

Investing in our Jewish Future

The top floor of our newly renovated building will be dedicated to education, with a safe preschool playing area for young children and families to enjoy. Emanu-El NEXT will maintain the historical integrity of our beloved sanctuary and allow us to adapt our facilities to best serve Emanu-El's community for generations to come.

We believe that Judaism guides us on our journey to be better people, create community, and repair the world. Our historic home has long been cherished as a magnificent building that symbolizes Jewish arrival and integration into our city. But the building no longer adequately serves the needs of the Emanu-El community and hinders our ability to effectively support and engage our congregation. The demands of the 21st century Jewish community - and Emanu-El's 1,800 congregant families - are quite different than those of the 300 families in the 1920s who created our current building. That's why we have embarked on an ambitious effort to revitalize and reimagine our home to meet the expanding needs of our current members and those of generations to come.



Donor Spotlight Nelli and Kevin Perkins

Nelli's family kept their Jewish heritage a secret while they lived in the Soviet Union. They never went to synagogue, kept kosher, or even so much as talked about the holidays. No acknowledgment whatsoever did Nelli have that her Judaism existed.

It wasn't until her family left St. Petersburg among the Soviet emigres in 1989 that she found out she was Jewish. Via Austria they came to Italy, where they waited for a US visa for several months. As they waited for permission to come to the US, Nelli's family revealed to her that they were Jewish. She cried in disbelief.

The San Francisco Jewish Federation helped them settle in the Sunset district as they helped many Russian and Ukrainian Jews

at the time. They arrived to the US on Thanksgiving Day 1989, with no English and little money, but freedom from the antisemitism to which they had grown accustomed.

It was Nelli's enrollment in the Hebrew Academy of San Francisco as a first grader that reconnected her and her family with Jewish life. Her grandparents took over childcare so her mother, who was a doctor in Russia, could complete her residency and medical board exams in order to practice medicine in the US. Nelli learned about Judaism among a host of Russian speaking classmates who came from similar backgrounds. "What I brought home

from school became much of the Judaism my family came to know,” Nelli says, as she remembers instilling in them practices like fasting on Yom Kippur. She precociously prohibited the Yolka under their roof; the traditional Russian New Year pine that mirrors a Christmas tree was banned by 6th grade.

Carrying on tradition into the present day, Nelli now raises her two kids in a Jewish home with her husband Kevin Perkins. Both children have been enrolled in Emanu-El’s Preschool. Ryan, 4, is a current student, and Brandon, 6, attended for the last 2 years before starting at Brandeis this fall. They have only hired Russian speaking nannies in the home to help their children maintain the Russian language – just one of the ways they keep the past alive.

Kevin’s maternal family immigrated to the US from Germany in the 1880s, first to Georgia, then to California where he was born. His paternal grandmother fled Germany as a child in 1936. Growing up in Santa Monica, attending Brentwood High School, and belonging to Wilshire Boulevard Temple all formed what Kevin would call, “a pretty standard Jewish kid upbringing in LA at the time.” When he went to UC Berkeley for his undergraduate degree, his grandmother encouraged him to visit Berkeley Hillel so he could meet a nice Jewish girl. But a different introduction lay in wait. In time, through a connection he made at Hillel, he met Moses Libitzky, a philanthropist, champion of causes, and successful real estate developer.

They’ve been working together ever since. Kevin is Senior Vice President of Libitzky Property Companies, where they own, develop, and operate commercial real estate. But you can’t work with Moses without being struck by his unquenchable generosity. “His story is inspiring, and he brought me to think about my community and philanthropy in a serious way,” Kevin says. For one, Moses taught Kevin that everyone has a philanthropic budget. For some it’s \$10M, for others it’s \$180. But generosity can’t be calculated by the number of zeros in a check – it comes from the spirit with which a gift is given. “Every gift matters. Every gift inspires others to give,” says Kevin.

Kevin is currently on the board of the JCCSF and UC Berkeley Hillel. He also manages the Mautner Perkins Memorial Lectures, an endowment started by his grandparents which gives out scholarships to UCLA graduate students in the life and physical sciences. Nelli and Kevin recently expanded the endowment to allow for a scholarship for first generation women in science. This was important to Nelli because she completed her undergraduate biology degree at UCLA. Dr. Perkins is currently the Medical Director of Headache Medicine at Sutter/California Pacific Medical Center, specializing in headache and migraine care. “Migraine is a life altering neurological disorder that impacts 1 billion people worldwide, disproportionately affecting women during some of their most productive years,” Nelli says. “I want to help them get their lives back.”

Kevin has been a member of Emanu-El since moving to San Francisco in 2008, when he also attended Emanu-El’s Late Shabbat services to “meet a nice Jewish girl.” But finding modern solutions to ancient problems, Kevin and Nelli met in 2013 on OkCupid, an online dating site where she was screening profiles for eligible bachelors who identified as Jewish. At that time, Nelli was a senior Neurology resident at Stanford. They dated “long distance” for 2 years until she completed her Headache Fellowship and moved back to San Francisco to start her first job.

They were married by Rabbi Jonathan Singer of Congregation Emanu-El, and have since become involved in Temple activities, primarily helping to raise money for the preschool’s annual fund which raised over \$100K and reached 100% participation from school families. Of great inspiration to their Emanu-El NEXT campaign gift was their gratitude for the role the preschool continues to play in their lives. They like that the Congregation Emanu-El Preschool is intimate enough for them to meet parents from other classes and form a community. “The teachers at Emanu-El are what make the preschool excellent,” Kevin adds. “Once we give them a state-of-the-art facility, it’s going to take our school to another level.”



Please visit our website, next.emanuelsf.org to learn more. Or, if you would like to make a commitment to Emanu-El Next, please contact Julie Weinberg, Senior Director of Philanthropy, at jweinberg@emanuelf.org or **415-750-7557**.