community building to nurture a strong, engaged, connected, vibrant, and enduring Jewish community.

In addition to the Annual Community Campaign last year, the community supported Federation in raising \$153,000 specifically for COVID-related needs in Washtenaw County, on top of the \$1.347 million raised from the 2020 Annual Community Campaign. These COVID relief funds allowed Jewish Family Services to expand telehealth services and deliver kosher meals to older adults in need; the Jewish Community Center to provide safe childcare services when so many young families had no other options; and Hebrew Day School to make radical structural changes to hold school in person. These incredible feats would not have been accomplished without the generosity of each and every donor to these community-wide campaigns.

Although vaccines suggest there is reason to be hopeful for the future, the greater Ann Arbor Jewish community still experiences tremendous need. This year, Federation is asking everyone who can to give generously, now, more than ever, to the 2021 Annual Community Campaign before the end of the allocations process this spring. Federation is deeply grateful to the community for supporting those most in need and building a vibrant, welcoming, inclusive, secure, and sustainable Jewish community in greater Ann Arbor, Israel, and around the world.

To make a gift or pledge to the 2021 Annual Community Campaign, visit [jewishannarbor.org](http://jewishannarbor.org) or contact Federation's Communications & Development Manager Rachel Wall at [rachel@jewishannarbor.org](mailto:rachel@jewishannarbor.org) or (734) 773-3533. ■

olive trees you and your children will never enjoy, check the weather on your deathbed, or, like Hikmet, spend 28 years in prison on charges of sedition and still create art about freedom. Schwartz says "to take living seriously, this poem reminds, is not to hoard life-chances, but to nourish the life-chances of us all." It was strikingly similar to Jewish philosophy: "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it."

In early February, *Jewish Currents* hosted a webinar and poetry reading by three of the contributors to the column: Chase Berggrun, Wendy Xu, and Kaveh Akbar. They each read the poem they'd selected and talked about how they'd found it and what it meant to them, and then had a Q&A

session. They discussed the purpose of poetry in times of struggle, the power of rereading and rediscovering familiar texts, the responsibility of poets and artists to work for change on a larger scale. The readings were powerful, all the more so for being read by someone deeply affected by the selected poems, and for being read out loud in community. Berggrun quoted a Holocaust-era poet who said "a poem is like a handshake": this webinar felt like a room full of handshakes, everyone on the call making small points of personal connection.

An audience member asked how we could reconcile the desire to go back to "normal" post-pandemic with the knowledge that the "normal" we had before was deeply harmful and unjust, and how to make art that moved toward a better future. Akbar quoted Gwendolyn Brooks, saying, "first fight, then fiddle": marginalized people have always had to clear space to make art, and have been able to use their art to clear space in turn for others. The overarching theme was that art was necessary, but not sufficient: we still needed to do the work of making the world we want to live in. ■