

## Fences make good security



JHV: MICHAEL C. DUKE

Work began last week on a security fence encompassing the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston on South Braeswood Boulevard. According to Joel Dinkin, JCC executive vice president, the construction is the result of a grant from Homeland Security, obtained by the two organizations. This security measure includes the fence, enhanced security cameras and an upgrade to exterior lighting.

## ADL against site, timing of Ground Zero Islamic center

*Decision not about rights, but what is right for victims, leader says*

By MICHAEL C. DUKE

A leading civil rights group has come out against the controversial building of an Islamic center near Ground Zero in New York.

The Anti-Defamation League issued a statement last Friday, July 30, opposing the proposed construction of Cordoba House, at 45-47 Park Place, two blocks from the World Trade Center and site of the 9/11 terror attacks.

The statement is clear in its reasons for opposing the proposed construction: "In our judgment, building an Islamic center in the shadow of the World Trade Center will cause some victims more pain – unnecessarily – and that is not right."

Nevertheless, ADL's position has generated negative reactions from some journalists and bloggers

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## Tuesday Night Live in Jerusalem filming in Houston Aug. 10

By JHV STAFF

A top-rated Israeli TV show is coming to town Tuesday, Aug. 10.

"Tuesday Night Live in Jerusalem Across America – From Houston" will film in front of a live local audience at the Westin Galleria Hotel, 5060 W. Alabama, 8-10 p.m.

Featured guests will include U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, Israeli roots-rock-reggae band Pey Dali and Israeli Consul General to the Southwest Asher Yarden. The variety show's theme that evening will be the Texas-Israel relationship.

TNL is co-hosted by Jeremy Gimpel and Houston native Ari Abramowitz.

"We want to project to the world what Jerusalem and Israel are really about," Abramowitz said.

The Houston show kicks off a U.S. tour for the Jerusalem-based, English language program which is entering its fourth season. The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston is co-sponsoring the local filming.

"This tour is about going from city to city, state to state, and showing America and showing the world that the nation and the people are standing with Israel, standing strong," Abramowitz said.

For tickets, email [houston@thelandofisrael.com](mailto:houston@thelandofisrael.com). For information, visit [thelandofisrael.com](http://thelandofisrael.com). □

## RAISING KIDS, RACING CARS

Book contains critical info told in an entertaining way

By MICHAEL C. DUKE

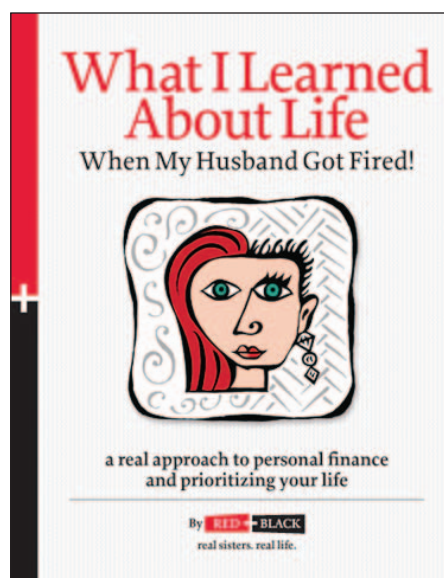
Values, priorities, relationships, financial literacy. What do all of these topics have in common?

Everything, according to sisters Tina "Red" Pennington and Mandy "Black" Williams.

"It's life," explained older sister Black, in an interview with the JH-V. "How do you separate any given topic in your life from everything else that it touches?"

Younger sister Red said, "It's having an understanding of what your values and priorities are, even though every day can be a firefighting exercise. All of these topics are related, in that values and priorities should guide the decisions you make and help you keep a sense of what's important to you and what you're trying to achieve."

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KIPP HOUSTON ART SCHOOL

Tina "Red" Pennington and Mandy "Black" Williams are teaching a financial literacy course, based on their book, at the KIPP Academy.

### CYJ given generous gift

Next year, 50 more children will have the opportunity to enjoy the Jewish camping experience at Camp Young Judaea, thanks to a philanthropic Houston couple. A 2,500-square-foot, handicapped-accessible, weatherized and air-conditioned cabin is the gift of Vela and Fred Levine. See complete story on Page 14.

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### jconnections

The Jewish Community Center of Houston quarterly newsletter is included inside the Herald this week. For JH-V subscription information, see "Yes!" Page 10

## Red and Black From Page 1

Sage advice that Red said she learned the hard way from Black.

The two sisters, in their late 40s and early 50s, recently co-authored a book titled "What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired! A Real Approach to Personal Finance and Prioritizing Your Life."

The above topics intertwine as themes in this real-life story of two Jewish sisters from Houston/Sugar Land. Though written with a female baby-boomer audience in mind, the self-published book has enjoyed broad appeal and success. It even has been adopted as required reading for local high school seniors.

### Communication

The book retraces a course of events that took place over a three-month period in early 2004, set in motion by Red's husband, the family's sole breadwinner, abruptly losing his job. Red, thrust into a realization of financial ignorance and insecurity – "the crisis," she deems it – turns to sister Black for comfort and advice.

Communication is key – both to the lessons Red learns from Black as she works through the crisis and to the book itself.

Structurally, the story unfolds through a series of phone calls, instant message threads and email exchanges. Brief narrations provide background information and underscore important points.

"We didn't put the book together this way because we thought it would be clever or different. We did it because that was truly how she [Black] helped me during those three months," Red said.

The back-and-forth conversations, intuitively archived by Black as they took place during the crisis – "I can multitask," she noted, "and I was already thinking then that this could become a book" – reveal opposing personality traits possessed and embraced by the two sisters. While these personality traits are distinctive, they exhibit archetypal qualities that allow readers to relate.

Red is the warm and fuzzy sister, and she's a talker. She has red hair – surprise! – and woke up one day to find herself financially in the red. She had gone from living in her parents' house to living in her husband's house. Being a good student and earning an arts degree from a well-known university unfortunately didn't engender financial literacy. Red's adult life out in the suburbs has been about baking cookies and raising kids.

Black, on the other hand, is about racing sports cars – expensive European ones with a rearing stallion on the badge. She has dark hair and is a pragmatist who thinks in bullet points and lists. Black chose the fast lane of professional career woman in the male-dominated oil and gas industry and made her first \$1 million before she turned 40. She holds an MBA in international finance and has become a dedicated volunteer and philanthropist.

Despite their stark differences in personality, Red and Black make their relationship work. The authors insist that the characters in the book are the characters in real life.

"Yes, I was that naïve," admitted Red, referring to her financial awareness at the time.

"Yes, I'm a total smart a\*s," Black admitted, referring to her sarcastic humor peppered throughout the book.



The sisters launched their self-published book at Neiman Marcus' Houston Galleria store last August. They earned a window display alongside the latest fall fashions.

**"What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!" is available at select independent bookstores, as well as gift shops at Beth Yeshurun, Beth Israel and Beth Shalom of The Woodlands and at [redandblackbooks.com](http://redandblackbooks.com).**

### Character values

Red is the dynamic character in the story, learning from her sister how values and priorities influence the ways one spends money and time. In that process, she discovers that personality types don't predetermine one's decision-making abilities.

"I've always looked at Mandy [Black] as this sort of creature that marched to her own tune, and the decisions she made and the way she went about it was very much individual," Red said.

"The events of the book helped me see that the way she makes decisions and approaches things are as relevant to my life as they are to hers. It's just that the decisions she makes at the end of the day are different, because her values and priorities are different," she said.

Though Black plays the role of advice-giver in the book, she too gained valuable insight from the experience.

"At the risk of having a warm and fuzzy moment myself," Black said, "watching Tina [Red] become more confident in the ability to take control of her own life helped me realize how empowering it is to have the ability to gather information and make conscious decisions."

Though Black is often abrupt with her sister, she is kind.

"How should you be expected to know something you either were never taught or were never exposed to? I don't think financial literacy is carried in our chromosomes," said Black, in defense of Red.

Jewish values also factor into the story, particularly with regard to education.

"Our parents always stressed education," Black said. "No matter what happens to you and where you go, if you have this big house and all this other stuff, and for some reason you have to leave, they can't take your education. It stays with you. Knowledge is our greatest asset."

### Neimans to KIPP

Red and Black decided to self-publish not because the book failed to attract interest from commercial publishers, but because the sisters wanted to get the story out as quickly as possible and with as much marketing say-so. Local firm Bright Sky Press served as consulting publisher.

"First and foremost, my feeling was, if I can make sure Natasha and Sawyer learn from what I had gone through, it was worth pursuing this book," Red said, naming her two redheaded daughters. "If this book could actually help other people, too, well then that's great."

The original marketing strategy identified baby-boomer women as the audience. The book launched at Neiman Marcus in August 2009, where it earned a window display alongside the fall fashion collection.

"When we set out to do this, we thought it was an amusing book that had some useful information," Black said. "Then, we started to receive feedback from readers, who said that this was critical information told in an amusing way."

Less than a month after the release, the sisters gave a presentation to the local Jewish Federation's Business & Professional Women's Breakfast Club. That meeting led to an opportunity to visit with administrators at Houston's KIPP Academy, a top-ranked college-preparatory school that largely serves the African-American and Latino communities.

Red and Black thought they would be giving a short, one-off presentation to students. Instead, they were invited to develop – and teach – a 12-week financial literacy curriculum for 90-plus high school seniors.

The sisters were official authors (though they prefer the description "stenographers") in less than 90 days and now were being asked to be teachers as well.

### 'Life of its own'

Red and Black taught twice a week at KIPP this past spring semester and were a hit. They'll be back for spring 2011. Moreover, they've expanded the curriculum to include alumni and parents and are tailoring the course so it can be instituted network-wide.

Their work with the students has been a labor-intensive but rewarding endeavor.

"When we launched this book, it was basically to establish a platform. It was not expected to take on a life of its own," Black said.

"We've had to put all these other ideas in the file for now. We can't not do the education. If it's that valuable to these kids, and if adults find value in it too, then that's great. We've just got to let the book take us where it's going to go," she said.

Black uses racing analogies when explaining financial literacy to the students.

"You have to look way down the road, because you can't do anything about the next corner because it's coming too fast. But, you can do something about corners way down the track, so you focus on those," she said.

"The key is to work backwards: If you look at where you want to be and you start working backwards, it makes it so much easier to prioritize and decide if this will put me on the road to where I want to be.

"I tell the kids: College is not a goal, it's a step along the way. College is a step to get you where you want to be in life," she said.

Red, when she's talking to students, emphasizes that "What I Learned About Life" is not a self-help book or a to-do list.

"When I went through this crisis, I just wanted my sister to give me answers. But, she couldn't because her priorities are different than mine. Where I spend money is different than where she spends money," Red said.

"So, I had to learn a process called QID: ask *questions*, get *information*, so you can make intelligent *decisions*. This is what I hope the students and readers of the book learn, too," she said.

Because of the book's themes and its success at KIPP, Red and Black have met with state education officials and the lieutenant governor's office. Their speaking circuit has expanded to literary council events and to synagogue and church groups.

Red and Black are hoping that interest in the book and its message will continue to grow. A sequel is in the works. □