

BOOKS

“Torah Time Travel” Takes Off



As a father and grandfather, a leader at his Harrisburg, Pa., synagogue, and the great-grandson of a rabbi, **Carl Shuman '78**, always enjoyed reading Jewish children’s books to his kids. But along with the good ones, he says, “a lot of them were dry and humorless.”

So, on the cusp of retirement in 2019 from a legal career that began after graduating from Georgetown Law School in 1982, Shuman started writing his own children’s books. The Haverford English major had penned two adult novels in the past, but didn’t get any interest from agents. His kid books are another story.

There are two in the *Torah Time Travel* series, with a third scheduled for publication in 2024—and he’s working on a fourth. Published by Behrman House/Apples & Honey Press, the books were crafted to appeal to “children and families who are observant and non-observant,” Shuman explains, “and they’re laced with humor because I figured that was the best way to reach readers.” Coincidentally, **David Behrman '77** co-owns Behrman House with Vicki Weber BMC '79, although Shuman didn’t know that until after they purchased his initial draft.

His two books, *Max Builds a Time Machine* and *Max and Emma Cross the Red Sea*, were released in March. “Each book is designed to focus on a particular value but in a humorous way,” Shuman says. “My characters journey to the past to resolve a dilemma or conflict. They’re stories about our biblical ancestors and Jewish values.”

In the first book, for example, Max doesn’t have many friends and initially isn’t kind to the quirky Emma. He goes back in time to observe three angels who visit Abraham and Sarah, and learns about being kind to the stranger. He brings the lesson back to the present and befriends Emma. In the second book, Max learns the values of courage and persistence after going back in time and hearing Moses stutter.

The books are chapter books, about 48 pages with illustrations, aimed at 7- to 8-year-olds. The Harold Grinspoon Foundation’s PJ Library, which distributes Jewish books to kids, is sending 20,000 copies to the 7-year-olds on its list.

“I do a lot of research, studying rabbinic explanations that often conflict with one another,” Shuman says. The books honor his great-grandfather and were also inspired by the late Dr. Sam Lachs, a rabbi who was head of Bryn Mawr’s History of Religion Department. Shuman took several classes with Lachs, and says that he “helped kindle my intellectual curiosity and cement my identity as a practicing Jew.”

Shuman, who also paints and gardens, calls the writing experience joyful.

“My editors think the books will be around for a long time, so it’s lovely to reach children and to have a legacy. Being a lawyer was gratifying, but this reaches a different level. I don’t think I could ask for more.”

—A. S.



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