

# SHALOM *y'all*

SUMMER 2018 | THE PUBLICATION FORMERLY KNOWN AS CIRCA



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## Putting the “All” in Y’all: THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

*A dedicated religious school director who shows up every Sunday to make sure teachers are supported, students are celebrated, and parents are invited to involve themselves in the experience.*

*A rabbi from outside the region who has made a habit of hitting the road to visit small Southern Jewish communities with no local full-time clergy person of their own.*

*Board members and supporters from across the South—and well beyond our territory.*

These are some of the partners who make the work we do possible.

The ISJL has always been an organization committed to partnerships, and in our eighteenth year we are deepening that foundational commitment. We’re doing so in several ways, all of which serve to raise the voices and share the stories of the partners with whom we proudly work.

In this issue, you’ll hear directly from many of our partners—from visiting rabbis to scholars-in-residence to community members, and even a former ISJL religious school teaching assistant now proudly serving as an Education Fellow!

You’ll also learn about Picturing Southern Jewish Life, a regional art project taking place throughout this year, culminating in a virtual exhibit that will share the Southern Jewish stories of individuals and communities throughout the region.

Most of all, you’ll read over and over again about how positively our partnerships impact everyone involved. We are so much more sustainable, more interesting, and more innovative when we work together.

Enjoy this issue of Shalom Y’all – and thanks for being our partner in the ongoing support and celebration of Southern Jewish life!







**Michele Schipper,**  
**CEO**

I WAS IN ATLANTA—my first trip there since becoming the ISJL's CEO. I was meeting several people for the first time. And as luck would have it... I had completely lost my voice.

I had awful laryngitis, and even after endless cups of tea and honey, it didn't get better. There wasn't a lot I could do about it, although I strained to get a few words out. And yet the meetings wound up yielding incredibly productive conversations.

You might ask, how can you have a productive conversation when you can't speak? Well, the answer is simple: It provides an important reminder, and incredible opportunity, to listen. To really listen.

The friends and supporters I met with in Atlanta shared wonderful stories about themselves, how they found the ISJL (or how we found them) and what ISJL programs intersect with their passions. I was humbled

and intrigued to get their detailed perspective. After all, they're partners in this work; they're invested; they have something to say, and I want to hear it.

In my first year as CEO, one of my top priorities is going to be to continue to listen. I want to hear about the impact the ISJL is having in your community, on your family, and for you personally. Taking that one step further, how can

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**I WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN YOUR COMMUNITY...**

we at the ISJL continue to adapt to the ever-changing needs of our partner communities and community members?

To get these answers, I'd like to arrange several “town hall” meetings across the region— an opportunity to meet face to face with community members. I want to hear about the challenges you face in your community and the ways that the ISJL staff and programs can continue to assist you. There are issues that some smaller

congregations are facing for their first time—what happens when we can no longer afford a full-time rabbi? Other communities may be wondering about their religious school—how can we retain our teachers and get our kids engaged? Maybe you're thinking about social justice, or doing a community history, or maybe there are things on your mind that we don't even know about yet!

We are committed to continuing the work with our community partners, responding to changing needs and making good every day on the ISJL's commitment to bring a meaningful and enriching Jewish life to everyone, no matter where he or she lives.

I have the privilege of working with a dynamic staff. As we continue to celebrate the ISJL's 18th anniversary, I know we've had a great impact; I hear it in the stories that our Education Fellows share from their time on the road, from blog posts by Hillel students who come South on an alternative spring break, from conversations with visiting rabbis who share their experiences of how joyful it is to spend Shabbat in a small

# CEO MESSAGE

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**MAYBE YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE, OR A COMMUNITY HISTORY, OR MAYBE THERE ARE THINGS ON YOUR MIND THAT WE DON'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT YET!**

Southern community.

I want to hear these stories and more from all of our community partners—and just as importantly, I want to hear from our community partners, donors, and friends, about what your interests are, what we might re-vamp, or what new program might meet your community's un-met need. Your voices matter, your support is vital, and I hope you'll share your thoughts with me.

I'm listening... even now that I have my voice back.

*Michele Schipper*



**Rachel Reagler Schulman,**  
**ISJL Board Chair**

AS A LAWYER BY day, I look at the word “partnership” and think of the legal meaning of the word. Partnerships involve contracts and agreements between two or more persons who combine their money, efforts, labor, and skills, or some combination of these, into a business or venture with the basic understanding that there shall be a proportional sharing of the profits and losses between the partners.

That sounds pretty serious, huh?

Well, that's the legal definition—but as ISJL's Board Chair, I look at partnerships differently. The ISJL enters into a number of different partnerships with different individuals,

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**AS THE ISJL'S BOARD CHAIR, I LOOK AT PARTNERSHIPS QUITE DIFFERENTLY...**

communities, organizations, and even families. Some of our partners are in our southern region while others are across the country and even across the globe. From donors to former Fellows to community members welcoming our visiting rabbis in their small Southern towns, our partnerships take many forms.

Wherever our partners are located, the ISJL is ready, willing and able to work with our partners in a manner to support our partners and accomplish our common goals. Since the ISJL is headquartered in Jackson, Mississippi, and serves a region of thirteen states, the ISJL routinely provides services and support remotely and from a great distance. This has helped us think creatively from the get-go.

The ISJL's education department recognizes the need to provide our partners with programs that are ready-to-go: easily implemented, requiring little preparation or training, and that manage to be fun and enriching for students and teachers alike. With the education partnerships between the ISJL and the congregations we serve, a

# BOARD CHAIR MESSAGE

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**THE POWER OF THIS PARTNERSHIP PROVIDES TEACHERS WITH ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND PROGRAMMING AVAILABLE AT THEIR FINGERTIPS...**

teacher is able to email or call an Education Fellow to ask for programming ideas for something very specific—say, a combined 3rd/4th grade outdoor-themed Shavuot lesson plan with a focus on environmentalism. The Education Fellow of ISJL programs, talk to other Fellows to see what programs they know about, and/or develop a new program.

Best of all, whenever a new program is written, it goes into our program bank—so the next time a community has that need, the program is already available! The power of this partnership provides teachers with access to resources and programming available at their fingertips; the beauty is the more the ISJL is asked to develop,

the more we have to give! The Rabbinical Services Department partners with b'nai mitzvah students to help them prepare for their upcoming simchas. If a congregation does not have a rabbi, the ISJL rabbi or a rabbi arranged by the ISJL will tutor the students via video conferencing so that these students are able to keep up with their studies even though there is no rabbi nearby. What an incredible service to offer to families so that they do not have to drive for hours to the nearest religious school for Hebrew school? (As a child who had to drive hours to religious school, I really appreciate this service!)

Finally, the board and staff of the ISJL appreciate the power of the partnership with our donors. No matter where you live, by donating to the ISJL, you ARE a partner with the ISJL in the work we do. Please continue to be a partner and ensure the continuation of the partnership by giving to the ISJL. Thank you for being a great partner!

*Rachel R. Schulman*



## Rabbinical

# PARTNER'S PERSPECTIVE:

## A "Rabbi on the Road"

By Rabbi Andy Bachman



I RECENTLY HIT THE ROAD FOR the ISJL on a nine-day-long Rabbis on the Road trip. The journey began in Tupelo, Mississippi; I continued on to Florence, Alabama; Brownsville, Texas; Columbus, Mississippi; Greenville, Mississippi; Jackson, Mississippi; and Monroe, Louisiana. In each community I found small but vibrant, loving, deeply rooted and committed communities making their lives as Jews in all the ways they can. In this article, I'll share just a few of the many moments that made this trip so special.

Among the Jews in Columbus, Mississippi, located near Mississippi University for Women and Mississippi State University, I found as I discovered everywhere on this trip an incredible warmth and hospitality, as well as a deep yearning for connection.

A highlight of this visit was a trip to the cemetery, which the community's president Paul Lasky maintains with incredible care and love. He grew up in a neighboring town where his parents owned small stores, and so he could fit together the lives of those buried in the B'nai Israel Cemetery with the skill of a puzzle-master.

"They say I'm the synagogue president," he confided, "but I'm really the go-fer."

Hardly. If you ask me, he is a noble keeper of the flame.

In Greenville, Mississippi, I was greeted with a lasagna dinner and salad; a robust history museum chronicling their storied community, once a thriving center of the "Cotton Belt" (the museum has memorabilia from Jewish Confederates who fought in the

Civil War, Nazi flags captured by Jewish soldiers who fought in WWII and liberated concentration camps, and other fascinating finds); and plenty to argue about. We were all still in shock as the unfolding tragedy of the school shooting in Parkland, Florida was becoming more painfully clear, and we dove among weighty matters from Jewish history to Israel to the Second Amendment and hyper-local politics.

After my talk in Greenville the synagogue president asked if I had any questions for them. I told them the famous Isaac Bashevis Singer line about there being a "long way between dying and dead" and I asked if they thought they were a dying community.

"Do we look like we're dying?" That was the response from everyone—all ten in attendance. "On March 1 we will host our annual deli lunch. Been happening for generations. We are going to serve 1600 sandwiches in the Temple. We are still, despite our small numbers, an important part of this community."

It was a real testimonial. They're not dying.

In Jackson, I visited the team at the ISJL and listened to blues music with my friend Macy; I made some new friends when I visited Tougaloo College; I took a breath and rested before continuing along the road.

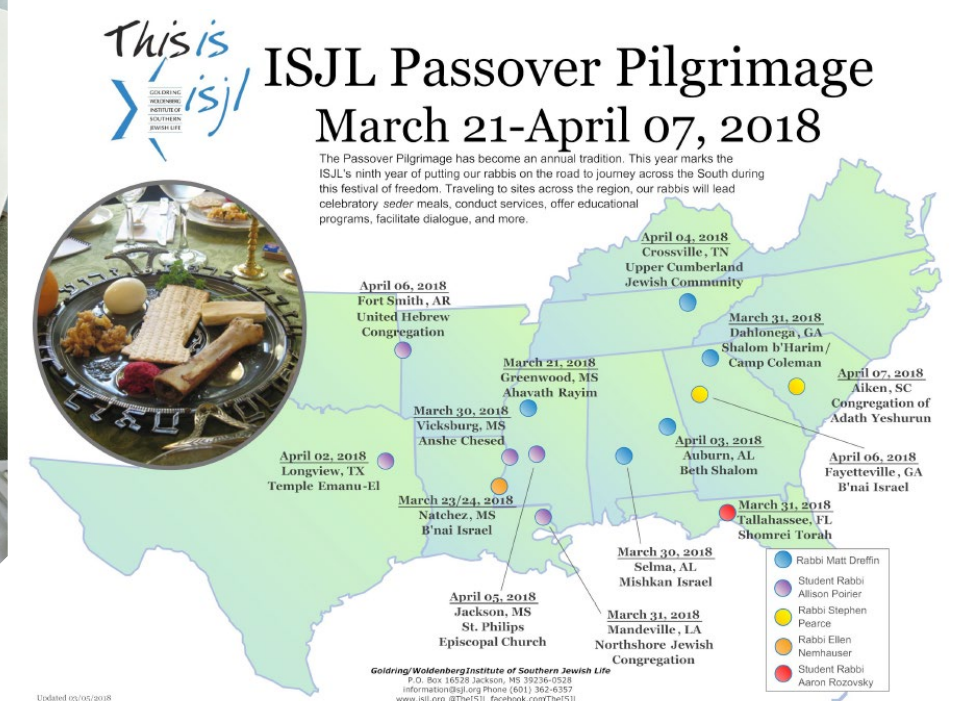
In Monroe, Louisiana, those Jews really know how to fill a weekend. Friday night services and dinner at a nice Italian restaurant. Saturday, Tot Shabbat at nine followed by Torah study at ten. Lunch with congregants. Basketball game between ULM and North Texas and beer at Flying Tiger followed by Havdalah and a talk and dinner with this unique and warm community.

I was humbled over and over again by their efforts, their pride and determination, and by their own humility in recognizing the necessity of their efforts to keep the flame alive.



## SEDER SCENES

This year's Passover Pilgrimage put FIVE rabbis on the road into communities across the South! Here are some of our favorite pictures from these joyful journeys for seder celebrations across the region.





## Rabbinical

# MEET OUR NEW DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES



### The ISJL's board and staff are excited to welcome our new Director of Rabbinical Services, Rabbi Aaron Rozovsky.

RABBI ROZOVSKY EARNED his rabbinical ordination this year from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the seminary of the Reform movement. Prior to beginning his rabbinical studies, he also completed a Master's degree in International Studies with a concentration in Latin America at Central Connecticut State University, and a Bachelor's degree in History with a Spanish minor at Providence College in Rhode Island.

"This is my dream job," Rabbi Rozovsky says of his new role with the ISJL. "To serve small Jewish communities throughout the South who have added so much to the American fabric and our understanding of what it means to be Jewish is the opportunity of a lifetime."

The experience he brings to the position is relevant and extensive. As a student rabbi, he served in an array of positions, primarily in small communities: teaching at

Kulanu Cincinnati Reform Jewish High School, working at the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education, advising students at the Hillel at Miami University of Ohio, and holding student pulpits at United Hebrew Congregation in Terra Haute, IN, and Temple B'nai Israel of Petoskey, MI.

Rabbi Rozovsky also has a special commitment to this nation's armed forces. He has served as a chaplain in multiple military settings, and was a fellow at the Jewish War Veterans of America (JWV) Cincinnati-Dayton chapter, Cincinnati, OH; and he has worked for twelve years with the Rhode Island Army National Guard. He also spent a year as a Liaison Officer for the US Army-Israel Defense Forces, in Jerusalem.

Perhaps most relevant for Rabbi Rozovsky, and what drew him to the ISJL's work, was his year-long deployment to Afghanistan with the Military Police. There, he learned how to create meaningful

Jewish experiences out of whatever was on hand, recalling having only "a few cans of corn, peaches, and Army rations" and still hosting "a festive Shabbos dinner."

In his role as Director of Rabbinical Services, Rabbi Rozovsky will travel two to three weekends a month to lead Shabbat experiences, will write a weekly Taste of Torah e-mailed d'var (sermon), serve as a remote resource for Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, engaged couples, and more; he will also work with colleagues to coordinate visits throughout the region with the ISJL's Rabbis on the Road program.

Being the ISJL's traveling rabbi is a prestigious and interesting rabbinical post. Previously held by Rabbis Debra Kassoff, Batsheva Appel, Marshal Klaven, and Jeremy Simons, as the "ISJL Rabbi," Rabbi Rozovsky will continue a proud tradition of service to the small but mighty Jewish congregations and individuals in towns throughout the South.

To welcome Rabbi Rozovsky or connect him to your community, email [arozovsky@isjl.org](mailto:arozovsky@isjl.org)

## Education

# PARTNERS AT EVERY STAGE: From Teaching Assistant To Fellow!

By Rabbi Matt Dreffin & Rachel Stern

THE ISJL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT is in its 15th year. We have grown from serving a handful of congregations in our early days to now reaching dozens of congregational schools, supporting hundreds of teachers and making sure that an excellent Jewish education is provided to thousands of students!

One of the benefits of our longevity is that we are able to look back and see our impact in a variety of forms. With each passing year the community of partner congregations grows in size and purpose. One of the most special aspects of these partnerships, and the one we want to call attention to in this article, is the incredible gift of raising a community of "ISJL kids."

Students who have been in the ISJL's education community for more than a year get excited each year as they wait to see who their new ISJL Education Fellow will be—and some of these students have been waiting in the wings until they can apply to be a Fellow themselves. That's the case with one of our current first-year Education Fellows, Harrison Bleiberg.

Harrison recently wrote about his "full circle" ISJL moment for our Southern & Jewish blog. Here's an excerpt from the piece, which beautifully illustrates the power of partnership and the connective threads in everything we do.



Prior to applying to work as an Education Fellow, I had worked with the ISJL curriculum as a teaching assistant at my temple's religious school in Birmingham, Alabama. I was also a long-time subscriber to the ISJL's "Taste of Torah" email list. So I was somewhat familiar with the ISJL in those obvious ways, but my connection goes back even further: Turns out I had been preparing to work for this Southern Jewish organization since the first grade.

Several times in my Jewish professional career, I have had "full circle moments" — moments when something from my past seemed to directly meet me where I was in the present. Like when I need to use a skill that I learned earlier at camp, or where I would get to work with one of my early mentors in a professional setting. The first "full circle" moment came during my initial job application to the ISJL. When asked to provide references, I gave the name of one of my supervisors from my days as a counselor at URJ Greene Family Camp. Little did I know, one of my potential bosses was not only acquainted with my former supervisor, but she had also been a counselor to my supervisor's mother!

During the fly-in interview process, I was provided with names of former Education Fellows, many of whom had been my counselors or teachers at Kutz and Greene camps. I recognized many faces and names in the introductory slideshows.

I enjoyed learning about how the ISJL operated and meeting all the wonderful staff of the ISJL, and hoped with all my heart that I would have the opportunity to work with the ISJL in the future.

(Spoiler alert: I did.)

Another full-circle moment came when I met the rest of my cohort on the first day of work. I was already acquainted with two of my co-workers from our fly-in interview, but I also came to realize that two of my other coworkers I had known for several years and had attended URJ Camps with me before.

Right now, the ISJL is preparing for our annual Education Conference. Looking over the attendance list, I recognize several names from many different points in my life. Everyone from my first-grade camp counselor to my Greene Family Camp faculty friends are somewhere on that list. In a few short weeks, I will see people who remember helping me tie my shoes during my first grade session at camp, and people who remember helping me supervise a cabin full of 6th graders during a 7:30 am Torah study program. As a new Fellow, I feel honored to be counted among my personal Jewish role models. I can only hope that I get to be part of others' full-circle Jewish experiences, too.

-Harrison Bleiberg, Education Fellow



Education

# FOCUS ON FAN

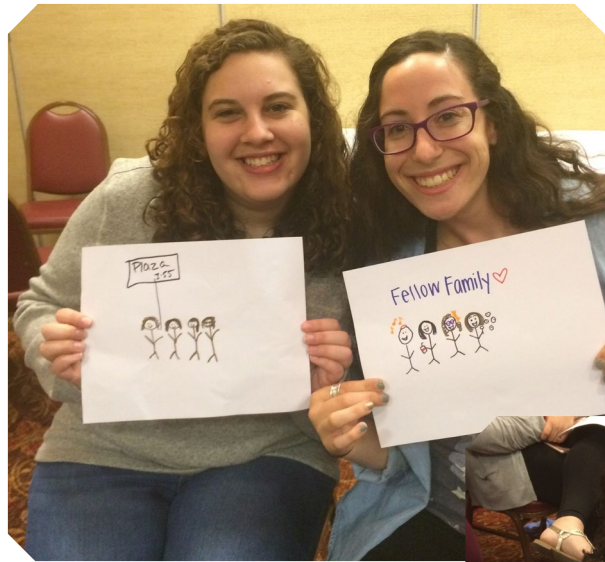
## This Summer: Former Fellows Return to the Education Conference

As we continue highlighting the Fellow Alumni Network (FAN), we have a really exciting update this time around: A group of former Education and Community Engagement Fellows will be returning to Jackson this summer to be the featured presenters at the annual Education Conference!

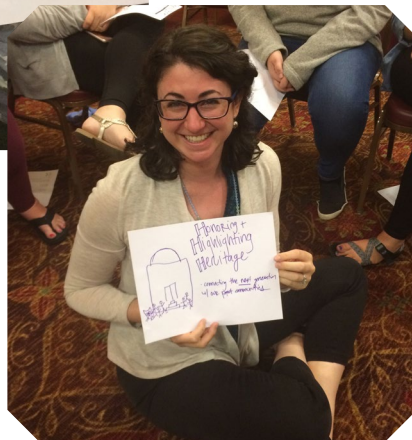
Coming from as nearby as Jackson and as far away as New York, Chicago, and Dallas, this mini-reunion in conjunction with the conference will be enriching for presenters and attendees alike. We are proud that these former Fellows are still partners in the ISJL's work—and most of all, how connected they remain to our community partners.

Here are the FAN folks you'll see at this year's conference:

- Rachel Glazer, Community Engagement Fellow 2016-2018
- Beth Kander-Dauphin, Education Fellow 2003-2005
- Alachua (Haskins) Nazarenko, Education Fellow 2013-2015
- Arielle Nissenblatt, Education Fellow 2014-2016
- Allison (Goldman) Parshall, Education Fellow 2009-2011
- Rabbi Andrew Terkel, Education Fellow 2007-2009
- Amanda Winer, Education Fellow 2012-2014



Stay tuned for more fun FAN updates!



Joshua Altshuler grew up in North Barrington, Illinois as the youngest of five children. A recent graduate of the University of Illinois, he studied History and Jewish Studies. At school, Joshua was active as a leader at Illini Hillel and as an actor with Illini Student Musicals. He spent multiple fun-filled summers at URJ Camp Olin-Sang-Ruby-Union-Institute in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin as a camper and counselor where he developed a profound passion for Judaism. A lover of reading, Joshua can often be found relaxing in a comfy chair with a fun, engrossing book and a warm mug of herbal tea. Joshua is



ecstatic to be joining the ISJL team and is excited to appreciate the diverse stories of Jewish life in the south!

JOSHUA ALTSHULER



Carrie Bohn is from Marietta, Georgia and recently graduated from Kennesaw State University where she studied Human Services. Carrie graduated with honors, and was a member of Gamma Phi Beta Sorority, Chabad of KSU

CARRIE BOHN

executive board, and KSU Hillel executive board. She is originally from Orlando, Florida, and is the youngest of three siblings. She loves college sports, music, and traveling. Her favorite place she has been to is Jerusalem, and she is hoping to go back to Israel very soon!

## MEET THE 2018-2020 EDUCATION FELLOWS!

Mackenzie Haun is originally from Overland Park, Kansas. She graduated from the University of Kansas with Honors with a degree in Jewish Studies and minors in Anthropology and History. For the past two summers, Mackenzie worked at URJ Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi, and she is so excited to work in the South for the next two years! When she isn't working, Mackenzie enjoys hanging out with friends, watching too much Netflix, and playing guitar.



MACKENZIE HAUN

Becca Leaman was born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. She recently graduated from Connecticut College with a major in psychology, a minor in Arabic, and an elementary education teaching certificate. During her time in college, Becca served as co-president of the Connecticut College Hillel for a year as well as a member of the executive board for three years. She was also a member of an a cappella group and taught spin classes on campus. In her free time Becca enjoys hiking and skiing. Becca is super excited about the next two years in Mississippi and with the ISJL.



BECCA LEAMAN

Whenever you have questions about the ISJL Education Department, you can email Rachel Stern at [rstern@isjl.org](mailto:rstern@isjl.org) or Rabbi Matt Dreffin at [mdreffin@isjl.org](mailto:mdreffin@isjl.org)



# PARTNERS IN RESEARCH: History Interns at The ISJL

## By Dr. Josh Parshall

The ISJL History department works with a variety of partners: local historians, oral history interviewees, synagogue archives, and professional scholars. Because the department currently consists of only one full-time staff member, the summer internship program provides some of our most exciting partnerships.

For ten weeks every summer, the department doubles or triples in size, and the often solitary work of historical research becomes a collaborative endeavor. I'm excited to introduce the 2018 interns—but first, I wanted to check in with just a few of the bright and interesting summer interns who have contributed to the ISJL History Department over the years.



### Where did you go to college and when did you graduate?

**Caryn (Miller) Burstein:** Rutgers University, History, 2011. I was also in the Rutgers Graduate School of Education's Five-Year Program and graduated with a Masters in Social Studies Education (M.Ed) in 2012.

**Jonathan Cohen:** McGill University, History, 2013.

**Harum Helmy:** University of Missouri, Journalism, May 2011.

### How did you hear about the internship and why did you apply?

**CB:** I found out about the ISJL's History internship on a Rutgers Career Services website. At the time, I was still considering my options career-wise, and, if there was a possibility that I would pursue graduate education in history, I thought a good research experience would be helpful. This internship paid, which was unusual, so I applied. I never thought I would

get it, and I never thought I would spend time in Mississippi... and love it!

**JC:** I don't remember exactly. I'm sure I was scouring the internet for any history internship I could find. I applied in the middle of the Montreal winter, so the idea of a summer in the Deep South sounded especially appealing.

**HH:** The school regularly sends out internship announcements. I thought an Oral History internship with the Institute of Southern Jewish Life was the coolest thing on the list.

### What did you work on as an intern?

**CB:** My job as an intern was to research Jewish communities around the South, and write up encyclopedia articles about them. One of my most memorable projects was working on the article about New Bern, North Carolina,

in which I wrote about the murder of local resident Abraham Nathan, who was killed at sea in 1787!

**JC:** Under the leadership of Dr. Stuart Rockoff, I wrote entries for the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, with a particular focus on a number of small towns in northeast Texas, including Kilgore, Mexia, Texarkana, and others.

**HH:** I helped Josh Parshall collect oral histories of Jewish life in the U.S. South. I helped with multimedia stuff, plus transcribing and archiving.

### What was the most memorable thing (maybe things) about the summer?

**CB:** The most memorable part about that summer was all of the traveling and activities I did both for the ISJL and outside of the ISJL with other people my age. I loved going to the B.B. King concert

in Indianola, tubing down the Bogue Chitto River, and traveling to Vicksburg. The trips with Stuart Rockoff (then the Director of History), Aaron Welt (summer intern), and Josh Parshall (then the ISJL oral historian) also stand out in my mind. It was on those trips that I had grits for the first time, had my first Po-Boy, and tried bread pudding for the first time. With the exception of grits, these are all things I still love to eat today.

**JC:** I loved immersing myself in the small but tight-knit Jewish community in Jackson, which offered a big change from my upbringing in the Boston suburbs. One of the most memorable experiences from that summer came during our road trips to Texas, when we would pull up to small cemeteries and spend hours in the hot sun reading the names on every single gravestone, looking for traces of a Jewish community that, in many cases, had long since moved on.

**HH:** My favorite memory from the internship was when Josh and I went to Columbus, Mississippi, and interviewed Elizabeth Gwin, who was 102 years old! She had the best bob haircut and told lovely stories about her friend who was Jewish and whose family had owned the general store in town. It was really cool to help record what sounds like ordinary stories, but when collected as oral histories help paint the bigger picture of Jewish life in the South.

### What are you doing now?

**CB:** I am a Social Studies teacher at Freehold Township High School in Freehold, New Jersey. I teach A.P. Microeconomics, A.P. Macroeconomics, World History, and U.S. History I. On the personal side, I got married in July 2017 to my wonderful husband, Brian.

In my free time, I like to play with my dog, Oreo, read books (mostly history-adjacent), watch TV, go biking, go skiing, or spend time with my family.

**JC:** I'm completing my dissertation on the history of American state lotteries in the Corcoran Department of History at the University of Virginia.

**HH:** I'm in DC, working part-time and volunteering with the DC Abortion Fund. Sometimes I ride my bike long distances for fun; last fall I biked solo from San Diego to New Orleans. Next time, I hope to ride the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route.

### Are there things about the internship that stuck with you or affected your subsequent path?

**CB:** The experience of the internship definitely stuck out for me. I had never really been exposed to other American cultures in that way, and I think it actually opened my mind a little bit. I am not afraid to admit that I was probably a northern elitist,

but spending this kind of time in the South brought me down to earth a little bit and gave me the chance to relax.

**JC:** The ISJL internship offered my first exposure to primary source research—the fact-finding missions that make up the essence of every good historian's scholarship. I visited 25 archives in 15 states for my dissertation research, and my internship played a big part in exposing me to the type of creative thinking scholars need to do when searching for sources.

**HH:** As a recent immigrant who was largely ignorant of U.S. history growing up, something that stuck with me was the story of Jewish activists who were killed by the KKK when they were in Mississippi to register Black voters. That helped spark my ongoing learning about post-slavery racism in the U.S. and informed my lifelong commitment to social and racial justice.



Above: Caryn Burstein (Left) and Harum Helmy (Right). Opposite page: Jonathan Cohen.

For more information about everything from internships to the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Community, contact Dr. Josh Parshall at [jparshall@isjl.org](mailto:jparshall@isjl.org)



# WHEN YOU PICTURE SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE, WHAT DO YOU SEE?



**We want you to show us!**

Picturing Southern Jewish Life is a project that celebrates the ISJL's 18th anniversary – our Chai year. We're working with partner communities throughout the South to create visual representations of our communities, large and small. This project is not only about contemporary southern Jewish life, but also about the things that represent us as southerners and Jews.



**Want to get involved? Email Nora Katz at [nkatz@isjl.org](mailto:nkatz@isjl.org) (or just reach out to your Education Fellow, if you're an education partner!) to learn more.**





Learn more about  
**The Diaries of Adam and Eve**  
 and our efforts to preserve  
 Temple B'nai Israel at  
[www.templebnaiisraelnatchez.org](http://www.templebnaiisraelnatchez.org)

**Heritage & Interpretation**

**PARTNERSHIP AT PLAY**  
**Staging An Event in Natchez**

**By Nora Katz**

WHEN YOU'RE PUTTING ON A PLAY, collaboration is critical. This April, the ISJL presented a staged reading of Mark Twain's *The Diaries of Adam and Eve* at Temple B'nai Israel, home to the historic Natchez, Mississippi Jewish community.

This timeless tale of the first family offered sparkling Mark Twain wit and wisdom in a unique staging, with classic characters brought to dazzling life in historic Temple B'nai Israel. The production also featured the unveiling of a statue of

Mark Twain donated to the Historic Natchez Foundation by StudioEIS, the nation's most prominent historical sculpture studio. With robust community support, the event was an important part of the Heritage and Interpretation Department's work to maintain the temple as a gathering space, performance venue, and monument to the legacy of the Natchez Jewish community.

We asked our sponsors, partners, and collaborators to share their thoughts on this groundbreaking production.

“ THIS PRODUCTION AND OTHERS LIKE IT WILL HELP THE COMMUNITY. IT'S THAT SIMPLE.

-Stratton Bull,  
 Production Sponsor



“ My grandparents, immigrants from Russia and Romania, met in Natchez, most likely at Temple B'nai Israel. Natchez's Jewish community was strong during the early 20th century, but for the most part, the Jewish kids in my generation moved away. Today, the ISJL, the Historic Natchez Foundation, and the Temple B'nai Israel membership are working together to raise funds and plan events to support the maintenance, operation, and preservation of the temple. This play is an example of the type of meaningful community programming we hope to present on a regular basis in the future.”  
 - Neal Nathanson, ISJL Board Member and Natchez native

“ THIS PLAY EXPLORES A WORLD THAT WE ALL FEEL LIKE WE KNOW. BUT WITH MARK TWAIN'S WORDS AND STORYTELLING, IT'S A DIFFERENT VERSION THAN ANYTHING WE'VE SEEN BEFORE.”  
 -Rachel Glazer, Actor and ISJL Community Engagement Associate



“ We're thrilled that the ISJL has committed to preserving both the temple and the legacy of Jewish Natchez. And the ISJL could not have chosen a more perfect project to present than this Mark Twain work, as he certainly had connections to Natchez and the Mississippi. The production of *The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, kicking off the preservation process that will allow the building to be widely experienced by residents and visitors alike, is truly meaningful to us, our visitors, our Jewish community, and the City of Natchez.  
 - Jennifer Ogden Combs, Executive Director of Visit Natchez and the Natchez Convention Promotion Commission

“ WHEN YOU'VE DONE THIS AS LONG AS I HAVE, YOU KNOW: THE ABILITY TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE IS A GREAT THING.  
 -Ivan Schwartz, Founder of StudioEIS

“ THIS PRODUCTION SHOWS HOW THE TEMPLE CAN SERVE A BROADER PURPOSE, AND IT'S A GREAT WAY TO OPEN THE BUILDING TO THE WHOLE NATCHEZ COMMUNITY  
 -Mimi Miller, Executive Director of the Historic Natchez Foundation



“ Being a part of this first theatrical performance at Temple B'nai Israel is humbling and exhilarating. I hope audiences will see this show not as a simple retelling of a bible story, but as a reflection on love, family, and marriage.  
 - Robert Atwell, Actor and Belhaven University musical theatre student

To learn more about the ISJL's Heritage and Interpretation department, email Nora Katz at [nkatz@isjl.org](mailto:nkatz@isjl.org)



## Programming

# A JEWISH YANKEE WHO KEEPS COMING BACK TO THE BIBLE BELT

By Joel Hoffman

BECAUSE I FREQUENTLY lecture in the South for the ISJL, Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson airport is practically my second home, taking its place alongside London's bustling Heathrow, Tel Aviv's spiritual Ben Gurion, and New York's three decrepit bastions of the Third World that we call LaGuardia, Kennedy, and Newark.

I travel a lot, after all. My lecture circuit has brought me to all of the six habitable continents, where I've presented in synagogues and churches, universities and libraries, living rooms and theaters. And there is definitely a certain glamor to it all. In Leuven, Belgium, I taught Bible translators from around the world, and in Mexico City, Mexico, I helped Hebrew teachers from North and South America improve their craft. I've skied atop a snow-pack of 55 feet (yes, feet) in Alaska

and photographed lions in South Africa. Ovid was right when he wrote that a traveler "delights to wander in unknown lands ... his eagerness making light of toil."

But it is toil. Thomas Fuller was also right when he said that "never any weary traveler complained that he came too soon to his journey's end." Travel is exhausting, which is why hospitality on the road is so important.

And no one gets hospitality right like the South.

I remember a Temple president graciously giving me a walking tour through his historic town despite a bitter cold snap. Another time, a Southern Baptist minister didn't want me to take a taxi to the airport, even though he had to wake up at 5:30am to drive me himself. And the ISJL made sure I didn't dine alone when aircraft maintenance

stranded me for a night. All in the South.

And of course the South is home to the Bible Belt. Now, that "Bible Belt" gets a bad rap. People hear the phrase and think of narrow-minded Bible-pounding intolerant yokels. Those surely exist, but I haven't met them. Just the opposite. My trips to the South have put me in front of Jews and Christians alike who are genuinely eager to learn what this New York Yankee has to teach.

Frequently those Jews and Christians are in the same room—be it at a synagogue, or a church, or at the Rotary Club—learning together in common fellowship. These amicable gatherings are all the more remarkable in the context of 2,000 years of Jewish-Christian coexistence that has more often been marked by hatred and violence than by tolerance, respect, and joy.

As a Cultural Programming Presenter for the ISJL I get to take part in all of this.

So I still agree with Douglas Adams: "It can hardly be a coincidence that no language on Earth has ever produced the expression 'as pretty as an airport.'"

Airports, including Hartsfield, are neither pretty nor comfortable. But nonetheless I head there from New York, then hop on another (probably delayed) flight, because I know that the destination will make my journey worthwhile.



To bring Joel or any of our other amazing presenters to your community, contact Alachua Nazarenko at [anazarenko@isjl.org](mailto:anazarenko@isjl.org)

## MEET THE BOARD

The ISJL's Board of Directors is comprised of some amazing people—and although many of them do not currently live in the South, they are devoted partners in the work of this organization every day.

As we continue profiling individual board members in upcoming issues of *Shalom Y'all*, with this issue's focus on partnership we wanted to focus on the board as a whole. At our spring board meeting, held this April in Dallas, we invited our board to participate in the Picturing Southern Jewish Life art project (featured on pages 14-15 – we want your community involved, too!). Enjoy their creations, and the insights they provide into why this partnership matters so deeply to the board members.







## Community Engagement

# THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTINUES TO EXPAND

By Dave Miller

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Department has been in constant motion—thanks to our amazing partnerships, which have rapidly expanded along with our programming.

This spring, we completed our second iteration of the Literacy Achievement Bonanza (LAB). We registered 150 students from the Jackson area in grades 1 - 5. They received a healthy breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack as well as a free book a day (more than 750 free books distributed!). We had more than 20 staff, which included teachers

and student teachers. Around 70 volunteers also gave their time, including a traveling Hillel group from Yale. You should also visit the website to see the incredible number of sponsors and in-kind donors we had this year ([www.isjl.org/lab](http://www.isjl.org/lab)). If your synagogue, church, community center, and/or school district would like to operate their own LAB all you need to do is reach out! Spring break 2019 will be here before you know it; we are already planning for it.

We've also been developing and piloting our Jewish Social Justice

Modules program. Currently there are 23 modules organized into five categories: keep, remember, act, share, and create. Each module is approximately 90 minutes. There are modules for every age group and knowledge level and consist of text study, discussion, and hands-on activities. We're eager to come to your community—so reach out today to get us to head your way!

Because our partners are the heart and soul of everything we do, we asked a few of them to share their thoughts with us. Here's what they had to say...

“Talk about the Problems (T.A.P.) is a great resource for our students and staff. Students serving as mediators to assist in resolving conflicts amongst peers has positively impacted school culture. As students engage in more courageous conversations, less physical altercations occur. The skills that students learn from this program will not only assist them at school, but in their homes, communities, and in the world. We value this partnership and look forward to expanding the conflict resolution program into more schools across the district.

—Amanda Thomas, Multi-Tier Support Systems Director, Office of Student Academic and Behavior Support - Jackson Public Schools



Of the many projects our library has participated in this year, I am perhaps most excited by the ‘Our Reading Family’ program than any other. Why? This innovative program funded with a Library Services and Technology federal grant started out with many unknowns—“Could we find the families that need the help? Would they commit and attend the weekly program for 4 hours on as a Saturday? Could we come up with a program that they would attend week-after-week and enjoy?” All of these questions were met with such a resounding yes! Largely because of the facilitators and staff of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, all of the 25 children and parents loved the training, attended every session, and felt that it made a real difference in their family's life. I was so pleased with the high quality of the instruction that was given and the difference that it made, that we are planning on extending the program to other libraries this next year and writing a much larger grant to facilitate it. Thanks to “Our Reading Family” there are kids whose reading skills are fundamentally changed and strengthened. Thanks for partnering with us to make such a fundamental difference in families who really needed the help.

—Patty Furr, Executive Director, Jackson Hinds Library System



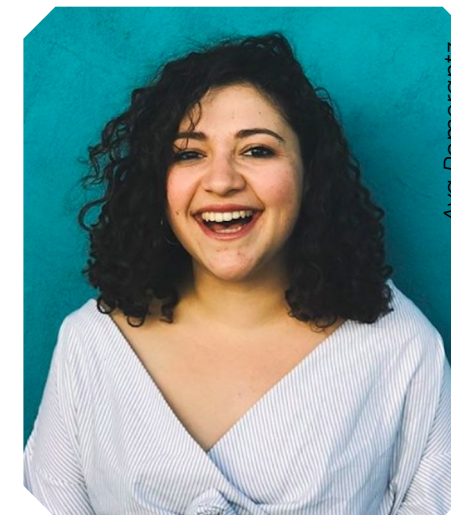
We were excited to be an early partner in the ISJL's Community Engagement Social Justice Modules pilot. Our kids did one that explored Jewish global diversity and they learned about Jewish culture in a number of countries that they might not have been familiar with and we as adults used one called, “Imagine A Just World” that used John Lennon's “Imagine” as a jumping off point for text study and exploration of feelings and great discussion. But, it also incorporated a chance for us to express some of our feelings through art, which was a scary proposition to some of us who don't do anything very artistic. But, it was non-threatening and people enjoyed it. Both programs were met with compliments and success... Rachel Glazer made it comfortable for everybody... we were quite happy and I'm sure that we will invite them back to do some other modules for us.

—Helaine Braunig, Community Partner in Shreveport, Louisiana

## The Community Engagement Department's Growing Staff

The Community Engagement Department has vastly grown in the last two years and a huge part of our success is due to the incredible work of Rachel Glazer, one of our CE Fellows. Her fellowship is set to expire in July of 2018—but unwilling to part ways just yet, we offered her the opportunity to be the very first Community Engagement Associate. This newly created position will allow Rachel to take on new opportunities and roles within the department. We are incredibly excited about this new position and even more elated over the individual who will be filling that role.

“I am honored to continue working in the ISJL's Community Engagement Department after the conclusion of my fellowship,” says Glazer. “I look forward to growing our programs in the South until such a day as our whole world is



repaired. Until then, we've got our work cut out for us, and I couldn't be more excited to pursue it with such fantastic educators.”

We're also thrilled to welcome Ava Pomerantz as our 2018-2020 Community Engagement Fellow, joining 2017-2019 CE Fellow Lizzi Meister. Ava says: “I am super

excited to join the ISJL team. I'm finishing up my senior year at Davidson College in North Carolina with a degree in Religious Studies. While at Davidson I was Co-President of Hillel, played clarinet in the orchestra, and worked at the local coffee shop/café on campus. Originally, I'm from Los Angeles, but my southern roots are fairly deep... my paternal grandmother grew up in Piedmont, Alabama, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. I'm eager to discover and explore so much more about my Southern heritage while here in Jackson. Looking ahead to my work with ISJL, what I'm most excited about is the chance to work with people of varying ages and backgrounds, from teenagers in the Jackson public schools to Jewish congregations throughout the South.”

To learn more about the Community Engagement Department and all its programs, contact Dave Miller at [dmiller@isjl.org](mailto:dmiller@isjl.org)



# WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR LEGACY TO BE?



**Legacy is more than what we leave behind—it's what we send ahead to those we love. It's how we impact the future, starting today.**

### ***What is a "legacy gift" or "planned giving"?***

A planned gift is a charitable gift that you decide now to make at some time in the future as part of your estate and gift plan. A planned gift can benefit you and loved ones that you name. At the same time, it stands as a lasting reminder to your children and succeeding generations of the values and charitable works that are most important to you. Wills, trusts, and endowments are all examples of planned giving and legacy gifts.

### ***How can the ISJL help?***

Whether it's preserving Southern Jewish stories, putting rabbis on the road to small towns, furthering Jewish Education, making our world a better place through literacy and life-changing community engagement initiatives—whatever touches your heart and resonates with your legacy will shape the conversation of how together, we can plan for a meaningful future.

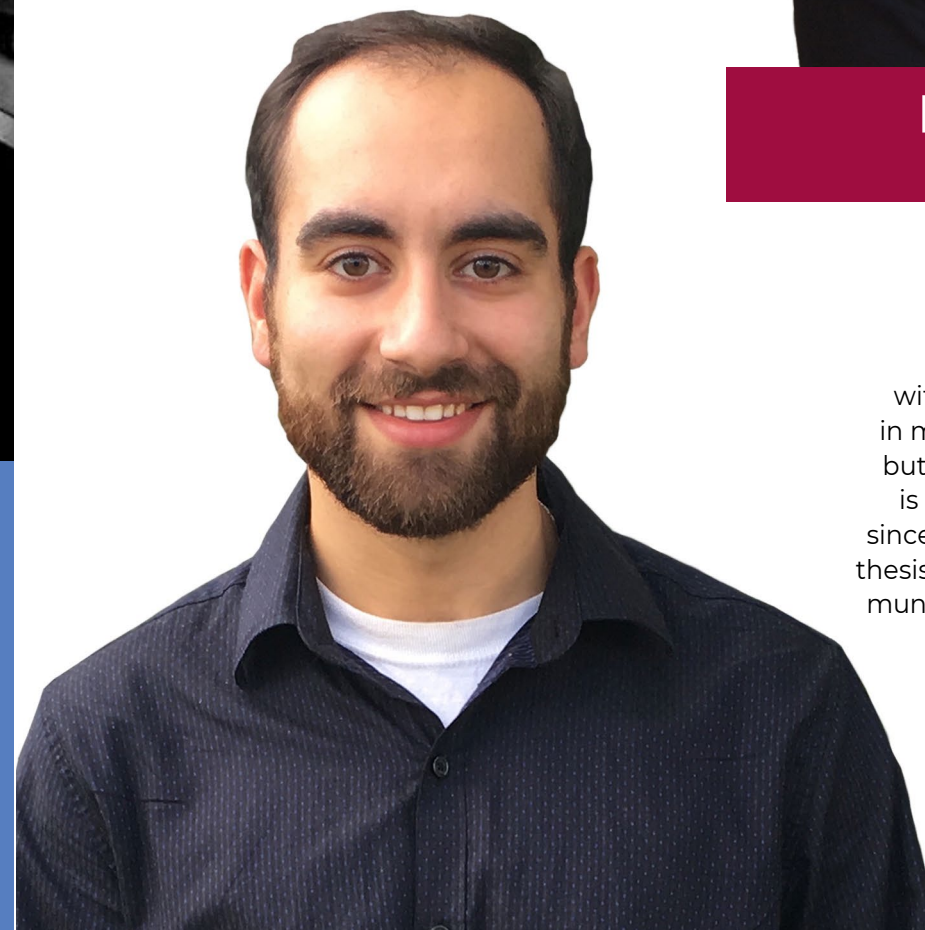
**The ISJL's Legacy Giving program can help you meet your planned giving goals. To learn more, visit [www.isjl.org/planned-giving](http://www.isjl.org/planned-giving) or email us at [information@isjl.org](mailto:information@isjl.org).**

## MEET THE 2018 ISJL INTERNS

Margaret is a graduate of New York University, where she designed a major around food system policy and the history and culture of food and nutrition. Margaret's interests in southern Judaism come from her family's roots in the Arkansas Delta, and she conducted a series of oral histories with southern relatives in 2016. Since then, Margaret has worked on several other relevant projects; conducting oral histories on bureka (Sephardic handpie) production in Atlanta, and recording a podcast on the growth of kosher barbecue. Raised between Vermont and Upstate New York, Margaret is finishing her second year in Birmingham, Alabama where she has worked as a farmer, a teacher, and a baker. She is excited for the move to Jackson and the chance to continue learning about southern Judaism while honing her skills in historical research.



**MARGARET WEINBERG**  
HISTORY DEPARTMENT



**JACOB MORROW-SPITZER**  
HISTORY DEPARTMENT

Jacob is a recent graduate of Tulane University with a BA in history and Jewish studies and a minor in mathematics. He's originally from Portland, Maine, but has mostly adapted to the New Orleans heat. He is thrilled to be interning with the ISJL this summer since the work will closely align with his senior honors thesis, which examined Jewish political involvement in municipalities across Louisiana and Mississippi during and just after Reconstruction. He is excited to conduct similar research this summer and hopes the internship will be a stepping stone toward enrolling in graduate school to pursue a Ph.D in history.





From the Blog

# THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE SOUTHERN SYNAGOGUE

By Bob Canter

I HAD A LUCKY SOUTHERN Jewish break: Soon after moving to North Florida from California, I was hired as the 5th grade teacher at the Block Family Religious School at Temple Israel in Tallahassee. I adapted quickly to my new congregation and fully embraced all aspects of Temple life. I figured Jewish life in the South would basically be like Jewish life anywhere. And in some ways, it is; but in other ways, it has a special nature all its own.

I didn't put my finger on it right away; but one morning during

Sunday school, it struck me.

We start each Religious School morning with a *t'filah* (prayer) service in the sanctuary. As the song-leader led us through the service, I watched a father in the first row, his arm around his kindergarten-age daughter. They were sharing the prayer book; intensely focused on the page. The dad was pointing out each word to his little girl, and they were reciting the prayers and songs together.

The sight of a Jewish father holding his young daughter close to him as they both participated

in the children's service was something I rarely saw in my old San Francisco Bay Area synagogue. At that larger religious school, a few parents did stay for *t'filah*, but those who did mostly sat in the back of the sanctuary, away from their children.

Don't get me wrong; the parents at our synagogue in California were of course devoted and caring. But there was an important difference, I believe — the surrounding environment, and how that culture brings us together.

The Jewish population in the



TEMPLE ISRAEL IS MY OASIS OF JUDAISM. LIKE AN OASIS, IT IS A WELCOMING SIGHT; INDEED, LIFE-GIVING. YOU LINGER THERE, DWELL THERE, MEET AND RELAX WITH OTHERS THERE.

San Francisco Bay Area is in the hundreds of thousands. Where we lived in the East Bay alone, there were four established Reform-affiliated synagogues. People had plenty of Jewish choices, and it was not uncommon for families to leave one synagogue and join another.

The situation could not be more different in Tallahassee, where we have a much smaller population. There's only one Reform congregation, and I believe that this is why the synagogue plays a more central role than it does in larger cities with multiple temples.

The synagogue is often the only Jewish organization in a small Southern town. As a result, Southern Jewish life in these communities is more concentrated and focused. The Jewish community is concentrated in terms of where we gather to pray, worship, learn, socialize and send our kids to school. The synagogue is where you see your "family."

"I'll see you at synagogue," we say to each other.

No need to specify which one: Everyone knows where you are talking about.

In Tallahassee, Temple Israel is

my oasis of Judaism. Like an oasis, it is a welcoming sight; indeed, life-giving. You linger there, dwell there, meet and relax with others there. You feel safe, and comfortable.

In Tallahassee, we Jews are fortunate to enjoy an excellent relationship with the community at large, and do not feel threatened or excluded; Temple Israel is valued as a cherished pillar of the community. This is due in large measure to the efforts of our rabbi, Jack Romberg, who for the last 18 years has made outreach to the non-Jewish community a core value of our synagogue. To our own membership and our neighbors, our synagogue is welcoming and friendly.

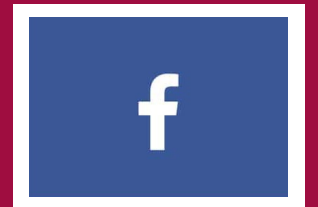


THIS, THEN, IS THE SPECIAL NATURE OF MY SMALL TOWN SOUTHERN JEWISH SYNAGOGUE, AND WHAT SETS IT APART... IT IS MY OUTPOST, MY SAFE HARBOR WHERE MY SPIRIT IS SET FREE.

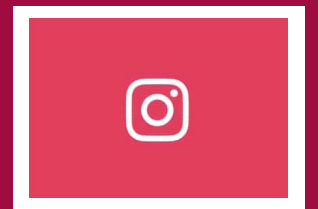
This, then, is the special nature of my small town Southern synagogue, and what sets it apart from bigger metropolitan congregations. It is my outpost, my safe harbor where my spirit is set free. I believe that we embrace our synagogue more fervently here than elsewhere because, frankly, there is nowhere else to go for Jewish life; so the one uniting place we have is a space we all cherish, support, and sustain. Our Southern synagogue is our lifeline to all things Jewish — our oasis of Judaism — and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Bob Canter is an ISJL community partner in Tallahassee, Florida. He recently wrote this for our Southern & Jewish blog on MyJewishLearning.com ([www.myjewishlearning.com/southern-and-jewish/](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/southern-and-jewish/)). If you want to contribute to the blog, email Beth Kander-Dauphin at [kander@isjl.org](mailto:kander@isjl.org).

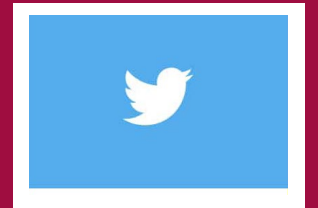
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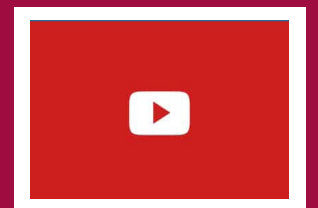
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In these pages, you can see the impact our education, history, heritage and interpretation, cultural, community engagement and rabbinical programs have on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1- April 15, 2018 to enable our important work.

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