

SUMMER 2021

# SHALOM *y'all*

A PUBLICATION OF THE GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG INSTITUTE OF SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE



▷ SUPPORTING  
▷ CONNECTING  
▷ CELEBRATING

**CONNECTING  
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## ON THE COVER:

Doni Zasloff and Eric Lindberg of the band Nefesh Mountain were featured in a recent episode of the ISJL Virtual Vacation. Learn more in the Heritage & Interpretation article in this issue, and listen to Nefesh Mountain's brand new album *Songs for The Sparrows*, available now!

*Photo credit: BAM Photography.*

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# CONSTANT CONNECTION

THERE ARE THREE VERBS IN OUR MISSION statement: the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) *supports*, *connects*, and *celebrates* Jewish life in the South. In our last issue, we focused on many aspects of “supporting” our communities and working in partnership. In this issue, it’s all about connection.

We joke sometimes about just how often we use certain words at the ISJL. **Connection** and **community** are right at the top of our List of Favorite Words. In some ways, it’s difficult to separate those two words—because connecting with our communities, connecting our communities to one another, and making connections within the wider community are all intrinsic, inseparable aspects of the work we do.

In this issue, you’ll see examples of all of these types of connection. From personal connections with southern Jewish identity to global connections across the Jewish world, we hope all the stories and insights shared here will deepen your own connection to the ISJL.

We also have some exciting news: our office has moved! As we return to an in-person office setting, it will be in a whole new building—but still in our home city of Jackson, Mississippi. Read on to find out where our new offices will be, and why we’re so excited about deepening yet another southern Jewish connection...

*L’shalom,*  
The Board & Staff of the ISJL



# FROM THE CEO



**Michele Schipper**  
CEO

IT'S NOT DIFFICULT FOR me to think about my personal connections to the Jewish South and the mission of the ISJL. Born and raised in Jackson, Mississippi, my southern and Jewish identities have always been intertwined. My Judaism is rooted in my family life, my congregational life at Beth Israel Congregation, and my camp life. I spent many summers at URJ Jacobs Camp where I made lifelong friends who are now scattered throughout the South and beyond.

After college and a stint working as Assistant Director at Jacobs Camp, my young adult self was ready to venture out into the world. Focusing more on the "Jewish" than the "southern," I moved to Los Angeles to continue my career in the Jewish world. Out west, I served in a variety of roles in organizations including Jewish summer camps and Jewish Community Centers. My adventures eventually led my family to Albuquerque, New Mexico, in an executive director role at the JCC.

But when an opportunity to join the incredible staff of the ISJL and to be part of the mission to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South unexpectedly found its way to me, I was ready to come home!

Who could have imagined that I could return to Mississippi to continue my career as a Jewish professional?

As a colleague said to me before I left Albuquerque: "As a Jewish professional, going home allows you to bring your community a broader knowledge, skill set, and understanding of the Jewish world and the wonderful possibilities that can be achieved."

Truer words were never spoken.

We all bring our collective knowledge and skills to the work

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.....  
of the ISJL. From cultural programs to educational opportunities to spiritual support, not to mention our work with the broader community, the ISJL is all about creating and deepening connections. Our fellowship and internship programs are wonderful examples of our commitment to connection—we bring young people into the immersive, incredible world of the Jewish South and send them off with connections they'll keep forever.

All of our board members have

southern roots, whether they still live in the South today or have moved elsewhere. The southern connections and ties to the ISJL remain strong. There's something unbreakable about these bonds.

I returned home to begin my work at the ISJL fourteen years ago. The "homecoming" continues this May as the ISJL offices are relocating to Jackson's Beth Israel Congregation. As many of us were required to stay at home during the pandemic, we are looking forward to our new home at Beth Israel. We are pleased that this move will be mutually beneficial for both organizations. I am fortunate that I will be able to work and pray in the same structure in which my Jewish education and community building began—a few decades ago.

Connection, in a year when we have not been able to be in person, has been vital. The ongoing engagement with our family, friends, and supporters from around the world has kept us going throughout the year. I hope that throughout the pages of *Shalom Y'all* you will find many ways to connect—by participating directly in programs in our southern region or through your financial support—so that all of our ISJL connections remain strong for many years to come.

With my sincere thanks,

# FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Jay Hesdorffer  
ISJL Board Chair

CONNECTIONS. WE ALL make them. Sometimes they are intentional, and sometimes they just happen. Let me tell you about one I never expected.

Sitting in my office on a gray April afternoon in downtown Chicago, I was on a business call to Hawaii. The person on the other end of the line unexpectedly asked: “Do you know the ISJL?”

“Sure,” I replied, surprised. “I know it well.”

He went on to tell me the story of how his friend and business colleague from Pennsylvania had just asked him to donate to the ISJL. He did! (Thanks again for that contribution!)

As an official “thank you” from the ISJL, he received a copy of *Shalom Y’all*. He opened it up, and there I was. He was immediately curious to know how I got involved. I told him I grew up in Mississippi. I went to URJ Jacobs Camp where I

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“FROM CHICAGO TO HAWAII VIA PENNSYLVANIA, THAT CONVERSATION COVERED A LOT OF GEOGRAPHY, BUT ITS ROOTS STARTED IN THE SOUTH.”  
.....

met Macy B. Hart, the founder of the ISJL. Now I’m the ISJL Board Chair!

From Chicago to Hawaii via Pennsylvania, that conversation covered a lot of geography, but its roots started in the South. It was a connection with the ISJL front and center that took me by surprise... but also made perfect sense.

Our ISJL board members span from coast to coast. We have members living in Manhattan, Palm Springs, Washington, D.C., Chicago, New Orleans, and everywhere in between. Our reach is far, but our roots are southern. As generations have migrated from the South, many have nevertheless maintained a strong and compelling connection to the region. The ISJL is living proof of those connections.

There are so many fascinating and far-reaching connections you can make when you participate in ISJL programs and events. We can’t wait to hit the road again to make meaningful direct connections... but in some ways this past year has ushered in even more connections. Take the virtual Passover Seder we hosted this spring—600 people tuned in. Now that’s a welcoming Seder table!

On a personal level, I enjoy creating connections to the ISJL around the holidays and especially on my birthday. When friends and family ask what I want for a gift, I say, “I want to introduce you to the ISJL. I would love for you to know about the wonderful work we do.”

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“THERE ARE SO MANY FASCINATING AND FAR-REACHING CONNECTIONS YOU CAN MAKE WHEN YOU PARTICIPATE IN ISJL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS. WE CAN’T WAIT TO HIT THE ROAD AGAIN TO MAKE MEANINGFUL DIRECT CONNECTIONS... BUT IN SOME WAYS THIS PAST YEAR HAS USHERED IN EVEN MORE CONNECTIONS.”  
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Thank you for the momentum you bring with your donations. Thanks for reading this publication. Thanks for going to our website to learn more about our amazing programs. Thanks for helping us provide powerful programming to Jewish communities across the South and allowing us to provide uplifting programs to communities in need. Thanks for providing the momentum that allows our programs to inspire, to empower, and most importantly to connect. Our connections are based in the South, but clearly they know no bounds.



Student with Community Hands craft from Dallas Kits Project.

## EDUCATION

# TO SHARE AND TO *KESHER*

## RABBI MATT DREFFIN

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

THE SIMPLEST VERSION OF the Hebrew root verb that uses the letters *kuf-shin-reish* means “bind” or “tie.” There are a lot of ways to unpack that meaning. Some of us have felt bound and tied to our homes this past year, constricted in the ways in which we can interact with our various communities. Since March 2020, we’ve been trying to make all the “normal” things happen in abnormal environments.

But that Hebrew root that seems like a restrictive tightrope can also be a lifeline. When we change the construction of the word, that very same *kuf-shin-reish* verb can be translated as “join,” “liaise,” “attach (emotionally),” and, yes, “connect.”

One of the ways in which we’ve seen congregations join together in the past is when two schools in

the same community have joined forces to educate their youngest learners. Most often we see large cities developing high school-aged programming that is open to multiple synagogues. In some of our smaller cities, we see two congregations merging their entire religious schools into one shared school for all ages.

In this past year, we saw communities that were geographically distant figure out some of the ways in which they could join each other in the virtual endeavor of providing a religious education for their students. The congregations in Montgomery, Alabama, already had a combined school, but due to familial connections and a desire for more interconnectivity, a religious school in Mobile, Alabama, also joined in their virtual experience.

Tallahassee, Florida, reached out to us so we could liaise between their congregation and other small religious schools that may have trouble educating various age groups because they don’t have enough teachers. It has been incredibly inspiring to see our directors and teachers commit themselves to making a joyous learning environment for so many students.

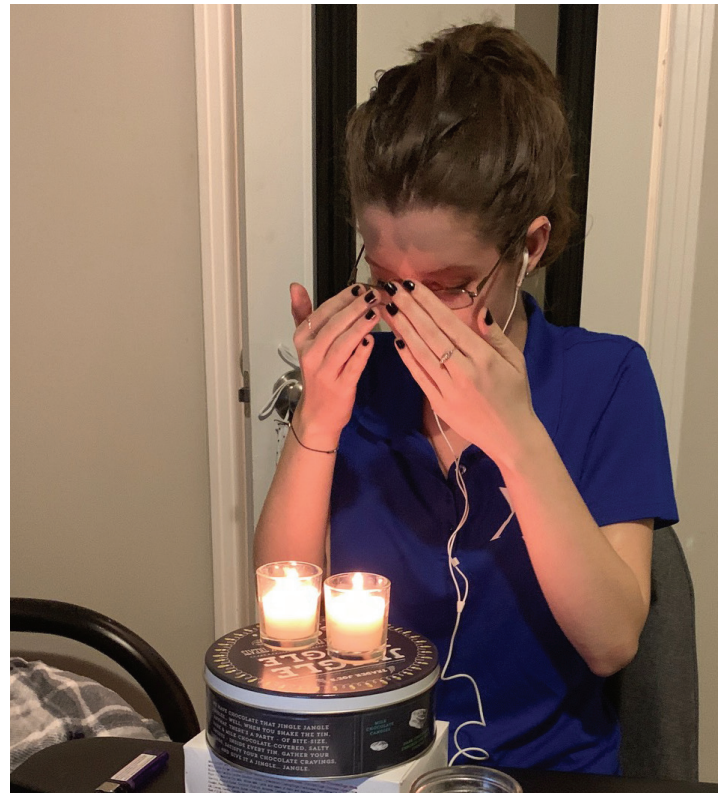
The loss of travel and in-person visits has been a challenge for our staff. We’ve adapted to the virtual environment as best we can, creating engaging programming and meaningful events for all our partners. While our team has certainly missed out on dining on local cuisine with board members and schmoozing with all sorts of folks at after-service oneg

celebrations, we've still been getting to know various people in all our communities. It has been encouraging to experience programs where kids remember us not only because we're wearing our bright blue ISJL polos, but also because they remember our names and the awesomely interactive session we led a couple of months ago. Our team has still gotten to know kids, parents, and clergy—even though they haven't been shaking hands and praying in the same room. A congregation in South Carolina has even requested that their current Fellow lead virtual services after they finish the Fellowship and start cantorial school in Israel!

The changing virtual world has led to new professional development opportunities for our staff. In the past, the team found themselves limited to professional development opportunities in Jackson or costly flights to travel somewhere else. But now, so many other organizations have had to rethink the ways in which they fulfill their missions digitally. This has allowed our team to connect with academic classes, deepen their practice in mindfulness and meditation, and learn some important skills required of not just Jewish professionals, but anyone in the workplace.

While the past year didn't allow us to connect with our partner communities as expected, we've found new and interesting ways to be together. We've learned a lot of lessons about how we can continue to be in touch with our region, and we're excited to combine those insights with some of our tried and true in-person strengths. If anything, the experience of running an education program digitally has shown us just how resilient and connected we are as one southern and Jewish community.

*Right: ISJL Education Fellow Rena Lubin saying candle blessings with a congregation in Tallahassee, Florida. Below: Eating a matzah dessert in Clear Lake, Texas.*



To learn more about Education at the ISJL, email [jewisheducation@isjl.org](mailto:jewisheducation@isjl.org).



# FELLOW FLASHBACK: SHIRA MOSKOWITZ & ARIELLE NISSENBLATT



THE ISJL FELLOW ALUMNI Network (FAN) is a group of inspiring young professionals whose careers and studies span a variety of fields, but who all have one thing in common: they spent two immersive years as ISJL Education or Community Engagement Fellows! In this issue, we're excited to get to feature two former Fellows whose ongoing connection has led to many shared post-ISJL adventures—including starting their own popular podcast, *Counter Programming!*



## What drew you to becoming an ISJL Fellow?

**Shira:** I wasn't sure what I wanted to do after graduating college. I saw the ISJL as an opportunity to explore roles in the Jewish world and explore a part of the country I wasn't familiar with. I had considered rabbinical school but the Fellowship showed me the importance of being an involved lay leader, and empowered me to pivot my career into the startup world.

**Arielle:** I really wanted my first job post-college to be travel-oriented. I loved the idea of getting to drive and see the country...all while being paid to do cool community-focused work. I'd also never been to the South before and was intrigued by living in a state that most of my friends and family had never been to, and making that place my home.

## What's something that really stuck with you from the fellowship experience?

**Shira:** Work-life balance is important! Because our job involved traveling on weekends, the team



was really great about leaving the office at 5pm. When I moved back to New York City, I found that there was a huge emphasis on “hustle culture” and working crazy hours. I am so appreciative that my first job after college taught me the importance of creating that balance for myself. I also learned that there is no one way to be Jewish. I visited so many different communities and experienced a myriad of ways to practice our religion. My own Judaism has been impacted by each of those interactions.

**Arielle:** It’s important to create content with multiple learning styles in mind. I’ve been working in the podcast industry for the last few years, and when I advise people on content, I always use the educational principles I learned at the ISJL. Some people are primarily visual learners, some are kinesthetic, some are auditory, and most are a combination of all three. Podcast content, though primarily auditory, can be created with a visual and kinesthetic audience in mind. I also learned that co-workers can become lifelong friends. I have such fond memories of hanging out in the office with my fellow Fellows, brainstorming, practicing

for visits, and having a good time. I’ve definitely carried that with me to my post-fellowship workplaces. I’m often the one to suggest an icebreaker or an after-work get together. And I’m still in touch with my entire cohort! Most of all, my time at the ISJL taught me how to engage in a conversation with anyone. We were professional schmoozers. I love meeting someone, finding out what we have in common (or not), and then learning more about that person.

**What are you up to these days?**

**Shira:** I’m currently working as a Customer Success Program Manager at Hopin, a virtual events platform. I write curriculum and implement and lead programs to help our customers better utilize our platform and host meaningful events. So really, not very far off from what I did as a Fellow!

**Arielle:** I’m the community manager at SquadCast.fm, a remote podcast and video recording platform. I also write the weekly EarBuds Podcast Collective newsletter and host the weekly Feedback with EarBuds podcast.

**Both:** Back in March of 2020 we were both anxious, as there was so much uncertainty in the world.



All of the podcasts we usually listened to were stressing us out even further. That’s when Arielle called Shira with an idea that only a former Fellow could have. What if we started a podcast to provide counter programming to all the grim COVID-19 news? But there’s a twist, she explained: each week we’ll cover a different “counter topic” like countertops, step counters, and Count Dracula. The idea sounded crazy but Shira did what any supportive former co-Fellow would do when presented with an idea like this— she said, “I’m in!” Today, we have released over 45 episodes on counter topics and are really proud of the content we’ve created, as well as the community we’ve built.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTION: STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



*We were so impressed by this Passover poem by ISJL student Charlotte Hetzel that we just had to share it!*

*Charlotte is a fifth grade student from Congregation Beth El in Winchester, Virginia.*

### PASSOVER POEM

By Charlotte Hetzel

Herbs so bitter just as slavery.  
Cruel, corrupt, inhumane as can be.  
Salted water are the tears.  
Now remembering we say cheers.

History behind this dish, oh so horrid.  
Now we pray and thank God instead.  
Ancestors struggled so now we can live.  
During Passover we rejoice and give.



LAB Student at drive-through Kick-Off CARnival.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH A LIFELONG LOVE OF LITERACY

**RACHEL GLAZER**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM MANAGER

EVERY MARCH FOR THE last four years, the Community Engagement Department team could be found buzzing between our offices, local libraries, public schools, and community partner sites preparing for our biggest event of the year: the Literacy Achievement Bonanza, or LAB.

We created the LAB as a way to provide a safe, fun environment for 100+ local elementary students to engage in literacy learning over spring break when other childcare programs were closed. Over the years, we have provided thousands of meals, books, volunteer hours, student teaching positions, and activities designed to reinforce state literacy standards. More than that, we built a community of students

who returned year after year for more play and learning with their friends, volunteers, and activity leaders.

Last year, LAB was the last event the ISJL conducted in-person

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before shifting to remote work due to the pandemic. As March 2021 approached, knowing that this year's program could not be in person posed a challenge: how could we bring the kind of connection we knew our program was capable of when we could not be physically together?

Thankfully, after months of working with our ISJL partners and seeing the ingenuity of countless COVID-safe holiday celebrations, we set our minds to building a program that was accessible, and, most importantly, fun!

We came up with four avenues of engagement so that however participants learn best, they'd have the resources they needed to have their own bonanza at home.



## Independent Work

We created a YouTube playlist of pre-recorded videos for Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, and 6th Grade activities that guided participants through each step of every age-appropriate, standard-aligned activity on their own time and at their own pace.



## Family Activities

We compiled student-specific folders with printed activity plans that gave caregivers the tools to lead activities for their children. These also included the required paper materials such as worksheets, examples, prompts, articles, and this year's LAB Bingo challenge. We offered prizes for participants who attended three Zoom sessions, completed various activities and compositions, and shared photos and videos of their work.



## Online Resources

In place of buddy reading, our wonderful volunteers recorded Read Alouds of their favorite children's books. We linked to this playlist as well as our archive of Word Play newsletters on our website. Each day, families received an email newsletter summarizing the day's theme and events, highlighting related activities, and informing them of the next day's offerings.



## Zoom Gatherings

Every morning, participants had the opportunity to log on and share cheers and chants, show off the work they'd done throughout the week, ask questions, and connect with other students. These were well-attended and the students were highly engaged. They also enjoyed our thematic games, book character dress-up day, and Zumba Kids session to get them up and moving.

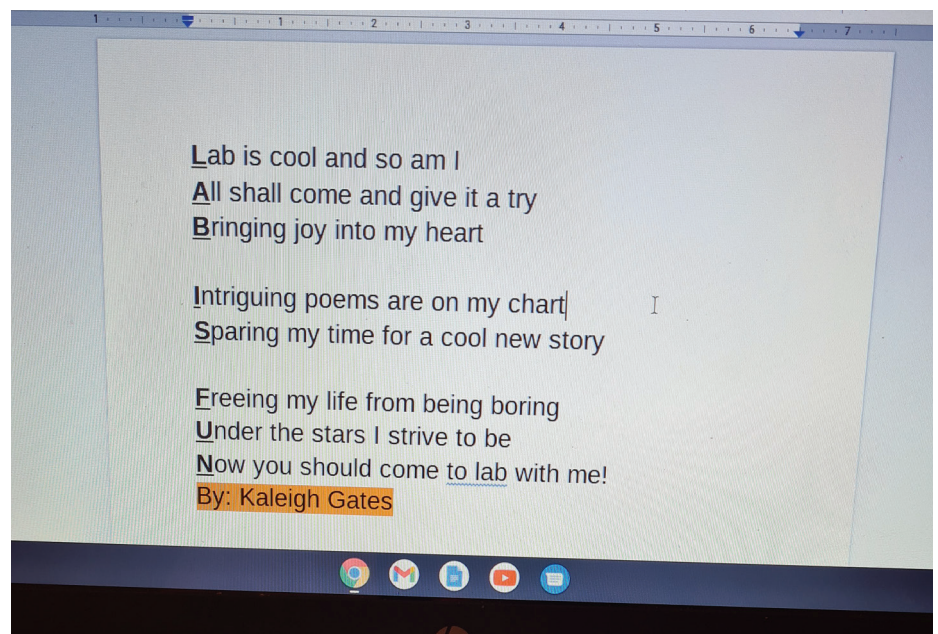
With the help of the rest of the ISJL staff, we put together kits with all of the activity supplies, snacks, and books tailored to each student's interests and reading level. Families picked up these materials the Sunday before spring break at our drive-through Kick-Off CARnival in the parking lot of Refill Café in downtown Jackson. Volunteers led no-contact activities for each of the four literacy areas (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) to get the participants excited about the week. At the final station, families received their kit, t-shirt, and two cases of water (since the water crisis in Jackson was ongoing during this time).

Even from behind masks, we could see the huge smiles of returning participants as well as new students who experienced LAB traditions like Recognitions for the first time. One 1st grade student rolled down his window at the end of his ride to ask if he could go through again—definitely a sign of the day's success!

The Zoom sessions were also

far more successful than I could have hoped. I worried about students' faulty WiFi connections, as well as their fatigue from a year of virtual and hybrid learning. Their excitement for LAB proved stronger. Not only did they enthusiastically play the games on each day's theme, but some of them created compositions during their independent work inspired by our time together. See an acrostic poem one of our fifth graders crafted below!

During our final Zoom session of the week, we held a modified Spelling Bee and Debate Tournament in the spirit of our usual Friday LAB traditions. When the clock struck 10:30am, marking the usual end of our Zoom call, not a single student logged off. They were motivated to continue spelling, debating, playing, and cheering one another on. In that moment I knew that it wasn't about the strength of our WiFi connections, but the connections we made with one another through a shared love of literacy.



To learn more about the LAB, visit [www.isjl.org/LAB](http://www.isjl.org/LAB). To bring the LAB to your community, reach out to Rachel at [rqlazer@isjl.org](mailto:rqlazer@isjl.org). To learn more about the ISJL's community engagement work, email [engagement@isjl.org](mailto:engagement@isjl.org).



## DEVELOPMENT



# THE ISJL IS A FAMILY TRADITION: CONNECTING WITH THE MEYER FAMILY

**RISA KLEIN HERZOG**  
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

*IN MY FIRST MONTH AT THE ISJL, I had the privilege to travel to Meridian, Mississippi, to help celebrate the 150th anniversary of Temple Beth Israel. What an amazing initial connection, as Meridian is also my husband Drew's hometown! We received a marriage blessing there 25 years earlier and were welcomed into the congregation's warm embrace. It was there that I reconnected with Harold and Helen Meyer, as well as their daughter Margaret. Margaret Meyer, an interior designer in New Orleans, currently serves on the ISJL Board of Directors. The Meyers'*

*oldest son, Tripp, lives in Atlanta; their youngest, Jimmy, lives in New Orleans with his wife Hope and their children Jeremy and Emma.*

*Supporting the ISJL is truly a family affair—and I was delighted to talk with Helen, Harold, and Margaret about why their family has so many connections with and such deep support for the ISJL. Some of Helen's answers follow!*



### **What is your connection to the ISJL?**

We have supported the ISJL from the early years. My husband Harold and I devoted time to serving on the

Board for many years. Now we take pride that our daughter Margaret continues the tradition by dedicating her time and resources as an ISJL board member. Years ago, through my active involvement in Temple Sisterhood in Meridian, I eventually became District President, which is where I first met Macy B. Hart. He was the NFTY President at the time. Eventually, as URJ Jacobs Camp went from an idea to a reality, Harold and I were there for the ground breaking. And as the ISJL developed, our interest and involvement in keeping the Jewish South strong and connected continued

through the years. The ISJL's focus on Jewish education, history, rabbinical services, culture, and community engagement appealed to us from the beginning and continues to interest us to this day.

### Why do you support the ISJL?

Our Jewish communities need the ISJL. We have witnessed how the ISJL works creatively, efficiently, and effectively to help southern Jews stay connected and supported. That is important to our family.

Both Harold and I come from families who settled in the South. Harold's great grandfather, Jacob Meyer, came to Mississippi from Neuwied, Germany, in the 1850s and settled in Marion / Meridian with his family in the early 1860s. As peddlers, horse traders, and wholesale grocers, the Meyers were community leaders. They were involved in the creation of their congregation, Beth Israel. I was raised in San Antonio, Texas, and attended Temple Beth El (currently using the ISJL education curriculum). So supporting the ISJL is a natural extension of the important role the Jewish community has always played in our lives.

In particular, we are impressed with the ISJL education curriculum. We would have loved to have had the ISJL's education resources when we were teaching Sunday School years ago. The curriculum and lesson plans are wonderful! Also, the rabbinical services offered to smaller southern communities are so helpful. You can rarely plan for a funeral. Having an ISJL rabbi available to conduct a funeral, wedding, bar mitzvah, or other lifecycle event is a comfort and a necessity.

**As "pioneer" donors who have been with the ISJL from the early years, what perspectives can you share?**



*The Meyer Family. Opposite page: Helen, Harold, and Margaret Meyer.*

Harold and I have been blessed with longevity and have seen a lot. We are glad to have witnessed how much has been accomplished through the years across the Jewish South. To know that all communities now have access to Jewish education gives us comfort for the future. We are thankful to have lived to see the ISJL grow and to have the impact that it does.

### And just for fun, what is your favorite Jewish food?

I don't necessarily have one favorite Jewish food...but since our interview is around Passover, I'm going to go with matzah balls. However, the Meyer family spin on them is a bit unique. Believe it or not, we serve our matzah balls with onions and butter. They are more of a side dish, so no worrying about the soup getting cold!

*Connection is easy with the Meyer family, as with so many of our dedicated supporters. We are so grateful to you all! Each day as I interact with caring Jewish southerners, I am uplifted and inspired by this unique connection we all share.*

*There are many ways that you can continue to connect with the ISJL. Please support our matching challenge which will leverage new and increased gifts to the ISJL on a one-to-two basis, allowing your gift to stretch even farther. Please consider joining our popular monthly giving society, the Chai Club. And of course, you can always support the ISJL by honoring and remembering friends and loved ones with tribute and memorial gifts to the ISJL in their names.*

*We appreciate your gifts that allow us to support, connect, and celebrate Jewish life in the South. Thank you!*

**To learn more about how your family can support the ISJL, email [development@isjl.org](mailto:development@isjl.org).**



*Nefesh Mountain*

## HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

# CULTURAL CONNECTIONS MAKE BEAUTIFUL MUSIC

**NORA KATZ**

DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

What are the songs that take you back to your childhood? Who are the musicians who have shaped your life?

My childhood was definitely a musical one—filled with the folk music of the 1960s and 1970s; the changing sounds of the British Invasion; the strains of traditional and contemporary Irish music; the powerful voices of Joni Mitchell, Ella Fitzgerald, Marvin Gaye, Tracy Chapman, Cass Elliot, and others; the cast recordings of countless Broadway musicals; and much more. On reflection, a common thread in the music of my youth

was the tension between tradition and innovation, between staying true to one's roots while still finding a unique voice in the present.

It's a tension that plays a central role in the work of contemporary scholars, producers, and performers of country, bluegrass, and klezmer music. I can hear strains of both klezmer and Americana music in the songs I've always loved—for example, in the lyrical folk music of the 1970s or the indie rock music of my high school years. I can hear the influence of Irish musical traditions in bluegrass and the music of

Appalachia. These connections between the tunes I've always loved and the traditions I didn't always fully understand became much clearer this spring when I was producing the ISJL Virtual Vacation episode "Southern Jewish Music: Klezmer and Bluegrass."

When I found myself sitting on a Zoom call with award-winning producer, historian, and banjo player Henry Sapoznik, getting ready to interview him for the episode, it felt like a full-circle musical moment. I was curious about how Henry, a Jew from Brooklyn, became a

heavy-hitter in the world of old-time music. He told us about his childhood, about his father's cantorial career, about the musical traditions of his Yiddish-speaking youth. He told us about traveling to North Carolina as a "seeker" (as he calls it), searching for the origins of bluegrass music from legends like fiddler Tommy Jarrell and banjo and fiddle player Fred Cockerham.

He told us about his experiences as a Jew in and around Mount Airy, North Carolina, and about how the folks he met asked him about his people's musical traditions: why wasn't he paying this much attention to the Yiddish music he had taken for granted as a child? He told us about how his scholarship, his work as a radio and record producer, and his output as a performer is rooted in an appreciation for tradition, and a passion for telling stories that conflict with the things we often tell ourselves about American history. His recent work uncovering the stories of early 20th-century Black cantors is a perfect example of this passion.

Henry's words echoed in my

head as we interviewed Doni Zasloff and Eric Lindberg, the husband-and-wife duo behind the acclaimed bluegrass band Nefesh Mountain. They, too, are Jews from the northeast, with roots in the South and a profound appreciation for the sounds of Appalachia. While Henry Sapoznik is a firm believer in performing Yiddish popular music and bluegrass as two distinct genres, Nefesh Mountain is a case study in the power of inflecting bluegrass music with Jewish culture and tradition. In our interview, Doni and Eric kept coming back to pride—pride in their identities as Jewish Americans, pride in the opportunities they have had to work with their musical heroes, and pride in how they have been able to introduce Jewish communities to bluegrass. Doni, Eric, and I bonded over a love of Irish music. We talked about the Irish band Solas—coincidentally Seamus Egan, one of the band's founders, was the last performer each of us saw in concert before the COVID crisis. We talked about how lilting (the way that Irish musicians sing tunes to each other,

often using nonsense syllables) feels very similar to the *niggunim* (wordless melodies) of the Jewish tradition.

There are few things I love more than music—listening to it, performing it, even just talking about it—but that deep love can feel tangential to my work at the ISJL. I enjoy being proved wrong, and producing this episode was a reminder of the many connections between the Jewish South and the music I love so much.

Each episode of the ISJL Virtual Vacation is an exciting new adventure for me, and I hope that the gratitude and curiosity I feel every time I get to work on a new episode comes through in the final recording. Most of all, I hope that the new things you learn connect to your own life as profoundly and joyfully as they do for me.

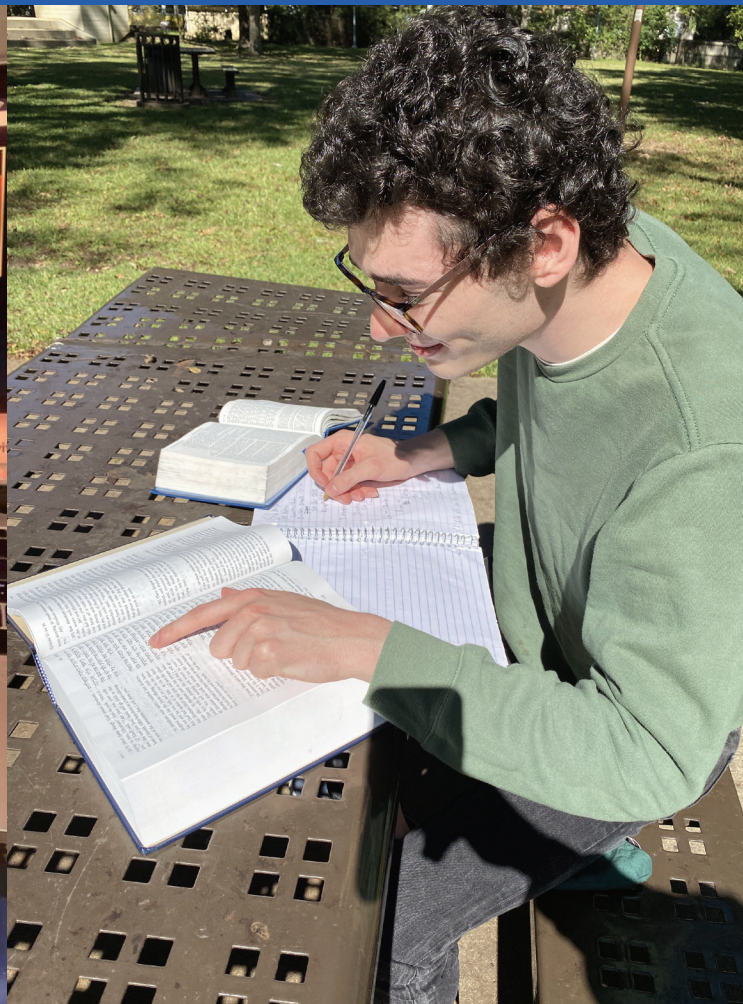
Let's keep connecting. Learn more about the ISJL Virtual Vacation and watch all of our past episodes at [www.isjl.org/virtual-vacation](http://www.isjl.org/virtual-vacation) or scan the QR codes later in this issue to start your road trip right away.

*Henry Sapoznik (left) with Tommy Jarrell in Mount Airy, North Carolina, in 1980.*



To learn more about Heritage and Interpretation, email [heritage@isjl.org](mailto:heritage@isjl.org).

**We're excited to start hitting the road again soon to connect with our communities in person.**

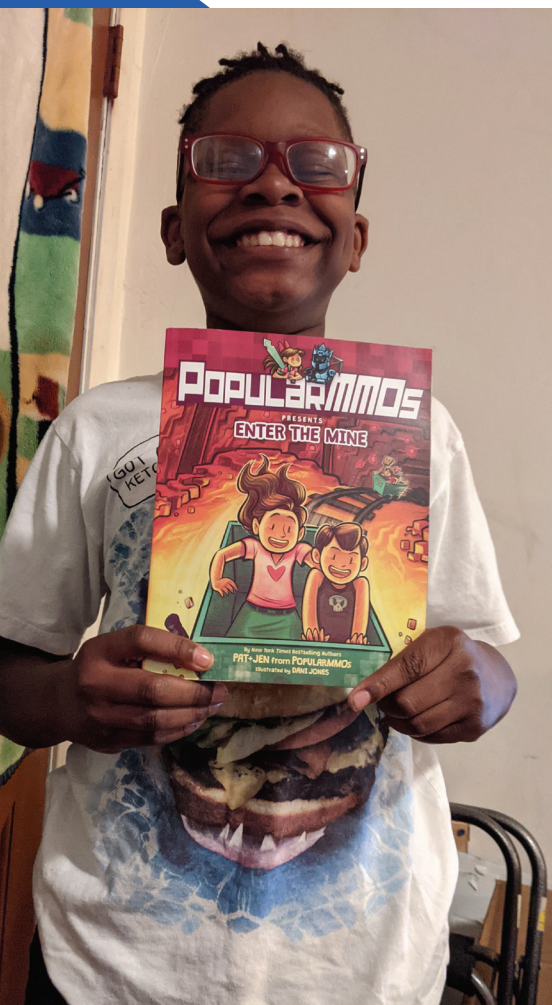


**In the meantime, though, we have continued so many wonderful connections...**



# WHAT *Connection* LOOKS LIKE

*From Left: Comedian Benji Lovitt's pre-Zoom-show selfie; Education Fellows have sometimes gathered together to work or socialize outdoors; one of our LAB students shows off his favorite book; Education Fellows Margo and Paige ran a Chanukah 8k.*



Check out some of the ways we've managed to stick together.

## PROGRAMMING

# CIRCLES OF CONNECTION

**ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ**

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OLD I started attending URJ Jacobs Camp, which is truly where my passion for Judaism began. As Judaism was becoming a central theme of my life, I also made lifelong connections to people who shared this love and enthusiasm with me. These connections shaped my life then and now.

From my early twenties up until ten years ago, my career was secular. I worked as a sales and marketing professional. I have always enjoyed sales as it afforded me the opportunity to meet new people, learn about their lives, and form new friendships and great working relationships. Along with my career I was, and still am, deeply committed to my local synagogue and to the Jewish community as a volunteer.

Adult education and cultural enrichment programs were a particular area of volunteer interest for me for many years. My favorite

volunteer experience was the many years I spent as the Chair of “Temple Sinai University.” This program ran for multiple weeks in the spring and fall, with dynamic congregational learning facilitated by Rabbi Edward Cohn. My volunteer job was to market the program sessions, as well as to handle the registration, coordinate the dinners, help with logistics, and to generally assist Rabbi Cohn in creating lifelong connections to Temple Sinai through a community of learners.

Sound familiar?

Ten years ago, my life and career came full circle when I began my current job as Director of Cultural Programming at the ISJL. I reconnected with Macy B. Hart from my years at URJ Jacobs Camp and was provided an opportunity to combine the best of my professional and volunteer passions! That’s my role in cultural programming at the ISJL, and I truly love what I do.

I genuinely believe that the luckiest people are the ones who “never work a day in their lives” because they have the chance to do what they love.

Over the course of the last ten years, my job has been to connect the excellent Jewish programming experiences from my youth at Jacobs Camp with the logistics of my synagogue involvement—and the deep connections I forged over the years by being active with the URJ and CAJE/New CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education), and more. I get to bring all of these connections, and all of this learning, music, and fun to all of our communities throughout the ISJL’s thirteen-state southern region. Along the way, I have been privileged to form meaningful relationships with clergy, staff, and lay leaders from everywhere!

We saw such growth in our on-the-road programming in 2019—and then, of course, an unexpected explosion of programming online in 2020. This summer we are offering more stellar Zoom cultural programming for our region, and several communities are already planning in-person programming for fall and spring. I want to connect the best of both worlds, and in our “new normal,” ISJL programming will include both in-person and online programs, along with some events that may be Zoomed or broadcast during your in-person community events.

Maintaining connections is the most important aspect of my work, always—so let’s stay connected!



### "Where Pride Dwells: A Celebration of LGBTQ Jewish Life."

**Rabbi Denise Eger**

Thursday, June 17th, at 7pm Central  
*Pride Month*

In celebration of LGBTQ Pride Month, Rabbi Eger will talk about LGBTQ Jewish history, inclusion, and ways for us to celebrate Pride Month!

Rabbi Denise L. Eger, past President of the CCAR, is a renowned activist and leader and is the editor of the groundbreaking book *Mishkan Ga'avah: Where Pride Dwells: A Celebration of LGBTQ Jewish Life and Ritual*. This collection of LGBTQ prayers, poems, liturgy, and rituals is both a spiritual resource and a celebratory affirmation of Jewish diversity. Giving voice to the private and public sectors of queer Jewish experience, *Mishkan Ga'avah* reflects Rabbi Eger's longtime advocacy for full LGBTQ inclusion.



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SOUTHERN  
JEWISH LIFE

To learn more about the ISJL's Cultural Programming, email [programming@isjl.org](mailto:programming@isjl.org).



## "Jews in America"

Thursday, July 1st, at 7pm Central  
*Celebrate Independence Day with a theatrical experience by The Braid!*

Ever since the first Jewish immigrants arrived in America in the 16th and 17th centuries, Jewish Americans have made significant contributions to our country. Their impact is immeasurable and many of them are household names. Yet countless other Jews, unknown to the history books, are unsung heroes. The stories of their courage, sacrifice, and devotion to our country are not often told.

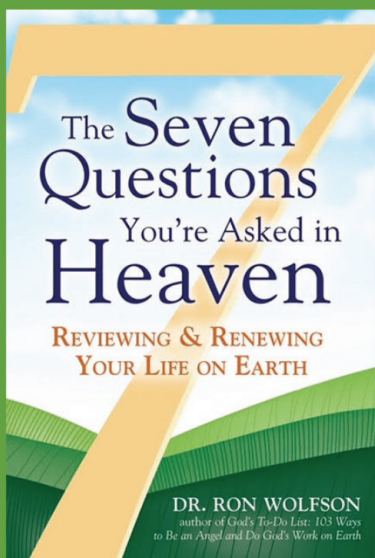
The Braid (formerly JWT) is telling those stories now in a new show titled "Jews in America—a celebration of being Jewish and being American."



## "The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven"

**Dr. Ron Wolfson**

Thursday, August 19th, at 7pm Central  
*Preparing for the High Holy Days*



What will you be asked in heaven about how you lived life on earth? Join Dr. Ron Wolfson to explore "The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven" imagined by rabbis in Jewish tradition. Humorous and poignant, this program will get you laughing and thinking as we approach the High Holy Days.

Dr. Ron Wolfson is the President of the Kripke Institute and Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University, where he has been on the faculty for 45 years.



**RABBINICAL**

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# CAREFULLY COMING TOGETHER

**RABBI CAROLINE SIM**  
DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES

AS I HEAD INTO MY SECOND year as the Director of Rabbinical Services for the ISJL, hopeful that I will meet more of my regional congregants in-person, I've been thinking about the ancient Israelites.

When the Israelites were fleeing Egypt, they went as one group. But although they may have been walking towards one destination, they were not of one mind. The Israelites had just experienced the devastating effects of the ten plagues, and seen their impact on the wider community. They were fleeing from an existence they knew to be detrimental to their physical, psychological, and spiritual health—enslavement. They were headed toward something they believed would be better—but this new future was unfamiliar and therefore unsettling.

Today, we are in the middle of our own journey. We are going through a period of hardship that severely

disrupted our lives. We're now starting the long journey from that restricted existence to whatever the new "normal" may be. We should be hopeful and enthusiastic about our destination—it, too, is an unfamiliar and maybe even unsettling new future.

We must stride forward and make informed decisions. But although we may come together as a community or a congregation, we may not all be of one mind. No matter what decisions are made, it is likely that at least one person will disagree or be dissatisfied.

There will be those who don't want to face a "new normal," and instead want to return exactly to the way things were before the pandemic.

There will be those who push back against a return to "the old ways."

There will also be those who will not be satisfied, no matter what is done, and simply complain about every decision, whether it restores

a tradition or creates an innovation.

When Moses faced these different factions in his congregation, he had the benefit of having God to help solve their problems. I doubt very much that God will show up at our synagogue board meetings to weigh in—God is still in our lives, but not quite as obviously as God is in the Bible.

Nevertheless, we modern Jews have an advantage we can use in a way our ancestors did not: our connections to each other.

It is our connections to each other that will see us through this time of transition.

For those who are willing to give up entirely, it is our responsibility to seek them out and try to rebuild a connection with them. We must connect them to our community, yes, but we must also share our ideas for the future as well as the present. We must help them know

**To learn more about the ISJL's Rabbinical Services, email [rabbi@isjl.org](mailto:rabbi@isjl.org).**

that there is still a way forward.

For those who want to go back to the way things were, we should remind them of the old adage, "you can never bathe in the same river twice." The situation we find ourselves in now has changed, and is different from the time before the pandemic. More importantly, however, we have changed and we have grown. In order to honor that change, we must move forward.

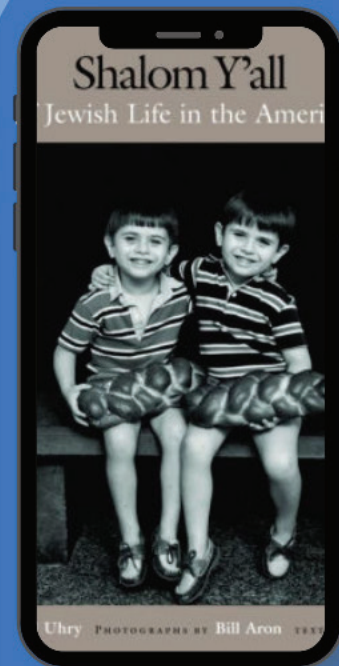
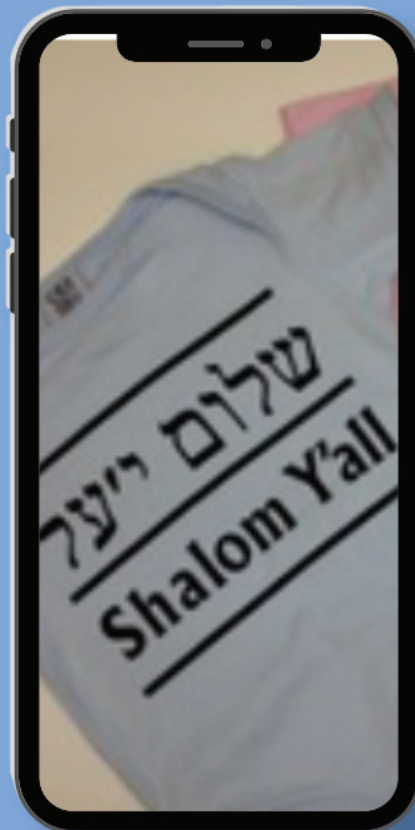
Just as with the ancient Israelites, dealing with this immediate set of difficulties does not mean we have

reached the end of our journey. After all, in a best-case scenario, the collective journey of our community never ends.

We have an incredible opportunity in the coming months as we make decisions about our communities' futures. We can blaze trails in new areas, and we can also revive well-worn paths. In all cases, one thing is true: we will continue to be connected to the rich history of the Jewish South, and we will continue to connect our changing traditions to future generations.

One such moment of connection: as a newly-ordained rabbi, I was honored and delighted to serve on my first Beit Din (rabbinical court) for a conversion ceremony. Welcoming a new member into our community is always a joy, and even in this time of distance, shines a light for increased and deepened connections awaiting us all.

I look forward to seeing more of you in the year ahead. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any spiritual needs I might be able to help you address.



## SHOP THE PEDDLER'S CART ONLINE

[WWW.ISJL.ORG/PEDDLERS-CART](http://WWW.ISJL.ORG/PEDDLERS-CART)



*B'nai Israel Congregation in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.*

## HISTORY

# COLLECTIVE HISTORY, PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

**DR. JOSH PARSHALL**  
DIRECTOR OF HISTORY

PUBLIC HISTORY, LIKE THE work I do at the ISJL, forges connections across time. But public historians also create connections across space, especially for descendants of southern Jews who now live outside the region. In doing so, we help those partners act as ambassadors of southern Jewry who introduce southern Jewish stories and experiences to national and international audiences. A recent and memorable example of this connection was a program that native Mississippian and ISJL board member Morris Lewis IV (known as “Lew” to his friends) helped to organize at his own synagogue,

Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell, New Jersey.

Lew contacted me last November about the possibility of presenting an online program for his synagogue. The congregation had formed a new anti-racism group, dubbed the Tzedek Initiative, over the summer, and one of their goals was to develop a series of learning activities around racism, both historical and present-day. Lew proposed a talk on “Black-Jewish relations in the South,” based on the premise that the South was a relatively early site of Black-Jewish interactions in the U.S. and that southern Jewish responses to race

and racism are a crucial piece of the national story of Jews and race. I enthusiastically accepted the opportunity, and we developed the event together over the next few months.

When I delivered the lecture in March, Tzedek Initiative participants had already conducted several sessions together, including a discussion of *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson’s history of the Great Migration. In preparation for the talk, we circulated three short readings: a piece I wrote for the ISJL blog, *Southern & Jewish*, called “Why Study Southern Jewish History;” another blog post on the

legacy of Rabbi Perry Nussbaum, who advocated for desegregation here in Jackson, Mississippi; and a pro-segregation pamphlet written by a Mississippi Jew and published by the segregationist White Citizens' Council. Participants were primed, we hoped, to think about southern Jewish history as constitutive to American Jewish history and to southern history, and to consider it critically in the context of Black history in the United States.

On its own, all of this would have demonstrated Lew's ongoing relationship with his southern Jewish roots and connected fellow participants to the history of Jews in the South. We went a step further, though, by having Lew deliver introductory remarks and sharing family history, including noting that his hometown of Indianola, Mississippi, was the birthplace of the Citizens' Council movement. Lew's introduction personalized the night's subject matter, even as it invited the audience to think about how their own family histories

reflected Jewish encounters with anti-Black racism regardless of location.

I'm always excited to share southern stories with out-of-region audiences, just as I value the chance to connect people to their families' southern Jewish histories. Collaborating with Lew on this project gave me a chance to do both, and his contribution enhanced the overall effectiveness

of the lecture by giving the audience a familiar face to associate with the larger history. Ultimately, I think we showed that southern Jewish stories are deeply interconnected with American Jewish history as a whole, and provided Tzedek Initiative participants with a useful opportunity to reflect on the past and present of that national story.

*Cemetery in Laurel, Mississippi*



## RETURNING TO RESEARCH

ALTHOUGH THE COVID-19 pandemic altered our plans to update the Mississippi section of the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, we have continued to make revisions. We are also adding new images where possible, and historian Josh Parshall recently took these photographs at Knesseth Israel cemetery in Laurel and B'nai Israel Congregation in Hattiesburg. The revisions to the Mississippi entries have been supported by a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council.

To learn more about southern Jewish history, email [history@isjl.org](mailto:history@isjl.org).



# SPECIAL FEATURE: WE MOVED!

THIS MAY, THE GOLDRING/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) moved from its longtime office space into a new, much more communal setting: Beth Israel Congregation (BIC) in Jackson, Mississippi.

The ISJL will remain an independent, non-denominational 501(c)3 organization. In 2020, the preschool once housed at BIC closed its doors; the ISJL will use the newly-available former classroom and reconfigured office space within the congregation's historic building.

"We definitely see this as a win for

the ISJL and for the congregation," says ISJL CEO Michele Schipper. "Lots of Jewish agencies and organizations are finding ways to reduce overhead while also building more of a sense of community, and we're feeling grateful that such an opportunity exists here in Jackson. We're excited for the increased collegiality, community connection, and operational streamlining this move allows."

The BIC team, including Rabbi Joseph Rosen, is excited to now be working alongside the nearly two dozen Jewish professionals working

for the ISJL. Having tenants in the building also brings more support to the congregation, strengthening both organizations. In the wake of the pandemic, this is a particularly poignant occurrence, bolstering two vital Jewish entities in the South by bringing them together for resource-sharing and long-term stability.

Still committed to supporting, connecting, and celebrating Jewish life in the South, the ISJL will be even better positioned to keep delivering on our mission for years to come.



**SCAN...**

**CLICK...**

**CONNECT...**



It's easier than ever to connect with the ISJL. Open your smartphone's camera app and point it at any of these QR codes to access the ISJL Virtual Vacation... or to quickly register for the June 13 ISJL Education Conference!



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COUNTRY, AND  
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# MEET THE



.....

“MY FAVORITE ASPECT OF SOUTHERN JEWISH CULTURE IS THAT SOUTHERN JEWS REALLY CARE ABOUT EACH OTHER’S WELL-BEING, OUR CITIES, AND OUR NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES.”

.....

## LEON RITTENBERG III

LEON RITTENBERG III HAS served on the ISJL Board of Directors since 2016. He grew up in New Orleans, a place that has been home to his father’s side of the family for more than 100 years, and spent a couple of summers in Mississippi at URJ Jacobs Camp. Leon has been active in the New Orleans community for much of his life, volunteering with numerous organizations, including synagogues and other Jewish institutions. He truly cares about providing opportunities for children

and families, which have been the focus of his attention. Leon is a local tax and estate planning attorney at the law firm of Baldwin Haspel Burke & Mayer. He obtained his college degree from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and his law degree from Tulane.

**Why I initially got involved with the ISJL:** Macy B. Hart saw me speak at a local event and wouldn’t leave town until I agreed to join the ISJL Board. Serving on the Board has been a pleasure both because of all that the ISJL has accomplished

and because each of the board members are so committed to the ISJL’s mission—in addition to being personable and intelligent.

**My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity:** My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity is that southern Jews really care about each other’s well-being, our cities, and our neighboring communities. Though our community is small, I have never felt isolated— even after Katrina when a large segment of the local population left New Orleans.

To see a full list of the ISJL Board of Directors, visit [www.isjl.org/board-of-directors](http://www.isjl.org/board-of-directors)



# BOARD



## ROBERT ROUBEY

.....

“(JOINING THE ISJL BOARD) OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO RE-ENGAGE WITH AND SERVE THE LARGER SOUTHERN JEWISH COMMUNITY THAT MEANT SO MUCH TO ME AS A YOUNG ADULT.”

.....

ROBERT ROUBEY HAS SERVED on the ISJL Board since 2007. Born in Pennsylvania, Robert moved to Baton Rouge at the age of 10 when his father, Rabbi Lester Roubey, began his tenure at Congregation B’nai Israel. During his high school years, Robert was very active in SoFTY (now NFTY-Southern) and went on to spend five summers on staff at URJ JacobsCamp and one summer at URJ Greene Family Camp. He received his undergraduate degree from Tulane and his medical degree from the LSU School of Medicine in New

Orleans. He completed postgraduate training in Internal Medicine at Emory University and in Rheumatology at NYU. Robert joined the faculty of the University of North Carolina School of Medicine in Chapel Hill. His long academic career combined laboratory and clinical research, patient care, and teaching. Since retiring from full-time clinical practice, Robert has focused on nonprofit service with both Jewish and professional organizations and various other interests including Jewish genealogy. He is particularly excited to be on the board of the new Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. Robert and his wife Lisa Brachman met at URJ JacobsCamp, have been married for over 36 years, and have two sons. Lisa grew up in Dallas and her family has diverse southern roots (Fort Worth, Texas; Memphis, Tennessee; Marianna, Arkansas; and New Orleans). Robert and Lisa are long-time members of Judea Reform Congregation in Durham, North Carolina, where they have served in numerous leadership roles.

**Why I initially got involved with the ISJL:** The short answer is that Macy B. Hart asked me. The more complete answer is that it offered an opportunity to re-engage with and serve the larger southern Jewish community that meant so much to me as a teenager and as a young adult. It was also a chance to re-connect with old friends, including Jay Tanenbaum, who was the ISJL Board Chair at that time.

**My favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity:** Growing up in Baton Rouge and working at two URJ camps in the South led to my deep appreciation for southern Jewish communities of all sizes and an abiding interest in the history of Jews in the South. I’m particularly moved by the ability of southern Jews to maintain a strong and positive Jewish identity while being fully engaged in their broader communities.

If you’re interested in learning more about supporting the ISJL, email [information@isjl.org](mailto:information@isjl.org).

# Matching Challenge

YOUR GIFT

GOES FARTHER

**Give a new or increased gift in  
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donation will be matched 1:2!**



**GIFTS & GRATITUDE**

**THANK YOU  
TO OUR SUPPORTERS**

In these pages, you can see the impact the ISJL has 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 or pledge from January 1 – March 31, 2021.

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### ***Charles Davis' birthday***

Ethel & Dr. Richard S. Wayne

### ***Rabbi Matthew Dreffin***

Elias & Michelle Chajet

### ***Dale Eastman's birthday***

Ethel & Dr. Richard S. Wayne

### ***Dr. & Mrs. Joel Friedman***

Ian Harvey Friedman

### ***Michael & Harriet Friedman***

Andrea Weeks

### ***Rachel Glazer***

Leonard & Rebecca Fishman

### ***Macy B. Hart***

Albert Fraenkel, II

### ***Susan & Macy B. Hart's 50th Anniversary***

Leanne & Alan Silverblatt

### ***Susan Hart's birthday***

Leanne & Alan Silverblatt

### ***Jay Hesdorffer's birthday***

Barry & Nancy Glazer

### ***Rabbi Debra Kassoff***

Ellen Bregg

### ***Nora Katz***

Congregation Beth Israel -  
Houston, TX

### ***M.H. Levine***

Kay Shapiro

### ***The Birth of Mika Maayan***

Jan & Paul Wachter

### ***The Birth of Miri Nisen***

Rachel Reagler Schulman

### ***Dr. Josh Parshall***

Karen & Theodore Eisenberg  
Morris & Stacey Lewis  
Congregation Beth Sholom -  
Framingham, MA

### ***Ronnet & Mark Rice and Kids***

Beverly Koplon

### ***Michele Schipper***

Rachel Reagler Schulman

### ***Rachel Reagler Schulman***

Theodore & Harriette Perlman

### ***Fred Silverstein's birthday***

Belle & Lewis Bear, Jr.

### ***Rabbi Caroline Sim***

Jewish Congregation of Blue  
Ridge, GA

## ***In Memory Of:***

**JAN. 1–MAR. 31, 2021**

### ***Clifford C. & Wilma K. Abrams***

Stephan & Laura Abrams

### ***Rae Alter***

Bain Serna

### ***Herbert Barton***

Don A. Mitchell

### ***Mollie Pitluck Bell***

John Bell  
James & Laurie Bell Dworkin

### ***Morrisse Meyer Bell***

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### ***Sam Y. Bell***

John Bell  
James & Laurie Bell Dworkin

### ***Elizabeth Bleiberg***

The Bleiberg Family

### ***Jodi Braham***

Risa & Drew Herzog

### ***Dudley Burwell***

Niki & Dr. Dudley Burwell, Jr.

### ***Jack B. Corman***

Risa & Drew Herzog  
Michele & Ken Schipper

### ***Eva Cusnier***

The Cusniers: Dr. Rachel,  
Edward, Maxwell, & Bradley  
George Hardberger & Family

### ***Lou Ginsberg***

Linda Foshee

### ***Laura Moch Goldberg***

John Bell  
James & Laurie Bell Dworkin

### ***Lucille Goldberg***

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### ***Milton Goldberg***

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James & Laurie Bell Dworkin

### ***Mark Greenberg***

Don A. Mitchell

### ***Anita Greenwald***

Dr. Herbert S. Greenwald, Jr.

### ***Rhoda Herzog***

John Bell  
Risa Herzog  
Miriam & Jerry Klein

### ***Frances Kiem***

Rachel Reagler Schulman

### ***Jay Lehmann***

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### ***Aaron Mandel***

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### ***Elias Moch***

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