

# CONNECTIONS

JSS's Francie Smith Saposnik recently left her "other" job as UW faculty.



## Francie Smith Saposnik

What her "net" is worth

Francie Smith Saposnik takes the term "connections" up a notch. The Director of Senior Services at Jewish Social Services is a consummate "connector" on the individual level: her irresistibly warm and loving nature thaws even the iciest curmudgeons. What most JSS clients may not know is how much of a *maven* (expert) she is in the social work world.

Until recently, Francie was a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Social Work, coordinating the Older Adults field unit, a part-time job she held since 1991 while working what appeared to be 24/7 at JSS. She'd teach and hold office hours in the evening, and placed dozens of social work up-and-comers in internships to learn the real-world ropes from the pros in local agencies. To avoid any conflicts of interest, interns placed at JSS have been part of a different field unit.

Francie's mentoring has created a personal and professional connection with many key individuals in the Dane County aging services community. JSS Associate Executive Director Barbara Spierer remarks, "Francie's been reluctant to give up teaching for many reasons, one of which is her belief that former students placed at other agencies have helped provide the best possible service to JSS clients."

Nonetheless, Francie did leave the UW this spring. At a farewell gathering on May 15, we talked with some former students, now members of Francie's inimitable network.

Mary P. Johnson, Associate Director of Psychological/Social/Spiritual Services at HospiceCare, Inc., credits Francie as "the reason I'm working at Hospice right now, because she introduced me to it and let me try it out, and I loved it." Deciding Mary would

be a good match with HospiceCare, Francie "worked her magic," says Mary, despite no apparent internship openings.

La Vay Elg-Scott, who began her social work training at age 51, thanks Francie for arranging for the financial award which funded LaVay's graduate studies. Then, by pairing her in a field placement with another non-traditional student, Diane Bright, Francie created a comfortable setting for both women. Today, dynamo LaVay manages two assisted living residences, an adult day center and a hospice residence for Mercy Health System in Janesville.

Two former students who share clients with JSS are Andrea Garn from ElderCare Inc. and Kirsten Pollack from the South Madison Senior Coalition. Andrea appreciates Francie as "the one who got me excited about geriatric social work. I hadn't really thought that would be an arena I'd want to work in, and now that's where I hope to be for a long time."

Finally, Mary Kerwin, now at the University of Wisconsin Geriatric Clinic, commented that "Francie's respect for her clients is immense, and her ability to advocate for people is something to admire." She was so moved by Francie's effectiveness in negotiating on behalf of those in need recently that she said, "I thought I had to call her and tell her what a goddess she is." Given Francie's consistently superlative written evaluations from students, we think many would agree.

Over the last sixteen years, Francie Smith Saposnik has indeed woven a wide and deep net to cradle those needing help in our community. Nearly all of Francie's former students have in turn trained new field placement students – as Mary Johnson put it, "the way she taught me they need to be trained." And so, despite her leaving UW, Francie's powerful "net" will keep expanding along with her commitment to JSS.

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# Denial, Family Style

## What if a family member won't accept the truth about a loved one?

### Part II in a series

BY RACHELLE RICHARDSON

As I sat in my Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Group, I realized that, while it was often overwhelming to be an only child in charge of my mom's life, doing battle with the disease was heart-breaking and exhausting enough without having to do battle with family as well.

I felt sad and angry for the daughter whose mom refused to send (former-executive) Dad to daycare...for the brother whose out-of-state sisters blamed him because Mom hadn't had a shower in three months...and especially for the husband whose kids now distanced themselves and seemed ashamed of their mom.

Each of these caregivers was up against family members in denial, unable to face their own fears – or the facts: Dad isn't who he was and might find comfort in a peaceful, accepting environment. Individuals with dementia are often terrified by water and may require bed baths. Shame may actually be grief in disguise.

Our support group could have benefited from *Mom's OK, She Just Forgets—The Alzheimer's Journey from Denial to Acceptance* – a little gem of compassion, perspective and rationality – but it wasn't around ten years ago. The book sheds light on the fears that breed denial – our own death or disability, social shunning, financial ruin, to name a few. It also addresses hot-button, often entrenched dysfunctional patterns like sibling rivalry and the “who's-in-charge” game.

Some families do rise to the occasion. One young woman in our group called a family meeting and came out with a cooperative plan. Were we impressed!

For other families, crisis can be a growth opportunity if at least one member seeks information and support. Jewish Social

Services is a great place to start. Geriatric social worker Nancy Dodge explains, “First, we offer families emotional support because it's really hard to come to terms with the fact their loved one is diminishing in capacity.” Then, JSS can work with family members, here and away, to reach consensus on care plans as the affected person's needs change.

a power struggle with her sister into a supportive care-sharing relationship, as a result of taking the *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* course co-facilitated by Nancy Dodge. (Call Claire Culbertson, Area Agency on Aging, 261-5679, for a schedule of upcoming groups.)

Occasionally, a family member with personal financial woes, substance abuse problems or plain greediness surreptitiously blocks plans in order to “preserve the inheritance.” This may be a form of elder abuse and should not be tolerated. If you're concerned, you can turn to JSS or the Area Agency on Aging Elder Abuse hotline, 261-9933.

Silver linings *can* be found in the darkest of clouds.

Tragically, a month before I received the diagnosis of my mom's Alzheimer's Disease, my step-sons' mother had suffered a stroke which left her cognitively and physically impaired. My relationship with them had always been strained and tinged with resentment. But we were suddenly thrust into the traumatic world of dementia together. The door to empathy and forgiveness opened, and we bonded as a family like never before.

*Rachelle Richardson is a free-lance writer who was a client of JSS until 2000, when her mother passed away.*

*“Families who work well together will have an easier time, perhaps, but dysfunctional families may actually gain more from this whole experience. Adversity has the power to bring about growth.”*

— Evelyn McLay and Ellen P. Young in *Mom's OK, She Just Forgets — The Alzheimer's Journey from Denial to Acceptance*

What if someone can't work through denial enough to join the team? asks McLay and Young. “We must accept this and not fight it...Leave the door open and the welcome mat out.”

That was a good strategy for Carol Spencer, featured in *Connections* two summers ago, who was able to transform

## Action Plans for Families

When family members feel that they are all real participants in planning, they're more likely to pitch in. Many of these ideas are taken from *Mom's OK, She Just Forgets*:

1. Remember, everyone's different, and doing the best they can.
2. Don't backbite or scapegoat anyone to funnel off anger.
3. Have everyone contribute to problem-solving research.
4. Call family meetings; take notes or record them.
5. Divide responsibilities and be specific, e.g., out-of-staters might send money for household help or an aide to provide respite to the day-to-day caregiver.
6. Don't have unreasonable expectations.

## JSS Offers A Sincere

# Thank You

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The following contributions were recorded between April 1, 2007 and June 30, 2007

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*Francie Smith Saposnik, thank you for your help*  
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*Barbara Spierer, 25 years at JSS*  
Betsy and Bezael Haimson

**Continued on page 4**

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We appreciate when you honor and remember others with a gift to JSS. Gifts that are unrestricted in nature allow JSS to use them where the greatest needs exist. A card notifying the designee or family is sent immediately.

Every donation means a great deal to us. We have made every effort to make sure our thank you lists are accurate and complete, but if we have inadvertently neglected to list your name, please let us know. Call Svetlana Govorukha, 278-1808. Thank you.

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**Continued on page 8**

Dear Friends,

Recently, Maria Cancian, JSS Board President wrote to you. The theme of her letter was *mazel*—luck. While at times it may seem like some people have all the luck, in fact, bad and good luck comes to most of us in equal measure.

When fortune isn't smiling, the staff at JSS stands ready to help. Last year, more than 1,000 people sought JSS' services to assist them through the acute crises and chronic problems that can beset anyone.

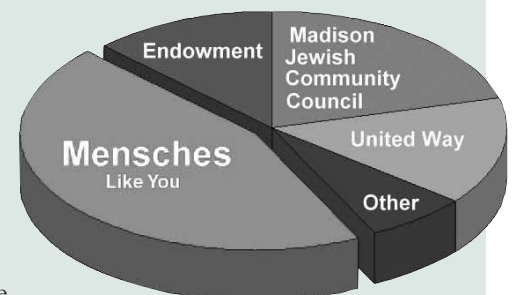
Listed on these pages are those of you who made contributions during the last fiscal year. Some of you designated JSS for your United Way gift.\* A few of you donated cars or boats to be sold at auction. Many of you made tribute gifts in memory or to honor someone you care about. Those of you who JSS helped last year and are able, sent money so that the agency will be there to assist others. But most of you are listed here because you provided JSS with an annual gift in response to a letter like the one Maria wrote. This year we hope we can count on you once again. You've been so generous in the past, and we hope our *mazel* holds out.

In the pie chart, you can see how much JSS depends on personal financial contributions, which brings us to the word *mensch*. A *mensch* is a good person, someone who has a sense of what is right and responsible, someone who helps others without an expectation of return. There is no higher compliment we can pay another individual than to call them a *mensch*.

*Mensches* are the heart and soul of JSS. Please give generously.

\*When you donate to the United Way, their volunteers decide what portion of the total will be allocated to JSS. However, if you choose to designate JSS, your gift is guaranteed to the agency.

As hard as we try, we may have left some names out. Please call us at 278-1808 so we can apologize and be sure to include your name in our next issue.



*Mensches make us whole.*

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## Did you know..?

- Sandy Bierman, featured in the last issue of *Connections*, has undergone a kidney transplant and is doing very well. Best wishes, Sandy.
- On August 25th, Director of Senior Services, Francie Smith Saposnik marks her 25th anniversary with JSS. *Mazel tov*, Francie!
- JSS senior summer outings have included: a visit to the Wisconsin Triennial Exhibit at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, a tour of the Governor's Mansion and the annual barbeque at the Goodman Campus.

### Jewish Social Services of Madison

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Barbara Spierer, *Associate Executive Director*

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# The Ties that Bind

BY JANICE BEERS  
Director of Immigrant & Refugee Services

Once in a while, someone special crosses your path and changes the course of your life for the better. My friend, Albert was such a person.

Albert and I met serendipitously at a coffee shop in 1998. He was there with his running friends. Somehow, I mustered the courage to walk up to the group and inquire about their running. "I have a new running partner," Albert declared, before he even knew my name!

For an entire year, Albert ran all of the local races at my pace. We always crossed the finish line with smiles on our faces, even if we were at the back of the pack. We became close friends over the years. We helped each other through trying times. Especially hard for Albert was the untimely death of his niece, Lizzette.



Some of you might have known Albert. He worked at the Bread Barn. When runners saw him at races they often exclaimed, "Hey—aren't you the "Bread Guy?" Albert became a mentor to many of the high school and college students who worked at the store. "Albert treated us with respect and talked to us as if we were adults," explained one of the young women.

Last fall, Sara Fountain walked into my office, asking for assistance with her immigration papers. She was born in Jamaica. When she was a young girl, her mother fell ill with cancer, and her grandparents brought her to the United States when she was just 8 years old. The day she left Jamaica, her mother passed away.

When I met Sara, I immediately took note of her last name. "I have a close running friend with the same last name," I told her. "You know Albert?" she

exclaimed. Sara is married to Albert's nephew, Tim.

This past March, Sara and I were disheartened to learn that Albert had been diagnosed with a rare form of liver cancer. That didn't stop him, though, from continuing to offer support to Sara and Tim through the difficult immigration process. Albert and his wife, Eve, became Sara's financial sponsor. That would have been enough; but Albert and Eve went one step further and insisted on paying the filing fees as well, a very generous gift.

Albert passed away on June 14th. Sara and I held each other and cried when we heard the devastating news. We couldn't believe that this vibrant man was gone. He was buried next to his beloved niece, Lizzette.

Sara and Tim's interview with the Milwaukee USCIS office is just a month away. I will proudly represent this couple in honor of my special friend, Albert Fountain.

## Planning for the Future

### Midlife and Aging Families of Persons with Serious Mental Illness

October 13, 2007 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM

Courtyard by Marriott Madison East (608)661-8100  
2502 Crossroads Dr., Madison, WI

*\*Please Note: This conference is for consumers, parents, siblings and others involved in the lives of adults with serious mental illness.*

#### Featured Speakers:

James A. Jaeger J.D., Elder Law Attorney  
*Legal issues and Financial Planning*

David Mays M.D., Psychiatrist  
*Meeting the Challenge and Open Discussion*

Speaker TBA  
*Issues Related to Social Security*

Donna Wrenn, Executive Director of NAMI Wisconsin  
*Beneficiary Plan*

Registration: Includes workshop, continental breakfast, lunch and snack. Registration, along with credit card information, can be phoned in or emailed. All participants will receive a letter to confirm their reservations for the training.

Registration is limited to the first 50 people

Sponsors: NAMI Wisconsin, UW Madison School of Social Work, and Jewish Social Services of Madison.

#### Planning For the Future Registration Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Meal preference: Regular diet  Vegetarian diet

Request: Social Work CEU's  Certificate of Attendance

Early Registration Fee: \$12 Deadline: September 7, 2007

Standard Registration Fee: \$15 Deadline: September 21, 2007

Charge Payment: Visa  Master Card Account

# \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Checks: Make payable to: NAMI Wisconsin, 4233 W. Beltline Hwy., Madison, WI 53711.

Call NAMI Wisconsin at (608) 268-6000 or (800) 236-2988 for further information. Some scholarships are available. Please complete and return this form to NAMI Wisconsin Inc., 4233 W. Beltline Hwy, Madison, WI 53711 before September 21, 2007.

## The Right Stuff – Jeff Erlanger z”l

Many generous people volunteer for Jewish Social Services, often touching lives as they go about their assignments. One exemplary individual is Jeff Erlanger, of blessed memory.

Jeff, a Madison native and Edgewood College graduate, began volunteering for JSS in 1995, while he was still a student. For many years, he delivered Hanukkah menorahs to nursing home residents, brightening their holiday and insuring that they were not forgotten. From 1998 until 2001, Jeff served on the JSS Board of Directors. Most recently, he was a telephone reassurance volunteer for an elderly woman who he called, faithfully, five days a week. These conversations helped her feel more secure as she adjusted to life in a retirement community. Whenever asked to perform a *mitzvah*, Jeff happily complied, saying that he enjoyed having the chance to help someone in some tangible way.

Jeff managed all of this in spite of his quadriplegia. He would tell you that he really wasn't doing anything special; he was just doing the right thing. He also understood "the right thing" to mean fighting hard on behalf of people with any kind of disability. He worked to insure that Madison become a fully inclusive community. With that mission in mind, Jeff served on several City of Madison and Dane County commissions and committees and campaigned hard for City Council, coming in a respectable second.

Sadly, Jeff died recently at the age of 36, leaving Madison minus a tireless activist and all around *mensch*. His obituary

included these words which describe Jeff perfectly. "He lived his life with boundless enthusiasm, taking advantage of every opportunity to make a friend or make a difference...He was never defined by his disability, and his optimism and accomplishments inspired us to see possibilities instead of obstacles."



*At JSS we also strive to see possibilities instead of obstacles, offering our clients hope, along with concrete solutions to difficult problems. If you are inspired by Jeff's example, you might want to become a volunteer somewhere in the community.*

To discuss possibilities, contact Louise Goldstein, (278-1808 ext 26, [louisejss@mjcc.net](mailto:louisejss@mjcc.net)) or go to [www.volunteeryourtime.org](http://www.volunteeryourtime.org)

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