

Rabbi Eric Polokoff, B'nai Israel of Southbury
**Erev Shabbat Vayera 5783 Bund Remarks
Before First Selectman**

This Sanctuary centers Jewish life in this region. This Shabbat we welcome distinguished guests and participants. As you've heard, Femina Melodia is in the house. And we are joined representatives of the Town of Southbury, including First Selectman Jeff Manville, and Selectman John Diehl; members of the clergy here tonight include Pastors Donna Cassity of South Britain, and Abigail Johnson of St. James, and Fr. Bob Kwiatkowski of Mid-South Catholic. And our 85th Planning Committee members including our chair, the tireless and extraordinarily detailed Ed Edelson, along with Anne Armeno, Carleton Donne, Barbara Mechler and Ronald Webb.

Major sponsors of this weekend include the Southbury Community Trust Fund at the Connecticut Community Foundation, and the Jewish Federation of Western Connecticut. Steve Seward of the CCF's Executive Committee is here, as is our own Lisa Segal, Chair of the Southbury Community Trust Fund. And a large shout-out to our wonderful partners on the campus, Gary Jones, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation. Thank you to you and the Federation's Grants Committee, under the leadership of Roy Walzer.

Acknowledging the disturbing growth of Antisemitism in America, may we acknowledge that thinking Jews alone can prevent it, is like thinking the Black community itself can end racism. We need allies. Gathering to commemorate a legacy of standing up to prejudice, I thank all present, whether you be Jewish or an ally.

I now invite forward Southbury's first selectman, Jeff Manville, for a proclamation...

After First Selectman

Thank you, Jeff. Scott – don't go anywhere.

Fifteen years ago we were here to thank the town and two churches, South Britain and the UCC, for their great courage in repelling the German American Bund and saying No to Nazis. At that time, in keeping with the Rabbinic teaching *If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?* We also raised consciousness about genocide in Darfur, as tonight I referred to Ukraine. In his film Scott Sniffen would highlight this value as he asked me to reflect on how Southbury's history obligates me as a Jew.

A decade ago, on the Shabbat prior to the public showing of "Home of the Brave," we honored the Reverend M.E.N. Lindsay's legacy and heirs. Rev. Lindsay had died in 1987. In 2012 we discovered and then contacted his family through our dear friend the Rev. Shannon Wall, then Pastor of South Britain and her mother. As was discussed in Tracey O'shaugnessy's article in today's paper, Lindsay had been a pack-rat. And he knew he had done something important. He saved his sermon from 1937 in his safe deposit box. He saved the typewriter he wrote it on.

These items were donated in 2015 to the US Holocaust Museum. But note – their significance was not recognized until a quarter of a century *after* he died. Could he have imagined a rabbi in Southbury would read these words of his sermon from 1937 and stop in his tracks, thinking – wow, that was not often readily articulated in 1937 –that in persecuting Jews “Nazism fails to walk in the doctrine of Christ?” Could he have imagined that an organized town effort would send a talented filmmaker to further uncover his leadership?

Tonight we honor that filmmaker, Scott Sniffen – who is very much with us, even as he joins us from home. (Scott, I don’t think I see pajamas, though you don’t seem to be wearing a yamulke.) Tellingly, Scott, too, a congregationalist embraces that same spirit of justice and empathy extending far beyond oneself. His most recent project is the film “Haiti Day by Day.” And as we recognize Scott let me likewise thank Scott’s wife Tracey, whom he has shared, counseled him to take on the project that became “Home of the Brave.”

I now invite forward our synagogue’s President, Steven Reps, to join me as we present this special award to Scott. Steven will hold up our certificate.

Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof – Justice, Justice you shall pursue. (Deuteronomy 16:20)

As we commemorate the 85th anniversary of Southbury overcoming the Nazis, we recognize filmmaker Scott Sniffen for documenting and expanding awareness of this unique occurrence in American history in his Emmy-nominated documentary, “Home of the Brave.”

Scott is a lot like the people featured in his movie – smart, hardworking and accomplished while being well-grounded and down-to-earth. A gifted story teller, Scott is dedicated to his craft and to preserving oral history. Compelling and professional, with power and simplicity he masterfully retells the town’s determination to reject hatred.

Since its premier a decade ago, showings in numerous venues (CPTV, the US Senate, theaters, classrooms and community programs) have helped lead to Southbury’s recognition as a model against indifference by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

On *Erev Shabbat Vayera* 5783 – November 11, 2022, B’nai Israel of Southbury hereby confers upon him this

תעודת תודה
Certificate of Appreciation

It’s signed by Steven and me. Scott, thank you. We pray for your full and speedy recovery. Of course, it sorta figures Scott would end up on the big screen... We invite you to unmute...

After Scott

Scott, your message is likewise avowed in the Peter, Paul and Mary song that serves as tonight’s anthem: “Light One Candle.” Inspired by your work, may we ensure that the light of human

dignity continues to burn brightly, as we remember the past and face the challenges of our time.

Closing Remarks – 85th Anniversary Dinner

Friends, permit me to note that I’m grateful to Senator Murphy for his very kind wishes, as well as for his eloquence in addressing rising hatred and Antisemitism. Within this larger effort the specific reference to me is an honor. And I know that this story is very much a relay, a collective effort.

Leading that effort, I’d like to thank Ed Edelson – who for months has worked tirelessly on behalf of this weekend, sweating every single detail. But this has been a group effort – with so many, including so many in this room – determining to make this evening and this weekend a fitting tribute to those on whose shoulders we stand. Our steering committee included:

Lisa Segal	SCTF, Chair
Anne Armeno	Southbury Economic Development Commission, Chair
Barbara Mechler	Panel moderator
Carleton Dunn	South Britain Congregational Church, Deacon
Carrie Chiappetta	Ass’t Superintendent
Donna Cassity	Pastor, SBCC
Jeff Manville	First Selectman
Fran Tepperman	Panel Moderator
Christ Gardner	Panel Moderator
Joshua Smith	Superintendent
Ken Bolin	South Britain Congregational Church, Deacon
Kevin Bielmeier	Southbury Economic Development Director
Melinda Elliot	President, Southbury Historic Society
Shawn Garan	Pastor, UCC
Ron Webb	Tribury Rotary
Ed Edelson	Coordinator of 85 th Anniversary
Eric Polokoff	Rabbi, B’nai Israel
Kelly Keenan	Southbury Arts and Culture Council
Kim McNeil	Southbury Arts and Culture Council

We’ve been fortunate this evening to have with us several authors. They will avow with me – with us – that there’s a right side of history. Sometimes, we’re able to look the past and be proud. It’s so telling whether it was Lois Lindsay talking about her father in Scott Sniffen’s films, or Jeff Manville relating his own family’s connection to the events of 1937, as Samuel Greene, MD, signed the town resolution, we discern the pride.

Our friend Rebecca Erbelding of the US Holocaust Museum has observed that genocidal activity can be successfully disrupted – there are, in fact, models for doing so, indeed, that’s the significance of what those courageous townsfolk in Southbury succeeded in doing – impeding menace and fighting hatred. The right side of history continues to guide us, as we *kvell*, translation “beam,” along with her family, on how inspired by this story fourth grader Natalia Reid established an Upstanders Club. Of course, in taking the time to be here tonight or this weekend, know that you, too, have chosen the correct side of history: respect and the dignity of all.

I wish everyone a good evening. I look forward to seeing folks tomorrow at South Britain Congregational Church. And I remind you that our next major gathering avowing our values of inclusion and hope is not a decade away, but Tuesday, November 22nd at Sacred Heart Church/Mid-South Catholic for the annual Interfaith Thanksgiving service.

Remarks: South Britain Church

Congregationalist friends, we have such a long history together spanning a quarter century. For me, it’s always great to be back at South Britain Congregational Church, even should I still be licking a few wounds about what I’ll describe as my narrow loss in the final “Faith Off” competition. As she assumed ministerial responsibilities here, amongst the topics I raised with Reverend Cassity was to ascertain her interest in ping pong. So much for a rematch.

Of course, Pastor Donna was immediately receptive to this weekend’s proceedings, that culminate now with a historic plaque celebrating Reverend M.E.N. Lindsay. Permit me to also give a shout out to Pastor Shawn and the UCC. Your predecessor, Rev. Felix Manley and your church were partners and leaders in Southbury’s response, and as such, it’s very fitting that you worship, celebrate and remember together here this morning. Indeed, 15 years ago our congregation honored both the UCC and South Britain along with the town.

For many years now my synagogue and our Jewish community have blessed the memory of Rev. Lindsay, and his work guiding your church and the town in formulating and executing the town’s stance against the German American Bund, that Nazi organization that had in 1937 sought to develop a camp here. The Rev. Lindsay characterized the Bund as “An insidious menace; un-Christian, un-American and pro-Nazi.” He also specifically condemned Nazism for its persecution of Jews. He likewise distinguished himself at the subsequent town meetings, where he moderated with skill and civility as the people of Southbury passed resolutions against the Bund. Southbury ultimately crafted and affirmed new zoning laws that forbade paramilitary activity and dissuaded the Bund’s presence. Through all of this, the Rev. Lindsay’s faithful and learned presence, his strategizing and organizing, and his powerful and inspiring words helped to galvanize a community into collective action.

All of this, of course, was grounded in faith. Your Scriptural reading this morning from Isaiah 65 is telling. It offers a striking image of a time when violence shall have ended. The passage concludes:

וְנִחַשׁ עֵפֶר לַחֲמֹ לוֹא יִרְעוּ וְלוֹא יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל-הָר קֹדֶשׁ אֵמַר יְהוָה:

And the serpent's food shall be earth. In all my sacred mount, nothing evil or vile shall be done – Says the Eternal God.

Notice how the serpent will no longer sink its fangs into human flesh or that of other animals, but instead, as discussed early in Genesis, shall eat dust. Speaking allegorically, Isaiah voices a determination to overcome menace and work for a time of peace and safety. Assuredly, this passage resonates with insight and hindsight. From our vantage, aware of the Holocaust and death camps, and the tens of millions of military casualties and civilian fatalities, nothing – absolutely nothing in human history – has proved more evil and vile than Nazism. It was this very poison that Rev. Lindsay, this church and town all dramatically stood against, well-before the onset of war. To reiterate, this happened in 1937 – before *Kristallnacht* with its destruction of Jewish property and synagogues throughout German occupied land, and the mass arrests and internment of German Jewish men in concentration camps. This happened before British and French appeasement at Munich, or the Nazi invasion of Poland that began World War II, and the deliberate murder of six million Jews, amongst others.

In honoring this legacy and permanently inscribing it as your own, congregants of South Britain Church link this institution to the sacred and to our land's highest ideals. In so doing, avowing your values and history, may we all go from strength to strength.

Cain yehi Ratzon. Be this God's will.