

## A C H I E V E R S &amp; E X E M P L A R S

# Honoring History & Saving Lives

BY DONALD COHEN-CUTLER

## THE SACRED TORAH *SHIDDUCH*

Temple Beth Or in Raleigh, North Carolina owns an Eastern European Holocaust Torah originally used by the Jewish community of Hermanuv Mestec, a small town in the Czech Republic about seventy miles from Prague. The scroll survived the Shoah; the Jewish community did not. “I thought the town itself had been destroyed during World War II,” says Rabbi Raachel Jurovics. “That’s what I would tell visitors to our sanctuary—until the day a young woman visiting with her classmates from the Southeastern Baptist Seminary spoke up: ‘No,’ she said. ‘The town was not destroyed. I come from there!’”

Eliska Donatova, now a Protestant pastor training other pastors in Eastern Europe, gave Rabbi Jurovics pictures of the town and the synagogue, a link to the town’s website, and a history of Jewish life in Hermanuv Mestec dating back to the 15th century. “Jews and gentiles had dwelled harmoniously in the town until the Nazi onslaught ended the lives of all but three of its Jewish residents,” Rabbi Jurovics explains. “Even though the effort had to await the fall of Communism, the town committed itself to preserving its Jewish heritage, caring for the Jewish cemetery, community center, and the ornately decorated synagogue—its pale blue ceiling painted with the golden stars of the firmament.”

To honor the town’s commitment, eighteen Temple Beth Or members and friends ranging in age from their late forties to early seventies traveled last spring to Hermanuv Mestec with their Torah in hand. They visited Jewish historic sites

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**SOLAR COOKER SUSTENANCE:** Ever since Rachel Andres of Temple Israel of Hollywood in Los Angeles and her colleagues at the Jewish World Watch (a Los Angeles-based genocide prevention and action group) launched the Solar Cooker Project two years ago, more than 5,000 solar cookers



have been distributed to Darfur refugee families in eastern Chad and western Sudan (shown here: making tea at the Iridimi refugee camp in Chad). Because so little firewood is available in this desert region, women and girls in the camps once had to wander for great distances to collect the wood needed to cook their meals, increasing the risk of sexual assault. Now there has been a significant reduction in rape in the refugee camp areas.

“My Jewish upbringing has taught me to protect the vulnerable—Jews and non-Jews alike,” Andres says. “My grandmother left Poland in 1919 to escape an arranged marriage. The rest of her family stayed and all 22 members were killed in the Holocaust. Just as I promised my grandmother I would bear witness and tell our family’s story, I promised the women of the Iridimi refugee camp that we would bear witness to the stories of the 4,669 families in their camp. And the Solar Cooker Project ([www.JewishWorldWatch.org](http://www.JewishWorldWatch.org)) gives people a concrete way to help; it’s a message to our generation that we can make a difference.”

and memorials, met with the town’s civic leadership, and, reading from the Torah, held the first Jewish service in the sanctuary since the Holocaust.

“The restored synagogue is a holy place, filled with righteous people of faith—Christians—who in a sustained act of humanity waited two generations for Communism to fall so they could restore the synagogue to honor 700 Jews who lived amongst them until World War II, 697 of whom perished in the Shoah,” writes Peter Gabor, a Temple Beth Or congregant who at age 21 discovered he was Jewish and his parents were Eastern European Holocaust survivors. Adds Rabbi Jurovics: “All of us privileged to make this journey will be processing our experience for a lifetime.”

## 52 WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LEGACY

Julie Zauzmer, 17, wanted to help people help others. So in the first week of January of 2008, inspired by “the incredible search engine [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com), which donates money to your favorite charity every time you search the Internet,” the teen member of Congregation Beth Or, Maple Glen, Pennsylvania, launched [www.52ways.org](http://www.52ways.org), a website that produces a weekly podcast on how to engage in social action projects. “I write, record, and post one episode each week,” she says, “each podcast featuring a different way to engage in community services and unique organizations that can help people change the world.” Her podcasts, downloaded over 800 times, are also available on iTunes. □

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