David Raphael 0:00
[COLD OPEN] One of the things that we're invested in, and we know based on our research that grandparents are interested in, is sharing their family narratives, the importance of family stories.

Siri 0:10
Here's what I found.

David Raphael 0:11
Oh, why did she... why was she talking? Siri started talking to me. I bought an Apple Watch and it's like having a Jewish grandmother on my wrist. "Have you eaten yet? Are you standing? Are you sitting? How come your posture's so bad?"

Heidi Rabinowitz 0:25
[MUSIC, INTRO] This is The Book of Life. I'm Heidi Rabinowitz. Today's episode is all about grandparents. We will hear from David Raphael, co founder of the Jewish Grandparents Network. And we'll enjoy the audio book Bubbe and Zaide written and voiced by Anne Marie Asner, along with the famous actor Ed Asner as Zaide. You may remember Anne Marie from our December 2019 episode, when she told us about her Yiddish inspired picture book series Matzah Ball Books. Before we dive into the episode, let's hear Anne Marie's suggestion for boosting black voices.

Anne-marie Asner 1:12
Hi, this is Anne Marie Asner, author of Bubbe and Zaide, the latest book in the Matzah Ball Books series of Yiddish inspired picture books. I identify as an Ashkenazi Jewish woman. I'll be joining you on the podcast to talk about my #ownvoices book, which centers around Caucasian Yiddish type characters, like Noshy Boy and Shmutzy Girl, but I would also like to boost black female voices. A personal favorite is Beloved by Toni Morrison, which gives a window into the black female experience in pre and post Civil War America and is a true literary treasure to read. Hope you enjoy both this podcast and Beloved.

Heidi Rabinowitz 2:07
David, what is the Jewish Grandparents Network?

David Raphael 2:10
The Jewish grandparents network is the first and actually the only organization formed exclusively to support and advance grandparents in their central role as key members of multi generational families, transmitters of Jewish values, and ultimately, key supporters of Jewish life. And there are a number of pieces to that. One piece of it is to support grandparents in the context of kind of greater complexities in American family Jewish life these days, we quote the new Jewish family of multi faith families, multiracial families, recombinant families, that the families that we grew up are very different than families today, and support grandparents in those roles. Also in recognition that many grandparents, and we have data on this, may not feel comfortable in their roles as transmitters of Jewish values, customs and traditions. And the third piece of it would be to encourage organizations, both to recognize grandparents' roles, to partner with them, and to support them in their efforts as well.

Heidi Rabinowitz 3:20
Is there something unique about Jewish grandparenting in particular?

David Raphael 3:26
Yes, I think there's a lot of things. So, I guess to start, the whole dynamic of the immediate family, this wonderful article by David Brooks was in The Atlantic magazine several months ago, that basically says that

the concept of the immediate family as primary family unit is relatively a new one. And maybe not really one that can be of success in the long term. He says that basically, in all traditions, grandparents have been the essential parts of families and we know in our research for instance, that for grandparents who live within an hour of their grandkids by car, bus or train, half of them are providing some kind of childcare service on a regular basis. So grandparents are central supporters of family life today in more ways than people recognize. And it's always been that way. In terms of the Jewish dynamic, we talk a lot about the importance of grandparents in transmitting Jewish values, customs and traditions. There are multiple studies that demonstrate that children who have strong relationships with their grandparents are more connected Jewishly, and those are studies done by the Cohen Center and others that looked at Israel Birthright alums and other young adults, saying that young adults and teens had strong relationships with their grandparents are more connected Jewishly. We know that there are studies out there that demonstrate that young adults and teens who had strong relationships with their grandparents are less likely to be engaged in unhealthy social emotional behaviors. And we're very invested in the work of Marshall Duke, the psychologist at Emory University, and Marshall is on our advisory committee and a really terrific grandfather, who tells us that kids who know their family stories are more emotionally resilient. He calls them "bubbe meises," and he doesn't say that in a pejorative way. But it's the transmitters of those values. that often happens through the grandparents more specifically, it's the grandmother who is transmitting those, who is sharing those stories. And so grandparents in all traditions have this special role in transmitting our family stories, which are linked to emotional well being in children. Jewishly you know, grandparents today, you know, we say we stretch out our arms and our history goes out 100 years in either direction. My grandparents came over from Eastern Europe. Russia and Romania. My father lived through the Depression. We know many grandparents today, whose parents and grandparents were Holocaust survivors. So specifically in regard to Jewish grandparents today, there is a link to that immigrant story, and the Holocaust story, and the other stories of those times, the birth of the State of Israel, which are central to our Jewish identity, and we are the ones who are sharing those stories and those traditions. So those are some ways I think, in which Jewish grandparents are often the ones who provide those vital links between both our traditions and our narratives.

Heidi Rabinowitz 6:43
During this global pandemic, many grandparents and grandchildren are not able to spend time together physically, so what are your recommendations for keeping those relationships strong and healthy? And what are some remote activities that grandparents and grandchildren can do together?

David Raphael 7:01
You know, the first thing I would say to grandparents is, don't panic. That's to say, we have this notion that if we don't see our grandchildren, they're gonna forget us. But Marshall Duke reminds us there are lots of instances where families are separated, whether it's because of military engagement or long term travel, other reasons, this is not the only experience that we've had where families have separated. This is the first time you have access to social media and communication, such as Zoom and FaceTime and other visual media. So grandparents are using those formats, obviously very two dimensional. We have grandparents who tell us that they miss that visceral sense of being with their grandchildren. The other challenge with Zoom and FaceTime is that our kids are kind of Zoomed out, like you know, a grandkid says No, not another Zoom call, I don't want to do it.

Heidi Rabinowitz 8:02
They're oysgezoomt.

David Raphael 8:04
Right, oysgezoomt! So what we've been exploring in the Jewish Grandparents Network is opportunities to create more three dimensional activities connecting, let's say via Zoom. So is there a way for instance, where a

grandparent and a grandchild connect via Zoom and then carry out some kind of activity each in their own home, and then come back and talk about it. And we're working in partnership with a number of different organizations, such as Beit Hatfutzot and Shalom Learning, to explore more three dimensional opportunities for grandparents and grandkids to engage. There are games that people could play remotely: somebody was telling me that her child's grandfather taught her how to play chess online. We know that children love making tents out of pillows and blankets and stuff like that. Grandparents could make a tent in their house and kids could make in their tent in their house and they could have a tea party together. We're actually developing curricula around hachnasat orchim, welcoming the guest. So grandparents could be inviting dolls into their tent. And kids could be inviting dolls into their tent. Depending on the age of the kid they could do, you know, we used to play hot and cold, where you would hide something and you know, getting hotter, colder, colder. And there's certainly, there's crafts and arts. Baking is something that we could do together. You know, each individually; part of it obviously has to do with the age of the child. I think grandparents should be thinking about what they can do to give the parents a break. Depending on the age of the child, you know, whether it's reading a book, or playing a game or building models with Legos, whatever it is, something that they could do, that would interest their grandchild so the parent could have a little time to themselves to do work or to lie down or eat lunch, have a snack, have some coffee, and just give them a break, recognizing that the important role of the grandparents here is not only to engage with the grandchildren, but also to be supportive of the parents. There's a lot of dynamics we hear when it comes to the COVID19 pandemic, one of the things we hear a lot is grandparents are telling us, our children are now protecting us. And we're the ones who are feeling vulnerable because we're over 60 or 65. And so that change in relationship between grandparents and their adult children is really important. In terms of other advice, I just think each grandparent has to determine what they feel safe about and what they're not prepared to do. And I also feel like they need to trust their children. I miss my granddaughter dearly, but my daughter's not ready to get into the car and travel for 10 hours to be here because she has to stop along the way. So I think everybody's got to work in partnership with their children to find a level of reconnecting in a way that they're comfortable with, and you really have to, like you do a lot as grandparents, take your signals from your kids.

Heidi Rabinowitz 11:08
Tell us about your own experience as a Jewish grandfather.

David Raphael 11:13
So I have one granddaughter, her name is Bina. She's extraordinary. She's turning three in August. She's a hoot. You know, we haven't seen her since this all started. We're in Atlanta and so we had made it our purpose is to make sure either my wife and I saw her at least once a month, we would travel to Baltimore. Now I want to say we talk to her via Zoom like every other day, give or take, and some time we'll be on the phone for five minutes and sometimes we'll be on the phone for two hours. Because my daughter and my son in law need a break, like they're both just exhausted. And so you know, we'll do the Bubbe and Zaide show for two hours and entertain her you know, just try to stay in there on, it's not so easy on Zoom. But because my granddaughter is so young she's transitioned very, very smoothly. The same kind of joy that we both feel that we get on Zoom or FaceTime as we do when we're in person. Obviously, it's not the same. But it is possible to maintain those connections. We like to read her books online. We'll get out of book and we'll point the phone at it, it's low tech, but you know, we do that.

Heidi Rabinowitz 12:22
Do you have any favorite Jewish children's books that you want to shout out?

David Raphael 12:27
All my favorite Jewish children books are pretty old, because they're the ones I read to my children. There's one that I love that's really timely from PJ Library. It was originally called Tea with Grandpa and now it's Tea

with Zayde. And it's about a child and her zaide who get together every day at three o'clock for tea and they do this and that. And in the last frames you're seeing that they're getting together virtually instead of in person. That resonated for me a lot. There was a book we used to read to our kids about life on kibbutz called the Chicken Man.

Heidi Rabinowitz 13:03
Yeah, those are great choices Tea with Zayde by Barney Saltzburg and Chicken Man by Michelle Edwards. Good choices.

David Raphael 13:09
I love that book.

Heidi Rabinowitz 13:11
And what does your granddaughter call you?

David Raphael 13:13
Zaide.

Heidi Rabinowitz 13:14
She calls you Zaide, sweet.

David Raphael 13:15
Yeah, so my wife is Bubbe. And I never had a Zaide. I had a Nana and Pop and my kids had Mom Mom and Pop Pop. But what we've discovered in our engagement with grandparents is that either people flee from Yiddish grandparental names, or they run towards them. We heard people say, Oh, I'm not a Zaide, you know, because they still listen to rock and roll. But by and large, we've discovered that grandparents choose grandparental names based on a grandparent they loved. So my wife had a Bubbe who she adored, and I was pleased to be a Zaide to her Bubbe.

Heidi Rabinowitz 13:50
That's so nice. I love that. It's tikkun olam time. What action would you like to invite listeners to take to help heal the world?

David Raphael 14:01
There are two that come to mind for me. One is more globally, I think we're at a time where everybody should take responsibility both for voting and for encouraging others to vote, and doing things that enable others to vote. No matter what your politics are, this is a major election coming up. And I think all of us need to play a role in ensuring that everybody has a voice in determining where our country is going. And the other one is that, you know, I used to travel a lot before the pandemic. And two things happen when a plane is delayed or there's some snafu when you're traveling. Either people get really, really nasty. Or they get really, really nice and cooperative and collaborative and they work together. "Well, let me help you fit this luggage. What if I move this around?" Whereas you have some people saying "Don't touch my luggage!" You know. So this is one of these times that I think everybody's feeling stress and everybody's feeling on edge. And I think one of the things that we could do in terms of tikkun olam is recognize that this is a time to be cooperative and collaborative instead of acrimonious and negative, that each of us in our own ways in whatever encounter we're involved in, whether it's with the cashier or crossing somebody while you're hiking, recognize that this is an important opportunity to be menschlich, instead of to be mean spirited. So if you're walking on a path, and somebody is walking towards you, then you be the one who is a mensch and moves to the side so the other person can walk by with appropriate social distance. So those are two things that come to mind.

Heidi Rabinowitz 15:45
Good. Let's take another moment to engage in tikkun olam by using our own white privilege to boost black voices. Is there a work by a black creator that you would like to shout out?

David Raphael 15:59
Well, the one person who I read on a regular basis is Charles Blow, who's a writer and editorialist, columnist for The New York Times. He's a magnificent writer, incredibly thoughtful. He writes beautifully. There's also Roxane Gay of the New York Times, who is another really wonderful columnist. So those are two folks that I read on a regular basis.

Heidi Rabinowitz 16:21
Okay, good. Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that I haven't thought to ask you?

David Raphael 16:27
Well, the one thing I wanted to mention real quickly, is that we spoke a little bit about the importance of family narratives and sharing our family's stories. We have a new page on our website, JewishGrandparentsNetwork.org, and there's a page called Pop Up Stories and we're encouraging people to share their family stories. So for your listeners, if you have a wonderful story of a grandparent or an aunt and uncle who were important influences in your life or specific story that kind of changed things or framed your way of thinking, we'd love you to submit it. If people have questions about the Jewish Grandparents Network, we're a new organization, so people could reach out to us and I will get back to them personally.

Heidi Rabinowitz 17:11
Excellent. David Raphael, thank you so much for joining us.

David Raphael 17:16
Well, thank you. This has been a great pleasure and a delight. And I just loved the important focus of your organization on books, engaging people in reading. So thank you.

Ed Asner 17:27
Bubbe and Zaide by Anne Marie Asner.

Anne-marie Asner 17:32
Bubbe and Zaide are so proud of their grandkids and often kvell and praise each of their greatest qualities.

Ed Asner 17:40
"Klutzy Boy really is so helpful,"

"Noshy Boy sure is appreciative."

Anne-marie Asner 17:43
...said Zaide. "Or Schmutzy Girl. I've never seen such enthusiasm," added Bubbe. Zaide responded:

Bubbe exclaimed, "We can always count on Shluffy Girl to do what she thinks is best."

Ed Asner 17:55
"I'm so glad they are coming over today," gushed Zaide.

Anne-marie Asner 18:02
"The house is stocked and ready," beamed Bubbe. With heartfelt love, the kids burst in to hug and greet their grandparents. "Hi Bubbe, hi Zaide," they cheered before heading off to their favorite parts of the house.

In the backyard Zaide pitches several balls to Klutzy Boy until CRASH! Klutzy Boy hits the ball straight through the window. "Oops, I'll get the broom," said Klutzy Boy, ready to put right his latest clumsiness.

Ed Asner 18:34
"That's my Klutzy Boy, so helpful!"

Anne-marie Asner 18:37
...kvelled Zaide. "Helpful!?" said Kvetchy Boy, stunned.

Bubbe checks in on Shmutzy Girl who has mounted a massive mural on the wall. "How do you like my art project, Bubbe?" asks Shmutzy Girl, covered with paint and glue. "I love your excitement, Shmutzy Girl," said Bubbe, leaving behind a bucket and a sponge. "She'll need more than soap and water for cleanup," Kvetchy Boy grumbled to himself.

In the kitchen Noshy Boy exclaimed between mouthfuls, "This food is delicious, world's best nosh!"

Ed Asner 19:14
"And the best nosher, so appreciative!"

Anne-marie Asner 19:17
...said Zaide. "He'll eat anything," muttered Kvetchy Boy.

Retiring to the living room for a break Bubbe and Zaide at nearly stumbled on Shluffy Girl, fast asleep on the floor. "Shluffy Girl certainly is independent," said Bubbe, taking a seat on the couch. Kvetchy Boy complained, "All she does is sleep!"

Ed Asner 19:40
"Would you like to join us, Kvetchy Boy?"

Anne-marie Asner 19:43
... said Zaide, settling in next to Bubbe. Kvetchy Boy paces, infuriated. "I don't get it. Klutzy Boy is super clumsy, yet you see him as helpful when he tidies is his latest breakage. Shmutzy Girl is head to toe messy, yet you see her as excited. Noshy Boy eats nonstop, yet you see him as appreciative. And Shluffy Girl sleeps anywhere, yet you see her as independent."

Ed Asner 20:12
"That's very observant of you Kvetchy Boy."

Anne-marie Asner 20:15
... said Zaide. "Yes, a sharp mine on that one," kvelled Bubbe. "I'm not being observant. I'm kvetching!" said Kvetchy Boy, exasperated.

"Kvetchy Boy, it's easy to see people's flaws," said Bubbe.

Ed Asner 20:31
But when you love someone, you look for the good."

Anne-marie Asner 20:34
...said Zaide. Confused, Kvetchy Boy asked, "Like a sharp mind?" "See, very smart," said Bubbe. Tired out, Zaide yawned.

Ed Asner 20:35
"Oy. Now I need to call the window repair company because of Klutzy Boy and the house cleaner because of Shmutzy Girl."

Anne-marie Asner 20:53
"And I need to restock the fridge from Noshy Boy," said Bubbe, exhausted.

"Perhaps after you follow Shluffy Girl's lead and get some rest," said Kvetchy Boy. "Good idea. That's our brilliant Kvetchy Boy!" said Bubbe.

Ed Asner 21:09
"A sharp mind, I tell you!"

Anne-marie Asner 21:12
...said Zaide. "I told you!" said Bubbe. Before they can say another word, Bubbe and Zaide are snoozing on the couch. Kvetchy Boy smiles and tucks them in. "Brilliant, huh?" beamed Kvetchy Boy, "I guess Bubbe and Zaide's kvells are nothing to kvetch at."

While Bubbe and Zaide rest, the grandkids use their helpfulness, excitement, appreciation and independence to put the house back in order. "Not too klutzy a job," said Klutzy Boy, admiring their efforts. Shmutzy Girl answered, "But still not quite the same without Bubbe and Zaide's special touch." "Neither are we!" said Kvetchy Boy, first in line for a hug before heading home.

Ed Asner 22:00
For more about this book and others, please visit MatzahBallBooks.com.

Tziporah Cohen 22:04
[MUSIC, DEDICATION] Hi, I'm Tziporah Cohen and I'm the author of the book No Vacancy, and I'd like to dedicate my episode of The Book of Life podcast to my patients, past and present, for trusting me with their stories.

Heidi Rabinowitz 22:21
[MUSIC, OUTRO] Don't be a stranger. Say hi to Heidi at 561-206-2473 or BookofLifepodcast@gmail.com. Check out our Book of Life podcast Facebook page, or our Facebook discussion group, Jewish Kidlit Mavens. We are occasionally on Twitter too at @BookofLife pod. Want to read the books featured on the show? Buy them through Bookshop.org/shop/bookoflife to support the podcast and independent bookstores at the same time. You can also help us out by becoming a monthly supporter through Patreon, or making a one time donation to our home library, the Feldman Children's Library at Congregation B'nai Israel of Boca Raton, Florida. You'll find links for all of that and more at BookofLife podcast.com. Our background music is provided by the Freilachmakers Klezmer String Band. Thanks for listening and happy reading!

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