

JELF President's Passions Extend to Art, Kitchen

BY MARCIA CALLER JAFFE AUGUST 4, 2016



Above: The Galleria Design kitchen provides a backdrop to Marianne Garber's baked goods, based on the cookbook she created of her mother's recipes, and fresh vegetables from Stephen Garber's garden. (Photo by Duane Stork)

Marianne Daniels Garber, community leader, author, educational consultant and president of the [Jewish Educational Loan Fund](#), enjoys a quiet moment at her Sandy Springs home as she explains her passion for volunteer work. Alongside husband psychologist Stephen Garber, founder of the [Behavioral Institute of Atlanta](#), she shares a glimpse into their home life. Their tasteful home, redesigned (several times) by Marianne's brother, architect Stanley Daniels, brings together a refreshing collection of pieces, from Rosenthal crystal, [Eric Blum](#)'s haunting encaustic paintings, a [Venske & Spanle](#) "Smurf," and [Ed Moulthrop](#)'s wooden bowls to a realistic tapestry by Maine artist [Alan Magee](#). A colorful sculpture by Tom McLaughlin sets the stage for surprises like a wall hanging of film footage by Laura Mills.

Jaffe: Your home celebrates the family. What went into that?

Stephen: We wanted our home to be comfortable and easy for our four children — a place to celebrate holidays and enjoy each other. Our dining room table, which once seemed generous in size, no longer accommodates everyone. We love art, but our most precious art is in the den: the self-portraits our children created as they grew up. We cherish them.

Jaffe: Your kitchen looks well appointed. Are you a gourmet cook?

Marianne: I've tried to follow my mother's lead making traditional Jewish dishes like gefilte fish from scratch. After she passed away, I became the family baker, even publishing her handwritten recipes in a cookbook, "I Remember Mama," benefiting the [Crohn's & Colitis Foundation](#). I recently prepared the desserts for a niece's wedding at [Callaway Gardens](#). Can you imagine transporting 30 iced cakes 100 miles in June? I was quite nervous. Red velvet, German chocolate and Italian cream cakes, Oreo brownies, and my mother's famous poundcake all made it safely to the wedding.

Jaffe: What goes on in your backyard garden?

Stephen: My passion is the vegetable garden planted with heirloom tomatoes, eggplant, zucchini, squash, kale and cucumbers. Marianne tries to keep up with the harvest by making cold cucumber soup, gazpacho, grilling vegetables, and sharing the bounty with family and friends.

Jaffe: The tzedakah box collection is a natural tie-in.

Marianne: When our children were at the [Epstein School](#), I helped start [Yom Tzedakah](#), which encouraged families to undertake a charitable activity together, modeling the importance of helping others and *tikkun olam*. Our collection is one more way to do that, from the [JNF](#) blue box of my youth to tzedakah boxes made of brass, wood, ceramics and pottery from places like Israel. The most unusual is from St. Petersburg, Russia, where a congregant was selling ones he created for his synagogue. When the tzedakah boxes became full, our kids decided where to donate the funds.

Jaffe: How did you get involved in JELF?

Stephen: My late father, Al Garber, grew up in Atlanta as a resident of the Hebrew Orphans Home, for which he was forever grateful. He was sent to college by them and even took time off from college for a short period to help run the home when the director unexpectedly passed away. He believed that a college education was the key to success and wanted to be a mentor and repay the kindness and opportunities given to him by the Jewish community.

Marianne: I learned much from Dad about appreciation. He was such a brilliant and positive man, a great mentor and friend to so many. He would tell us that we were the disadvantaged ones because we could never appreciate an apple as he did. For the kids in the orphanage, apples were a delicacy. Al was a very successful businessman and a true mensch who inspired all of us.

Fast-forward to today: I am proud to be a part of JELF, which is the oldest continuous nonprofit in the state of Georgia. Currently, 722 Jewish students from a five-state region are benefiting from over \$5 million in interest-free loans. These are last-dollar loans that ensure students can fulfill their dreams of higher education. This year we will award loans totaling \$800,000, bringing our total since 1961 to almost \$11 million. We are proud of a 99 percent repayment rate, and many of our alumni are presently involved in JELF and making a difference in their own Jewish communities.

Jaffe: Tell us about the upcoming event on Aug. 30 at [Flourish](#), the new [Legendary Events](#) venue.

Marianne: It's going to be amazing, featuring Jesse Itzler, founder of Marquis Jet, which he sold to [Berkshire Hathaway](#); creator of [Zico Coconut Water](#), which was sold to [Coca-Cola](#); a former [MTV rapper](#); and co-owner of the [Atlanta Hawks](#). Jesse is married to Sara Blakely ([Spanx](#) founder/CEO), with whom he has four children. He's an inventor, entrepreneur, an extreme athlete and a fabulous speaker. He has written a [fun and motivating book](#) about his experiences training with a Navy SEAL. Every dollar raised during the evening will help more needy Jewish students. Tickets start at \$54 (\$36 for 40 and under). For more information, go to www.jelf.org/itzler.

Jaffe: How can folks get involved with JELF?

Marianne: We have all types of committees for different individuals interested in helping, as well as events for all ages, including the younger generation. Besides the money we raise for the loans, we also need to heighten awareness so that Jewish students who need us know about our mission. Interest-free loan granting is very confidential, but there are indeed Jewish families in hardship situations, bankruptcy, illness, etc., as well as those who just need a little help. A traditional college loan of \$5,000 may charge as much as \$2,650 in interest alone (based on a generous 4.6 percent interest rate). So the fact that a loan is interest-free can make a big difference. Working for community causes such as JELF, the [Atlanta Jewish Film Festival](#), my synagogue or the [Tower of Talent](#) benefiting [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta](#) is my pleasure. I am honored to do so.

Photos by Duane Stork



Stephen and Marianne Garber and bichon Joey sit in front of a bold Vaccaro painting on custom furniture designed by Charles Gandy. The white “Smurf” by Venske & Spanle rests on the table.



The Garbers' most treasured art is their children's self-portraits.



A folk clown by Howard Finster provides a whimsical spark.



The Garbers bought their first painting at Piedmont Park and now display it above a colorful sculpture by Tom McLaughlin.



Near the top of the stairs, Laura Mills' "Film Footage" turns old CNN footage into an artistic wall hanging from the Marcia Wood Gallery.



The Garbers' master bedroom has a rock textile by Maine artist Alan Magee. The white ceramic on the left was acquired on a trip to Italy.



Marianne Garber's tzedakah box collection goes back to her Jewish National Fund blue box.



Rosenthal crystal lights up the foyer.



The living room features Eric Blum’s encaustic work, which the Garbers find “fascinating,” alongside golden sculpture by Hector Najera.

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