



Sarah, Keren, Emily, Jonathan & Ethan

TELLING our STORY

When All Roads Lead to the JCC

Lori Kronzon and Elana Silver have been close friends since they were 17 years old, sharing in monumental milestones such as serving as bridesmaids in each other's weddings and being among the first hospital visitors to welcome their respective friend's new babies. They even found ways to "bridge" their Upper East Side-Upper West Side neighborhood gap when they both lived in New York City, often meeting with their young families in Central Park. When the Silver family moved from Manhattan to New Jersey, Lori and Elana remained close; however their day-to-day routines diverged until a series of unexpected events brought their families together in new and meaningful ways – and the JCC was the connecting thread.

Elana, a Bergen County native, moved back to the area from the city, where she and her husband Benjamin and their three young children, Ethan, Sarah, and Emily, were longing for a more suburban pace of life. The Silvers became JCC members shortly after their move and have made the JCC the focal point of their family's life for the last nine years. They attended the *Leonard and Syril Rubin Nursery* and *Neil Klatskin Day Camp*, ran in the track group, took swimming lessons and are currently committed participants on the JCC Waverunners swim team.

Lori, a native New Yorker, settled down on the Upper East Side with her husband Liron, fully intending on raising their twins Jonathan and Keren as "city kids." Both Lori and Liron come from families imbued with serious musical study, so a musical education for their children was of great importance to them. They began investigating music school options when their twins were 3½ years old. "We made inquiries at some of the well-known NYC conservatories," says Lori, "and while the programs were amazing, nearly all of them offered the majority of their mandatory classes and recitals on Saturdays, and couldn't accommodate our Shabbat observance."

"By complete chance, I happened to share my frustration with my friend, Carey White Miller, who I knew to be an incredibly talented and accomplished violinist. What I did not know was that Carey also happened to be the Artistic Director of Violin Groups at the *JCC Thurnauer School of Music*. Carey gave Thurnauer a stellar endorsement, equating it to the finest NYC pre-college conservatories. What's more, she told me that the entire JCC facility operates in accordance with Orthodox Jewish observance, so my twins would not miss out on any classes, recitals or opportunities."

Knowing that Elana was a JCC member, Lori called her to find out more about the JCC in general. After hearing all the positive things Elana had to say, Lori and Liron made a visit. They were so completely taken by the music school and everything else the JCC had to offer, that they decided to take a leap. They packed up their New York life and moved to Bergen County where the JCC became a center point of their lives, just as it had for Elana.

Living in the same community, Lori and Elana became closer than ever, and as a result, their children also grew close. They met often at the JCC, and their interests began to rub off on each other. Elana's children begged to play instruments like their friends, and Lori's children begged to join Elana's on the JCC track club, go to Neil Klatskin Day Camp, and to take swim, art and dance lessons. In no time, they were doing everything together at the J - from performing in concerts to running in the Rubin Run.

"For years, my kids did everything at the J except study music," Elana explains with a laugh. "But once Jonathan and Keren entered the picture, we added Thurnauer to our JCC routine. Ethan plays classical guitar, Sarah studies flute, and Emily studies both piano and flute. Their musical interests have grown into something incredible that all five of them share. They are 100% committed to their instruments, their group classes, the recitals and the social interactions the school provides."



Jonathan & Keren

Performing together in places like the Jewish Home, where they get to share music with seniors and bring them some joy, has been incredibly meaningful for all our kids. It's not something I ever expected or planned for them, but it's totally amazing and has made our bonds with each other and the JCC that much stronger. All I hear myself constantly saying to my kids is: 'You can do whatever you want as long as it's at the J!'

While the Kronzon's refer to the JCC as their "base of operations" for all of their children's extracurricular activities, Liron has found a community, far from his native Israel at the JCC. He has even traveled to the IAC National Conference in Washington D.C. as a member of the JCC delegation for the past two years. Whether kibbitzing in Hebrew with his buddies at the JCC gym, or attending IAC events at the JCC with his family, Liron feels that he is not only preserving his Israeli cultural identity through his affiliations at the J, but infusing his children with as much "Israeli-ness" as is possible.

“It's been a huge added gift for us because the JCC creates endless opportunities for our children to explore their Israeli cultural identity. They attended EMEK for several years and this will be the third consecutive summer they attend the Israeli high-tech camp, *Big Idea*, where they can explore robotics, coding, 3D modeling, and mobile app creation, while connecting with Israeli and Israeli-American children in Hebrew. With its kosher food, beautiful campus, swim instruction and outdoor sports, we couldn't have dreamed up a better summer experience for our kids."

For the Silver family, physical activity and athleticism is a way of life, and Elana finds the JCC the perfect venue for their active, athletic routine.

“The JCC is an amazing place to be outdoors in the summer, with its pools and water park, but it's during the long winter months when the incredible JCC resources truly come to life for my family. Shooting hoops in the gym, swimming laps in the indoor pool, running with the Kronzon kids on the indoor track, or working out in the kid's gym is such a positive outlet. At first, we saw the JCC as a place where our children would learn valuable skills and utilize their

time constructively. Just a few years later, we see the unbelievable impact the JCC programming has had on our children's development. The confidence and self-esteem they have derived from their JCC activities have become an invaluable part of their identities."

On a typical weekday, all five kids are actively engaged at the J. Ethan has guitar lessons and plays with the guitar group; Sarah and Emily take flute lessons and participate in flute groups; and Emily takes piano. Jonathan studies both piano and saxophone while Keren takes a cello lesson and then joins her friends for rehearsals in the Strings Camarata.

After class, all the kids often gather in the Cafe for a snack before the Silver kids hit the pool for their intensive swim team routine. On Sundays, the kids frequently head to the gym to run the track or play basketball, while Lori and Elana debrief each other on their week or head to the gym for Pilates, Yoga, or a great Spin class.

I can't overstate the value of these experiences," Lori concludes. "The *Thurnauer School of Music* and the JCC community have given our children experiences they never would have known. They study music with children from around the globe and it gives them an expanded view on life through the platform of music, which is universal and unifying. The community we have found at the JCC is a gift.

“Recently, our children performed at a recital and one of the JCC and Thurnauer founders, Sandra Gold, was sitting in the audience with a close friend, watching one of her grandchildren perform. It was so touching to see, and I turned to Elana and said: I want that to be us one day, coming to the JCC to watch our grandchildren play music here.”

It's been an incredible journey, and both Lori and Elana credit the JCC for being a constant, connecting thread in their lives.

As Elana shares, "My life truly revolves around the Center, and the more I think about how it all came to pass, the more I appreciate its unique and special value. I introduced Lori to the JCC, but she introduced my family to Thurnauer; and now our children share these incredible bonds that reflect a blend of both our family's interests. I find this pretty amazing.

The quality and caliber of the programming are beyond compare, but it's the way the JCC brings people together and shapes the course of their lives that makes it stand apart. It's something I will be forever grateful for."



Ethan, Sarah & Emily