

Diverse Backgrounds and Common Goals: Hebrew Day School Families

Whether they come from Venezuela, Latvia, United States, or Jamaica, families who attend HDS seek educational excellence in a nurturing environment. They want their children to be academically skilled, grounded in their Jewish identities, confident in their talents, and poised to contribute to the world around them. Below is a snapshot of five HDS families.

Ricardo and Andreina Seir
Arianna (HDS '11) and Gabriel (HDS '13)

Ricardo and Andreina Seir were both born in Venezuela and met in the last year of dental school at the Central University of Venezuela in the capital Caracas. Andreina's parents and grandparents, also from Venezuela, are Catholic as is 99% of the population in Venezuela. Ricardo's mother was born in Tel Aviv, Israel; his maternal grandparents escaped there from the Holocaust, the only survivors of an 80-member family. The family moved to Caracas to join a paternal great uncle who had moved there for the promise of great opportunities. Ricardo's maternal grandfather was a pharmacist who had been the only Jewish student at the university in Prague where he had studied.

Ricardo's father was born in Venezuela in a small town called Valera where his parents immigrated before WWII. Ricardo's parents attended a Jewish day school in Venezuela, the same school that Ricardo attended years later, the Moral y Luces Herzl-Bialik. "I grew up with the notion that every Jewish kid, regardless of money or background, would attend this school," says Ricardo. "I attended from kindergarten to high school, had the same friends growing up, and remain friends with them to this day. I had at least 3 teachers who also taught my parents. My parents' childhood friends from school are still their friends. The Jewish community in Caracas is a very close community, and people help each other in every respect. I wanted something similar for my children, so for me there was no doubt that they would attend Hebrew Day School," says Ricardo.

Following dental school in Venezuela, Ricardo and Andreina came to Ann Arbor to pursue master's degrees in the School of Dentistry. Andreina has a Master of Science in Pediatric Dentistry. Ricardo has a Master of Science in Restorative Dentistry. They married after they finished school. When the political situation changed in Venezuela and their personal security was in danger, they decided to stay in Ann Arbor where they have been for the last 16 years. They both taught at the dental school, and now work in private practice. Both of their children, Arianna and Gabriel, were born in Ann Arbor. The family speaks Spanish at home, and now that the children are learning Hebrew, they are tri-lingual. "I come from a very close-knit family where love and support are a must," says Andreina. "The first day I walked into the HDS, I felt that this was the place I wanted for my children, not only because of the religion, but also because of the warm sense of community that you can breathe."

Michael Farquharson and Donnalee Grey-Farquharson
Chaelee (HDS '14) and Rachel (HDS '16)

Michael Farquharson and Donnalee Grey-Farquharson are both from St. Thomas, Jamaica. Both went to the same high school although they did not know each other then. Donnalee moved to Toronto, Canada to attend the University of Toronto and later became a certified high school teacher in Chemistry and Biology. Michael moved to Columbus, Ohio, where he obtained a degree in computers and electronics. After they met, Donnalee came to Ann Arbor for graduate school at the University of Michigan in Technology Education and Survey Methodology, and Michael came along. Donnalee currently works on education research projects in the Education and Well Being Department at the University of Michigan's Institute of Social Research. Michael is currently an Information Technology Specialist at the University of Michigan's International Institute.

Donnalee's Jewish journey began in her teens and was formalized as a young adult in Canada. Michael had knowledge of Judaism but was plunged into Jewish culture when he met and married Donnalee. They have three daughters: Michelle the eldest is in college, and Chaelee and Rachel are both students at HDS. The family belongs to Temple Beth Emeth congregation.

"HDS is important to us because it embeds the girls in the Jewish culture, and provides a Jewish family and home away from home for the girls," says Donnalee. "Our daughters love learning, reading, and writing Hebrew as a part of their day. The standard of education is very high and the children are nurtured, not only academically, but also emotionally. They are given what they need on an individual level. The teachers and staff are very accessible and responsive to our needs," adds Donnalee.

Debbie Zivan
Brayan (HDS '11)

Debbie was born and raised in Rochester, NY where she was a member of Temple Beth El, a Conservative synagogue. She did not attend a day school but found a deep connection to Jewish life from attending Camp Ramah in Canada. She came to Ann Arbor to attend University of Michigan. Debbie works in the field of Health Care Satisfaction Research and teaches the juggling chug at HDS. Brayan was born in Guatemala and came to live with her when he was 2 1/2 years old. Debbie and Brayan are members of the Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Havurah.

"While I struggled with the idea of putting him in an all-Jewish environment," says Debbie, "I felt that dedicating a significant part of his elementary education to Judaic education was the most effective, positive and enduring way to make living a Jewish life a core part of his foundation. I hope that this, in turn, will serve as a guide for him the rest of his life. Yet another key factor in my decision related to how I see things shaking out in the Jewish world; I am a big supporter of the various streams of Judaism and various definitions of living Jewishly; feels to me like exposing Brayan to a strong base of Jewish learning increases the chances of sustaining diversity in the Jewish world. With an HDS education, Brayan understands Jewish thought and text as a rich resource for many Jews from a variety of backgrounds," Debbie adds.

Luba Frank and Boris Bondin
Michael (HDS '07) Natan (HDS '13)

Luba Frank was born in St. Petersburg. She received her MD degree from Latvian Medical Academy, and while there, met Boris. Boris was born and raised in Riga, Latvia, and at the time was pursuing his engineering degree from Riga Technical University. They met and got married in Riga in 1991, and two years later decided to move to Israel, where they lived and worked for 13 years. Luba completed her radiology residency program at Carmel Medical Center in Haifa, and in 2006 received an offer from the University of Michigan to participate in a year-long postdoctoral fellowship in Cardiothoracic Radiology. Their two sons Michael and Natan (now 14 and 8 years old) were born and raised in Israel. Luba currently is an Assistant Professor in the Cardiothoracic Division of the Radiology Department at the University of Michigan, and Boris is an electrical engineer at the University of Michigan Plant Operations.

“When we first thought of coming from Israel to America with two small children, we were concerned,” shared Luba. “How could we go to a cold new place without knowing anybody, leaving everything behind even for one year? But when we started to search for information, we were surprised at how many people were associated with Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan. Many people in Ann Arbor guided us before we came and also when we arrived. As we searched the web to know more about our soon-to-be home, we discovered Hebrew Day School. We were very excited to know about its existence, and we received the enrollment package by mail while we were still in Israel. Until today we still have no regrets for sending Michael to HDS for 5th grade in our very first year here. He was happy to go to school where he could speak his native Hebrew language while at the same time learning English and meeting new friends. He had his very own small Israel in America, which made transition to our new life much easier. We were very impressed with how he progressed. The help and personal attention Michael got from the teachers at HDS made him able to get an exceptionally high score in the MEAP in 6th grade, even in English, after only one year of being in the United States. Now Michael is a 9th grader at Huron High School, plays in the school’s Junior Varsity tennis team and is an all “A” student. He is also very happy to attend Hebrew language lessons at “Keshet” to help him keep up with his Hebrew and all of his friends from HDS. This summer he proudly took part in the Maccabi games in Omaha. Last year, family and friends celebrated Michael’s Bar Mitzvah at the Chabad House of Ann Arbor. Michael’s brother, Natan was only 4 years old when we brought him to the United States. We consider HDS a great opportunity to keep Natan connected to Jewish environment. We hope he’ll find lifelong friendships, and become a part of the community while obtaining a great education in Ann Arbor’s very academically challenging environment,” says Luba.

Myra and Rich Klarman
Max Klarman (HDS '14)

Rich Klarman was born in Detroit. He grew up in Southfield and attended Southfield Public Schools K-12. He was one of the very few kids in his neighborhood who didn’t attend after-school and Sunday Hebrew school. Rather, his dad taught him to sound out siddur (prayer book) Hebrew, and somewhat later he studied some conversational modern Hebrew with a tutor. Just

before his Bar Mitzvah, Rich and his sister, Emily, began to attend "Junior Congregation" at B'nai Moshe, where Rich's Hungarian grandparents had been members since the 1930s. "Junior Congregation was led by Mark Eichner," says Klarman. "He was a fantastic storyteller, and he happens to also be the father of another HDS parent (Adam Eichner)." Rich also attended Camp Young Judaea and Tel Yehudah during high school. He came to Ann Arbor as a freshman in U-M's Honors College, stuck around to earn his law degree, and never left. Rich has been attending Rabbi Glogower's Talmud class for 18 years, although he admits, "My Aramaic is still fairly horrible." Rich earns his livelihood as the TestGuru, providing private tutoring to aspiring lawyers (LSAT, law school, and bar exam) in his home office in the Burns Park neighborhood.

Myra Klarman was born in Brooklyn, New York and grew up in the suburbs of New York City. Her family was unaffiliated, although she does remember attending Hebrew school for one year. Her fondest Jewish memory was the annual Passover seder at her grandparents' apartment. "Best matzoh ball soup ever," she says. Myra came to Ann Arbor to be with Rich. "One of our first projects as a young couple was hosting our families for Passover," she shared. Myra studied graphic design and graduated with a BFA from Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts). Eighteen years later, after running her own successful design studio, she found her true calling as a portrait photographer. She enjoys sharing her photography talents with dozens of arts, educational, and social service organizations in the community, including HDS.

The entire Klarman family has been actively involved with FestiFools since its inception in 2006. Myra is their official photographer. Rich is on the steering committee and designed and maintains the festifools.org website, and Max is among the most enthusiastic community volunteers, who build puppets on the weekends leading up to the yearly event held in the beginning of April. They are also very involved with the Ann Arbor Summer Festival and Burns Park Players.

"We value the diversity of approaches to Judaism across the HDS families, from extremely observant to extremely secular, and the mutual respect — and commitment to *klal yisrael* — that that fosters," say the Klarmans. "We're so happy that HDS is not only giving Max the individual attention that allows him to thrive in school, but also a solid foundation in Jewish culture. The school is the perfect size: big enough that he has plenty of social stimulation and opportunities to participate in activities like the band, the string ensemble, and chess club, but small enough that it's still a tight-knit community that truly knows and adores him."

For more information about HDS, contact 971-4633 or look at www.hdsaa.org. Evening Open Houses will be held on Monday, December 13th and Thursday, January 27th. Day Tour will be held on Tuesday, January 11th