

The mission of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is to preserve and document the practice, culture and legacy of Judaism in the South. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience operates under the auspices of the Institute.

Preserving the Past: ISJL Provides Online Histories of Southern Jewish Communities

The ISJL **Digital Archive Project** is designed to present an online history of every congregation and significant Jewish community in the South. Currently, we have completed Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, and as of April, we launched the state of



Tennessee. In all, the ISJL Digital Archive now contains the histories of 83 different southern Jewish communities. Included in this CIRCA is a history piece on Union City, Tennessee, one of the Tennessee

communities whose history is now available through the ISJL website's Digital Archive section.

The Digital Archive is a continual work-in-progress. This summer, history interns will assist Dr. Stuart Rockoff in collecting, documenting and uploading the histories of the next states slated for the Digital Archives, working towards the goal of making a comprehensive history of our entire region available for easy online access. If you have additional information about any of the communities or congregations, please email rockoff@isjl.org. To access the archives, simply visit www.isjl.org and click on "ISJL Digital Archive."

Preparing for the Future: ISJL Education Staff Increases to Eleven

Here we grow again! As the Education Program moves into its sixth year, the ISJL is excited to introduce a second full-time Educator and five new Education Fellows. These new staff members come from diverse backgrounds, locations and experiences, and will be wonderful additions to the team. Fellows will begin their two year Fellowship in June, and will get to meet everyone at the 2008 Education Conference.

Educator



Jordan Elizabeth Magidson was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. As an undergraduate, she attended Michigan State University, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and minored in Journalism and History. It was during her tenure at Michigan State that her passion for Jewish education was ignited. In 2005 she entered the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at Hebrew Union College, where she has been pursuing a Masters of Arts in Jewish Education. After living in Jerusalem and Los Angeles over the course of the last three years, Jordan is looking forward to moving to the South. Jordan is excited

to be working for the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, and helping to build a rich and thriving Jewish community in the region.

Education Fellows



Shelby Deeney is very excited to be returning to the South after four years in Boston, where she studied at Tufts University. Shelby graduated in May with a B.A. in Latin and a minor in African Studies. She grew up in Memphis. A member of Temple Israel, she served as MeFTY president and spent ten wonderful summers at Jacobs (continued on page 4)

Message from the Institute Board Chair



We often hear today that the world is “flat.” As I write this message, sitting in a new hotel in Wuhan, a city claiming 10 million people in Hubei Province in central China, I cannot help but reflect on this. Thomas Friedman wrote an entire book on how that reality is affecting our economic lives. Five hundred years ago, navigators and astronomers were busy proving that the world was not flat. Now we have come full “circle.” We understand that our round world is flat, albeit in a different way: as technology has advanced, the world has “flattened” in terms of commerce, competition and information flow.

Viewing the movement of people, information, and culture in this new paradigm is useful in thinking about what contemporary Jews must do to thrive in this new flat world. Judaism is based upon lessons learned from tradition. Thousands of years of collective wisdom, derived from debate and enhanced through study, surround a core of beautiful spirituality. Out of this, grow communities, families and individuals, well-prepared to contribute to the world. We must be doing something right because Jews’ contributions to society have always been more substantial than our numbers.

Information flows almost instantaneously now. Lives are more portable. Even when we anchor ourselves with a long-term home or job, international travel is commonplace and we take for granted the wonder of fast and cheap international telecommunication. In this new world, Jews can and must live everywhere. Not all of us will live in areas with large Jewish communities and traditional sources of support.

This is not unlike the conditions that led to the development of Jewish communities in the South. Our ancestors traveled outward to follow their dreams and ended up struggling to maintain Jewish identities. But in a flatter world, there is no reason to struggle for Jewish content. The ISJL addresses the needs of the widening Jewish world by developing programs and delivery methods compatible with our flat world. With the ease of travel and the breeze of telecommunication, we deliver rabbinic support, educational enrichment, and Jewish culture. We refuse to be bound by the old. We constantly experiment with the new, enabling Jewish families to thrive.

In our region, the southern United States, we honor the rich history and experience of those that came earlier. But it is important to realize that the model we are developing can be applied beyond our geography. Wherever Jews might wish to live, they will want to live Jewishly. They will want to study our history and our traditions, celebrate our festivals, and contribute to their communities. And all of this, they will want to pass on to their children.

Using technology available to us, we can gather the very best and the most engaging in Jewish resources. We can put them wherever a Jew needs support. I continue to believe, quite strongly, that when Jews concentrate in just a few areas, this jeopardizes security and understanding. Let’s work together to make new Jewish communities, to allow Jews to thrive among all neighbors, and to enable Jewish children to inherit the very best of our wisdom.

L’Shalom,

Message from the Institute President



Because it is so important to me to convey the philosophy behind the Institute’s work, I am using my CIRCA column as an opportunity to start a dialogue about our endeavors. The Institute directly addresses Jewish communal issues at the root, rather than seeking “band-aid” responses. My last article focused on the education and rabbinic departments as two examples of our work. This time, I want to move from giving an example to offering a challenge: take our example and *use it*.

Our rabbinic department is soon to have two full-time rabbis. In addition to coordinating trips for visiting rabbis, the real work of this department is to serve congregations that do not have a rabbi. There are many communities without rabbis in our thirteen-state Southern region – but our research has shown that this is not a uniquely Southern phenomenon.

Presently, our one rabbi serves two dozen communities a year. A second rabbi will enable us to serve twice as many – but the need is so great that the Institute cannot adequately cover our own territory, even with two rabbis. And what about the rest of the Jewish communities, outside the South? Having identified this need and seeing the positive impact of our itinerant rabbinic program, the question seems obvious: *why not replicate this program in other parts of the country?*

The benefit to individuals and communities is so evident, yet no collaborative effort to take on a similar program has emerged. A state like Illinois, or Connecticut, or Ohio could take on the challenge of replicating

our work. Federations, community foundations, the denominational movements, and other funders from across the state could come together around a table of dialogue, and hire full-time rabbis whose sole job is to serve communities within their state who do not have rabbis of their own.

When asked if I enjoy my work, I respond quickly in the affirmative, but add that my real ambition is for the ISJL to be “put out of business.” What can put us out of business? A larger *communal* effort to meet the needs of Jewish communities, regardless of size, denomination, or geographic location. We must get past the attitude “if you want Jewish life, come get it,” and take on a more inclusive outreach approach: “if you want Jewish life, we’ll deliver it to you.”

What the ISJL is doing can easily be mirrored in other areas, on a larger scale. In my opinion, it’s quite simple: the ISJL already functions in our thirteen-state area as a lab project. We are dedicated to promoting Jewish life and opportunity to Jews and their neighbors in our territory. Some of you who will read this can do the same for your territory. If you need some guidance, I would be delighted to speak with you. You can become the movers and shakers who make a difference. Together, we will rearrange those three little words “Why we can’t” into a new paradigm: “Why can’t we?”

June Conference Marks Sixth Year of Education Program

On June 22-24, 2008, the ISJL will host its annual "Go and Teach" Education Conference, kicking off the sixth year of the ISJL Education Program. This year we will increase the number of our communities in Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Georgia. We will also be expanding into North Carolina and South Carolina. With a total of nine

fellows, the education department will expand to include two satellite offices: second-year Fellow Andrew Terkel will be in Austin, Texas and second-year Fellow Mandy Farb will be in Atlanta, Georgia. This will provide easier access to our communities in the current eastern and western reaches of the department's territory. The majority of the education staff will still be based in the main ISJL office in Jackson, Mississippi.

At this year's conference, we will welcome our new congregations and look forward to seeing our veteran communities as we join together in this transformative Jewish experience. The conference is not only the kickoff to a religious school year using the ISJL Education Curriculum, but it is also an opportunity to network, study together, build community, share

challenges and successes, and celebrate the common bonds we share as members of southern Jewish communities.

This year we will have another star-studded lineup of Jewish professionals from agencies including the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE), Facing History and Ourselves, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). Featured speakers include Rabbi Seymour Rossel, acclaimed author and educator; URJ

Small Congregations Representative, Rabbi Victor Appel; performer Jonathan Ross; and ISJL staff, including Director of Education Rachel Stern and our new Educator, Jordan Magidson, as well as Rabbi Batsheva Appel, Dr. Stuart Rockoff, and ISJL President Macy B. Hart.

Every year we strive to make each conference more outstanding than the last. This year we will have our well-received *Torah Lishmah* (learning for the sake of learning) sessions for conference participants as well as station rotation sessions to model the use of this learning method. We will also have new sessions on Tough Questions Kids Ask, How to Market Your School, and an interactive theatre performance by Jonathan Ross of Storahelling. As the Education Program starts its first year "out of pilot," we will discuss the key points of what this will look like for your communities.

Throughout this past year, the Education Fellows have been diligently writing new additions to the curriculum. We took suggestions and input from our communities as we thought about useful and creative topics for lesson plans. These include a *Madrichim Handbook*, a *B'nai Mitzvah Workbook*, Katrina's Jewish Voices Curriculum, a Southern Jewish History Unit, an Anti-Semitism Packet, and a Director's Handbook. During the conference we will unveil all the new additions to the curriculum for 2008.

As always, we encourage you to attend the conference ready to learn. You will leave feeling prepared, motivated, and supported as you enter a new religious school year. The Education Department always leaves feeling excited to work with such committed teachers and community members. Everyone at the education conference is reminded of the important and sacred nature of our work.



(EDUCATION STAFF - continued from page 1)

Camp. She was on the board of Tufts Hillel in college, and active in NFTY-Southern in high school. Shelby has had exceptional opportunities in her education: she studied and traveled in both Africa and France, and she can't wait to travel the South as an Education Fellow.



Samantha Gannon grew up in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. She attended the University of Florida in Gainesville. Upon graduation, she received a B.A. in Jewish Studies along with a minor in Education. Samantha's involvement in the Jewish community dates back to when she was in high school with her local youth group and NFTY. In college, she held the position of Programming Vice President of both KESHER and her sorority Alpha Epsilon Phi. Samantha aspires to become a Jewish camp director.



Janine Julia Jankovitz recently graduated from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with a B.A. in Jewish Studies. She also completed a minor in English, and a Certificate in Creative Writing. As a Hebrew school teacher for Society Hill Synagogue and an intern for The Gershman Y Jewish Arts and Cultural Center, Janine has long been dedicated to working for the Jewish community. She has been an active facilitator for the Anti-Defamation League's

Confronting Antisemitism program for the past four years as well. As a writer, Janine works primarily with poetry and narrative memoirs.



Rachel Jarman is a recent graduate of Brandeis University with a B.A. in Religious Studies. While in Boston she worked in the Education Department of the New England Aquarium and served as Editor in Chief of the Brandeis yearbook. Originally from Connecticut, Rachel's first time in Mississippi was with the ISJL last summer as an intern at the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, and she especially enjoyed her stay at Jacobs Camp. She is extremely excited to be able to serve the southern Jewish community.



Lena Wise attended Texas A&M University. She graduated this May with a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Science and Entomology. She is from Sugar Land, Texas and enjoys camping and scuba diving. Lena was very active in Texas A&M Hillel, serving as President her junior year, and has participated in two Alternative Spring Breaks to Argentina and Israel.

ISJL Says Nesiya Tovah to 2006-2008 Fellows Amy and Bethany

ISJL 2006-2008 Education Fellows Amy Steinberg and Bethany Zwick have completed their fellowships and are moving on to exciting new phases in their lives. We thank them for their two years of service, and wish them *nesiya tovah* – safe journeys – as they each pursue their next endeavor.



Amy Steinberg

Amy has been a valuable asset to the ISJL team. Asked about her experiences here and her plans for the future, Amy says: "As CIRCA goes to press, I am still studying for my Hebrew exam... wish me luck! I have been accepted by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and will be heading to Israel this summer to start a dual master's in Jewish Education and Jewish Communal Service. I came to the Institute as an Education Fellow looking to be more involved in the Jewish community and get a taste of Jewish communal leadership. But I have come away with so much more: not only great practice and skills, but also wonderful relationships with many of my community members, and a new perspective on the Southern Jewish Experience. As I go back to school looking for more theory and training in Jewish education, I will take the unique outlook of religious school values and communal life that I have come across from the past two years. My hope is to return to the South and be a resource in the region."



Bethany Zwick

After two years of traversing the South from Georgia to Texas, Bethany Zwick will be packing up her bags one last time this summer and moving to Washington, D.C. to start her graduate degree. She will be studying Museum Studies at George Washington University. Bethany says: "I came into this Fellowship looking for experience in the Jewish professional world. But what I found was more than just gaining the Jewish experiences I was looking for- it was a life changing experience." Bethany spent her second year as the first Education Fellow to work out of a satellite office, moving to Austin, Texas to serve Texas and Oklahoma communities. "Being in the communities was the best part of the fellowship. Being able to see the effect that a strong Jewish education program has on entire communities has been so emotionally rewarding." The ISJL is grateful to Bethany for her dedication and hard work.

Comedian Michael “Ziggy” Danziger Brings Laughter to Three Southern Jewish Stages

The Institute is proud to present a new performance series, the Southern Jewish Stage. In May, Michael Danziger, an acclaimed Memphis comedian, visited three communities: Hot Springs, Arkansas; Jackson, Mississippi; and Shreveport, Louisiana.



Michael “Ziggy” Danziger is a hilarious performer and comedy writer. He performs in clubs, at colleges, and for organizations all over the country. His smart observational comedy is a hit with all audiences. Michael is a past winner of Comedy, Tennessee’s “Funniest Person in Memphis,” and he remains the reigning “Funniest Jew in the Deep South.”

A native southerner and former assistant director at the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi, Michael has a special place in his heart for southern circuits like these. Though his comedy is typically broad and not specific to any group, for this Southern Jewish Stage tour, “Ziggy” has developed new material to highlight some Jewish humor.

“Chief Rabbi” of Nigeria to Return South

Nigeria’s “Chief Rabbi,” Howard Gorin, spent three weeks in Africa this spring. He describes glowingly his experience taking in the “sights and sounds of Nigerian Jewry,” and says “this community deserves to be noticed and recognized as part of *K'lal Yisrael* (the Jewish community).” Following his recent return from Africa, Rabbi Howard Gorin will be sojourning South for a second tour with the ISJL.

Rabbi Howard Gorin shares the Torah with eager students. Photo courtesy of Rabbi Howard Gorin.



This past February, Rabbi Gorin donated a week of lectures to the ISJL, visiting a half-dozen communities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama to speak about his work with Jewish communities in Africa. The leader of Tikvat Israel Congregation in Maryland since 1980, Rabbi Gorin has also been actively involved with Jewish communities in sub-Saharan Africa for many years. He led a Bet Din to Uganda in 2002 and has visited Nigeria three times, in 2004, 2006, and most recently in 2008, providing both educational materials and spiritual leadership to the emerging community there.

For more information on this upcoming program as it becomes available, or if your community is interested in learning more about a visit from Rabbi Gorin, visit www.isjl.org or email information@isjl.org.

News from The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience

We continue to receive interesting and important donations to the museum. We are appreciative of the community support to the mission of the museum. Below is a list of recent acquisitions:

- Two prints of the Moses Montefiore Synagogue in Marshall, Texas. Donated by Gail Beil of Marshall, Texas.
- Collection donated by Louis and Audrey Kariel of Marshall, TX. The collection contains goods and papers from the Hubb Shoe Store, owned by Mr. Kariel in Marshall, Texas.
- Confirmation gown (circa 1899) donated by Myra Lipper of Houston, Texas.



David Coen, a graduating senior from the University of South Florida will be joining the ISJL as a museum intern this summer. David is a history major and active in Hillel, and we are excited to welcome him to the museum.

Interested in a tour? We offer museum tours between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, and larger group tours on Saturdays by appointment. Call Kate Lubarsky at 601.362.6357 if you are interested in visiting the museum!

Union City: Former Jewish Hub of Northwest Tennessee

The ISJL Digital Archive continues to grow. Recently, the histories of thirteen Jewish communities in Tennessee were unveiled on our website, www.isjl.org. Below is an excerpt of the history of Union City, Tennessee. Stay tuned as additional states are added in the months to come.

In her memoir, *The Jew Store*, Stella Suberman tells the story of her family's time living in "Concordia, Tennessee" in the 1920s. Concordia was a pseudonym for Union City, a town in the northwest corner of the state. Her family owned Kaufman's Low Price Store, which was located in downtown Union



Kaufman's Low Price Store was owned by the parents of Stella Suberman, whose book "The Jew Store" recounts her experience growing up in Union City.

City in the 1920s. Wanting to give their children a stronger Jewish upbringing, Suberman's family soon moved back East. Their story may have turned out differently if it had taken place after World War II, when several Jewish families moved to the area and created an

active, close-knit community.

Located on the New Madrid fault line, the area around Union City in Obion County was reshaped during an 1811 earthquake, in which the Mississippi River ran backwards for several hours and created Reelfoot Lake, a 23-mile long swamp. The newly formed lake displaced Cherokee hunting grounds and opened the way for American settlement in the area. Union City was incorporated in 1861; its name honored the origins of the town, which arose upon the confluence of two railroad lines. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, Union City emerged as an industrial center during the era of the "New South." Between 1875 and 1879, three furniture factories opened in the area, as Union City became a typical "boom town."

It was during this boom era that Jews first arrived in Union City. David Lowenheim came to town in 1882 and opened a dry goods store that catered to the growing number of factory workers. David Levy was a successful tailor who arrived the same year as Lowenheim. Levy gained notoriety by penning theater reviews of traveling shows that came through Union City for the *New York Mirror* newspaper. Both Levy and Lowenheim failed to sink deep roots into the community and moved away once the industrial boom petered out in the 1890s. For the next few decades, a handful of Jewish merchants lived in Union City for brief periods of time before moving on.

The Jewish history of Obion County was transformed when Solomon Schatz bought a dry goods store in the small town of Kenton and moved his large family from Jackson, Tennessee. Sol Schatz and his children became major economic forces in the area for much of the 20th century. They bought lots of prop-

erty in the county, and opened Kenton's first cotton gin. The Schatz family was also involved in the egg and poultry business. Sol's sons opened retail stores in towns throughout the area. Dave Schatz opened a branch of the Schatz Brothers store in Union City in 1918; it remained in business for over fifty years. Various Schatzes served on local bank boards. Sam Schatz helped to make strawberries a cash crop for Obion County, and became a major wholesale supplier of the fruit. Dave Schatz became an important figure in the economic development of Union City. He helped to bring industry to the area, often investing in ventures that would benefit the local economy. Popularly known as "Uncle Dave," Schatz served on the city council and was head of the local chamber of commerce. The success of the Schatzes also benefited the local Jewish community as several Jews moved to Union City to work for the family's businesses.

After World War II, Union City experienced another industrial boom, which finally led to the creation of an organized Jewish community. While cotton and corn farming remained important economic staples in the area, several companies built factories in and around Union City in the 1950s. The Brown Shoe Company led the way, though the opening of a Goodyear Tire plant in the early 1970s marked the height of the boom. In 2007, Goodyear remained the largest employer in Union City.

Several Jews took part in Obion County's version of the industrial revolution. Phil and Netty Roseman moved from Boston and opened garment factories around Union City. David and Sylvia Wechsler opened a uniform factory in nearby Martin. Irving Berlin also opened a factory in the area. All of these new residents chose to live in Union City, where the county's Jewish community was centered. Other Jews moved to town to open retail stores in the wake of the area's economic growth.

Harry and Ruth Gorman came to town from St. Louis in 1950 to open a women's clothing store. The Gormans' experience moving to Union City in 1950 reflected the nature of the local Jewish community. Soon after they arrived in town, they began receiving calls from local Jews inviting them to social events. Since there was no congregation or synagogue, the Jewish community of Union City was largely constituted through social ties. Union City Jews socialized together, hosting dinner parties and card-playing sessions with each other. Six Jewish families lived on

The Jewish Center of Union City closed in 2004, and is now rented by a Christian congregation. Photo by Stuart Rockoff.



the same block on Bishop Street, in a subdivision that had been developed by Dave Schatz. Interestingly, they were able to build a strong Jewish community with no religious foundation. It wasn't because they were irreligious; Union City Jews usually belonged to congregations in nearby cities like Paducah, Kentucky, Jackson, Tennessee, and Cairo, Illinois.

The growing number of Jewish children in Union City eventually led the community to organize a congregation. In the 1930s and 40s, there were a few short-lived efforts to form a religious school for their children. Most Jews in Union City sent their children to other cities for Sunday school. In 1954, they formally established a religious school in Union City with parents serving as the teachers. The school first met at the Davey Crockett Hotel, and later in the Masonic Lodge and a local Baptist Church. The kids would regularly travel to Jackson for special holiday programs.

It was during one of these trips that tragedy struck the group, prompting the creation of a permanent home for Union City's Jewish community. On March 10, 1957, a car filled with Union City children was heading back from Jackson after a Purim party when it lost control and overturned. Five-year old Sammy Schatz, the son of Mark Schatz, was thrown from the car and died. Other children in the car were injured. After the accident, local Jews resolved to keep their kids closer to home and decided to build a Jewish center for Union City. Dave Schatz donated a piece of land, and the "Jewish Center" was dedicated in 1959.

Union City Jews celebrate confirmation on the new building's stage before it became a sanctuary bimah.



According to its charter, the Jewish Center was to be used as a religious, educational, and social facility for the area's Jews. In most communities, Jews organized a congregation first, and then built or acquired a building; in Union City, it was the opposite: the build-

ing inspired the creation of a religious congregation. At first, the Jewish Center was used primarily for Sunday school and social gatherings. Union City Jews would still travel to other cities for religious services. The raised platform at one end of the building was used as a stage, not a bimah. In 1963, Union City Jews requested a student rabbi from Hebrew Union College to help run the religious school and prepare older students for confirmation. This led to a string of student rabbis, who were able to gently coax the "Jewish Center" into a religious congregation. By the late 1960s, under the guidance of student rabbi Steven Foster, the group had acquired a Torah and built an ark to house it, transforming the stage into a bimah. By 1970, regular Shabbat and high holiday services were being held at the Jewish Center. Although the community now had a functioning religious institution that was affiliated with the national Reform Movement, they continued to identify the congregation with the name of the building, "the Jewish Center."

The evolution of the Jewish Center provoked some controversy amongst its members. In the late 1960s, some members objected to holding weekly bridge club meetings at the center. The room the card players had been using was now an unambiguous sanctuary, and some thought it was inappropriate. When the board voted narrowly to ban the card playing, some members resigned in protest, though this rift was eventually healed.

The Jewish Center was a regional congregation, attracting Jews from surrounding towns in Tennessee and Kentucky. In the early 1970s, the congregation had about 15 to 20 children. During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, congregation members raised \$20,000 for Israel. That next year, their student rabbi wrote a history of the local Jewish community and predicted that the congregation would double in size over the next twenty-five years due to the increasing industrial development in town.

Unfortunately, this growth never occurred, and the community has slowly shrunk since the 1970s. Most of the Jewish children raised in Union City didn't return after college, moving instead to larger cities like Nashville and St. Louis. The string of Jewish-owned stores downtown gradually closed. Falkoff's Department Store closed in the early 1990s, while Libby's Store, owned by the Gormans, closed later that decade. Today, there are no Jewish-owned retail stores in Union City.

The Jewish Center stopped hosting student rabbis sometime in the 1990s, and by 2004 had disbanded. They rented the building to a local church group and are now trying to sell it. As of 2007, only nine Jews remained in Union City. While its heyday was short-lived, for a few decades after World War II, Union City served as the Jewish hub of northwest Tennessee.

Sample a "Taste of Torah"

Every week, the Institute's Director of Rabbinic Services, Batsheva Appel, sends out a "Taste of Torah" email. "Taste of Torah" is a weekly commentary on the week's Torah portion. Ready to be read from a bimah or shared in any sort of worship or study setting, it is a resource made available to anyone who wants to join the mailing list.

Want to try a "taste"? A snapshot of a Taste of Torah emailing is featured on this page. To sign up and receive the full weekly emails, email tasteoftorah@isjl.org.

Riiiiight. - Bill Cosby as Noah

"Evan Almighty" is rated PG (Parental guidance suggested). It has some mildly naughty humor, but nowhere near as much sex or violence as the Book of Genesis. - from the [New York Times](#) movie review.

Blessed are You, Lord Our God, Ruler of the universe, who remembers the covenant and is faithful to God's covenant, and keeps God's promise. - blessing said upon seeing a rainbow

Taste of Torah

A Bima-Ready D'var Torah

29 Tishrei 5768



Parashat Noach
Torah: Genesis 6:9-11:32
Haftarah: Isaiah 54:1-55:5

Dear Michele,

When it comes to gifts for young children, Noah's ark is a favorite. We decorate children's bedrooms with Noah's ark. We buy children's books about Noah's ark. We give them play sets of Noah's ark. It might be because it is a bible story that everyone knows. It might be because it is a story that has so many animals in it. But it is very easy to buy things pertaining to Noah's ark for children. [When one adds in things for children with rainbows on them, the number of options increases dramatically.]

What is it about the story that we want them to know? If we look at the narrative very closely, it doesn't seem to be appropriate for small children, after all a story about the destruction of the entire earth by a flood is somewhat more traumatic and violent than the death of Bambi's mother. The presence of all sorts of cute animals doesn't change that fact.

It can't be that Noah's ark is a warning on what will happen if they don't behave. The people in the story are not just naughty, they are corrupt; in fact, they are so awful, they have corrupted the earth itself, which is why God has decided on a flood. Besides, at the end of the story, God promises never to flood the earth again, so using the story to teach good behavior seems over-the-top. Adults need to remember that we can corrupt the earth by our actions, but what do we want children to know?

It can't be that we want them to be just like Noah. Yes, Noah is considered righteous in his time and is described as someone who "walked with God" [Genesis 6:9]. We want more for our children. We want them to grow up to be people who not only are conscious of their relationship with God but work to help others. Noah only saves his family and there is no sense that he in any way warns anyone, even his neighbors. [As was portrayed in the movie, *Evan Almighty*, if one starts building an ark in the yard, it is bound to be noticed.] We could say that he is only doing exactly what God asks of him, but that is too easy. If Noah "walks with God", why doesn't he challenge God to save more people? Even if Noah has given up on everyone, there must be something he can say to God. As adults we learn to care for others every time we read, "remember that you were a stranger in the land of Egypt", so what do children learn from Noah's ark?

I think that the story of Noah's ark is a story about promises. We want children to know that not only is God present in their lives, but that God has made a promise to Noah and to us. In fact, there is a covenant between God and Noah's descendants. According to rabbinic tradition, this covenant includes seven laws for Noah to keep as he and his family repopulates the earth. These include the requirement to establish courts of justice and the prohibition against murder. We promise to uphold certain minimum standards of behavior and God promises not to repeat the flood. It is with God's promise and Noah's promise that the earth gets a fresh start.

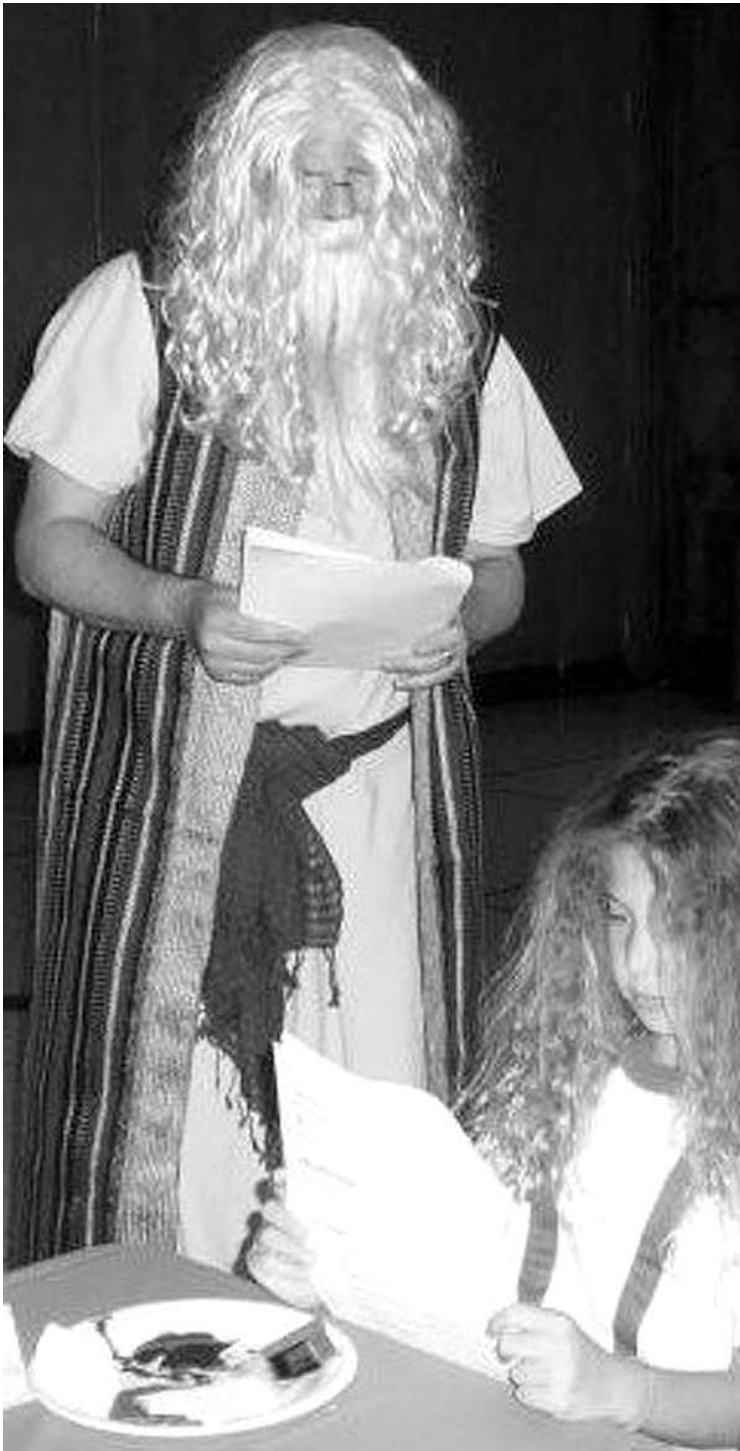
Noah's ark teaches us about making promises and keeping promises. At the end of the Noah story, God sets the rainbow in the clouds, to serve "as a sign of the covenant" [Genesis 9:13] between God and us. We give our children Noah's ark books and Noah's ark play sets to serve as a sign of our side of the covenant with God. God has the rainbow, we have our children, and we each remember our part of this very old covenant.

Snapshots of the Southern Jewish Scene

More faces and places from around the Jewish South...

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA: While ISJL Fellow Bethany Zwick was visiting Oklahoma City, another visitor was also in town... looks like Moses decided to crash the yummy chocolate seder!

Moses joins the chocolate seder in Oklahoma City.



JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI: The Institute, Jackson's Beth Israel Congregation, and Millsaps College co-sponsored a night of learning with Rabbi Lawrence Kushner. An engaging and enlightening evening was had by all.

Beth Israel member Sheila Rubin thanks Rabbi Kushner for his presentation while he signs a book for her.



FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS: Rabbi Batsheva Appel checked out the Trolley Museum on a recent visit to Fort Smith, Arkansas!



JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI: The ISJL Board of Directors convened in April in Jackson, Mississippi. As part of the meeting, longtime ISJL supporters Ben and Betty Lee Lamensdorf and Elaine and Manny Crystal were honored.



A Friend-Raiser in Texas

On Wednesday, March 5, Carolyn and Jay Kaplan hosted an evening reception in their home for the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. Approximately eighty guests from the Houston Jewish community gathered to recognize the organization's successes in promoting Jewish life in thirteen states across the South.

ISJL President Macy B. Hart delivered a captivating presentation, articulating the Institute's unique regional approach to strengthening Jewish education,

offering rabbinic services, preserving history, and promoting Jewish culture in southern communities large and small. Macy highlighted the ISJL's work and partnerships in Texas, including religious schools in San Antonio, Beaumont, Frisco and Colleyville participating in the ISJL education program, and other collaborations with numerous congregations across the state. Following Macy's words, the engaged audience initiated an extended period of questions to glean more details about the ISJL's mission and operations.

In addition to the Kaplans graciously opening their home, the event was co-hosted by Shirley and Allen Becker, Mary Lyons Harberg, Barbara and Barry Lewis, Ambassador Arthur Schechter, Lyn and Dr. Carl Schmulen, Lynn and Armand Shapiro, Jeri and Marc Shapiro, Joy and Benjamin Warren and Kay and Fred Zeidman.

L-R: Allen Becker, Shirley Becker, Barbara Lewis, Barry Lewis, Macy Hart, Jay Kaplan, and Carolyn Kaplan. Photo by Jennifer Deutsch.



ISJL Represented at Hillel Summit 2008

How can Jewish values and organizations help promote a more civil society on today's college campuses? This question sparked three days of discussion and deliberation at Hillel's Summit 2008, held in Washington DC from March 24-26.

Thanks to generous support from the Natan Fund, ISJL staff member Ari Glogower was able to participate in the substantive event, which addressed both the challenges and opportunities facing Jewish organizations on college campuses. While Hillel and similar organizations currently enjoy increased exposure in university life, these groups constantly seek to balance the universality of Jewish values with the particularity of the unique Jewish experience.

Attendees included university faculty members and administrators, philanthropists, Jewish community leaders, student leaders and Hillel professionals and board members.

Although the Hillel Summit particularly addressed the situation on college campuses, the lessons addressed at the conference are important to every Jewish community. Many of the ISJL's partner communities face the same challenge of promoting a Jewish faith that is engaged in the contemporary world while rooted in traditional Jewish values. As the ISJL continues to grow, participating in this national conversation will improve our ability to provide high quality services to our partnering communities.

ISJL President Honored by Foundation for Jewish Culture

ISJL President Macy B. Hart is being awarded a Special Citation for Service by the Foundation for Jewish Culture. Macy recently completed his term as Board Chairman of the Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM). While serving as CAJM chair, Macy was also an actively participating member of the Foundation for Jewish Culture board. Macy is being honored for his work as CAJM Chairman; his leadership helped to take the organization from a completely volunteer operation to a professionally staffed agency with its first full-time operational budget. The Special Citation for Service is a newly-

created, unique award, acknowledging Macy's dedication, activism, and the important contributions he was able to make while in office.

The Foundation for Jewish Culture, formerly the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, is an advocate for Jewish cultural life and creativity. The award ceremony will take place at the Jewish Cultural Achievement Award dinner on Thursday, June 12 in New York City. Presenting the award to Macy will be Nancy Berman, Founding Director of the Skirball Museum.

ISJL Board Meets in Jackson, Mississippi

The ISJL Board of Directors gathered in Jackson April 11-13. It was a great opportunity for the board members to get a chance to hear directly from all of the staff about the remarkable work that is being accomplished in the field. The staff presented a typical weekend in the life of an Education Fellow's visit to a community, how cultural programs are developed and put on the road, how a history of a Jewish community that no longer exists is researched, and the types of visits and interactions our rabbi facilitates.

In addition to the staff presentations, the board members continued their discussions regarding the education program coming out of pilot for the 2007-08 academic year. They were pleased to hear about the conversations and comments gleaned from veteran communities, and eager to learn about the new communities joining us in the future. Development consultant David Altshuler guided the board through the



development process, and plans for growing the Institute in the future.

Not every moment of the weekend took place around a board table. In addition to sharing a lovely Shabbat service with Beth Israel Congregation, the ISJL also had the opportunity while in Jackson to recognize and honor past board members whose leadership helped us in those early years. Elaine Crystal and Ben and Betty Lee Lamensdorf are pillars of the community, and exemplars of ISJL board excellence. We thank them and all past and present ISJL board members for their dedication to our cause.

Make Future History: 2008 Annual Campaign

The first Jewish congregation in the South, and the third established in this country, was Mickve Israel, founded in Savannah, Georgia in 1735. Since then Jews have settled throughout the region, establishing communities and congregations and making the South their home. At the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life we are committed to building on this long and distinguished legacy of Jews in the South. *With your help, we can ensure that Southern Jews continue to make history in the future.*

We truly appreciate the hundreds of gifts that we received as part of our 2007 annual campaign. If you are one of the hundreds of our long-term supporters, please consider a slightly larger gift this year. If you have not yet become an ISJL supporter, we encourage you to consider us in your philanthropic giving for 2008. Your support continues the growth in our outstanding work with our rabbinic outreach services,



educational program, cultural development and preservation work throughout the South.

If you are like so many of us that prefer to give monthly, as opposed to annually, please join the **ISJL Chai Club**. Donors who make a gift of at least \$18/month for 12 months can have their gift automatically charged to their VISA, American Express or Mastercard. It's convenient and deeply appreciated. Please complete the information on the enclosed contribution envelope and your Chai Club gift can begin!

All contributions help us continue the incredible work in our community. Thank you in advance for helping us as we continue to grow.

Development News!



Charlett Frumin, a supporter of the ISJL since its inception, recently joined the ISJL staff as our Houston coordinator. We are thrilled that Charlett, someone who has spent years as a volunteer in the Houston Jewish community, has joined the ISJL team. As Charlett says, "Since my high school days in Shreveport, Louisiana, I have been involved with Jewish life in the South. I am excited to be part of such an important Jewish educational and cultural project that will insure the continuation of Jewish life experiences for future generations."

2008 ISJL Contributions

The ISJL annual campaign has been a successful effort for several years. In 2007 we adopted the theme *Make Future History*, and your gifts are doing just that. By making your gift to the 2008 Annual Campaign, you can help preserve and celebrate our history and build a stronger future in Jewish communities in the South and throughout the United States. In this and future issues of CIRCA you can see the impact our education, history, museum and rabbinic programs have on thousands of Jews in communities just like yours.

With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends its thanks to everyone who made a contribution between **January 1 and March 31, 2008**. Gifts received after this period will be recognized in the next issue of CIRCA. Again, *thank you*.



MAKE FUTURE HISTORY

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Please go to our website www.isjl.org, click on the CIRCA & E-NEWS tab, and then fill in the form on the lefthand side of the page. Questions? Email information@isjl.org

SAVE THE DATE!

The 21st Annual



November 15-16, 2008

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