

# THIS WEEK



**CALENDAR**  
Music, theater  
and more events.  
Page B4

Section **B**

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Jon Masters' book describes a life of privilege and a charade. Upper left: Masters at his Princeton graduation with his parents and younger brother; below left, with his bride, Rosemary, a fellow Harvard Law School student. Above: the couple with their children, Brooke, now an editor at the Financial Times in London and his son, Blake, a film writer and producer in Los Angeles.

Photos contributed

## *Keeping secrets: a family memoir*

*Many plan to write their family history, secrets and all; Jon Masters did*

By Julie Ruth

SOUTHFIELD — Jon Masters vividly remembers the Sunday afternoon in 1948 when his father came into his bedroom while he was reading the comics, and made him promise never to tell anyone that the family was Jewish — not his friends, not his baby brother, and not his future wife.

“If I (told anyone), he threatened at my bedside, he would die, and I believed him,” said Masters, who was ten years old at the time.

Masters, a longtime Southfield resident, kept that promise for 30 years, and has recently written a compelling memoir of growing up in New York City in the 40s and 50s when anti-Semitism was “widespread, respectable and as commonplace as white bread” in the U.S.”

His new memoir, “Fear, Fathers and Family: In Search of the American Dream” tells the story of an ambitious young man who built a highly successful life within the WASP establishment, and explains what led him to reveal the family secret to his wife and the world at large when he was 40, a decision that would change his life completely.

In this beautifully written book, Masters takes the reader into his life of privilege as a child in New York City in the ‘40s and ‘50s, where he lived in a Park Avenue apartment with “a father who looked like John Barrymore and a mother as beautiful as any movie star.”

His father was a successful Wall Street lawyer who had thriving practice with mostly Jewish clients. But his father, seeking acceptance and success in the WASP upper class,

changed his name from Moskowitz to Masters, dropped his Jewish clients, and eventually cut his connection to his extended Orthodox Jewish family of ten siblings altogether.

Cutting himself off from his Jewish family wasn't enough, and Edward Masters sought further protection against anti-Semitism by having his family become Episcopalian. “He wanted success, and he needed access,” Masters wrote. “To get it, he joined the upper class Christian establishment.”

Edward Masters explained to his son that he and his wife were changing their religion for his own good, to protect him from discrimination he had experienced as a boy. Meanwhile, he demanded excellence from young his son in

*Continued on B3*

By Ron Kujawski

size, and orientation, of course, is needed to reduce food for plants. So, how do you deal with the problems of poor lighting? Start by evaluating the conditions in your space. You can buy an inexpensive light meter to measure light intensity in foot candles. For comparison, you should know that a bright sunny outdoors in summer receives about 10,000 foot candles. Indoors, a sunny, south-facing window in summer receives about 8,000 foot candles; light comfortable reading gives out only about 100 foot candles; a desk lamp from two 40 watt fluorescent tubes will give about 600 foot candles at a distance of 6 feet. The peace lily, a night plant, tolerates about 100 foot candles. Succulent light plants such as creeping fig need about 200 foot candles. Do you know the light conditions in your home, and do plants match the illumination levels.

## Daniel Klein at Lenox Library

Continued from B1

He quotes from the world's greatest thinkers, hoping to get some guidance on how to live the best life he could. Now, from the vantage point of his eighth decade, he revisits this collection of philosophy, adding new insights that strike a chord with him at the end of his life. From Epicurus to Emerson to Camus to the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr—whose words provided the title for his book—each extract is annotated with Klein's thoughts. This talk is part of the Distinguished Lecture Series. Distinguished Lectures are free. For further information about the series, call the library at (413) 637-2630. For more information about the author, see [www.travels-hepcurus.com](http://www.travels-hepcurus.com).

# Berkshire Festival of Women Writers offering memoir workshop and retreat

LENOX — The Berkshire Festival of Women Writers is hosting, "Writing the Journey of Your Life: Focus on People," Jan. 29-31 at the Rookwood Inn. The weekend retreat, with commuter and residency options, is the third of a series of three writing retreats for women.

Led by Jennifer Browdy, Ph.D., founding director of the BFWW, professor of literature and writing at Bard

College at Simon's Rock and a memoirist herself, the retreat will provide structure and support for the woman memoirist in any stage of her writing journey, from working with the initial concept to fine-tuning the details and narrative arc. There will be opportunities for both individual work and group interactions.

For more information visit [berkshirewomenwriters.org](http://berkshirewomenwriters.org).

The tuition and facility fee of \$425 per person includes Friday evening welcome, Saturday lunch and mid afternoon snacks, and Sunday breakfast. Workshop sessions will begin on Friday evening from 5:30-7:30 p.m. and run from 9:30-12:30 p.m. and 2-5 p.m. on Saturday, and 10 a.m. to noon on Sunday. Rooms at Rookwood Inn are not included in the tuition fee.

## Jon Masters: reaching for the American dream

Continued from B1

all academics and sports he engaged in, so that he would be welcome in high society and be able to pursue any kind of success he wished.

Masters never saw his father's relatives after that, and he grew up knowing next to nothing about either side of his extended family. He never heard stories about life in Russia from his mother or grandmother at all. Years later he learned that his great-grandfather, who operated a factory near Odessa, had been murdered in a pogrom along with likely other family relatives, and the factory and houses were destroyed.

Although they were demanding parents, Masters writes, they were also warm, sensual people who educated him about elegant clothes, wines and other fine things in life. To his parents, appearance, dress and manners were marks of class and, therefore, worth, he said, noting with some irony that his parents had admired the Duke and Duchess of Windsor despite their support of Hitler.

Masters complied with the family secret, ambitious in his own right while wanting to excel and please his father in the WASP world of Exeter, where his parents had their son baptized and confirmed as an Episcopalian in the fall of his freshman year.

Doors did open for Masters over the years that had been closed to his parents. He fulfilled his parents' every hope for success at Exeter, Princeton and the U.S. Naval Reserve Officers training corps, then went on to Harvard Law School, where he met and married his wife Rosemary. He kept the family secret, but hedged around the secret by

asking her: "Would you want to marry me if I was a Jew?" "Of course," she replied.

He would go on to succeed at every career objective he set his mind to -- military, politics, law and theatre, among other fields.

But Masters paid a high price for keeping his family's secret for three decades, essentially living a double life. In one life, he lived "constrained by his parents' fear of exposure...like a trembling social outcast." In his other life, he rebelled against his family's secret, but was too afraid to reveal it. So he pretended his past didn't exist. "I was ambitious, smart and could be whoever I wanted to be," he said.

By the time Masters was 40, he wrote, his double life had caused him to lose his way. "I didn't know who I was: a rising star or an outcast?" he wrote.

A self-described loner, Masters had no confidantes and held his beloved wife at arm's length, fearful that he would expose the secret and terrified of consequences. Both his wife and brother, Kim, suspected that he was hiding something, with Kim, who still did not know about his Jewish heritage at age 30, thinking the family didn't talk about other relatives because a serial killer might be in the family.

Masters shares how and why he was finally able to tell them the secret, the ramifications of withholding that information from his wife and brother and the reaction of his father to the news.

Abandoning that secret allowed him to have a rich and fulfilling life, where he sought new career and personal goals. "Priorities changed, and success looked different," he wrote.

Above all, he was deter-

mined to be a different kind of father to his two children, one who allowed them to figure out for themselves what they wanted to think and do with their lives.

He and his wife longed to find a family-oriented atmosphere where they could bring their children outside Manhattan, and they found it accidentally in the Berkshires through their friend Peter Berle, whose parents invited them one Labor Day weekend for a visit.

Residents will recognize various names of locals as Masters describes how the Berkshires became more of a home than New York City to his family. "After being on the outside for so long, it feels very good to be a member of this community," he writes.

His brother Kim has a completely different perspective on his family and their secret, which he shares in his own chapter of the book.

Masters, now 78, decided to write this memoir to give his grandchildren and great-grandchildren "a window on the past that will enrich their lives." He hopes others will benefit as well from his experiences, especially the life lessons he includes in a special chapter that he acquired throughout the years as he struggled to free himself of the destructive influence of a father he loved and admired to build a fulfilling life.

"My parents felt that the past was not relevant," he wrote. "I disagree; it influences the present (and) we can learn from the past."

It's a page-turner that could have you staying up all night. I did.

"Fear, Fathers and Family" is available at the Bookloft in Great Barrington and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).