BUILDING UNITED COMMUNITIES

A dinner and discussion around the topics of immigration and refugees in connection with the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Throughout history, violence and persecution have driven the Jewish people to wander in search of a safe place to call home. Jews are a refugee people. At the Passover Seder, Jews gather to retell the story of our original wandering and the freedom we found. But Jews do not just retell the story. Jews are commanded to imagine ourselves as though they personally went forth from Egypt – to imagine the experience of being victimized because of who they are, of being enslaved, and of being freed.

Stepping into this historical experience, we cannot help but draw to mind the 65 million displaced people and refugees around the world today fleeing violence and persecution, searching for protection. Like many of our ancestors, today’s refugees experience displacement, uncertainty, lack of resources, and the complete disruption of their lives.

Over the past year, we have read almost daily about humanitarian crises, watched xenophobic hate crimes increase, and been overwhelmed by the sheer number of people being persecuted. In the United States in particular, we have experienced a devastating closing of doors to refugees. We now have the opportunity this evening to move beyond the headlines and the statistics to focus on the individual experiences behind the numbers and policies. These are the experiences of refugees around the world who, like the ancient Israelites, are finding liberation amidst brokenness and rebuilding their lives. Tonight, as Jews embrace the experience of our ancestors, we also welcome others to lift up the experiences of the world’s refugees who still wander in search of safety and freedom.

USING THE GUIDE

On the Jewish holiday of Passover, Jews have a feast, known as a Seder. A Seder includes reading, drinking wine, telling stories, eating special foods, singing, and other Passover traditions. The central tradition of Passover is the maggid, telling the story of Jews Exodus from Egypt. The story begins with the youngest person at the seder asking the Four Questions (Mah Nishtanah) which ask how this night is different from all other nights. Tonight at our Turn the Tables dinner, we will be using this guide to ask four questions of our own:

1) Who are the world’s refugees?
2) Who are the world’s immigrants?
3) Who are DREAMers?
4) How are immigration and Passover related?

By asking these questions, we are bringing conversations about immigration and refugees to the table. Our goal is to leave this evening with heightened AWARENESS, having had the opportunity to SPEAK UP about complex issues, and feel driven to TAKE ACTION to build a united community for all.

Picture: Casa San Jose
Question 1:

Who are the world’s refugees?

Discussion Questions:
- What was your community like growing up? Were there any large groups of immigrants?
- Look at the *Figures at a Glance*. What surprises you?
- How does your concept of “home” change after reading Warsan Shire’s poem?
- What parts of Warsan Shire’s poem stand out to you?
We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. Nearly 20 people are forcibly displaced every minute as a result of conflict or persecution. An unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from their homes. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 10 million stateless people who have been denied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record.
no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it’s not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn’t be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles traveled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitted

dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange

messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

Thanks to JFCS for the poem
Question 2:

Who are Pittsburgh’s immigrants?

Discussion Questions:
Look at the map of Refugees in Allegheny County.
• What surprises you?
• Is it different than what you expected?
Look at the pictures both in the guide and around the room.
• Which one stands out most to you?
• How do these differ from other immigration photos you have seen?
• How can we create a more inclusive Pittsburgh?
IMMIGRANTS OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY

The following is an overview of select immigrant populations residing in the City of Pittsburgh and contiguous neighborhoods. Linguistic information is provided in parentheses about each group.

- **Bhutanese (Nepali):** Largest refugee group in Pittsburgh. Many have been attracted to our region from other states. The greatest concentration can be found along the Brownsville Rd/Rte 51 corridor, including Carrick, Mt. Oliver, Brentwood, Baldwin and Whitehall, as well as Greentree.
- **Burmese (Burmese, Karen and Chin):** Ethnically diverse group of refugees from Myanmar residing mainly in Prospect Park with notable groups in Troy Hill and Bellevue.
- **Chinese (Mandarin):** One of the largest immigrant groups in the region, including individuals from Taiwan and Hong Kong. While they are dispersed throughout the city, a large student population resides in the East End, especially Squirrel Hill and Shadyside.
- **Congolese (Kituba, Swahili and French):** A fast-growing group due to recent refugee arrivals, dispersed throughout the region with notable concentrations in the West End
- **Indian (Hindi and Gujarati):** Another of the largest immigrant groups in the region, residing largely in the East End and outer suburbs.
- **Iraqi (Arabic):** A generally dispersed group with a large refugee population, though there are known concentrations in Greenfield and Mt Lebanon.

- **Latinx (Spanish):** A large group of diverse individuals from Mexico, the Caribbean, Central and South America. They are widely dispersed, although large populations are known in Beechview, Brookline, Oakland, Highland Park, North Side and many of the surrounding suburbs.
- **Russian (Russian):** This population resides largely in the Homestead, Greenfield and Hazelwood neighborhoods.
- **Somali-Bantu (Somali, Maay Maay and Kizigua), Somali (Somali), Rwandan (Kinyarwanda and French), and Burundi (Kirundi and French):** These groups largely reside in Northview Heights and other North Side neighborhoods, along with smaller immigrant populations from other African countries.
- **Syrian (Arabic):** While there are known concentrations in the North Side and Crafton Heights, the Syrian population is largely dispersed throughout the region.
- **Afghanistan:** The most recent group of Immigrants to Pittsburgh. They live in Bentwood.

Other notable immigrant populations dispersed throughout the region include:

- **German (German)**
- **Italian (Italian)**
- **Japanese (Japanese)**
- **Korean (Korean)**
- **Pakistani (Urdu)**
- **Polish (Polish)**
- **Sudanese (Arabic)**
- **Turkish (Turkish)**
- **Uzbek (Uzbek and Russian)**
- **Vietnamese (Vietnamese)**

*This content is based on various data provided by the Allegheny County DHS Immigrants & Internationals Initiative. It should not be viewed as a complete representation of immigrant populations in Pittsburgh. For more information about the I&I Initiative, visit [http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/immigrantresources](http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/immigrantresources).*

*Thanks to Casa San Jose and All for all, Resource: Department of Humans Service*
May 25, 2017, approximately 3 a.m. Following a forty-eight-hour trip to the U.S., this family took their first train ride—from airside, Pittsburgh International Airport to the baggage hall, landside.

After living in the Brentwood neighborhood of Pittsburgh for three months, Kheena Gurung made her first visit to a large grocery store. She took her niece, Salina Rai, age nine, to help translate and guide her through the store. Kheena seemed overwhelmed and confused at times.

Iffat Idrees was born in Pakistan. She arrived in the U.S. in 1974.

Fumiko Tezuka was born in Japan. She arrived in the U.S. in 2017.

Both came to the U.S. for their spouses.

Iffat’s husband, a U.S.-educated physician, also from Pakistan, visited home to find a wife. Iffat’s parents arranged their marriage. She first spoke with her husband on their wedding day. They moved back to the U.S. after their wedding. Iffat had to adjust to living in an apartment with no family around.

Fumiko came to the U.S. from Tokyo with her husband who is in a two-year program at Carnegie Mellon University. She left her job as a teacher, as well as her family and community, to move to Pittsburgh during his studies.

Iffat: “Then, back home, everybody’s marriage was being arranged that way. So you grew up with that idea that is going to happen to you and you kind of accepted. The lady next door heard me [crying] and she came over and she knocked on the door and she was like, ‘Honey what’s wrong?’ And I’m like, ‘I’m just lonely. I don’t know what to do.’ ”

So she kind of became my mother. And she taught me everything. I had never cleaned the house because we have servants back there who do everything for you. I had never cooked in my life. And so I never had done any grocery shopping in my life. And then you learn. Then eventually I learned to drive. Got my license. And then there was no stopping me.”

Fumiko: “So for me the first week was really, really tough. Like here I was alone at home and I had no friends. And even shopping and taking a bus is an adventure to me because of my language... I was working in Japan but I quit my job. So I lost my community suddenly and my husband was busy in study and he has a community and a classroom and parties he enjoyed while I’m alone and it was really tough.”

Pictures

Take a second look at the selected pictures below. Talk with your table about what these recent immigrants go through.

Photo and Captions by Annie O’Neill

Photo and Captions by Scott Goldsmith

Thanks to Brian Cohen for the photo
I was six years old when I started working. I always helped my mother with the small amount of money that I earned. I grew up with the hope of continuing to help my mom.

As I grew up, in time there were more expenses and I earned little money despite working all day. My mother began selling food outside of the house. I wanted to take her out of selling food. I came with the hope of lifting my mother from the need to work and of doing something for myself, like buying my own home. But time passed and to date my mother continues selling food. She never wanted to stop working; it was impossible for her when she also started to help my grandfather at 6 years old. So I stayed here helping her and my sisters with the little that I could manage.

Now, I am just looking to be stable in the United States for the good of my two beautiful daughters, Emma Nicole Ibarra Romano and Brianna Julianna Ibarra Romano. Now they are my motor to continue moving forward.

Jose Luis Ibarra Sanchez
3/19/2018

I would also like to thank this country for offering me the opportunity to raise my children with the knowledge of different cultures and showing them that no matter one’s race, ethnic origin, or religion that all are equal with something unique to share.

Isabel
3/20/2018
Question 3:

Who are DREAMers?

Discussion Questions:
- Look at the facts and figures about DACA and DREAMers. What surprises you the most about DACA and DREAMers?
- Think about Pablo and Adriana story. What stands out in their story?
- What can you do to support DREAMers?
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, is a Department of Homeland Security policy that allows for certain undocumented Americans to have their deportations delayed and obtain a temporary work permit.

To be eligible, a person must have been age 30 or younger as of 2012, enrolled in or graduated from school, and not have a felony conviction. For additional qualifications, visit the USCIS website. Individuals must submit to a biometrics and background check, and pay $495 in fees as part of their application. DACA lasts for two years, and each renewal (which costs an additional $495) is not guaranteed.

What are the results of DACA?

Because of DACA, 886,814 of the potentially eligible 1,932,000 undocumented Americans had their applications accepted.

A survey of 1,308 DACA recipients showed:

- **95%** are currently working or in school
- **63%** got a better paying job
- **54%** bought their first car
- **48%** got a job with better working conditions
- **12%** bought their first home

DACA recipients contribute $1.2 billion annually in federal, state, and local tax revenue. That revenue would disappear if DACA were repealed.

Congress and government officials are publicly debating the continuation of DACA. Ten state attorney general’s threatened to file a lawsuit over the program, while 19 state attorneys general and Washington, D.C.’s Attorney general have urged President Trump to keep the program in place.

73% of Donald Trump voters want young people who are undocumented, “DREAMers,” to stay in the US legally.

Source: Morning Consult/Politico National Tracking Poll

Thanks to All for All for the resource
Thanks to All for All for the resource

Pablo arrived in this country with the clothes on his back and a prayer in his pocket. Fourteen years later, he has almost everything he needs — a home in Pittsburgh, a high school education, a plan for his future.

But he’s missing one thing: a Social Security number.

He realized just a few weeks ago that it was something he needs to get student loans and, in the case of some schools, to apply at all.

Pablo, who turns 18 this month, is one of about a million eligible young people who stayed hidden rather than embrace an opportunity for temporary legal status when it was offered under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

The Immigration Justice Clinic at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles estimates that 1.8 million Dreamers, as they are called, were eligible for DACA, but Pablo and many like him were dissuaded by government distrust that has only grown since President Donald Trump took office. Now they are left in an agonizing limbo as lawmakers in Washington debate their fate as part of yet another stalled immigration reform effort.

They might be offered a second chance at some sort of DACA status. They might be forced to stay hidden. Or they might face imminent deportation.

This is the story of one Pittsburgh family.

The parents are undocumented immigrants. Two children are citizens. And one could have been a DACA recipient but is not.

They asked not to be identified by their last names or neighborhood for fear of deportation.

Undocumented

Pablo dreams of becoming an anesthesiologist. It’s the hardest thing he can think of to be, and he wants to prove a point by shattering stereotypes of Mexicans working as gardeners and laborers.

The news that he needs a Social Security number to get to college devastated Pablo, a strong student who takes five advanced placement classes, participates in a community service club, and skips lunch twice a week to take an extra class that he hopes will give him an edge in the college admissions process.

He’s been talking over his options with a youth worker at the Pittsburgh-based Latino outreach center Casa San Jose, and he is growing discouraged.

“Now I have to start all over and think of what I’m going to do fast before I finish [high school]. Even for trade school or to be a truck driver, you need [a Social Security number]. Everything,” Pablo said. “You basically can’t do anything.”

That includes getting a driver’s license, boarding a plane, working legally or even — as it turns out — completing a certain class requirement to register to vote.

He has told only one teacher and a few close friends about his undocumented status, but suspects more may know.

Passing on DACA

The designation didn’t mean much to him until he became a teenager and started talking about getting his driver’s license. His mother and stepfather explained why a license was one of many things he couldn’t have.

“That’s when I saw the world differently because at first I had a different perspective that I’m like every other kid. Then after that I felt like an outcast,” he said.

Pablo was just 12 — not yet old enough to apply — when then-President Barack Obama issued his executive order creating DACA in 2012.

By the time he turned 15 and became eligible, the Republican presidential frontrunner was calling Mexicans like him rapists, proposing to rescind DACA and threatening to deport immigrants by the thousands.

His mother Adriana panicked.

“It’s confusing for me, DACA. I thought … after they take information they say, ‘You go home. You go back to Mexico.’”

She wouldn’t let him apply.

And now — unless Congress changes things — it’s too late.

“It’s my fault,” she says now.

That’s something she says often. “It’s my fault.” Her fault Pablo waited too long to apply for DACA, her fault he is here illegally to begin with, her fault he can’t have a driver’s license like his friends, her fault college is out of reach. It’s all her fault.
Pablo regrets that he didn't try harder to persuade Adriana to let him apply for DACA, but he had his own worries. He worried that immigration would come back for his mother and stepfather.

Adriana wants her family to stay together, but she would sacrifice her own life in America for her children’s.

“I don't care what happens to me. I only want them to have it better,” she said one afternoon after her lunch shift as a cook in a local restaurant.

Her 10-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter are American-born citizens who have never been outside the country, who speak good but imperfect Spanish, and who have never known the kind of poverty and violence that pervades her homeland. They’re too young to care for themselves so if their parents are deported they would have to go, too. If DACA is reinstated, at least Pablo could stay.

Though the prospect of her family being separated frightens her, she harbors no ill will toward those who want undocumented immigrants to be deported.

“Maybe they don't know what happened in Mexico and they don't understand why we come here,” she said. “If I go to your house and I start living in your house and I don’t explain nothing to you and you don’t understand, you’ll be mad. You’d say, ‘Why are you staying at my house? That’s my house. That’s my country,’” she said. “That’s why we need to talk. We need to explain.”

Lawbreakers should be deported, she said, but most living without documentation are like her — people who pay taxes and work hard.

Immigrants like Adriana have found ways to work illegally by supplying tax identification numbers instead of social security numbers to employers who are supposed to require work permits, which they don't have. Her husband, who works at a factory, uses a TIN, too, as does Pablo, who works part-time at a restaurant for pocket money to spend on the pretty American classmate he plans to marry someday.

The Internal Revenue Service, which issues TINs, doesn’t share information with Immigration and Customs Enforcement because doing so would discourage immigrants from paying their taxes.

Always on alert

The family lives in a house with 14 windows — all the better for checking outside for immigration officers. It’s something Adriana does every morning.

Adriana has only seen Immigration and Customs agents once — or at least she think she saw them. An unfamiliar car parked with two people inside flipping through paperwork was enough to spook the family on a January morning. Adriana called Monica Ruiz, an immigration advocate at Casa San Jose, who immediately drove over.

By the time Ms. Ruiz arrived, the car had disappeared, but not the family’s fears.

Ms. Ruiz drove around the block a few times to make sure the car was gone, then took everyone to school and work.

Pablo wouldn't get out of the car.

“He was like, ‘Mom, Mom, Mom. Can I just go to work with you? I don’t want to be away from you.’ He was like, ‘How am I going to know you’re OK?’” Ms. Ruiz recalled. “I had to drop him off at school like that. It was very sad.”

For Pablo, it was just another day.

Immigration agents have been raiding convenience stores and restaurants known to employ undocumented immigrants. Pablo said he has spotted them waiting outside the neighborhood branch of the public library.

Enforcement is stronger now, but it isn't new.

Pablo remembers his stepfather’s deportation. The family had just celebrated the baptism of all three children. A family friend got stopped for a traffic violation in a car he borrowed from Pablo’s stepfather, who was called to retrieve the car from the side of the road in Oakland.

When the stepfather arrived, immigration agents were waiting to haul him back to Mexico.

While he was away, a relative cared for the children so Adriana could work two full-time jobs — one in a factory and the other on a department store’s cleaning crew — in order to afford her $950 rent and to save the $4,000 or $5,000 needed to pay a “pollero” — smuggler — to get him back across the border.

All the while her husband made tearful phone calls, telling her he was missing his children.

“The kids, too, were crying, and I’m crying all day and I looked like a crazy woman. I didn’t brush my hair. I didn’t do nothing, just work, work work,” Adriana remembers. “I had three babies and I had fear.”

Her husband returned a few months later. The fear never left, though.
A life in Mexico

Fear was what finally drove Adriana out of Mexico, too. She grew up poor. At age 6, she would rise before dawn to pluck chickens at the open-air market where the grandmother who raised her had a small stand. At noon, she would board a bus alone and head back to an empty house to get herself ready for school, which ran from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

There was always food on her grandmother's table, but seldom money for Christmas presents or treats like pizza or fast food. If Adriana outgrew her shoes, it could take her grandmother two months to save up for new ones in a country where the minimum daily wage is, even today, just 88.36 pesos — $4.70.

At 20, Adriana was working six days a week at two jobs — cooking chicken at KFC and pasteurizing milk at LALA Foods — while her grandmother watched her toddler son. She was able to set enough aside to take Pablo to see clowns performing at the town square, to buy him salty chicarrones from street vendors. Often, she brought him home with three balloons when she knew one would have been enough. She was proud that she was able to buy her grandmother gold earrings.

But crime was getting worse. There were drug cartels, Mafia-style street gangs that demanded protection money, and adolescent boys running around with guns. Rampant violence made families afraid to walk outside a night and made Acapulco one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

She worried for Pablo and wanted a better life for him, but she had never really thought about leaving Acapulco.

And then the call came. Her Papa, who had left when she was 2 and now lived illegally in Florida, had saved $4,000 — enough to pay "polleros" to get her and her son across the border, but she had to be ready in a week.

That was enough time to quit her job, say goodbye to her grandmother and gather her supplies in a backpack: 2 gallons of water, a stash of beef jerky and canned tuna, and 200 pesos — about $11 in cash. More than that could get her robbed or worse.

She put on two pairs of jeans — one over the other — and layered on the only two long-sleeve T-shirts she owned.

She was ready.

The first leg of the journey would be easy: a quick plane ride from Acapulco to Hermosillo, Mexico. Adriana was given instructions to go to a hotel and find a driver waiting there to take her 172 miles north to Nogales, Mexico, where a smuggler would lead her on a grueling six-day walk to Arizona.

First she had to do the unthinkable — hand Pablo to a stranger. The woman, someone her father's ex-wife knew, would take him across the border, presumably passing him off as her own child. Adriana doesn't know the details of Pablo's journey and he can't remember.

"I think he crossed in a car with other kids," Adriana said.

"I think about that now and if you told me to do it again I would say no. Maybe I can't see [Pablo] again," she said.

Back then, with her Papa's assurances, it was worth the risk to escape poverty and violence.

She made the sign of the cross over her small boy, stuffed a prayer card in his pocket so that la virgen Maria, full of grace, might keep him safe on his journey. She told him not to cry, and he didn't.

Adriana was told she would find him in a week or two in Arizona. She hoped he would be there. She hoped she would make it across the desert to meet him.

Many didn’t.

Walking in the dark

The route was peppered with makeshift wooden crosses where, Adriana presumes, those who couldn't complete the journey are buried.

In her own group of 15, two didn't make it. An old man and a pregnant woman couldn't go on after a few days of travel. Adriana is still haunted by thoughts of what might have happened to them in the desert.

"I always remember them. Always," she said. "It’s hard but you can’t do nothing."

The group had to keep going.

"From 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. we never stopped walking," she said.

She stepped blindly into the dark night without the aid of a flashlight because that would attract attention.

"You only follow the man who is in front of you and you can see nothing," she said of the trek through thick, thorny and snake-infested underbrush that made her legs bleed. Fourteen years later, tiny scars on her legs bear witness.

Nights were long, dark, exhausting and cold — an average low of 36 degrees that month. Adriana warmed herself with trash bags she found along the way.

Days reached up to 88 degrees. The group sought shade under trees where they slept and tried not to deplete their limited water supply. Distrustful of the men in the group, the women took turns sleeping so one could always keep watch.

By the sixth day, Adriana had run out of water and out of will, too.

"I thought I would die there, but they told me, 'Be strong for your son. He’s waiting for you.'"

With swollen knees and blistered feet, she pressed on, matching her footsteps to a campy theme song from the TV show "La Hora Pico" that ran through her head.

Finally, after seven nights, the group arrived at the border. There was no celebration. Everyone was too tired and, even then, some wanted to stop before going the final few miles to the street where they were to wait for a van.

One van, 13 immigrants.

Adriana was given a hairbrush and some soap to clean caked dirt from
her face, using her shirt as a washcloth. She was the younger of the two women in
the group, the one who could most easily pass for the wife of the van driver. With
instructions to act casually if she spotted any immigration officers, she climbed
into the passenger seat.

The others piled into the van and lay down side-by-side and on top of each
other horizontally across the van where the seats used to be so they couldn’t be
seen through the windows.

Adriana was never told the name of the town she was driven to, only that
it was in Arizona and it was where Pablo would be. After about an hour’s drive she
was dropped off at a house while the rest of the group continued on.

Two men came outside, one grizzled-looking and in his 40s, the other
whose face she can’t recall.

Where was Pablo? Why was she — the only young woman in the group —
the only one let out here? She panicked but she followed the men inside.

There in the living room of a strange house, she held her son in her arms
and, for the first time in eight days, Adriana smiled.

**Reminders of a harsh life**

She spent four years in Orlando, living for most of that time with her
father. Later she moved to Pittsburgh to be with the man who would become her
husband and the father of her youngest two children.

This is home now, and Adriana has no desire to return to the poverty and
violence of Acapulco even for a visit. Sometimes, though, she grows nostalgic for her
family and for the coastal city that was a juxtaposition of extreme poverty and extreme
beauty.

She brought no photos with her from Mexico, so when her children ask
about Mexico she shows them images in books, and she calls them to the television
whenever there’s programming about Acapulco.

She doesn’t show them the photos and videos she finds online, mostly
from the online news site Lo Real De Guerrero, which reports on street violence.
The photos are gruesome, the videos are worse, and three or four new ones are
posted every day.

On a single day in February: a driver and his passenger shot dead in a
taxi; a man lying face-up in a pool of blood; two lifeless bodies with hands tied
behind their backs on a dirt road; the naked body of a man reportedly stabbed in a
bathroom; a dead body stuffed in the truck of a car; a wounded man who witnesses
saw dragged from a car and shot and a bloodied body in front of a church. On
other days Adriana checks the site to find photos of dismembered bodies, and
strangulation victims whose limbs are bound with duct tape.

The images haunt her as do the conversations with her sister in Acapulco
who calls when gunfire outside her windows frightens her.

Adriana shields her children from most of this, but she wants them to
understand that are lucky to be in the United States, so she tells them just enough.

“She said it was harsh there, that you don’t want to go there,” said her 10-year-
old, an American citizen who could be forced there nonetheless if his parents
are deported. That could delay his dream of becoming a technical engineer, but
Adriana may have no choice but to keep him and his 12-year-old sister with her.
They can always return when they are old enough to care for themselves.

Not Pablo, though. Nothing is more important to Adriana than ensuring his
place in the country that has been his home for 14 years.
How are immigration and Passover related?

Discussion Questions:
- How can we use the story of Passover to create more understanding of the refugee experience?
- How can we move forward and be allies to refugees?
- In Passover Jews often say “Next Year in Jerusalem” to as a way to look forward to the future. What are some action steps you can take in the next year to create a more inclusive society?
In 1929 my grandmother, Anna (Rutmanowich) Diamond left her home in Radom, Poland. She traveled across Europe with her three small children, Jack, my father, who was only two years old, his sister Frieda and their brother Lou. In 1929 hatred of the Jews in Poland was already apparent; violent attacks and pogroms by Poles and Russians made it all-too-clear that Jews were no longer welcome in Eastern Europe.

She had little help from my grandfather, Charles, who left Poland in 1922. But Anna and her three children made their way, somehow, to the south of England and to the port city of Southampton. They boarded a passenger ship, the S.S. President Roosevelt in September of 1929, crossing the Atlantic Ocean and arriving in New York about a month later. They came through Ellis island as refugees, and like hundreds of thousands of fellow Jews, settled on New York’s lower east side. Had Anna and her family stayed in Radom their fate would have been the same as Anna’s parents and her five siblings, all murdered by the Nazis at Treblinka.

My father’s family, wandering around the New York of the 1930’s and the depression, impoverished and knowing no English, I’m sure, resembled immigrants and refugees who today flee Syria, Europe, South or Central America. And, like today’s immigrants and refugees they worked exceptionally hard to succeed. My father attended Stuyvesant High School in the 1940’s, at that time a rather elite New York City public school for boys. He became the first one in his family to go to college: attending tuition-free City College in New York.

For my family, then, Passover is not an esoteric history. We share the history of our ancestors, our parents, our grandparents who made long, arduous journeys away from evil and toward freedom. On Passover we are encouraged to tell the story. In 2017 it doesn’t hurt to be reminded that we are all the sons or daughters of refugees.

On Passover We Are All Refugees

Article by James D. Diamond

In 1929 my grandmother, Anna (Rutmanowich) Diamond left her home in Radom, Poland. She traveled across Europe with her three small children, Jack, my father, who was only two years old, his sister Frieda and their brother Lou. In 1929 hatred of the Jews in Poland was already apparent; violent attacks and pogroms by Poles and Russians made it all-too-clear that Jews were no longer welcome in Eastern Europe.

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Avadim Hayinu “We Were Slaves”

Avadim hayinu l’pharoh b’mitzrayim, Vayotzeinu Adonai Eloheinu misham, b’yaad chazakah uiviroa netuyah were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Adonai, our God, brought us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm Jews are a people of memory and action. On Passover, Jews use stories and memories to remember and retell the narrative of our collective liberation. Jews share the ancient Exodus story, year after year, so that it resonates through the generations as a narrative of deliverance from slavery to freedom.

In Hebrew, Egypt is called Mitzrayim, which means “a narrow place”. Every year, the Haggadah asks us not only to share the story of Exodus and individual struggles for liberation, and are reminded that the fight for freedom is ongoing.
Next year in Jerusalem

At the beginning of the Passover Seder, Jews are commanded to consider though Jews, too, had gone out from Egypt. At the end of the Seder (and once in the middle) – we say the words, “Next year in Jerusalem” to recognize that, just as redemption came for our ancestors, so, too, will redemption come for us in this generation. For those of us fortunate enough to have a roof over our heads, we may understand these words to mean that the parts of us that feel adrift will find steady footing. However, for the world’s 65 million displaced people and refugees, these words can be a literal message of hope that they will be able to rebuild their lives in a safe place.

After experiencing unimaginable trauma and often making harrowing journeys out of danger, refugees across the United States are finding liberation after oppression. For Mohammad Ay Toghlo and his wife, Eidah Al Suleiman, the dream of “Next year in Jerusalem” has become a reality in Buffalo, New York.

After war came to their village outside Damascus, they witnessed the murder of their pregnant daughter and the kidnapping of their son. They sold their car to pay a large ransom and then ultimately escaped to Lebanon. After a lengthy vetting process, Mohammed, Eidah, and their youngest son, Najati, received word they would be resettled by HIAS through the Jewish Family Service of Buffalo.

Mohammed says that, when he found out, he thought he was dreaming because “the United States is such a big thing for us that I don’t even see that in my dreams; I was so happy.” Najati is learning English and enrolled in school, and he says that, when he finds himself on the street on the way to school or to an appointment and he needs assistance, people go out of their way to communicate with him and help, even reading his body language to try to understand what he needs.

While the family’s move is bittersweet because their oldest son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren remain in Lebanon and they worry constantly about their safety, Najati says that, here, in the United States, “wherever we go, we find helpful, loving people.” As he settles into his new life here, Najati made a drawing to express his gratitude for the opportunities that the Jewish Family Service of Buffalo and the United States government have provided him and his family.

The drawing expresses thanks to the United States and features a large Jewish star, surrounded by the phrase “Thank you, Jewish Family” in Arabic experienced to fulfill new hopes and new dreams here in America. The family’s life in Buffalo is not free from difficulty, but they are beginning to pick up the broken pieces of the trauma they have.