

SPRING 2010

CIRCA

Newsletter of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life



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ISJL's EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

10 Education Fellows

13 States

3,000+ Students

60 Religious Schools

10 'Go and Teach' Conferences



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Andy Muchin

Design

Marie Owen

P. O. Box 16528

Jackson, MS 39236

601-362-6357

Fax 601-366-6293

www.isjl.org

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Ten years of continuing the tradition



Message from
ISJL Board Chair
Rayman L. Solomon

Earlier this year, I was asked to give a keynote address at a symposium on "Judaism and the South" at the Crain-Maling Center of Jewish Culture at Hendrix College in Conway, Ark. The Center's very able director, Professor Marianne Tettlebaum, had assembled an impressive array of speakers, including a number of excellent students and the talented writer Steve Stern. I was asked to talk both about the history of Southern Judaism and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

One of the historical points I made was that the story of Southern Jews was defined by the attempt to create community rather than to adhere to religious practices. In isolated communities throughout the South, Jews attempted to connect with their Jewish neighbors in a broad geographical area while building a strong Jewish cultural and religious life that often varied greatly from the ritual and dietary laws of their ancestors. Temples in the Southern states were among the earliest members of the Reform movement. They often served families who lived a drive of several hours away. Meanwhile, generations of Delta Jewish teenagers from Memphis to New Orleans (on both sides of the Mississippi River) gathered on weekends to socialize.

The 10-year history of the ISJL continues this tradition of expanding the community of shared Jewish experiences throughout the region. ISJL President Macy Hart has always

spoken eloquently of creating a unified virtual congregation in the Institute's 13-state region. Macy and the staff have pursued this goal through many of our efforts. ISJL-sponsored cultural programming brings noted authors and performing artists to congregations and communities throughout our region. The very successful tour of noted Israeli jazz multi-instrumentalist Amir Gwirtzman, which has been generously underwritten by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, is the latest of such programs.

In our History Department, Dr. Stuart Rockoff's web-based "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities" has brought together the stories of Jewish communities and congregations in eight states, with plans for five more. The narratives document the commonalities of the Southern Jewish Experience, such as the many Jews who served as mayors. Similarly, more than 1,000 people are drawn together weekly through the thought-provoking electronically delivered "Taste of Torah" *d'var Torah* that all three of our Rabbis – Debra Kassoff, Batsheva Appel and now Marshal Klaven – have written.

The ISJL makes its most concentrated attempt to create one community within the region through the Education Department. Over the past 10 years, we have created and fine-tuned a core curriculum for Early Childhood through 12th grade that has been

adopted by congregations in each of the 13 states in the region. Whether students attend religious school at large congregations with professional educators in New Orleans or Atlanta, or meet at small-town temples or synagogues to be taught by lay teachers, they are bound together through study of the same materials at the same time through the ISJL curriculum. The bonds are strengthened through the efforts of ISJL's Education Fellows, who visit each congregation three times during the year and correspond weekly with the teachers. These Fellows coordinate their work so that when new projects are designed or new materials are created, they are available to all schools at the same time. Also instrumental is the annual "Go and Teach" Education Conference in June that brings together representatives from all of the participating congregations in the region to learn about the curriculum and pedagogy.

Macy's expert leadership is vital to creating community in our region. Equally important is the Board of Directors' unflinching support and willingness to work hard to realize that shared vision. And, of course, in the difficult economic times that we have experienced, the ISJL's important community-building could not occur without the individual and foundation support from so many of you. I am most appreciative of everything that each of you does.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Solomon".

The farmer's lesson of patience and perseverance



Message from
ISJL President
Macy B. Hart

In my previous article, I wrote about one of the two major issues that I think handicap the American Jewish so-called community. That article centered on the lack of elephant trainers available to remove the elephants from the room of dialogue. That shortage has continued our path of communal dysfunction. When was the last time you asked a professional or lay leader in your community how everything is going, and received an answer of “fantastic”? That could be a sign that they are talking around the elephants, avoiding the root causes of our challenges.

A second major concern is that we American Jews simply do not have enough farmers in our midst and therefore miss the valuable lessons learned from working the soil. I am the grandson of a merchant-farmer. Joe Schneider (my mother's father) came to this country by himself at age 12. He peddled from the northeast to Winona, Miss., where his cousin owned a department store. After a few years of working for the cousin, my grandfather bought a piece of the store, then more, then half, then the entire store. He was successful selling clothing to several generations of families. My mom and dad continued that tradition.

My grandfather also owned a farm. In fact, some of my earliest recollections are of gathering

eggs in his henhouse. I also remember planting strawberries, corn, cotton, okra, tomatoes, watermelons and many other crops. Oh, I was impatient to see the “fruits” of my labor. I would till a bit of soil, plant the seeds, work the soil into a small mound, water it and go home. The next day I would return to the mound and see it was still just a mound. I would return daily for a week or more before seeing a small plant emerge from the mound. Each day, I would observe that the mound yielded a larger plant. After a few weeks, I would see some blooms, then a miniature fruit. Finally, after 75-90 days, I could pick the fruit.

The wait seemed like a year, but I learned an important lesson. It takes time for things to grow and mature. We have to nurture our seeds in order to see them become a life-supporting part of our world. Unfortunately, we simply do not have enough farmers in the Jewish “community” to teach this crucial lesson.

The Jewish “community” is very impatient. We want change in key areas. We herald innovation and revisioning, but too many of us expect immediate results. All too often, consumers, funders and lay leaders celebrate newness but do not stay with an effort long enough for it to achieve the hoped-for change. The projects get

seed money, but not the ongoing funds they need to grow and bear fruit.

The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life always has worked toward addressing consensus-identified problems and enacting meaningful solutions within the Jewish community. Our solutions go to the root of these issues and advocate for sustainable commitment and culture change.

If you are a supporter, funder or leader pushing for a program, I urge you to think about sustainability. New or revised programs require multi-year funding and the funders' personal involvement and nurturing. These programs require lay and professional leadership to keep the momentum strong when the normal bumps in the road appear as a result of the changes needed. I am so glad my grandfather was a farmer as well as merchant, because it taught him to teach my Mom and Dad to teach me so that I could teach when my turn arrived. It's my turn now. I ask you to embrace the farmer's lesson of ongoing commitment to projects when you think about your role in the bigger and, we all hope, better picture of Jewish life in the decades ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Macy B. Hart'.

**EXTRA! EXTRA!
Read all about us!**

The media and the Jewish world have been brimming with news of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life's innovative work and accomplished staff.

ISJL Rabbi Marshal Klaven was the subject of a March 31 Associated Press news service article that appeared in at least 100 American newspapers and websites. Those media outlets included USA Today, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Houston Chronicle, Dallas News, Salt Lake Tribune, St. Petersburg Times and the Huffington Post website.

The article reports that Marshal travels the South in rented cars, "working with congregations that are too small to sustain their own full-time rabbi. Klaven, who is single, sometimes works in three or four small communities a weekend, performing weddings, leading [S]abbath services and visiting congregants who are ill."

He observes that while in large cities it's easy to assume someone else will pray or will get involved in Jewish community projects, "[T]hese small communities

know that there is nobody else. If they don't go, Judaism does not exist in these towns."

The AP article has inspired further coverage. A reporter from The Economist international newsweekly followed Marshal during a recent visit to Auburn, Ala. We expect to see that report soon.

Meanwhile, Amir Gwirtzman's travels around the South as a Schusterman Visiting Artist are attracting attention from myriad local news media and synagogue bulletins. A crew from

Alabama Public Television accompanied him to Hunstville, Ala., recently to film a broadcast segment. The ISJL is coordinating the Israeli multi-instrumentalist's eight-state tour.

Even the ISJL has jumped on the media bandwagon with some self-documentation. The Slingshot Fund provided a portable camera to each organization it is funding in 2010, a group that includes ISJL. The idea was to provide a video rather than a written report. Education Fellow Emily Andes led the effort to film and edit the five-

minute video featuring many of your favorite ISJL staff members and their adventures on the road. It's available by searching "ISJL" on www.youtube.com.

ISJL video also appeared in a Rosh Hashanah greeting on the Covenant Foundation website. Covenant honors and supports achievements in Jewish education.

We at ISJL are *kveln* – Yiddish for beaming with joy – that the world is noticing our innovative work and its positive impact.

http://www.isjl.org'."/>

A rabbi prays

By Rabbi Marshal Klaven



“So, what’s the big deal?” you may ask about the headline. “Doesn’t a rabbi pray every day?” Sure. Often my prayers – in terms of both words and deeds – are directed towards achieving the Divine dream of justice and peace for all. Rarely are my prayers provided a direct audience with those whose role is so instrumental in achieving those ends through the rule of law.

On Feb. 11, 2010, I was invited into the Mississippi State Capitol to present the opening prayer to a full session of the State Senate. In concert with this honor, the Senate recognized the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life – its mission as well as its staff (particularly our foresighted founder and President, Macy Hart), who were present that morning. It was indeed a humbling moment as I represented the ISJL and Judaism with these words:

O Heavenly Father, we – who have assembled here today to govern Your world by the rule of Law – have come to know You by different signs and symbols, by different forms and figures. Whether it be the Cross or the Crescent, whether it be the Star or the Circle, each – we pray – will serve Your people as a guide, directing us and inspiring us to walk in Your just ways.



Rabbi Marshal Klaven (center) of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life opened the Feb. 11 session of the Mississippi State Senate with a prayer. He was invited by Sen. David Blount (right), who led the Senate in the Pledge of Allegiance. Lt. Governor Phil Bryant (left) presided over the Senate.

But, should these not suffice, should we somehow get lost along the way, then let us remember – dear Lord – that we have yet one more inspired sign, one more sacred symbol that may still point the way to You; a sign all Americans know well: our National seal. For its centerpiece, the Eagle, reminds us of Your eternal promise sworn to the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness of this world: “I the Lord shall bring you to Me on eagles’ wings” (Exodus 19:4).

Yet, we also know well – our beloved Maker – that it cannot be by Your might alone that we shall arrive at a Land filled with Promise. No, dear Lord, these promises shall be realized when all become instruments of Your will. Therefore, we pray – with humble hearts and steadfast spirits – that just as that Eagle balances its flight with arrows in one talon and olive branches in the other, that You – God – will give each of us the strength of mind and the courage of heart to do the same. Because only with balance, not leaning too far to the left or too far to the right, can we hope to stay steady on our path to You.

יברכך יהוה וישמרך:

May the Lord bless and keep you.

יאר יהוה | פניו אליך ויחנך:

May the Lord deal kindly and graciously to you.

ישא יהוה | פניו אליך וישם לך שלום:

And may the Lord’s favor be upon you, granting you peace.

Some may see these words and the opportunity to share them from the State Senate podium as nothing more than one small step for a Southern Jewish man. I prefer to understand it as a giant gesture on behalf of the state of Mississippi, recognizing the strength that comes from diversity. I hope that this step will remain as a resounding reminder to each of us that at any moment we can be called upon to step-up and be an ambassador of Judaism. For as the great military reporter of World War II, Meyer Levin, wrote in 1950, “Injustice towards the Jew cannot be overcome by getting people to forget us... only by getting to know us.”

Rabbinic Intern set for summer

Student Rabbi Jason Levine will assist the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life's Rabbinic Department this summer as a Rabbinic Intern. He will provide rabbinic services to ISJL partner communities, write occasional "Taste of Torah" weekly commentaries and lead some of the ISJL office's weekly learning sessions. He hopes to leave his mark on the ISJL by composing a pamphlet on interfaith programs for communities.

Jason attends the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati and maintains a



student pulpit at Temple Anshe Emeth in Pine Bluff, Ark. He brings to our communities a passion for Judaism, specifically Southern Jewry, as well as a wealth of experience in interfaith engagement. As he employs his knowledge gained from HUC-JIR in our visits, he will enhance his skills necessary for his future rabbinate, ensuring that the thread of Southern Jewry remains strong in the tapestry of American Judaism.

Jason emerged from a large pool of high-caliber rabbinic and cantorial students interested in our Summer Rabbinic/Cantorial Internship.

Committed to a better life for all

By Malkie Schwartz

And the name of the newest department at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life is... the Department of Community Engagement. We appreciate the input we received from CIRCA readers as we sought a fitting name for the department. The name Community Engagement expresses the ISJL's commitment to maintaining and expanding the contributions of the Jewish community to the broader Southern community, to which we belong. Community Engagement makes clear that the ISJL is committed to partnering with others to ensure the best possible outcomes for communities in our region.

While contributing resources is crucial, especially to people who are struggling to meet their basic needs, we need ongoing engagement to create lasting impact. It is easy to underestimate what we learn from one another. When we engage and build relationships

with individuals and institutions, we are better able to understand the choices they are making and to work with them to advance their own visions for their communities.

Most of my work, which I balance with my law school classes, has been to research the many potential partners for ISJL Community Engagement efforts. Sometimes I have the opportunity to get involved in the efforts. Here in Jackson, Miss., Blackburn Middle School is introducing a Peer Mediation program. The school community – Principal Brown, teacher Ms. Harkins, counselors and students – want to address fighting in the school. Peer Mediation will empower students to resolve their own conflicts, based on the understanding that they are more likely to follow through on a resolution they reached themselves.

Students will be called upon to serve as mediators to help their peers resolve conflicts.



The process generates new solutions that allow each party to get some of what it needs. Through the Department of Community Engagement, the ISJL has been providing curricular materials and a facilitator, me. In the coming months, I will continue to help train the peer mediators so that the program can be launched when school opens in the fall. As the Department of Community Engagement develops, we hope to work with many of our partner Jewish communities on projects that address pressing local needs.

Five new Fellows to join Education Department

Five new Education Fellows will join the staff of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life in June. Michelle Blumenthal, Lauren Fredman, Sara Silverman, Claire Solomon and Mark Swick will begin two-year stints with ISJL as traveling educators who work with Jewish religious schools throughout the South. They will join four second-year Fellows.

The ISJL received more Fellow applications this year than ever before. We are delighted by the talents, skills and personalities of our wonderful, new staff. Here is an opportunity to get to know them:



Michelle Blumenthal is a 2010 graduate of the University of Arizona

with a double major in Judaic Studies and Communication. She was an active member of the Alpha Epsilon Phi sorority, taught at the Kurn Religious School of Temple Emanu-El in Tucson, Ariz., and interned at her campus Hillel. Having spent nine

summers at URJ Greene Family Camp and the spring of 2009 studying in Israel, she has a strong passion for Jewish education. Originally from Houston, Michelle served last summer as intern at the ISJL's Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. She looks forward to living and working in Jackson.



Lauren Fredman received a bachelor's degree in Journalism with a

minor in Psychology from the University of Missouri in December. She grew up in Salt Lake City and Denver, where she was involved in the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and served on her chapter and regional boards. After graduating from high school, Lauren spent a year studying and volunteering in Israel. In college, she served as President of the Hillel House and taught at both the religious and Hebrew schools of the local synagogue. Lauren loves traveling, being outdoors and painting. She is excited to move to the South and join the ISJL team.



Sara Silverman was born and raised in Houston. She moved to Tempe,

Ariz., where she received a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Arizona State University. Her love for children and education sprang from her second home, URJ Greene Family Camp. After spending summers there as a camper, she worked as a counselor and ultimately assistant unit head in charge of educational programs for the 4th and 5th graders. Sara is ready to be back in the South and excited that the ISJL is giving her the opportunity to share her knowledge of Jewish education with others.



Claire Solomon always says she has dual city-ship: she spent the

first half of her life in Chicago, then moved to Philadelphia. She spent the last four years in upstate New York at Skidmore College. She received a bachelor's

degree in American Studies with a minor in English in May. At Skidmore, she was involved in Student Government, Hillel and interfaith endeavors. She enjoys singing (in choruses and in the car), reading, writing, and listening to and telling stories. Claire is excited to relocate south; her grandparents live in Helena, Ark.



Mark Swick, a native of Bethesda, Md., is thrilled to be

joining the ISJL staff. A 2010 graduate of Indiana University, Mark majored in Jewish Studies and History. Throughout his life, Mark has loved learning about and teaching Judaism. He served as President of the Helene G. Simon Hillel Center at IU and sang in IU's Jewish a cappella group, HooShir. He also supported the US-Israel relationship on campus and nationally. Mark cannot wait to meet the Jews of the South!



Goodbye and thank you to the five departing Education Fellows (from left): Janine Jankovitz, Rachel Jarman, Shelby Deeney, Lena Wise and Sami Gannon.

Farewell to five fine Fellows

We are approaching the time of year when we say goodbye to the Education Fellows we have grown to love and who have been wonderful ambassadors of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life for the past two years. As always, these amazing people are heading to outstanding opportunities. We like to think we have helped them along the way.

- Shelby Deeney will attend law school at Washington University in St. Louis beginning in the fall as she pursues a career in international law.
- Sami Gannon is moving to Atlanta, marrying Jason Tanenbaum and has accepted the position of Youth and Teen Director at Temple Sinai there.

- Janine Jankovitz, once a lover of the East, now has eyes only for the South. She will be working at the Eudora Welty Commons Gallery in Jackson, Miss., as an Arts and Cultural Events Promoter.
- Rachel Jarman, who hails from Connecticut, is moving back to Jackson from the ISJL Field Office in Dallas and pursuing work in museum education.

- Lena Wise is moving back to her hometown of Houston, marrying Eric Lieb and studying for a master's degree in Public Administration at the University of Houston.

We thank them all for their fine work and wish them all the best in the future.

Annual Education Conference: Three days of magical moments

In these times of economic hardship, one might question why the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life offers the annual "Go and Teach" Education Conference without charging a registration fee to participants. Perhaps the ISJL could save money by bringing in fewer speakers, by providing less material or even by offering the conference every other year. Perhaps we could choose a less professional venue.

Not a chance!

The Education Conference is an essential investment for ISJL. At the conference, Jewish education is the priority as participants are honored and supported for their work. The conference is recognized throughout the country as one of the premier Jewish education gatherings.

Each conference produces many magical moments. Teachers network and collaborate, identify challenges and brainstorm solutions. They enjoy "aha moments" when they learn a skill from some of the finest instructors in Jewish education, who are donating their time to share their knowledge. The ISJL

Education Curriculum, which now serves more than 3,000 Jewish students, comes to life.

This year, we are privileged to present Rabbi Samuel Joseph, Ph.D., a visionary in the field of Jewish education, as our keynote speaker. Rabbi Joseph is Professor of Jewish Education and Leadership Development at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. His special interest is how Jewish institutions and organizations can achieve excellence as they seek to fulfill their mission and vision. He is one of many wonderful instructors scheduled for the conference, which will take place June 27-29 in Jackson, Miss.

We look forward to seeing hundreds of Jewish educators from 13 Southern states as ISJL continues to invest in providing an excellent Jewish education to every Jewish child. For more information, contact the ISJL Education Department, (601) 362-6357, or visit the ISJL website, www.isjl.org.

Do tell: What ISJL means to our constituents and colleagues

As we reflect on the 10th anniversary of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, we're proud of all we've accomplished. But you don't have to just take our word for it. We hear often from people who benefit from our work or who enjoy working with us to fulfill our mission. Here's what they tell us:

Betsy Chernau Nashville resident sat for ISJL Oral History interview



I am a fifth-generation Nashvillian. There are not many of us from my family left in Nashville. My grandchildren don't live here, so it's very important for them and my descendants to see this Oral History video someday. My childhood memories and those of my mother's are, of course, unique to our family, and I am grateful they will be preserved. My mentally sharp mother, Elizabeth, died a couple of years ago at 101 years old. Among the many stories she shared through the years was of her grandfather being strung up by the KKK on his way to market. He was saved by being able to make the Masonic distress sign so that a Klansman cut him down. As a result of this incident, he wore an ascot around his neck until his death. Of course, there are many other stories to share. The oral history interview was a fun experience. [ISJL Oral Historian Josh Parshall] was charming. He was relaxed, thus allowing me to feel entirely at ease. I did so enjoy talking to him!

'It's very important for my descendants to see this Oral History video someday.'

Joel Lurie Grishaver Co-owner, Torah Aura Productions, author, scholar and educator



Jews in small towns are wonderful, and much of the Southern Jewish community is in small towns. There is graciousness, a hunger, an appreciation you don't find in the big, urban cities or elsewhere. When you teach at ISJL Education Conferences, it feels like you are making a difference, teaching ordinary people who will go back and do their best to save the Jewish people and the world. You can't do better than that.

'When you teach at ISJL Education Conferences, you are making a difference.'

Cynthia Kristan-Graham Director of Education, Congregation Beth Shalom, Auburn, Ala.



The ISJL has been a lifeline to me in more ways than I can enumerate. For the first time, our small Sunday school is using a consistent and dependable curriculum that is both student- and teacher-friendly. As Director of Education, I have the pleasure of attending the ISJL's annual Education Conference. Besides being intellectually and spiritually fulfilling, it is the closest thing to an adult Jewish summer camp that I have found. The visiting ISJL Rabbis and Education Fellows have brought professionalism to and inspired enthusiasm within our lay-led congregation. The rabbis have tutored *b'nei mitzvah* students and our first confirmation class in creative, long-distance learning arrangements. ISJL Rabbi Debra Kassoff officiated at the *bar mitzvah* of my son, and ISJL Rabbi Batsheva Appel officiated at his confirmation and my own adult *bat mitzvah* ceremony. What more can I say? The ISJL has helped this California native survive – and sometimes thrive – in the South.

'ISJL Rabbis and Education Fellows brought professionalism and enthusiasm.'

Wendi Ochs
Education Director,
Temple Beth El,
Pensacola, Fla.



Eleven years ago, the Temple Beth El School for Jewish Living was a typical small congregational school. Much of what we taught was beautifully Jewish, but inconsistent. We had difficulty finding teachers who could develop engaging lesson plans. We were filled with passion, but lacking in focus. Then along came Macy Hart and the ISJL. We were fortunate to be one of the schools asked to attend the first ISJL “Go and Teach” Education Conference. Our school has never been the same. We’ve benefitted from many positive changes through our partnership with ISJL, including:

- **Consistent curriculum.** We have a clear idea what we will teach each year.
- **Ongoing support.** ISJL education professionals are available when needed.
- **Teacher recruitment and retention.** With no need to develop lesson plans, teachers are easier to enlist. With ISJL’s curriculum support, teachers are more likely to remain.
- **Increased confidence among families.** They appreciate the consistent spiral curriculum approach.
- **Annual Education Conference.** Our teachers develop skills, improve their knowledge and network with colleagues from around the South.
- **Education Newsletter.** This wonderful source of information helps teachers focus on upcoming holidays and prepare for class.
- **Growth and change.** New, tested educational programs come our way each year.

‘Families appreciate the consistent spiral curriculum approach.’

Greg Weisman
Rabbinical student,
former Education Fellow



During the two years I spent at the ISJL (2005-7), my duties as an Education Fellow took me to more than a dozen congregations across the South. Through my interactions with them – spending *Shabbatot* together, learning from and teaching each other, coming together at our Education Conference – I learned an important truth about our communities: as much as they fit within a type, each is unique. While smaller, more isolated communities share some characteristics, each has its own essence, its own spirit. Now that I am three years into rabbinical school and finishing a two-year term as the student rabbi for a small congregation in southern California, I realize how important my ISJL experience was. I constantly find myself reflecting on my time at the ISJL, using what I learned and adapting it to what I am doing now.

‘I constantly find myself using what I learned and adapting it to what I am doing.’

Joel Hoffman
Author who has made
two speaking tours for ISJL



The ISJL blends a daring vision with a commitment to excellence in practice. As a result, its programs – whether aimed at children, adults, or communities in general – are well thought out and well executed. As an author and presenter, I have found working with the ISJL to be both easy and rewarding. Its attention to detail lets me focus on my lectures, and I look back on each event knowing that I’ve been part of a program that people really appreciate. It’s a winning combination.

‘I look back knowing that I’ve been part of a program that people really appreciate.’

Oral History's Four A's

By Josh Parshall

In my first year as Oral Historian at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, I have had the pleasure of talking to many wonderful people. The quotes on the following page are from just a few of the interviews I've done for our growing oral history archive. Sometimes, people turn the tables and ask me what I do in my job. I explain **The Four A's**:

Acquisition: get high-quality recordings of interesting interviews –

This is the best part of the job. From my first interview with George Copen in Tupelo to my most recent conversation with Benjy Nelken in Greenville, everyone I spoke to this past year revealed a unique

perspective. In all, I recorded 41 video interviews from August to February. Much of the new material from the last year comes from Tennessee, a state in which we had previously done little oral history work. In the coming months, we will add interviews with members of Jewish communities in Texas and Kentucky.

Archiving: store the results securely in multiple formats with supplementary resources –

In addition to making several small changes in how we document important information about each item in the archive, we are working to establish a new digital storage system. A growing number of interviews is already saved to an in-office hard drive in digital formats. A new storage device will allow us not only to expand this collection, but ensure its continued security.

Access: make whole or partial interviews available to the public in print and multimedia form –

Look for additions to the Oral History page in the History section of our website, www.isjl.org. Along with up-to-date information on the ISJL Oral History Program, we will post links to video clips from our archives. In addition, I have worked with ISJL's Education Department to incorporate

a series of interview excerpts into a new supplemental adult education program. The clips, along with introductory notes and contextual information, will be available through our website for classroom or at-home viewing.

Assistance: help Southern Jewish communities to do their own oral history work with meaningful, high-quality and long-lasting results –

After meeting with local Jewish historians in several communities, it is apparent that collecting our stories for future generations is a shared priority. It is difficult, though, for volunteer and part-time collectors and archivists to keep up with quickly changing technological standards. Our first step in helping local oral historians is our new online manual, which has recently been made available through the Oral History page of the ISJL website. Eventually, we will offer workshops for training local oral historians and presenting the important work of the program.

For online interview excerpts, as well as a brand-new guide to do-it-yourself oral history research, check out the newly revamped Oral History page on the ISJL website: http://www.isjl.org/history/oral_history.htm.



AWARD WINNER – Dr. Stuart Rockoff (left), Director of the History Department of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, receiving the Preserver of Mississippi Culture Award from the Mississippi Humanities Council (MHC) on Feb. 26. Stuart was honored for his work at ISJL and collaboration with colleagues throughout Mississippi. With him is MHC board member Andrew Mullins.

*Irene Bass of
Blytheville, Ark.*

**On moving from
Los Angeles**



“Well, I never saw Blytheville until I moved here. Artie picked out our other house – he did everything – and I didn’t see it until we moved here. But I do remember when we walked in the house to see it there was a note on the counter from Huddy Cohen, ‘Call me as soon as you can.’ That was my first experience with Huddy. ... When I saw Blytheville, I couldn’t believe it. Small town, you know, just something I wasn’t used to at all. ... We got settled. And then, before I knew it, the High Holy Days were here, and that’s when I started, you know – I took the three oldest kids to the Temple. Making friends in Blytheville is not the easiest thing, and if I didn’t have the Temple family, I don’t know what I would’ve done, I really don’t.”

*George Copen of
Tupelo, Miss.*

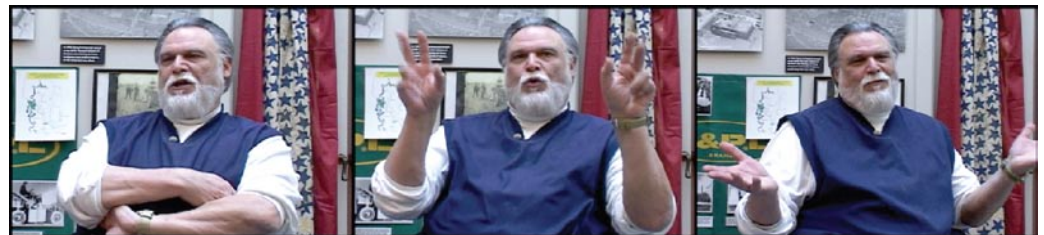
**On his
Bar Mitzvah party**



“It wasn’t punch and cookies afterwards, it was a full-fledged dinner, and the liquor flowed. And that was during the time of Prohibition, but we weren’t too worried. We took over the little café in the Hotel Tupelo – now torn down – and we weren’t too worried because we had the mayor there and the chief of police...”

*H. Benjamin Nelken
of Greenville, Miss.*

**On the civic role
of Jews**



“What I always thought was interesting was the participation of the Jewish community here in Greenville. Greenville was an interesting study, not just in general growth of a city, but it was an oasis of tolerance for years. Religious tolerance and racial tolerance. And the Jews always were welcomed here, felt very comfortable here and participated in the growth of the community and in the actual governing of the community.”

*Mira Kimmelman of
Oak Ridge, Tenn.*

**On moving from
Cincinnati, and life
as a Holocaust
survivor**



“Like a new life, a new leaf in a book. ... Tennessee, first of all, was regarded as the end of the world. People felt sorry for the Kimmelmans, who moved to Tennessee. But we did not know: Oak Ridge is not [like the stereotype of] Tennessee. We have been made welcome from day one. The first time we came to the synagogue, we were right away invited to people’s homes for dinner, which was very, very unusual, because in Cincinnati, except for the family, no American Jewish family ever opened the door to us. So, it was a revelation. A month after we arrived, I started to teach in our religious school, and I’m still doing it. I’m still at it – as long as I can. As long as we have students.”

Bible scholar wows crowds in four cities

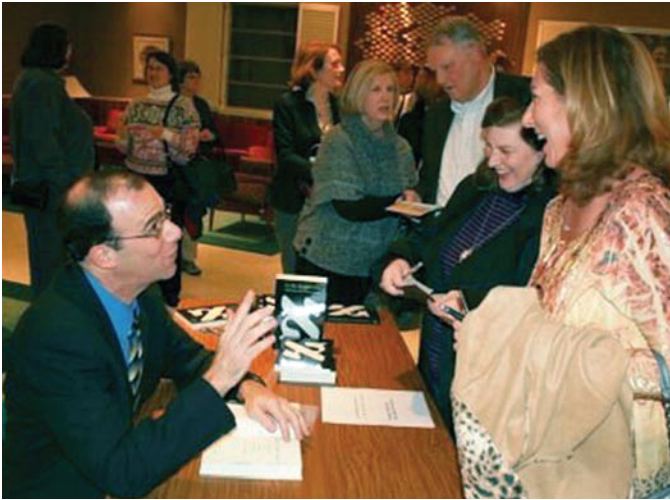


Photo by Rob Goldsmith

Author Joel Hoffman signing books and chatting with readers in Dothan, Ala.

Modern understanding of the Bible is plagued by mistranslations and misunderstandings that can be corrected and unraveled. That's the message that scholar and author Dr. Joel Hoffman brought to four cities Feb. 8-11 on a Southern States Jewish Literary Series tour organized by the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

Hoffman, an expert in translation, Hebrew and the Bible, spoke about his

2010 book *And God Said: How Translations Conceal the Bible's Original Meaning*. He spoke at Temple Emanu-El, in Dothan, Ala., Temple Beth Or in Montgomery, Ala., Temple B'nai Shalom in Huntsville, Ala., and Temple Beth El in Knoxville, Tenn. (co-sponsored by Heska Amuna Synagogue). More than 300 people attended his universally well-received presentations.

The Southern States Jewish Literary Series presents talks and book signings by distinguished authors.

New menu of cultural programs available

Whether it's a musician, author, scholar or comedian your community wants, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) can help you find just the right Jewish cultural presenter. The ISJL's new Cultural Programs Menu lists six presenters and 10 possible programs. They are:

Southern States Jewish Music Series

- **Lil' Rev** – The singer, multi-instrumentalist, songwriter and music historian offers three one-man programs that weave his singing and string instruments with narrative: "The Jews of Tin Pan Alley," "Jews & Blues" and "Fiddler on the Roof' Meets 'O Brother, Where Art Thou.'"

- **Bert Stratton, AKA Klezmer Guy** – The two-person show "Driving Mr. Klezmer" features klezmer, Yiddish swing, Tin Pan Alley and spoken word. Bert plays clarinet and reads his comedic prose sketches accompanied by Alan Douglas on vocals and piano. They're members of the Yiddishe Cup klezmer band.



- **Uri Barnea** –Through live music (violin, recorder and voice) and recordings, Rabbi Barnea presents an historical survey of Jewish music from ancient times to hip-hop. He has a Ph.D. in music and enjoyed a long career as conductor, composer and violinist.

Southern States Jewish Literary Series

- **Charles London** – The author will speak on *Far from Zion: In Search of a Global Jewish Community*, an exploration of the Jewish Diaspora, including New

(continued on page 14)

Israeli jazzman conquers South with music, knowledge, friendship

He has received the key to the City of Lakes Charles, La., and invitations to return to almost everywhere he has performed. Israeli jazz multi-instrumentalist Amir Gwartzman has been wowing audiences and making friends in eight Southern States all spring as a Schusterman Visiting Artist – a program of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation in partnership with the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.

The ISJL Programming Department has been working with congregations, Jewish Community Centers, universities, schools, music museums and music festivals to schedule Amir for his “Inhale-Exhale” solo concert, “Israel Is a Mixed Bag of Pipes, Horns and Flutes” demonstration workshop and master classes.

Amir has performed worldwide as a solo jazz musician and a member of the Israeli world music band *Esta*. He plays (and shleps) a woodwind section full of saxophones as well as

bagpipes, clarinet, classical flute and African, Asian, European and Middle Eastern instruments. Amir likens flutes to people. “The flutes may look a little different and sound a little different, but in the end, they’re all flutes,” he says.

In “Inhale-Exhale,” Amir plays jazz, R & B and Jewish songs with a unique twist. He uses a loop machine to instantly record and play back each instrument, allowing him to build an ensemble sound. His workshop features a wider array of his instruments and his you-gotta-see-it-to-

believe-it-trick of playing three Irish penny whistles at once.

The praise for Amir has been non-stop. Len Springer of Lafayette, La., wrote to thank “the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life for helping make Amir’s visit to Lafayette so enjoyable for Temple Shalom members and for the broader community...We could not be more pleased by Amir’s good nature and fine musicianship.”

Bob Schwartz of Tupelo, Miss., noted: “In less than three days, Amir made six appearances here, including talks and demonstrations at a library and church, a workshop with college music students, visits to two public schools and a final concert. This was an ambitious

schedule, especially in light of our seeing up close just how intensive each of these appearances was. Every one was a joyous success.”

Amir also has played with some of the best musicians in Jackson, Miss., including a presentation at an international summit in Gulfport, Miss., attended by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Amir led the annual Mal’s St. Paddy’s Day Parade through downtown Jackson as he tooted his bagpipes.

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation underwrote the major costs of Amir’s visit. The ISJL handled logistics and some expenses. The ISJL hopes to collaborate with the Schusterman Family Foundation to bring more Israeli artists to the South.



Amir Gwartzman playing two saxophones simultaneously during his concert at Temple Sinai in Lake Charles, La.

(NEW PROGRAMS continued from page 12)

Orleans and Bentonville, Ark. *Far from Zion* was a finalist for the 2009 National Jewish Book Award. London is available to tour in November and December to support the release of *Far From Zion* in paperback.

- **Ellen Bernstein** – Teacher, rabbinical student and founder of modern Jewish environmentalism, Ellen Bernstein wrote *Let the Earth Teach You Torah, Ecology & the Jewish Spirit* and *The Splendor of Creation*. She speaks on “The Bible’s Ecological Roots”; “What Can Judaism Offer the Environmental Movement?”; and “Ecological Understanding of Shabbat.” Ellen is available from Sept. 20-26.

Southern States Jewish Performance Series

- **Michael “Ziggy” Danziger** – The comedian performs at clubs, colleges and gatherings nationwide. His Jewish-themed humor is popular with synagogue crowds. Ziggy has won Comedy Tennessee’s “Funniest Person in Memphis” competition and is the reigning “Funniest Jew in the Deep South.”

To see the full programming menu, visit the “Cultural and Art Offerings” section of the ISJL website, www.isjl.org, or contact Director of Programming Andy Muchin, amuchin@isjl.org or (601) 362-6357.

Jewish American Heritage Month: Many ways to celebrate in May

Since 2006, May has been recognized as Jewish American Heritage Month, a time to celebrate the achievements of Jewish Americans, foster pride among American Jews and educate and enlighten a wider audience about the history and achievements of Jewish Americans. Jews have lived in North America since 1654 and the South since the late 17th century.

The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, a program of Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, urges congregations to see Jewish American Heritage Month as an opportunity to explore their history and look further into the larger Jewish immigration story. Following are a few ways in which you can participate in Jewish American Heritage Month:

Oral history projects document and preserve the heritage of your community and connect generations. Check the ISJL website, www.isjl.org, for a guide to conducting oral histories with family and community members.

Expand the Jewish book collection at your congregational or community library. For a list of suggested books and to see which books are sold by the ISJL Peddler’s Cart, see the website. You’ll also find a list of **web resources**.

Check www.isjl.org for updates and let us know how we can help you celebrate this month in your community.

Save the Date

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