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Jun. 26, 2013

Family Friendly
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 L.A. Neighborhood
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As a neighborhood resource for parents and soon-to-be parents in and around Los Angeles, The Agency's **Michelle Schwartz** is interviewing dynamic moms and dads and asking for their valuable insights on the neighborhoods they live in. Today, Michelle talks with Gail Lesser-Gerber, President of **Papa Ben's Kitchen**.

A native of Los Angeles, Gail lives in the Miracle Mile area of Los Angeles with her husband Michael. Gail runs the family business together with her daughter Jenica, and she is also the Director of the **Zachor Holocaust Remembrance Foundation**, which was founded by her mother, Jean, and her father, Ben, who is a Concentration Camp and Holocaust survivor. "I am so proud to be their daughter," shares Gail. "I have inherited a joy for life and a zest for business from both of them that inspires me each and every day to share with my children."



Where are you originally from and where do you live now? Tell me a little about why you love living in your neighborhood?

I have lived in the Miracle Mile of Los Angeles my whole life. I love the community feeling, the quaintness and especially the diversity. Our neighborhood is filled with old beautiful, Spanish style homes and is conveniently located. We are just minutes from Beverly Hills and Downtown Los Angeles.

The best part about living in this area is that the streets are very neighborly, where everyone really knows each other and looks out for one another, which is rare to find now-a-days in Los Angeles. You still come across small, family businesses that have been around since I was a child and my kids were children. My children Jenica and Adam went to the same elementary school that I did, Hancock Park Elementary at Fairfax and Colgate Avenues.

I always look forward to my weekly occurrence of running into someone that I grew up with in this neighborhood, and I always get excited wondering who I'm going to run into next. It's always so fun to catch up on family and see how everyone is doing. This neighborhood energy brings people back to their roots and gives them great memories to re-visit and share. Once this part of the city is in you, it never leaves.

What are the best ways to keep your kids active in the neighborhood?

Farmers Market holds a special place in my heart and the heart of the entire Lesser and Gerber families. We spent countless weekends shopping and dining there, listening to music and getting involved in the fall Halloween festival, pumpkin patch, hay rides mardi gras, St. Patrick's Day and much more – and still do. I am delighted the neighborhood is so vibrant and filled with various places for a new generation to visit and create their own memories at including the **Museums**, **Farmers Market**, the **La Brea Tar Pits**, **Pan Pacific Park**, and **The Grove**.



Pan Pacific Park (photo, at right) is a location especially filled with so many great family memories. My son, Adam played Soccer and Baseball there. My daughter, Jenica took several years of dance and gymnastic classes there. The Library was always a place the kids would go to do their homework and gather after school. The swimming pool was also a popular spot to gather during the summers, even for me, I was a lifeguard at the pool as a teenager. It's been incredible to see the more manicured, larger park exist today, especially as home to the **Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust**, which helps to keep the park's warmth.



Would you say you live in a kid-friendly area? Are most nearby restaurants kid-friendly?

Yes I do live in an incredibly kid-friendly area. Even though we are in the middle of the big city we have small neighborhood parks, always a dog or a baby to meet on the streets and someone to say hello too. The convenience of this neighborhood is ideal for any family, new or older as everything you need access too is truly just a few short minutes away. One of my favorite things to do is babysit my nephew Joshua while I send his parents off on a local date night, since there's so much around our area to do.

Where are you and your husband's favorite places to go without the kids?

My husband, Michael has Multiple Sclerosis and is unable to walk, so we need to be more creative with our outings. We love going to the local farmers markets, especially the one on **Larchmont**. We used to enjoy a hike now and then, now we walk the outdoor places of entertainment such as the Grove, which in keeping with the needs of the community is accessible to folks with physical challenges.



In fact the Grove (photo, at left) has added a new life to the area in my opinion. It has truly turned this central part of town into a wonderful destination for people from all over Southern California to gather for movies, eating, walking, listening to good music, all of it. If you go to the grove on a Saturday night after the Sabbath it is a beautiful sight to see. People from the neighborhood walk over and enjoy the evening with family and friends, drinking coffee, sharing a kosher hot dog from the park side stand and sharing the evening outdoors listening to great music.

Only in California are we lucky enough to do this all year round.

Our favorite movie theaters are the Landmark at the **Westside Pavilion**, The Grove and the **Arclight** (of course)! We still enjoy cruising Hollywood Blvd for the fun of it! We love going to the **El Capitan** and watching a good kids movie, it keeps us all feeling young and who doesn't love that?

Tell us about any rare gems or best-kept secrets in the area that make your life a bit easier.

My favorite dining secrets are **Cayenne** on Beverly, **Bulan** on Melrose, **Fiddlers** on Third Street, **Jeff's Kosher Sausage**, **Chic** and **Bloom** on Pico and my latest favorite find is **Food Fair** by Diego on Beverly Blvd. We love finding local neighborhood restaurants and our neighborhood is filled with them and loads of variety.

Is there anything you or your partner is working on or want to share with the readers?

Today my daughter, Jenica and I are enjoying the legacy of working together in the family business. We manufacture a cookie product called **Mandelbroyt**, an Eastern European cousin to biscotti. We run the day to day business of **Papa Ben's Kitchen** from my home office. The business is run, managed and owned by my Mother, Jean, Daughter, Jenica and I using family traditions and recipes passed on by my Father, Ben.



My daughter brings her expertise of marketing and e-commerce to the business beyond the brick and mortar. Our cookies can be purchased on our website at www.PapaBensKitchen.com or at any one of the local Gelson's or Western Kosher stores near you in Los Angeles. Papa Ben's Kitchen Mandelbroyt is also now available at select Whole Foods markets around Southern California.

Featured Listings



Architectural Masterpiece with Amazing Views

5 Bedrooms **\$9,500,000**
 6 Baths
 Sq. Feet



602 N. Roxbury Dr | Beverly Hills

7 Bedrooms **\$7,485,000**
 6.5 Baths
 Sq. Feet



9133 Oriole Way | Sunset Strip

5 Bedrooms **\$38,000,000**
 10 Baths
 12,530 Sq. Feet



Michelle Schwartz is a founding agent at The Agency, a Los Angeles native, a wife and mom of 2 (ages 3 & 19 mo). Having been born and raised in Beverly Hills, and now living in Studio City, she is savvy to the city as a whole and the nuances of the areas that make LA so special. Now with 2 young children, she is more and more aware of how her life revolves around the needs and conveniences of the children. Michelle has asked her friends to help her create this series of a neighborhood resource for parents and soon-to-be parents in and around Los Angeles. Should you need any assistance or want more information on finding or selling a home, please feel free to contact **Michelle**.