

350-Year-Old Torah Restored

As Jews around the world celebrate Shavuot—the holiday that commemorates receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai—Temple Ahavat Shalom has another big reason to celebrate: they are completing their restoration of a 350 year-old Torah. Every member of this Northridge congregation has had the opportunity to take a turkey feather quill in hand and write a letter in this scroll, aided by a Torah scribe.

“We are going to make this Torah, once more, as it was intended to be,” Rabbi Barry Lutz promised the congregation at the kick-off of the restoration last September. “A living, vibrant part of a Jewish community.” Nine months later, that vision is nearly complete. The congregation will write the final letters on Sunday, marking the occasion with a special celebration.

This Torah scroll has a colorful past. It was written in the 17th century in the town of Kolin, in the former Czechoslovakia. The Torah was in use for more than 300 years until it was hidden away in Prague during the Holocaust, where it remained until being discovered in the 1960s.

In 1978, Temple Ahavat Shalom’s Rabbi Solomon Kleinman and Esther and the late Harvey Saritzky decided that their congregation should have one of the Czech memorial scrolls. Esther went to London to retrieve a scroll with one instruction: “Bring back a scroll that our children can carry.” Since then, all of the synagogue’s bar and bat mitzvah children have carried that little Torah around the sanctuary. Rabbi Lutz says they carry it not because it is the smallest, “but for the last children of Kolin, who never had the opportunity to celebrate their own b’nai mitzvah, or to hold and hug this little Torah.”

TAS student Eden Glaser found the experience of writing in the

Torah to be very meaningful. "It's just writing," she says, "but it's powerful writing."

Restoring a Torah is a complicated process. It has more than 300,000 letters and is written on special parchment with special ink. The restoration is performed with the same tools and methods that have been used to write Torah scrolls for thousands of years.

"This little Torah is not ours, it is theirs—the people of Kolin," said Rabbi Lutz in his Rosh Hashanah sermon. "We carry it for them. We carry the hopes and dream of a Jewish community that is no more. This is their precious legacy to us. And this is the promise we made to them: to care for their scroll and do all we can to make sure that they are never forgotten."