



Grandma Joyce visits with kids at Congregation Mishkan Tefila.

# Reclaiming a grandparent

By Molly Ritvo

An unusual grandmother recently visited Congregation Mishkan Tefila in Chestnut Hill to teach children about Alzheimer's disease. Joyce Simard – or Grandma Joyce – is a social worker and author of "The Magic Tape Recorder." Simard is known for her brightly colored clothing and educates children on how to support a grandparent who is living with Alzheimer's.

Simard has not been personally affected by the disease, but said she understands the emotional pain Alzheimer's causes in a family.

"I feel that Alzheimer's disease takes enough of a toll on a family," Simard said in an interview with the *Advocate*. "It shouldn't also rob people of their grandchildren. If you can help a child understand why grandma or grandpa can't remember things, it becomes more OK for the child to visit his or her grandmother."

According to the Alzheimer's Association's Web site, the disease is a brain disorder that is a progressive and fatal disease that destroys brain cells, causing problems with memory, thinking and behavior severe enough to affect work, lifelong hobbies or social life.

At the Mishkan Tefila event, Simard visited with the religious school children and, through role-playing, music and stories, the children learned how to enjoy the company of elders suffering from memory loss.

According to Stephen Simons, the synagogue's educational director, it is vital for children to understand the disease.

"I am aware of many of our students who have grandparents suffering from memory, hearing mobility, or hearing loss," he said. "It is important that children be given the opportunity to visit with and accumulate positive memories of these family members as well as treat them with love and respect."

Simard said there is a social stigma surrounding the illness and she wants to combat that and make it more socially acceptable to

talk about memory loss.

"Adults really don't know how to tell their kids about what happens at the end of life," she said. "I started to be a social worker because I wanted to make a difference, but I really didn't have any idea of how to work with memory loss."

After working as a social worker for 20 years, Simard said she realized that many families stopped taking their children to visit their grandparents at nursing homes because they wanted their kids to remember the way "Bubbe" used to be.

"I am always surprised at how many children know their grandparent has Alzheimer's disease," Simard said. "Americans are living longer, but that means that more and more of the population deal with some form of Alzheimer's."

According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are as many as five million people living with Alzheimer's disease in the United States. In Massachusetts alone, there are currently 120,000 people 65 and older who have the disease.

Not everyone responds to statistics, however. Simons said that Simard knows how to make the disease understandable to everyone.

"Grandma Joyce's program is delightful and extremely child-centered," he said. "In order to understand where you are and where you are going, it is important to understand from whence you came and how past generations' experiences can help you go on to promote the future generation of Jews."

Simard's visit to Mishkan Tefila was sponsored by EPOCH Senior Living. Simard, who is based in Florida and Prague, travels across the country visiting EPOCH centers that care for Alzheimer's patients and hold story hours for children.

Added Simard: "You don't have to be afraid of someone with Alzheimer's disease."

All you need to do is love and cherish people who are having difficulties remembering things."



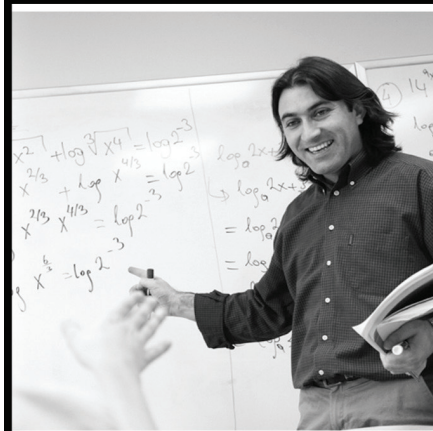
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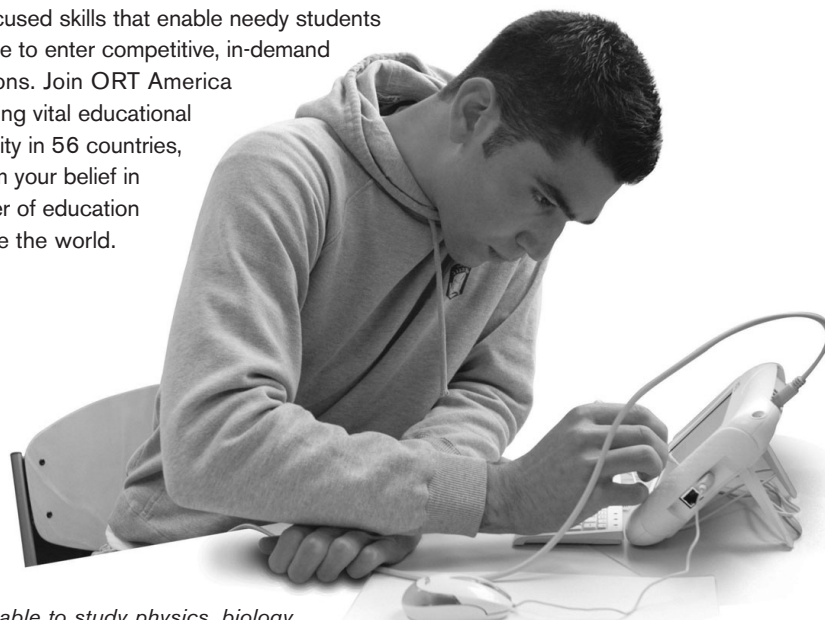
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