

FALL 2012

CIRCA

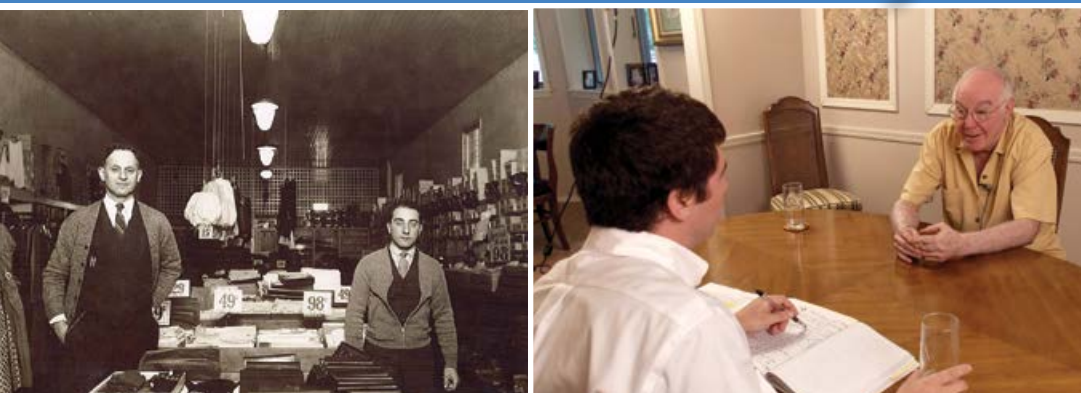
Newsletter of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



community



identity



legacy

This is isj!

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WOLDENBERG
INSTITUTE OF
SOUTHERN
JEWISH LIFE

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Message from
ISJL Board Chair
Rayman L. Solomon

This issue of *Circa*, like each, contains articles detailing the amazing achievements of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. There are contributions from each department detailing successes in educational and cultural programming, rabbinic services, historical and archival research, and outreach through our community engagement. As a Board we are immensely proud of all of these accomplishments and the excellence of our outstanding professional staff.

But how do we ensure the continued existence of the ISJL's work? How do we adapt to the changing social, economic, and demographic conditions that face our region and all not-for-profits? These are the questions that the ISJL Board is addressing through our strategic planning process. As we began our second decade we reengaged the same consultant who had helped us put together our first plan in 2002. What struck us most in looking back at our first plan was that in the ensuing years we had accomplished almost every ambitious goal we had set for ourselves. For the past six months the committees of the Board together with the professional staff has been working hard to complete a plan that ensures sustainability and makes us a more efficient and effective organization both within our thirteen-state region and, perhaps on a limited basis, outside

that region. We are exploring the feasibility of targeted strategic opportunities in other geographic areas as long as they enhance, not diminish, our abilities to deliver services to what is our primary mission. Our discussions are wide-ranging and exciting. Our goal, which we all share, is to look back in ten years and realize that yet again we have accomplished the ambitious objectives we have set for ourselves.

One thing that is very clear to all of us is that the ISJL will have to continue to expand its base of support nationally, as well as in our region. In this issue we discuss our efforts to expand the Institute's "Friends" campaign. Our loyal supporters generously give for many reasons. There are those still living in the South who are grateful for the rabbinic or educational or other services they receive. There are others, such as myself, who are "expat" and are grateful for such services that are being provided to family and friends who are still in our childhood communities where there are no longer enough Jewish families to support a temple. Others, who might not have a direct connection to the South, support the ISJL because they see innovative and high quality programs that can become a model for delivery of Jewish services

throughout the United States. Of course, there are countless more reasons. We want to make the case for support to each of these potential new Friends.

For those who have been supporters throughout the years we also want to make certain you are aware of our planned and deferred giving opportunities. We are able to work with you to determine a gift that meets your financial objectives while providing you the satisfaction of knowing that your philanthropy is helping to ensure that the ISJL will be able to continue to deliver the highest quality of services to Jews throughout the South.

As I write this, High Holidays are upon us. It is a time for reflection and planning for future behavior. The Board's strategic planning process is engaged in this. It is also a time when traditionally the President of a temple or synagogue reminds members of the community of the important role the institution plays in their lives, and urges them to support it generously. I urge you all to continue to support the ISJL. I wish each and every one of you a happy, healthy, and sweet 5773!

L'Shana Tova,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Solomon", written in a cursive style.



Message from
ISJL President
Macy B. Hart

Since we were founded twelve years ago, the ISJL has enjoyed tremendous success in addressing some of the most crucial areas of Jewish life. Our staff and board remain resolved to providing Jewish opportunity and education throughout our region. In many ways, the ISJL grew out of my own personal experience, as I had to face many of the problems that still plague the American Jewish community today. I am proud of the work we have done to address these issues head-on. As I reflect over the past twelve years, I feel truly blessed and lucky to work with a staff and board that continue to challenge and change the Jewish world on a daily basis.

As I contemplate our legacy, I am reminded of an architect, who takes theory, engineering, and design into account as he or she draws the blueprints for a house. The ISJL's work is a blueprint for what the American Jewish community can be as long as we continue to stretch the envelope and push against the restraining status quo. Culture change is a very difficult enterprise in which progress can be measured in decades rather than weeks, months or years. Despite these challenges, the ISJL remains committed to reshaping the Jewish future. Our focus is on the Jewish people from birth to death, or as I call it "Life to Legacy."

In the future, there will be a large number of Southern Jewish children, from all religious backgrounds, from both small and large communities, who have been educated by the ISJL's curriculum system which offers a delivered *common body of Jewish knowledge*. They will have been participants in the ISJL approach, grade by grade, lesson plan by lesson plan, taught mostly by lay teachers, who are guided by the ISJL Education Fellows under the supervision of professional

Jewish educators. The ISJL Education Program already works in almost eighty congregations. By the end of our second decade, the number of children we will have reached will be in the tens of thousands. We are already teaching over 3000 children in this year alone. These participants in the ISJL education system will themselves teach and organize as they resettle all over the country. Mark these words.

In the future, Jewish agencies, Movements, seminaries, and congregations will encourage or require staff clergy to serve small communities that do not have clergy of their own. The ISJL Rabbinic Department is already doing this within our region and often receives requests from clergy in other parts of the country about how they can take part. This past year, Central Synagogue of New York City partnered with the ISJL and has sent its five clergy members to visit nineteen different small congregations across the South. The ISJL understands that having a rabbi or cantor for just one Shabbat weekend can mean so much to those who live in areas that are far removed from the centers of American Jewish life. Yet, we know that no one is really isolated, as the young people raised in these small communities often end up in big cities with large Jewish populations. Jews live all over the United States, but the organized Jewish community has forgotten this. These small, isolated, and underserved communities are hungry for Judaic stimulation. The ISJL is turning up the lights. Mark these words.

The idea of Tikkun Olam, or repairing the world, is a central concept of Judaism. Historically, Southern Jews

have played an active role in making their communities and neighborhoods better. Honoring this tradition, the ISJL continues to push beyond the Jewish world to work in the larger community. The ISJL has created a program in which youth groups, church groups, and fraternities and sororities can adopt elementary schools and be role models and help **teach students to read**. We are also teaching middle school and high school students how to resolve conflicts through peer mediation. In the future, the ISJL will create a new Community Engagement Fellowship program for young Jewish adults to deliver these programs throughout the region. They will work with small and large congregations and communities to help repair the neighborhood. Mark these words.

In 2000, the ISJL started with some seed money to begin serving the needs we identified. Now, we need the grassroots to nurture the seedlings we have sprouted and bring about the fruit that awaits the next season. As with almost every non-profit organization, the economic downturn has presented the ISJL with great challenges. Simply put, we need more individual givers. In the future, I would like to see thousands of donors who have been touched by the work of the ISJL joining our effort to build a stronger Southern Jewish community. Please support our **1000 New Donors Campaign** and help us maintain the march toward a brighter Jewish future. Life to Legacy: mark these words. Thank you in advance for your contribution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Macy B. Hart". The signature is stylized and fluid, with the first and last names being the most prominent.

The ISJL: Beyond the Numbers

Each year, the ISJL shares with our supporters the incredible numbers we are able to achieve. The number of miles traveled, the number of communities served, the number of histories compiled, to name just a few. To us, these numbers are a point of pride. They represent tremendous dedication, time, and energy. But they also represent so much more. Within each mile traveled, community served, or history preserved, there are so many stories. That's why, in this issue of CIRCA, we are taking you **beyond the numbers**.

We want to share with you the sense of **community** our work fosters.

We want to celebrate the strengthened sense of **identity** that our work nurtures.

We want to clearly illustrate how what the ISJL does, every day, sustains our Jewish **legacy**.

For those of you who have only recently become acquainted with the ISJL and our work, you'll be able to meet each department, and find a friendly little blue-shaded box that explains just what each department does.

For those of you who have been our supporters for years, we wanted to share some new stories from each department – personal insights from the staff about why they find their work with the ISJL meaningful, how it impacts them, how it impacts the communities we serve, how it impacts Jewish life in the South and beyond.

We hope that the stories from each department will inspire you to continue to support the ISJL – or if you only recently learned of us, we hope you will feel moved to become one of the **1,000 New Donors** we're seeking

to gain this year. Whether by joining our Chai Club, making a gift in honor of a loved one, supporting a particular department or the entire organization - every contribution ensures the ISJL's continued ability to build community, enhance identity, and secure a lasting legacy. We simply cannot do it without you.

Thank you for enabling us to engage in this work; we are honored each day to do what we do.

L'Shalom,
The ISJL Staff

THIS IS ISJL.

The ISJL (Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life) is a nonprofit organization supporting Jewish life, culture, and community engagement in the South and beyond.



Chronicles of the Circuit-Riding Rabbi: Stories from the Frontier of American Jewish Life



Rabbi Marshal Klaven
Director of Rabbinic Services

Our rabbinic department making 90 visits to roughly 50 different communities in 13 states over the course of just one year may seem extraordinary, but these Herculean numbers do not tell the entire tale. They merely represent the amazing, transformative relationships which have come to define the ISJL, our partnering communities, their members, our rabbinic partners and my rabbinate as the Circuit-Riding Rabbi on the frontier of American Jewish life.

Here is just one of my stories from the road:

Upon hearing the word “Shabbat,” the excited, engaged eyes of my student went blank. This student is a very bright 11-year old girl from a rural part of Mississippi. We were in my office in Jackson, MS. Her parents had brought her here with the hopes of beginning

Bat Mitzvah lessons. Where they live, there has been a Jewish presence since the 1880s. But their numbers are few, and their community has been without a full-time rabbi since the 1990s. For rabbinic support, what they have now is me – serving their small community, along with members of another 105 small Southern congregations, all of which go without full-time rabbis.

Realizing that she did not know the word Shabbat, I explained: “In English, it is called ‘the Sabbath,’” thinking it was just the Hebrew pronunciation that was tripping her up. Even then, the word did not register. So, I tried explaining it, hoping that would jog her memory. “It’s the Jewish day of rest.” Still... nothing. I couldn’t believe it! How could such a brilliant girl not know such a pivotal day?

Then her father, who was raised in an Orthodox home, who went to *shul*, who became a Bar Mitzvah, said: “You know, sweetie, that’s why grandma doesn’t drive from Friday night to Saturday night. She’s observing Shabbos.” The snapping of neurons connecting within

the mind of this little girl was almost loud enough to hear. “Ah, yes,” she exclaimed. “I do know... *Shabbat*.”

Whether she truly did or did not know Shabbat at that moment, she soon came to truly understand Shabbat: its warmth and its joy, its peace and its meaning, as it became a treasured part of her family’s practice. One of the conditions for starting Bat Mitzvah training was honoring Shabbat as a family, whether by attending the occasional services of their home-town congregation or those of a congregation nearby (relatively speaking: 45 minutes away). The second condition was meeting once a week for our training session.

Having been starved of this particular Jewish knowledge (though that is not to say that she didn’t have other Jewish nutrition, as she proudly understood herself to be a Jew), she was a very hungry student. So, immediately, we began our lessons, meeting once a week via Skype. Within a matter of months, she went from not being able to distinguish an Aleph from a Bet to being able to not only read Hebrew but also to chant it beautifully.

2012 RABBINIC STATISTICS

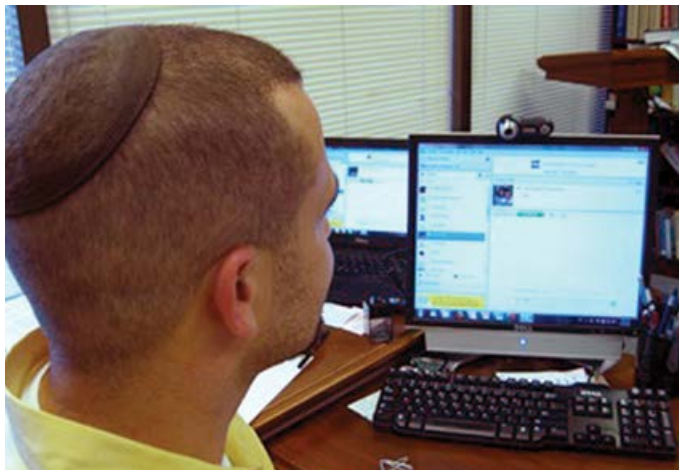
90
Visits

50
Communities

13
States

1
The number of people we need to make a moment meaningful.





Rabbi Klaven using skype to connect to students

This is how, community to community, we strengthen identity and guarantee our Jewish legacy. This student,

along with my other students scattered across the South, inspire me every day. They live as Jewish islands in a sea

of mainly Christian faiths. And, while this strengthens their Jewish identities in immeasurable ways, it also leaves them feeling a little alone and isolated. It would be easy to understand them giving up, folding their cards, throwing in the tallit of their Judaism. But they don't. Through these lessons, their identities are affirmed, as they feel connected to a Jewish world, ensuring that while Judaism could be lost in a single generation, this shall not come to pass. My students will not allow it.

Transformative: How a Summer Internship Helps Shape a Rabbi

*HUC-JIR Student Rabbi
Lisa Kingston
ISJL Rabbinic Intern,
Summer 2012*

Fried chicken, fried pickles, fried okra.

Most of my expectations about traveling around the American South for the summer seemed to revolve around food, mostly fried. Of course, the South is so much more than fried food! There's also sweet tea, boiled peanuts, creamed corn, caramel cake, and butter beans, all of which I tasted here for the first time!

Kidding aside, I came down to Jackson, Mississippi to work as the ISJL Rabbinic Intern, expecting one thing: to be filled and fulfilled in

meaningful relationships with Southern Jews. "There are enough Jews in the South to warrant an entire organization?" was one reaction I received from people upon hearing about my summer job. Or, "Isn't there a lot of discrimination against Jews down South?" To those reactions I simply said: "Yes, there are," and "no, there is not."

The South is a region often characterized by people with a deeply committed religious faith - and in that respect, Jews are no different. ISJL founder Macy B. Hart had a vision for Southern Jewish congregations: he knew that they would always be stronger together, even if they were spread far apart or belonged to different

denominations. It was with that belief that the ISJL came to be, promoting Jewish life and documenting the historical legacy of the Southern Jewish experience.

Although I was going to be serving and preserving a legacy I knew little about, I immediately understood the significance of my role. In my internship, I learned that Southern Jews seem to have an inherent talent for welcoming others into their communities. The Jewish value of *hachnasat orchim*, "welcoming the stranger," becomes amplified by "southern hospitality." Every community I entered immediately seemed to care about me and the Jewish experiences I was bringing to them. *(continued on page 6)*

THIS IS ISJL: RABBINIC SERVICES.

Throughout the region, small congregations lack rabbinic leadership. The ISJL *provides rabbinic services*, traveling to these under-served congregations, supporting Jewish life in every corner of the South. We also coordinate visits through our "Rabbis on the Road" programs. In 2011, our rabbinic department conducted 57 visits to 34 communities in eleven states; this year, the department is on track to conduct 90 visits to 50 communities in thirteen states.

(*INTERN continued from page 5*)

In return, I quickly cared for them too. Hopefully, I was able to give back to those who were so generous to me. While I was treated to many delicious meals and stayed in beautiful homes, my ISJL mentor, Rabbi Marshal Klaven, reminded me to “earn my keep.” For example, at the beginning of the summer when I was planning on reading only a few verses from Torah, he gently asked me if I felt the people I was serving only deserved the minimum of the Jewish experience. Of course not! In fact, because Judaism is often harder to access in the South, all the more so are Southern Jews thirsty for learning, prayer, and experiences that help them connect to *Am Yisrael*. I felt proud to be able to deliver meaningful and authentic Jewish prayer services, Torah study, sermons, life cycle ceremonies, and pastoral care.

I also served a variety of people, across the Jewish spectrum. I was lucky enough to see the extended Southern Jewish family which the ISJL has helped to create and nurture at our annual Education Conference. There, we spent 3 long days learning and sharing dynamic approaches to Jewish Education.

For much of the summer, I was on the road. I visited communities of varying sizes, both near and far. I even visited a prison, praying with the Jewish inmates



Student Rabbi Kingston, Rabbi Klaven, Shirley Eriksen

and sharing challenges and goals for the future. With the support of Rabbi Klaven, I developed my rabbinic skills and felt more assured in my own rabbinic authority. He patiently worked with me as I practiced music, liturgy, trope, lessons, and sermon delivery. The time he spent with me was time that students don't often have amidst the many pressures of school. He is open and generous as a mentor, just as he is as a rabbi.

Perhaps the most important lesson I learned from Rabbi Klaven and the ISJL is that **an organization that serves its community does not sit in a building or behind a desk.** We go out on the road and meet people where they are, whether they are in town or a few states away. We talk to people face to face, and recognize that “Southern Judaism” is not one monolithic thing, and that each community has its own culture and its own needs.

Some congregations here are growing. New businesses, university programs, or expanding cities are bringing young Jewish families to communities who are happy to welcome them. And some communities,

sadly, are dwindling. These communities recognize their obligation to preserve the deeply rooted histories of their congregations and the ISJL is here to help them with that too. This summer I was able to help connect a congregation who closed its doors with a congregation who is growing into a new building. This new congregation will hopefully receive the Torah scroll from the old, truly allowing our Tree of Life to help new life flourish.

From my short time with the ISJL, I have become a more confident rabbi, both personally and professionally. I hope to bring with me to my own future rabbinate the model of outreach that the ISJL seems to implement so naturally. I'll miss the South. I'll even miss the Jackson heat; not the near 100 degree weather per se, but the warm and welcoming community of the ISJL office, Rabbi Marshal and his assistant Shirley, and all the passionate Jews I have met in various congregations.

And of course, I'll also miss the food.

Todah Rabbah to all y'all at the ISJL!

THIS IS ISJL: INTERNSHIPS.

Each summer, we offer internships for students interested in history, oral history, museum work, community engagement, and for a current rabbinic or cantorial student who wants on-the-ground experience and mentorship from the ISJL rabbi. We consistently attract top-level students, who do great work for the ISJL – and also wind up truly enriched by their time at the ISJL.

DID YOU KNOW?

As an individual, if you itemize your tax returns, you can generally deduct charitable contributions representing up to 50% of your adjusted gross income – and corporations may generally deduct contributions up to 10% of their taxable income. When you are making your year-end giving decisions, please consider including the ISJL. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, with an excellent rating on Charity Navigator. A great choice for year-end giving!

My Job: Being A Southern Jewish Representative

*Rachel Jarman Myers
Museum and Special Projects
Coordinator*

“Raise your hand if you’ve ever met someone Jewish.” Most of the fifth grade students in the room stared up at me blankly but one confidently shot his hand up in the air. “Put your hand down if it’s me.” He smiled and slowly lowered his hand. Being “the only Jewish person in the room” was once very foreign to me. As a transplant from Connecticut, I grew up in a large Jewish community and spent time in an even larger one in school at Brandeis University. Now because of my position at the ISJL, whenever I meet someone new and tell them where I work, I inherently introduce myself as Jewish. This introduction could very likely be one of the first exposure people have had with anything Jewish, so I do my best to be a good representative.

I’m certainly not the first person to take on this responsibility. Jews have always been a tiny minority in the South, and have worked hard to represent themselves well. They were visible contributors to their communities by owning successful businesses, joining social groups, and even holding public office, all while



Rachel Jarman Myers presenting a lesson to students

sharing their faith openly with their neighbors. But as Jews move to larger cities and smaller congregations diminish, how can we locally continue their Jewish legacy?

The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience’s new **Traveling Trunk program** represents Jewish culture in each classroom it visits. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience Traveling Trunk is a hands-on educational opportunity containing artifacts, photographs, maps and three lesson plans to teach students about nineteenth century European immigration to the American South and how these Jewish immigrants made an impact on their communities.

While I do enjoy getting to visit students in-person on occasion, the lesson plans we developed were intended to prepare any user to be a Jewish educator. This program travels to towns where congregations once were and interprets Jewish life in the South in a positive and compelling way. With artifacts, photographs,

newspaper articles and even interactive board games in the hands of teachers and students, the stories and lives of historic Jewish communities come alive.

Teachers who request the trunk are excited to expose their class to a religion and culture they often know very little about. Lessons provide an avenue for students to connect with this material and relate it to their lives today. They are exposed to familiar words that they discover are actually Yiddish, or find inspiration from Jewish merchants in order to design their own businesses. It’s appealing to educators because lessons focused on Jewish immigrants in America not only promote understanding and appreciation of Jewish heritage but for other diverse populations and how they have all shaped our community and region.

Last year the trunk reached 400 students, and I hope this year it can reach twice as many. Whether it’s one

THIS IS ISJL: MUSEUM.

Known as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE), the ISJL’s oldest department is innovative in the way it simultaneously preserves Southern Jewish history and creates inclusive cultural programs by collecting artifacts, photographs, art, and manuscripts, then using the collection for exhibitions, education, and traveling community programs.



student connecting to a new view of state history, educators to a new way of teaching cultural heritage, or even between two people who have just met, these experiences not only better connect our diverse communities today, but help link us to the legacy of communities in the past.

If you are interested in hosting the MSJE Traveling Trunk in your community email me at rjarman@isjl.org. For more information, visit our website: isjl.org/museum/traveling_trunk.htm

Preserving the Legacy of Southern Jewish Life

Dr. Stuart Rockoff
History Department Director

For the last several years now, I have been traveling across the South researching the history of Jewish communities both large and small for inclusion in our online *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*. To date, we have over 230 community histories in ten different states completed and online. We just finished sixteen community histories from Oklahoma, which are now available on our website. Over the past month alone, our encyclopedia has been accessed over 11,000 times – an amazing number!

While our histories of large cities, like Atlanta, New Orleans, and Houston



Newspaper research uncovered this article describing Rosh Hashanah services in Okmulgee in 1934

receive lots of “hits,” what’s especially meaningful to me is the number of times our small community histories are read. Over the past six months, our history of the Schulenberg/Halettsville Jewish community has been read more times than any other of the 55 histories in the Texas section.

Such information confirms something that I’ve often said: while Atlanta and Dallas may not need us to preserve their Jewish history, Waycross and Texarkana probably do. This idea has stuck with me as I’ve driven across Oklahoma trying to uncover the state’s Jewish history. Much has been written about the Jewish communities of Tulsa and Oklahoma City, but much less about smaller places like McAlester, Enid, and Ponca City. In fact, one former Jewish community was just about forgotten.

When I was putting together my initial list of Oklahoma communities to research, I added Okmulgee because according to the *American Jewish Year Book*, 125 Jews lived there in 1927. This seemed like enough people to merit a history. There had been no mention of an Okmulgee congregation



Remaining members of Temple Emanuel – Ponca City, OK with Stuart Rockoff

in the only published book on Oklahoma Jewish history, and none of the contemporary experts on Oklahoma Jews were aware of any congregation. So imagine my surprise when I was thumbing through the 1930 Okmulgee City Directory in the public library and found “Congregation B’nai Israel” listed under churches. After reading through many reels of newspaper microfilm, I discovered that Okmulgee Jews founded a congregation in the 1910s, and even bought a modest house to act as a synagogue in 1925.

B’nai Israel never had a full-time rabbi, instead bringing in student rabbis from an Orthodox seminary in Chicago to lead High Holiday services. Later, they brought

in student rabbis from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Members of the congregation led the regular services. Gershon Fenster, a local merchant, was the most active lay leader during the early years. After he moved to Tulsa in 1923, he would return to Okmulgee once a month to lead services. At its peak, B’nai Israel had about 35 families, drawn primarily from Okmulgee and nearby Henryetta. By 1946, this number was down to about 20, and B’nai Israel was only holding services on the High Holidays. By the 1950s, the congregation became inactive, and the house was sold in the 1960s.

Even after the demise of B’nai Israel, a handful of Jews remained in Okmulgee. Ben Colchensky ran an oil

field pipe and supply business before retiring in 1958. Later in life, he wrote a popular weekly column for the local newspaper called “Ben Sez.” In a newspaper article about him published in 1973, Colchensky declared “If I had my life to live over again... I would live in the same town. I have been very happy.”

Despite Ben’s love for his hometown, both of his children left Oklahoma. After his wife Minnie died,

his daughters moved him to Tulsa. Today, there is no longer a Jewish community in Okmulgee. But there is now a history of the community, documenting and remembering its presence and impact.

Jewish life once flourished in countless small towns like Okmulgee across the South. Today, many of these communities are extinct, their congregations long gone. Yet thanks to our efforts,

communities like Okmulgee will not be forgotten. People seeking to learn about the southern Jewish experience will use the *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities* and its histories of places like Okmulgee for years to come. For people with roots in these communities, our encyclopedia is an assurance that their experiences have value, and that their stories will be a lasting part of the grand narrative of American Jewish history.

Why Oral History Matters: A Personal Reflection

Josh Parshall
Oral Historian

No one lives forever: not me, not you, not our parents or grandparents.

When I took the job of Oral Historian at the ISJL, I did not realize that my work would make me so aware of this basic fact, one that we often ignore in the muddled rush of everyday life. But death is what makes oral history—all history, really—so vital: none of us will be around to tell his or her own story forever. A life history interview, for all its limitations, captures a fragment of someone’s experiences, memories and personality. When someone we love has passed away, oral history is only a tiny comfort. Compared to nothing, though, an hour of a father’s voice or a single

video-recorded gesture from a grandmother is everything.

This spring, we lost my grandfather, Noah Barkovitz. When someone dies at 97 years old, and manages to surprise the people closest to him, it’s a great accomplishment. Sure, he had slowed down a lot since retiring at 89, and yes, he’d had increased heart problems since last fall, but he remained alert and funny. We were all still shocked to lose him.

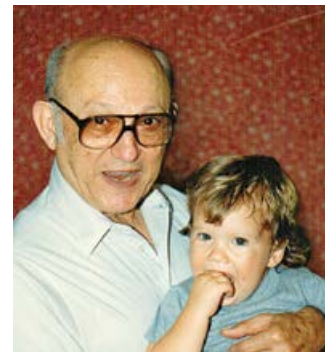
I know that my entire family misses him terribly. I miss him even more knowing how much he wanted to attend my upcoming wedding. But I do have a piece of him: two audio recordings that we made in 2008. His voice is a little slurred, and his Southern accent is stronger than ever, it seems to me.

My grandmother, not so far withdrawn into her dementia as today, laughs at his jokes, asks him some questions and contributes her own thoughts. Even when he dodges questions to tease my grandmother or just can’t remember the right details, the interview is a treasure.

On Yom Kippur, at *yahrzeits*, during the traditional morning prayers, and whenever we gather to comfort mourners or bury the dead, our traditions remind us of the blessing that is life and the inevitability of its end. When I listen to Noah’s recordings or watch interviews with others who have passed away, I am reminded again how important these interviews are to the families and friends of the people I speak with. I remember also how lucky I am to do such meaningful work.

THIS IS ISJL: HISTORY.

With the mandate of *preserving the rich history of the Southern Jewish Experience*, our history department documents and disseminates information about the rich history of Jewish life in the American South. Oral histories, lectures, publications, and a digital state-by-state *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities* are some of the ways this department contributes to cultural preservation.



Josh and his Grandfather - 1986

If you, your family or your congregation is interested in preserving memories with an oral history, contact Josh Parshall at jparshall@isjl.org or for more information – www.isjl.org.



Rabbinic Services



Community Engagement

This is

isji

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Museum



Throughout the region, small congregations lack rabbinic leadership. The ISJL provides rabbinic services, traveling to these under-served congregations, supporting Jewish life in every corner of the South. We also coordinate visits through our “Rabbis on the Road” programs. In 2011, our rabbinic department conducted 57 visits to 34 communities in eleven states; this year, the department is on track to conduct 90 visits to more than 50 communities in thirteen states.

Committed to offering meaningful community engagement opportunities, the ISJL’s community engagement department works in partnerships with nonprofits, schools, individuals and congregations to pursue tikkun olam, repairing our world. Recently, our peer mediation program T.A.P. (Talk About the Problems) was named a “success story” by the Kids Count Initiative/Annie E. Casey Foundation.

With the mandate of preserving the rich history of the Southern Jewish Experience, our history department documents and disseminates information about the rich history of Jewish life in the American South. Oral histories, lectures, publications, and a digital state-by-state Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities are some of the ways this department contributes to cultural preservation.



History



With the goal of offering inclusive cultural programs to cities big and small, the ISJL brings authors, speakers, musicians, comedians, and more to the region, sharing the joy of Jewish culture with a diverse audience while fostering shared experiences and community-building.

Programming

Dedicated to providing educational services to Southern Jewish communities, our education department currently serves more than 70 congregations. With an innovative approach to regional educational services, we have a “three c system”: conference (held annually, bringing together all of our education partner communities), curriculum (user-friendly, fully scripted, comprehensive lesson plans), and community visits (on-the-ground support and follow up for all communities implementing the ISJL education program).



Education

Known as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE), the ISJL’s oldest department is innovative in the way it simultaneously preserves Southern Jewish history and creates inclusive cultural programs by collecting artifacts, photographs, art, and manuscripts, then using the collection for exhibitions, education, and traveling community programs.

“It Worked!”: A Story of Community Engagement

Malkie Schwartz
Director of Community
Engagement

I stood outside of the Mississippi College School of Law building, waiting with middle school students whose parents were on the way to pick them up. We had just finished a peer mediator training attended by 18 students from three local middle schools, including Blackburn Middle School, where T.A.P., our peer mediation program, has been in existence for 3 years. The day’s training was led by students from the Black Law Student Association (BLSA), all of whom had spent time with ISJL staff, mastering the curriculum so they could effectively teach and implement it. It was clear that all who participated learned a lot and had a great time.

It was dark, windy and rainy, and all of us huddled close to the doors where we were less likely to get wet. Next to me was a 7th grade student who was staring at the ground. When I asked how he thought the training went, he shrugged his shoulders. I asked whether he was excited for T.A.P. to come to his school. He looked up at me, smiled and said “It’s

not going to work at my school.” I asked him why he felt that way and, reluctantly, he explained why he didn’t feel that his fellow students would choose to talk through a conflict rather than fight it out. An experienced Blackburn mediator overheard our conversation and immediately jumped in. “That’s what we thought about our school,” she said. I asked her how the program is going today, and she proudly talked about its successes—38 mediation sessions during the last academic year, an improved school environment, and an exciting leadership opportunity for her.

The exchange between the two students took me back to my initial conversations with the first cohorts of student mediators at Blackburn Middle School. At first, they resisted the peer mediation program. They were adamant that it would not work. We made a list of all the reasons that they believed the program would not work—and there were many. Then, we went through each challenge and talked about how we could address it.

It seemed unrealistic to the students that any form of conflict resolution



Malkie Schwartz with student mediators receiving an award.

would seem like a genuine alternative to their classmates. For many of their classmates, using their fists instead of their words was the norm. But the students in that room had been selected to be mediators because they were going to *change* the norm. The question now was whether they were up for the challenge of taking on the role of an agent of change.

They were afraid that T.A.P. wouldn’t work – because it was their responsibility to make sure it would work, and the task was daunting. The students understood that fighting was always going to be an option, but that through their leadership, they could help make their peers aware of another, more peaceful, option.

A moment later, the Blackburn student’s mom pulled up to the curb. The

student grabbed her bag and began skipping to the car. “Wait!” I called after her. “What did you say when you first heard about T.A.P.?” “It wouldn’t work!” She yelled back from across the pavement. “And what happened?” I asked. “It worked!” She shouted triumphantly.

Hearing those words, directly from one of the student leaders, really brings home why we do what we do. I hope her experience, and endorsement, and enthusiasm, resonated with the doubtful new student as much as they did with me. I hope we all hear the cheerful student’s message loud and clear – that even when you think “it’ll never work,” if you put in the effort, you can look back and yell out: “It worked!”

T.A.P. makes it possible for the students themselves

to improve their school environment. They are the agents on the ground, providing opportunities for their peers to resolve conflicts peacefully. With a greater understanding of the bravery it takes from them to introduce a new social norm, I have a stronger appreciation for the privilege

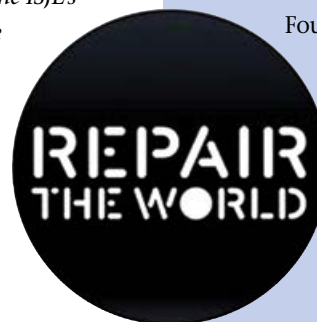
we have to provide them with the training and the tools that allow them to succeed. T.A.P. continues to grow.

I hope you'll join us in making sure that programs like these are possible. Please support the ISJL in this effort, and become a donor or

increase your gift, to ensure our continued contributions to Southern Jewish life. Just as the T.A.P. program only works with the dedication of the student mediators, the ISJL and my Community Engagement department only work with the dedicated support of our donors.

THIS IS ISJL: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

Committed to offering meaningful community engagement opportunities, the ISJL's community engagement department works in partnerships with nonprofits, schools, individuals and congregations to pursue tikkun olam, repairing our world. Recently, our peer mediation program T.A.P. (Talk About the Problems) was named a "success story" by the Kids Count Initiative/Annie E. Casey Foundation.



Malkie Schwartz Selected as Repair the World Fellow

The Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) Department of Community Engagement is happy to announce the launch of a partnership with **Repair the World**. Our director of Community Engagement, Malkie Schwartz, has been selected for Repair the World's Fellowship Program. She joins a national cohort of leaders in community service and engagement.

Repair the World, like the ISJL, aims to make service a more defining part of American Jewish life by infusing service-learning with Jewish sources, values and traditions. Repair the World works to develop models and tools that can be of great use to Jews who are seeking meaningful service opportunities. Our partnership with Repair the World will allow congregations in our network to benefit from their established service models and tools.

Many Jews are committed to service with a particular emphasis on education. The ISJL's goal is to work with congregations to develop an ongoing project through which the congregations can impact the **educational experience of youth in the community**. Repair the World and the ISJL decided to focus on education because it is an area that is of great need and has also been expressed as being of interest to the ISJL's partner congregations. Malkie is honored that she and the ISJL are able to participate in this effort.

"As a Fellow, my responsibility is to conduct a Jewish Service-Learning Project that will utilize Repair the World's resources to enhance local communities' efforts to improve education," says Malkie. "My hope is that through my position at the ISJL, and the tools made available by Repair the World, we

can increase the number of meaningful service opportunities available to Jews throughout the South."

To learn more about Repair the World, visit www.werepair.org; to learn about the ISJL's involvement and the opportunities and resources available related to this partnership, email Malkie Schwartz at mschwartz@isjl.org.



How Does the ISJL Education Fellowship Program Make a Difference?

Rachel Stern
Director of Education



The ISJL Education Fellowship is a unique position. The Fellows are educational resources for the congregations they serve, making them educators – but they are also simultaneously students, soaking in every experience, learning even more than they teach. It's a truly transformative “first job.” That's what makes this program amazing: **we're not only serving Jewish communities every day, we're also cultivating the next generation of national Jewish leaders through our Fellows program.** Our Fellows are very aware of just how fortunate they are to be able to engage in this meaningful work. They realize that through the work they do with the ISJL's partner communities, it is *their own Jewish identity* that is being strengthened, every day. We recently asked our second year Fellows to share something they learned from the road as well as something that they were proud of teaching. Here are their responses:



“I was very nervous the first time I was asked to lead a text study. With the support of my “fellow” Fellows, I was able to not only study in depth, but also to confidently lead the adult education text study. I was personally enriched in the study, and helped reach others by teaching. I have learned that everyone deserves the privilege of interpreting the texts that are so important to our Jewish tradition. The ISJL's education department is comprised of people from a variety of religious backgrounds; it is incredible to discover how all of our voices combine to create a fuller, richer product than one person could complete alone.” – *Erin Kahal*



“In my time as a Fellow, I have been afforded so many opportunities, including the opportunity to lead services, to read Torah, and to deeply engage and even teach Jewish text! In the community in which I grew up, women are not given these kinds of leadership roles. Therefore, the sense of empowerment I have gained during my time with the ISJL has changed and what I have learned will be forever incorporated into my Jewish Identity. Teaching and learning go hand in hand.” – *Reva Frankel*



“Over the last year, I have learned that you can make ANYTHING into a Jewish experience, and use not only traditional methods and texts in order to teach and learn, but also the experiences of everyday life. I also view my ISJL Fellowship as a truly ‘two-way-street’ kind of partnership: all of the Fellows working together to teach and inspire the next generation has also inspired and taught me!” – *Ben Chaidell*



“I have learned so many different and wonderful things as a Fellow. What stands out to me most is the realization that there is so much diversity in our community – so many different kinds of Jewish communities in and around the South! However, possibly even more importantly, this Fellowship has taught me so much about myself through my interactions with children. I've always been comfortable and confident around adults, and having the opportunity to interact with, influence, and impact Jewish children has helped me grow as a Jewish adult.” – *Rachel Blume*

THIS IS ISJL: EDUCATION.

Dedicated to providing educational services to Southern Jewish communities, our education department currently serves more than 70 congregations. With an innovative approach to regional educational services, we have a “three c system”: **conference** (held annually, bringing together all of our education partner communities), **curriculum** (user-friendly, fully scripted, comprehensive lesson plans), and **community visits** (on-the-ground support and follow up for all communities implementing the ISJL education program).

We need you!

Help the ISJL Reach 1,000 New Donors

From July through December 2012, we're making a big push to build support, not only from major foundations and national donors but also from the grassroots supporters who have always been at the heart of the ISJL, supporting our work from the very beginning.

Our goal is to add 1,000 new donors to our list of supporters in 2012.

Here's some basic information:

- Our goal is 1,000 new, lapsed, or doubled donors
- **New donor:** anyone making a first-time gift to the ISJL of \$100 or more
- You can also be counted as a “new donor” if you're a “lapsed” or “doubled” donor:
 - **Lapsed donor:** if you haven't given in more than two years, we miss you! Come back, and you'll be counted as a new *and* returning donor!
 - **Doubled donor:** if you double (or more!) your annual gift, you'll help us make our goal and get counted as a new *and* returning donor
- **One easy way to give? Join the Chai Club,** and pledge to have the ISJL automatically deduct your “chai” gift each month: \$18, or any multiple of eighteen: \$36 Chai Club, \$72 Chai Club, etc. All new Chai Club members count as new donors!

The ISJL is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization; all donations are tax deductible and you will always be provided with documentation of your gift for tax purposes. It's now even easier to give online, including setting up a recurring gift and joining the Chai Club.

Visit <http://www.isjl.org/contribute> to learn more.

Thank you for supporting the ISJL!

“Southern & Jewish”: National Blog Debuts

The ISJL is thrilled to announce the launch of our new and national blog, “Southern & Jewish.” The blog was created in partnership with My Jewish Learning, and is hosted on the MyJewishLearning.com website.

MyJewishLearning.com is the leading trans-denominational website of Jewish information and education. Offering articles and resources on all aspects of Judaism and Jewish life, the site is geared toward adults of all ages and backgrounds, from the casual reader looking for interesting insights, to non-Jews searching for a better understanding of Jewish culture, to experienced learners wishing to delve deeper into specific topic areas.

The “Southern & Jewish” blog, which is updated multiple times each week, celebrates and shares the Southern Jewish experience. Authored by a team of ISJL staff, topics will include everything from road-trip anecdotes, to personal reflections, to questions and explorations around all things Southern and Jewish. Here’s an excerpt from one of our recent posts:



...Yes, there is a pervasive Christianity in the Deep South; it's called the Bible Belt for a reason. I'm not disputing that. In fact, when I first moved down here, I was told that there were two dominant religions in the South: Christianity and Football.

But the truth is, being any minority, anywhere, can be pretty tough. There are assumptions made by the majority, accommodations made for the majority, curiosity, and yes, even ignorance that members of the majority might have when it comes to their friendly local minorities. But that's not a phenomenon reserved only for those of us living South of the Mason-Dixon...

(Post title: “Southern & Jewish: Pride or Prejudice?” 9/7/2012)

Want to read more? (We thought you might.)

The direct link to the new blog is: <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/blog/southern-and-jewish/>



With My Jewish Learning’s excellent reputation and visibility, including an average of more than 135,000 site visitors and 478,000 page views monthly, the ISJL is excited to become an even more visible participant in the national Jewish conversation. Many thanks to My Jewish Learning for making this partnership possible, and we look forward to all the blog posts, comments, and connections ahead!

THIS IS ISJL: SOCIAL.

In addition to our blog, we’re all over the social sphere. You can like the ISJL on Facebook ([facebook.com/TheISJL](https://www.facebook.com/TheISJL)), follow us on Twitter (@TheISJL), and always be up to date on the latest pictures, initiatives, awards and activities going on at the ISJL.

From L.A. to LA: Renowned Speaker Ron Wolfson to Tour Southern States

Ann Zivitz Kimball
Director of Programming

The best way for me to introduce you to the work of the programming department is to let it speak for itself, by sharing with you an upcoming program, and also some words directly from the scholar the ISJL is bringing down South.

Dr. Ron Wolfson is a renowned speaker, author, and all-around *mensch*.



He is a visionary Jewish educator whose enthusiasm for bringing Judaism alive in homes and synagogues has shaped his work in the community. He is the author of many books, including his most recent publications *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven: Reviewing and Renewing Your Life on Earth*; *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community*; *God's To-Do List: 103 Ways to Be an Angel and Do God's Work on Earth*; and *Be Like God: God's To-Do List for Kids*.

Why is he so excited about his upcoming ten-day tour

of the South, which will take him from his "L.A." to the other "LA"?

"As a product of a small Jewish community in Omaha, Nebraska, I deeply admire and appreciate the Institute of Southern Jewish Life for its leadership in serving the Jews of the South. The ISJL is justifiably lauded for its laser focus on providing the human and material resources that truly help to sustain Jewish living in the area. Why have I accepted the invitation to tour with the ISJL Programming department? Well, who can say no to Macy Hart? In addition to the pleasure of meeting the warm and wonderful people in the towns I will visit, Macy promised that I would enjoy the best grits this side of heaven! Seriously, I am very excited to meet y'all!"

Because of his own small town roots, he understands that it is a high priority to address and nurture the intellectual and spiritual needs

of small congregations, including our partner congregations here in the South. He knows it is just as worthwhile to visit Gemiluth Chassodim in Alexandria, LA, a community with fewer than 100 families, as it is to speak to an audience of thousands in Los Angeles.

Wolfson is currently the Fingerhut Professor of Education at the American Jewish University (formerly the University of Judaism) in Los Angeles, where he has been a member of the faculty since 1975. He has also served as Dean of the Fingerhut School of Education, Vice President and Founding Director of the Whizin Center for the Jewish Future and the Whizin Institute for Jewish Family Life. The book, *First Fruit: A Whizin Anthology of Jewish Family Education*, which he co-edited with Adrienne Bank, won the 1999 Jewish Book Award.

Ron Wolfson joins a wonderful collection of

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speakers and scholars who have recently partnered with the ISJL to bring the highest caliber of learning and culture to communities of all sizes. His ten day tour will include stops in Alabama (Birmingham and Mobile), Florida (Pensacola), Louisiana (Alexandria, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans). If you are in or near one of these cities, do not miss the opportunity to learn from Dr. Ron Wolfson!



Thank You to Our Contributors!

In these CIRCA pages, you can see the impact our education, history, museum, cultural, community engagement and rabbinic programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution from January 1, 2012–August 15, 2012 to enable our important work.

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