

## CHAT ROOM



SYLVIA KAMBOURIS

## Taking a stand against gun violence

There comes a time in a person's life when you feel it is necessary to step out of the safety of your everyday routines, cut through all of the excuses and rationalizations and come out of your comfort zone to take a stand for something you deeply believe in.

For me, the reason to take a stand comes from the obscene statistic that each day 14 children die from gun violence. Whether by suicide, accident, or homicide, close to 6,000 children will be dead every year and the lives of their families will be shattered and forever changed.

I am not the only one who is awakening to the realization that the current status of gun-related deaths involving 36,000 people a year is unacceptable. Across the country, mothers and other concerned citizens are rising to take a stand: We have had enough — my child, her child, his child will not become a victim to gun violence. We are joining together in a movement called the Million Mom March.

**A tapestry of women from all walks of life are coming together with a common goal: the enactment of common sense gun laws.**

Laws to protect and ensure the safety of that which is most precious to us, our children. The common threads weaving us together are our shared feelings of horror, outrage and tremendous sadness when a child's life is lost to a gun. We are all victims when we begin to fear sending our children to school, when we watch the news and over children being killed in their schools or when guns too easily get into the hands of children, resulting in murders, suicides or accidental deaths. How many times must we see this happen? How many first graders do we have to see get killed? How many first graders do we have to see point a gun and kill?

### Million Mom March

How do we ever recover? When a child dies like this, we face a collective loss and an enormous void as it strikes a chord deep within our soul. Million Mom March is about the belief that there is personal responsibility and accountability — that the time has come to realize that all children have a right to live in safety, that not one more child should die that individuals can and must make a difference.

We have been patient too long. It is taking too long to pass reasonable, common-sense laws, laws that the majority of the people support. This is where women come in. There is great power in women, by sheer numbers. The Million Mom March is giving us the opportunity to make our voice known and to be heard. On Mothers' Day, May 14, we will march in Washington and in Lansing.

This is not a political issue. It is not an anti-gun issue. It is a public health issue. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, firearm violence is a national epidemic and a national emergency. Guns are dangerous and lethal when they get into the wrong hands. In an article recently published in the American Journal of Public Health, 35 percent of people living in a home with children 18 or younger said they keep at least one firearm. That means 8 million children living in homes exposed to unsecured guns. All these guns from an industry that is not subjected to the same consumer safety regulations as products in other industries.

Million Mom March is asking for common-sense laws involving gun registration and licensing, safety

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## Making matzah

### Youngsters learn Passover story by baking bread

**A group of kids from the Birmingham Temple learned how to bake matzah at the Jewish Community Center.**

BY JOANNE PORRETTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

After the 10 plagues, the Israelites — rushed by the Egyptians to leave — snatched up their unbaked dough, although it had not had time to rise. It is this scenario remembered by Jews worldwide as they begin to prepare for the season of Passover, to begin this year at sundown April 19. It is a season of commemoration, of remembrance and of symbolism.

For a group of children from the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills, the journey to understanding the intricacies of the season began last Sunday, as they participated in a "Matzah Bakery" offered at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield.

Their faces stilled by concentration, they watched as the natural sheaves of wheat were ground to chemach (flour) and mixed with mayim (water). The Jewish college students who were demonstrating the process studiously mixed an age-old story in with the recipe, describing the Jews leaving in haste from Egypt.

Menachem Zakos, a student of Chabad, did most of the talking. Animated and gesturing, he recalled the episode in the story of Exodus in which the Israelites, lacking time to raise their dough properly on the night of their escape from bondage, baked unraised dough into flat, hard cakes called matzah.

The matzah is made with flour and water only, and the process is performed quickly so that there is no possibility for the dough to rise. In fact, the matzah must be completed within 18 minutes of the moment water touches the dough so that the bread remains flat when eaten — thus, the modern day commemoration of eating only unleavened bread during Passover.

### Taking the challenge

The children took the challenge. They rolled their flour/water mixture into thin hard cakes, poked the cakes gleefully with plastic forks so the dough would not explode (later reported as their favorite part), and worked on Passover crafts as their matzah was whisked into ovens to bake. Parents and teachers looked on, their mood a mixture of gentle indulgence of fun while setting an example of proud solemnity.

While her matzah baked, Eleanor Gamaleki, 6, diligently worked on a



STAFF PHOTO BY HEARON LAMBERT

**Busy bakers: Sarah Gerendasy, 2, of Bloomfield Hills and a member of the Birmingham Temple, was barely able to see over the table to roll out her dough. Below, Davis Trapp, 6, of Farmington Hills, designs a cover for his matzah with his dad, Bill, at his side. For more photos, please turn to Page B-3.**

cover for her bread decorated with the Star of David. While thoroughly enjoying each aspect of this Sunday School field trip, it was apparent that Eleanor was absorbing the deeper message.

### Story retold

"The Jewish had to travel across Egypt with the matzah," she said, "and they didn't have time to bake it with yeast, so that's why we just eat matzah at this time of year. I mostly think about how hard it was for them to travel all across Egypt to get away from a horrible person."

While the Exodus and suffering of the fleeing Jews was an important message, the group emanated a definite sense of celebration throughout the morning. Along with the symbol of unleavened bread, the children learned that the karpas, a green vegetable, symbolized spring and new life. Haroset, a savory mixture of chopped nuts, apples and wine, tastes of "sweet freedom" and brings to mind the transition from slavery to freedom.

As the students of Chabad oversaw the events, their spokesman, Menachem Zakos, quietly reflected on his motivation.

"The ultimate reason for all of this is for encouraging Jewish people to come back to tradition. This is what is done through all of our work."

And the events of this snowy spring morning did culminate in a sense of tradition as the children took their



seats in front of the freshly baked, flat, unleavened bread, proudly wearing baker's hats. They sat quietly for the blessing.

"Blessed art thou, oh eternal our

God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with thy commandments and commanded us to eat unleavened bread."

And that they did.

## Survivor finds helping others healing

BY KATHIE O'DONOHUE  
SPECIAL WRITER

What started as a potential tragedy for Farmington Hills resident Mary Plato has become a wellspring of hope and encouragement for many. When

Plato lost her hair through chemotherapy treatment for breast cancer, she stopped by her regular beauty salon to say hello.

Curious, her friends at the shop inquired about her hair loss and Plato unabashedly whipped off her wig to display her bald head.

Another salon client observing the situation was a head nurse from Mott 7, a pediatric cancer unit at Ann Arbor's University of Michigan Hospital who Plato says "liked my style. She asked me to come and work with them as a volunteer." Plato has been with Mott ever since, each Friday making the 30-mile trek to encourage and support young cancer patients and their families.

"It's a healing experience for me as I help others," Plato says. "I listen to a lot of parents, and I have credibility because I've had surgery, chemo and radiation."

She plays with the patients, talks to parents and assists with siblings. She sometimes relieves parents so they can get a breath of fresh air.

"This is one of the most fulfilling things I've ever done," she adds.

First diagnosed with breast cancer in January 1998, Plato is now clinically free of disease. She maintains five-month follow-up visits to her doctors. Yet she recalls her initial reaction to her cancer diagnosis.

"I knew immediately from the behavior of the X-ray tech that something wasn't right," Plato said. She had just had an unremarkable mammogram 14 months earlier.

"I cried at first," Plato relates, after being told she had cancer. "But I was never without hope. My doctors were excellent; I found support from many people. But I give the credit to God."

At Mott 7, cancer cases run the gamut, according to Plato. Recently she says "we had a 3-week old baby (as a cancer patient) ... and there are 20-year-olds with cancer," as well as every age in between.

While cancer is a traumatic disease at any age, Plato observes "a 7-year-old with cancer is different. I've been to the prom, I got married, had children, and I don't want to die. (Some of these kids haven't even made it to third grade. I want to help, to give back. I had so much support when I had the cancer. This is the least I can do to show thankfulness. So many people were there for me."

Theresa Foster, Child Life Specialist at Mott 7, described the volunteer program.

"We use round-the-clock volunteers in four-hour shifts. They are a very important part of the program. Some work bedside or in playrooms. They play with the patients, give parents breaks and help care for and pay attention to the other siblings. They bring new energy and new life to the program," she said.

"I can't say enough about the volunteers. The hospital wouldn't function without them."

In a unit that could be profoundly depressing, Foster says they keep an "upbeat atmosphere. There are many new medications that calm the effects



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DRISCOLL

**Your turn: Mary Plato plays a game of Scrabble with a young patient, Kevin, at University of Michigan Hospital.**

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