

Pickles, Seder and Camp

By Elisabeth Wechsler

Want to learn how to make pickles, jam or chutney? Mark your calendars for Saturday, February 4 and join in the fun to prepare for Tu B'Shevat. This workshop is open to the Beth El community and may be an expanded way to celebrate the holiday that honors trees of the season and the fruits they bear: hard, soft, with- and without seeds. At the Seder itself on Wednesday, February 8th you will learn what each of the fruit types is, with both fresh and preserved fruit made on the previous Saturday provided.

The Tu B'Shevat celebration is just one of several ideas Ruth Ehrenkrantz is planning for Spring. "Everyone here is interested in cooking and local foods, so this seemed a good way to tie it to the holiday," she said. At one of her first Chanukah Bazaars, Ernie Alexander (a founding member of Beth El), brought pickles he had made and sold them at the bazaar, giving her the idea.

March 7 Erev Purim begins another celebration at Beth El in which the entire Megillah (Book of Esther) will be read in Hebrew. Volunteers are needed to read a section. Then, various highlights of the Megillah will be read in other languages (by volunteers, of course) and the celebration will include schnapps and juice tastings plus songs led by Rabbi Zellman. "Maybe we'll have sake with the Japanese reading," Ruth said, giving a universal feel to the evening.

As chair of the Ritual Committee (which exists to support the clergy), Ruth is scheduling a Seder for the second night of Passover (Saturday, April 7th) for the Beth El community. Bonnie Cooperstein is coordinating this event. There will be a catered meal and both rabbis will lead the Seder. Last year the second Seder was attended by more than 100 people. Signup and costs will be announced at a later date.

Ruth attributes her love of working with people to her camp experience at Habonim in Red Hook, NY. The camp is sponsored by a Zionist organization and is set up like a

kibbutz. The kids work every day but Shabbat and are divided into sections for each task to be done, she said. Her parents insisted that

Ruth attend this camp with her brothers, Jonathan and Dan, because her mother was planning to make Aliyah to Israel when she met Ruth's father in England. They married and moved to the U.S. instead.

"Camp is a key experience for many people and, especially, for me," Ruth said. She found that she liked working with people in this way and that that's what led her to work with Beth El—taking on projects, planning programs, and so forth.

A Berkeley native, Ruth and husband Spencer Klein, plus their two sons Solomon (14) and Micah (11) enjoy hiking at Yosemite. Last summer they whitewater-rafted on the Rogue River in Oregon and explored the area nearby.

As she describes her life, there are "chapters." She has a degree in arts management and landscape architecture, ran an arts colony on Nature Conservancy land, has done regional environmental planning and is now raising the two boys with Spencer. Solomon had his Bar Mitzvah last year and is now in Beth El's Midrasha. Micah is in 6th grade religious school and soon will be preparing for his Bar Mitzvah.

Ruth was raised in a home with strong Jewish practice. They celebrated all the holidays with her mother almost always singing Jewish songs. Her father was an architect and his father was a rabbi. Ruth's family lived in Berkeley until the Reagan era when they moved to Chappaqua, NY. Her brother Dan is now a rabbi in Philadelphia and her other brother, Jonathan, lives in Mt. Vernon, NY. Her mother moved to White Plains, NY, to be near her synagogue, and visited Ruth at Beth El for this fall's Shabbaton.

In 1989, Ruth moved back to Berkeley and met Spencer in 1994.

Spencer is an astrophysicist at Lawrence Berkeley Lab and focuses on the South Pole where he has visited twice (the last trip was five weeks). The South Pole is apparently a good place from which to study neutrino physics. He recently gave a talk at the Lunch and Learn Series.