

Shabbat Chinuch
Young Israel of St. Louis
May 2018

In memory of: Adele and Rabbi Frank Hoffman

Congratulations to all of you for reaching this milestone in your Torah studies - Shabbat Chinuch – a program established in memory of our parents, Adele and Rabbi Frank Hoffman. We wanted to give you an idea why this program so exemplifies who our parents were and what they stood for.

Our mom was born in New York in 1918 which relative to St. Louis had a much more developed Jewish community when she was going to school. Our dad was born in Webster Groves in 1914 to parents who had immigrated from a shtetel in the Ukraine which no longer exists. Our family has been a part of the Orthodox Jewish community since the 1880s when our father's uncle came to St. Louis followed by many other family members.

When our dad was a child, Jewish education in St. Louis was still in the form of a cheder, an afternoon Jewish studies program. There were several Orthodox shuls, but there was no day school. He was fortunate in that he went to college in New York and Chicago and received Semichah from the Skokie Yeshiva, so he knew the importance of Jewish education.

After World War II a focus on Jewish education began as soldiers began to return home from the war and start families. Several families got together and decided to begin a day school in St. Louis that would rival the public schools in education and provide a comprehensive Jewish education as well.

When the Hebrew Academy first began there was no school building which could house all of the students. There were many locations that held different classes including a school building on Demun Avenue in Clayton, a building in Wellston, and old home on Price Road in Creve Coeur, the Zechariah Yosef Yeshiva on North and South and the classrooms of the Chesed Shel Emeth shul on North and South. Finally in 1960, 50 years ago, the Academy moved into its current location on Warson Road. The people that agreed on this location were forward thinkers as there was almost nothing out on Warson Road which was considered so far away from the Jewish community in University City.

Our dad was instrumental in securing the land, raising the money and developing the site with the help of Sam Rich, a Jewish builder who lived on our street (Shandel Drive which was named for his mother, Shaindala Rich), and built many of the homes in University City. At that time there was no central sewer system along Warson Road, and in order to get permission to build, the Academy had to run a sewer pipe all the way from Olive Street Road to the school.

This was the only Jewish day school in town, so if you wanted to attend the school, it was open to everyone. Although most of the students were from the Orthodox community, there were others who belonged to other shuls or no shul and whose parents worked on Shabbat, but the school's policy was to be inclusive to all.

Our teachers came from all walks of life. Most of the Hebrew teachers were American Rabbis, but some were not Rabbis, some were Israeli and many were women. The English teachers came from all different backgrounds as well.

Running a school in those days was extremely difficult. People in general did not have as much money as they do today, and Jewish day school education was no where as common place as it is today. So many of the programs that you are used to having were not even thought of in those days. People of our parents' generation worked long and hard to build a building, develop a good staff of teachers and create a high quality school that was devoted to excellence in both secular and Jewish education.

Our parents were two of the many people of their generation that gave so much of their time and resources to create the school because they felt that Jewish education was so crucial to raising a Jewish family. And as hard as people worked in places like New York and Chicago, creating, running and developing a school in a city like St. Louis with a much smaller Jewish population was a monumental task.

All of us owe a great deal of gratitude to people like our parents, and there were so many of them, that gave so much time and effort to create the school that has educated so many Jewish students over the last 60 – 70 years.

We hope that you can begin to appreciate all of the effort that went into creating a new school in such a difficult time. You are the beneficiaries of this hard work – and congratulations again to all of you for achieving this wonderful milestone.

Kenny Hoffman
Teaneck, NJ
Class of 1966

David Hoffman
Needham, MA
Class of 1969