

# A Time for Reflection. A Time for Hope.

“The new dawn blooms as we free it.  
For there is always light if only we’re brave enough  
to see it, if only we’re brave enough to be it.”

—Amanda Gorman, *National Youth Poet Laureate*

Can you believe it is another December and we are still navigating Covid almost two years later? It really is hard to reconcile. While Covid remains a serious concern, I am hopeful someday soon we will think of Covid like we do the flu, with annual shots and cautionary behavior to minimize risk for illness, while moving through our days and through the world with a bit more normalcy.

I hope you will join me in taking a few minutes to reflect on not only the challenges of 2021, but also all that the Foundation accomplished, despite so many obstacles. I am proud of what together, mostly remotely, we have been able to achieve, in terms of both honoring our mission as a Foundation and nurturing our organizational culture. I assert, to a significant degree, it was our “workplace personality” that carried us through these trying times. With the pandemic hopefully in the rear-view mirror soon, and a measured return to the way things used to be, we have come to appreciate the little things in life, like seeing a colleague in person at the office to catch up on a new project, or to check in on how their family is doing, or meeting a friend for coffee or tea, instead of scheduling it over Zoom. And perhaps pre-Covid we took these moments for granted, but we certainly don’t today!

Navigating these often-rough waters of the pandemic reminds me of a dinner that Joel and I recently shared with Dr. Harsh Trivedi, president and CEO of Sheppard Pratt Health System in Baltimore,

and his wife, Urmi. Both are Israel Mission alums. Harsh talked about the Stockdale paradox, a fascinating concept that speaks to the need to support resilience in your team (your family, community, etc.) by acknowledging how hard things currently are, to be realistic about the uncertain path forward, and to assert an unshakeable belief that we will persevere. Adjusting your frame of reference—that not everything is sunshine and rainbows—can indeed allow for a greater sense of control and an enhanced ability to manage realities, especially in today’s world.

The idea arose from Admiral Stockdale, a prisoner of war in Vietnam for seven-and-a-half years. When asked how he survived such horrible conditions, he said it was his ability not only to have faith, but also to ground himself in reality. “You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

Harsh also reminded me of how critical it is to never lose sight of the importance of mental health. He shared news that Sheppard Pratt has already provided more than 1 million telehealth appointments with patients across Maryland and beyond in 2021. This is massive growth of their virtual services. Couple this with the Surgeon General’s recent advisory regarding adolescent mental health, including data that symptoms of depression and anxiety have doubled during the pandemic, as well as

adolescent female suicide attempts, and the importance of the Foundation’s work in this space is even more profound. And as we are truly “family” at the Foundation, we must continue to be mindful of each other’s mental health, and personal challenges, as the past two years have been difficult for everyone.

## Reflecting on 2021...

As I continue to reflect on what this past year has provided, I gather inspiration from the experiences I’ve had and the individuals whose voices have resonated with me, grounded me, inspired me, and ultimately given me hope for what the future holds. Please allow me to share a few of those experiences and voices with you.

I visited Israel this fall for the first time since pre-Covid. As I think you all know, I had to quarantine in a hotel for one week (something I do not recommend to anyone!), and then pushed what would have been two weeks of meetings into one very long, busy, and meaningful week.

One of the most memorable experiences for me in 2021 was joining Women of the Wall, a group of Jewish women and men from around the world who strive to achieve the right for women to wear *talit* (prayer shawls), pray, and read from



Here, I am wearing a *talit* (prayer shawl) for the first time in my life, and praying next to Anat Hoffman, who is the embodiment of courage, strength, and perseverance. If only our prayer shawls could speak. Our *talitot* carry the words from the Song of Songs: “Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice: for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is fair” (2:14).



Rafi Rone, Rachel Garbow Monroe, and Einav Aharoni at the 8200 Women's Alumnae event in Jaffa, Israel.

the *Torah* collectively and out loud at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The struggle for equality and tolerance at the Western Wall has been long, and it is not over yet. I participated in a very meaningful, yet somewhat frightening, prayer service chaired by the indomitable Anat Hoffman, the executive director of the Israel Religious Action Center, the public and legal advocacy arm of the Reform Jewish Movement in Israel. Anat is also the chair of Women of the Wall. While being jeered, pinched, spat upon, and yelled at from all sides, participants attempted to read a *Torah* on the women's side of the *Kotel* (Western Wall). I joined these brave women who courageously continue to find ways to share organized prayer together.

Also during the trip, as part of the planned itinerary, I met with two different women's leadership groups. The first group included female alumnae of the highly regarded Unit 8200, an Israeli Elite Intelligence Unit in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The second group was comprised of 25 professionals from JDC, our largest grantee in Israel.

I was surprised to learn professional women across Israel do not routinely gather for formal or informal learning, to hear voices and leadership journeys of other women, or to support one another through collective agenda. This reminded me of not only the patriarchal history of the country, but also the reality that there is still so much work that needs to be done to support and advance women in the workplace. I believe we are at a particularly critical moment in time to invest in the leadership development of women, especially those who have chosen to lead vital institutions, both across the world in Israel, and also right here at home in Baltimore.



Women's Dinner in Baltimore, starting with Fay Hartog-Levin and going clockwise: Redonda Miller, Audrey Johnson, Dara Schnee, Shelonda Stokes, Stacey Ullrich, Paula Pretlow, Tchernavia Rocker, Rachel Garbow Monroe, Maria Tildon, and Alicia Wilson.

There are a few new ideas on the horizon, and I look forward to sharing more with you as we create an exciting agenda in this space.

I continued to be inspired when just recently, while visiting Chicago, I attended a dinner that included remarks by Jorgen Vig Knudstorp, executive chairman of the Lego Brand Group. He knocked my socks off! Early in his remarks, he asked us to pick up the small bag of 10 or so Lego bricks that were placed at each of our seats, and he gave us 45 seconds to build a duck. As you can imagine, the room was instantly loud with hundreds of people talking and opening bags, and everyone at our table constructed what would roughly pass as a duck, though each was made somewhat differently. What an instructive exercise! What were the takeaways? Flexible thinking is key in that, in most instances, there are multiple solutions to a problem, and the more ideas you have on the table, the more likely you are to find the best solution—not simply the expected one. And, of course, to have fun!

Jorgen Vig Knudstorp also talked about the importance of being surprised—surprised by an idea that hadn't been conveyed before, maybe because it was too radical or potentially unpopular, or



Nimrod Goor places the mezuzah at the newly renovated headquarters of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Jerusalem.

too much of a heavy lift. I love this idea and would like this to be a call to action in 2022! Surprise me! Surprise us! Do you have a great idea that you have not shared, but you just know would make a meaningful difference in the way we do our work, the way we work together, or the way we partner and participate in the communities where we work? Please don't keep it to yourself! Share your ideas—your surprises—with me...with us!

Another voice of leadership that has stayed with me now for several months was when I heard Michael Crow, the president of Arizona State University, speak to a group of 10 CEOs. Michael urged us to rethink the outdated thinking behind the "it is either X or Y" framing that is so common. He urged us to consider the idea that there are many, many solutions to almost any problem, and limiting ourselves to the expected responses of only X or Y stunts our capacity to thrive both as people and as an organization. I agree! I hope we will all push ourselves to think about a variety of solutions to challenges we face in 2022, and in doing so perhaps find even better answers than we expected.





The Weinberg Foundation Trustees (L to R): Rob Kelly, Paula Pretlow, Gordon Berlin, Fay Hartog-Levin, and Nimrod Goor, during the November 2021 Board Meetings in Baltimore.

When I have the chance to hear someone who is exercising leadership in ways that are disruptive, bold, and unexpected, I listen closely. Our DEI consultant, Yavilah McCoy, CEO of Dimensions, was asked what motivates her, as she works to restore dignity and humanity to others. “That life and all the gifts associated with it are not to be taken for granted. That in these days the ability to breathe itself teaches us to participate in a divine ecosystem where my life is connected to others’ lives. Where my belief in a compassionate creator teaches me to know that I live in a world where there is enough for us to share with all.”

### With Gratitude...

In January 2021, I believed by the fall we would surely be able to hold the Rosh Hashanah Open House and our Biennial

Community Gathering in person, without any Covid restrictions. How wrong I was!

Happily, we celebrated Rosh Hashanah this year with an open house taking place over three shifts, an event held in our backyard. What I love about this holiday celebration is the diversity of attendance—Jewish individuals who may or may not be observant in any way and even more guests who are not Jewish but come join us in a gesture of community and celebration. This year, we celebrated with different varieties of apples and different types of honey so that everyone could find the combination they liked best. Quite apropos for 2021, providing options for everyone to make the experience as sweet as possible!

I am very thankful we were able to hold our first in-person Board Meetings in almost two years in Baltimore last month. Yes, all of the Covid-related measures were

Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski with Rachel Garbow Monroe at the Rosh Hashanah Open House.



in place to make everyone as safe and comfortable as possible, and yes, we were compliant and careful. And we also got to sit together in a room three-dimensionally and spend time together. What a blessing.

I am especially grateful that we were able to hold our mostly virtual Biennial Community Gathering. It was wonderful that the Board and staff were together in Baltimore and Hawaii. While the two offices were separated geographically, we were together in spirit as one Foundation. And, if this event demonstrated anything, it is that the Foundation is resilient in its resolve and creative in its problem solving! It is hard to believe the broadcast to over 1,400 people around the country and in Israel was done from, again, our backyard. I cherish that while we are a large philanthropic entity—a \$3.3 billion foundation set to give \$140 million in grant funding in 2022—our soul is warm and familial. And to me, this is in part what distinguishes the Weinberg Foundation from other large foundations across the United States.

I am also still deeply affected by the words and stories shared by our impressive special guests, Dr. Erica Brown, award-winning author, scholar, professor, and friend, and of course, Dr. Albert Bourla, CEO at Pfizer. In her remarks, Erica encouraged us to dream bigger and aspire to higher levels. I agree with her push to think bigger,



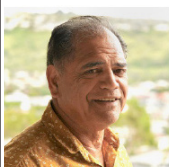
(L to R): Aaron Merki, Alicia Wilson, Darius Graham, Dawn Kirstaetter, Shelonda Stokes, and Baltimore City Mayor Brandon Scott at the Rosh Hashanah Open House.

and make bolder change, and now is the time to do so. As we each navigate our professional roles, I hope we will all heed her advice.

Dr. Bourla offered us the sage advice to “love what you do” if you want to truly be successful. And his powerful story of his mother being spared, at the very last minute, from the firing squad after being arrested and separated from her family as a teenager during the Holocaust has stayed with me, as I imagine it has stayed with each of you. Dr. Bourla explained that his mother, perhaps surprisingly, became an optimist because of this experience. She would tell him, “Never say it’s done. It’s never done before the end. You should go and try.” When we feel defeated about a particular issue or feel like a project or initiative may not come to fruition, let’s remember: It’s not game over until it’s over. We can and will make an impact despite the barriers.

### And With Resilience and Hope...

As we enter the new year, we will continue our important Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work, which requires us to give up the comfortable and the familiar, pushing us to grow and change, in part by learning from those whose voices have been silenced in the past. And we must embrace both where we are now as well as where we hope to be. Racial equity work is critical, and also difficult and challenging. The Board and I are collectively committed to this important professional development and education for everyone at the Foundation.



Corbett Kalama



Jonathan Hook



Craig Demchak

Throughout 2022, we will say goodbye to Corbett, Jonathan, and Craig, who will be leaving the Foundation following truly remarkable service. I am proud that Corbett and Jon will both be succeeded by three exemplary professionals already



Trustee and Chair Amb. Fay Hartog-Levin (Ret.) speaking during the Biennial Community Gathering.

at the Foundation as a result of internal promotions. Congratulations again to David, Giorgio, and Marisa. I also look forward to bringing in a new senior professional who will join our Communications Team.

As a reminder, Jonathan will retire as the Foundation’s chief investment officer in September 2022. David will be promoted to serve as the Foundation’s CIO. Craig will retire as chief communications officer in October 2022. His successor will be announced in February. Corbett will retire as executive vice president – Hawaii office at the end of 2022. Giorgio will be promoted to vice president, Hawaii operations and real estate, and Marisa will be promoted to managing director, Hawaii programs and communications. We will celebrate and thank each of our colleagues before they conclude their roles at the Foundation, and I know we all look forward to saying thank you! I also know it will be a year of change, and we will work hard to manage each transition smoothly and with consistent communications throughout the organization, both internally and externally.

While the offices are open in a hybrid manner with both in-person and remote work, with some ebbs and flows, I look forward to being in the office with more frequency, along with all of you, in 2022. While I could be wrong again, like I was in 2021, I hope and expect there will continue to be an increased return to normalcy throughout 2022. This includes three planned trips to Hawaii and three to Israel. The annual Israel Mission trip will take place in April, after a three-year hiatus. The alumni trip will take place in October. Two of our Board Meetings will be virtual



and two will be in person, with the first in-person Board Meetings scheduled the first week in May in Baltimore.

Finally, on a personal note, the Monroe family is, thank G-d, happy and healthy. Ben returned from his gap year in Israel (his favorite part of the trip was learning Arabic, which he is continuing to study in college) and is home from Ohio State for winter break. Danny has just returned from Indiana University for his winter break as well. I am grateful both boys will be with us for several weeks, returning to college in early January. Audrey is working in New York City, and will join us to visit Joel’s Dad, and then for a family trip for several days at the end of the month. We miss Dad, of course, especially during this holiday season, but continue to surround and support Mom, who is also doing well. Our hearts still miss our sweet dog Darcy, who died in early November, but thankfully we have Louie to keep us on our toes.

For all of us, sustaining our good health and happiness means not forgetting what



Mom, my kids, my nephews and niece, and Louie.





Rachel and Joel Monroe at home in the backyard, summer 2021.



Quality time with friends at Miraval in Arizona. (L to R): Susan George, Dara Schnee, Rachel Garbow Monroe, Elise McVeigh, Stacey Ullrich, Audrey Johnson, Alicia Wilson, and Shelonda Stokes.

got us this far. For example, in a recent meeting with Dr. Sonja Santelises, the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, Sonja spoke about the the importance of maintaining the boundaries we created for ourselves during Covid, as the world returns to its former rhythms. I could not agree more. My boundaries include daily yoga/exercise; getting outside and walking the dogs (now just Louie); devoting time to my family, including Joel and the kids who make me belly laugh daily, as well as my parents in the beginning, and now my Mom who is as strong and fierce as they come thank goodness; protecting time with my closest of friends who give me such positive energy; and working to move a little bit more slowly through things. Granted, that last one remains a challenge.

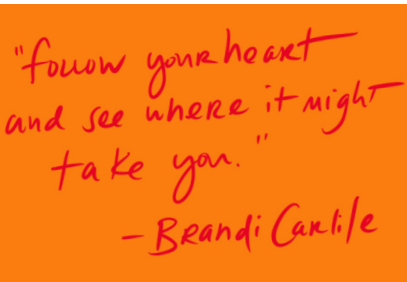
I feel energized and excited for what 2022 holds both personally and professionally. Having made it through 2020, and now 2021, I'm realistic about what this pandemic recovery entails, and have faith in what lies ahead. Many of you know my



Summertime fun! (L to R): Dara Schnee, Dorie Fain, Susan Howe, Louie, Rachel Garbow Monroe, Alyssa Sapia, and Stacey Ullrich.

favorite singer/songwriter is Brandi Carlile, and her lyric "Follow your heart and see where it might take you" holds special meaning for me. I hope those words move and inspire you as well, as you look forward to what the future holds for you and your loved ones.

I have also grown to value a sense of humor even more than I ever thought possible. But mostly, I feel truly blessed—and extremely fortunate—to have each and every one of you by my side as we muddle through this journey together. I don't take any of you, or any of this, for granted. In the wise words of the profound Ted Lasso, "I feel like we fell out of the lucky tree and hit every branch on the way down, ended up in a pool of cash and Sour Patch Kids."



Art by Emily Gaines Demsky as part of a Valentine's Day mailing.

**May you all have a joyous holiday season. Wishing you a healthy, peaceful, and very Happy New Year!**

Warmly,

**Rachel Garbow Monroe**

December 2021