WINTER 2013





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This is ISJL

The ISJL is celebrating an important milestone this year. We're turning thirteen.

In the secular world, the number is not necessarily a significant one. Other than marking the onset of "the teenage years," there's nothing particularly special about a thirteenth year. But in the Jewish world, there is a lot of meaning in achieving one's thirteenth year.

It is the age of adulthood. It is when we claim our place in the Jewish community, accepting the responsibility of living a Jewish life. It is an acknowledgement of maturity.

And as we always tell *b'nai mitzvah* students, becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah is not the end of a journey. **It is only the beginning**.

That's why, as we celebrate our organizational "B'nai Mitzvah," we are focusing on the ISJL's past, present, and most importantly, our future. We are celebrating these past thirteen years, but we are planning for the next thirteen – and beyond. Our work here is not done. It is only beginning.

We also just received an early B'nai Mitzvah gift, which you can help us bring to fruition. Thanks to an anonymous donor, we have a matching campaign with a very quick turnaround time – March 15, 2013! If you participate in this campaign, the donor will match your "B'nai Mitzvah" gift to the ISJL on a 1:2 basis. This means your gift of \$100 becomes \$150, your gift of \$200 becomes \$300, and so on. But unless we can collect \$500,000 in pledges by March 15, we will not receive this gift. (You can find more information on page 3).

So enjoy some of the stories and memories you'll find in this issue of CIRCA, and stay tuned for our ongoing celebrations and announcements throughout our 13th year.

L'chaim!

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Message from ISJL Board Chair Rayman L. Solomon

This issue of CIRCA begins the commemoration of the B'nai Mitzvah year of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. As a baby boomer growing up in Helena, Arkansas in a classical Reform congregation before 1967, the year when the movement began to become more ritually observant, I was confirmed and did not become a Bar Mitzvah. So, this is my first "Bar Mitzvah speech."

The ISJL's celebration is considerably different from that of a b'nai mitzvah. The traditional ceremony marks a Jewish child's reaching an age at which he or she is responsible for his or her actions and accepts the obligations of being a Jewish adult. In the Institute's case, from the beginning, we set out an ambitious mission and carefully focused on it. In a decade we had almost completely fulfilled our programmatic agenda. Last year as we finished the first decade of the original mission statement, we reevaluated and updated it to focus on initiatives that will increase our effectiveness, our efficiency, and our sustainability.

My "speech" is also non-traditional, in that it borrows more from the parents' speech than the young person's speech. For rather than provide commentary on a Torah portion, I want to remark on the amazing accomplishments of the ISJL. What began as a Museum with a vision of serving the increasingly unmet needs of small and diminishing congregations throughout the South has become a dynamic and vibrant organization that has achieved national attention for its award-winning programs. We have extended our programming to all thirteen states of our region, and with our educational pilot initiative in St. Louis at Temple Israel we have expanded beyond our original boundaries.

Our rabbinic department has reinvented the 19th-century concept of the itinerant rabbi, and has brought comfort and learning and prayer to people who had thought they would never again have a rabbi for services or life-cycle events. We have partnered with Central Synagogue of New York to further expand rabbinic services to underserved communities through our Rabbis on the Road program. Our education program has become nationally recognized for its comprehensive and innovative curriculum. Our "delivery system" of itinerant Education Fellows has gained attention for producing a cohort of committed Jewish leaders of the next generation. Our history department's web-based Encyclopedia has won awards and is relied upon by scholars and the public as the authoritative source for the history of Southern Jews. Our cultural department has provided Jewish musical and literary programming for Jewish and non-Jewish communities throughout our region, and the Museum has mounted award-winning exhibits. Our newest department, Community Engagement, has pioneered innovative pilot programs which will help fulfill our collective obligation to promote justice.

The most traditional part of this "speech" is the thank yous. First, I cannot express adequately my appreciation for our President, Macy Hart. His vision and energy are unequalled by any leader. Our COO, Michele Schipper, has brought excellent organizational and interpersonal skills to the ISJL. The administrative and professional staffs are dedicated and phenomenal. I also want to recognize the past chairs of the Board, Herman Kohlmeyer, Sylvia Goodman, and Jay Tanenbaum, for their leadership and devotion to the Institute. The past and present Board members have all contributed their time and considerable talents to ensure the Institute's success.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for the financial support you have provided. We have gotten extraordinary support from the Goldring and Woldenberg Foundations. Many other foundations have invested in our programs, for which we are grateful. Individuals have also responded generously to our annual requests for contributions. While I am not certain that as the ISJL continues to develop we have any need for the traditional b'nai mitzvah gift of fountain pens, we will certainly continue to depend on your financial generosity. You'll read in this issue about our current short-run matching campaign; it's a wonderful time to give.

Blicht



Message from ISJL President Macy B. Hart Hard to believe it's been thirteen years since the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life became a reality.

In the beginning, we were told we were "trying to do too much" and that it would "never happen." I am pleased to announce that we officially begin our celebration of our B'nai Mitzvah with all departments up and running. More importantly, they are all delivering programs to communities large and small, to individuals, groups, professionals and lay people (like myself), children, adults, schools, churches, community centers, public venues and more.

Before there was the ISJL, there was the MSJE – the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. We started as an organization dedicated to preserving history. The ISJL grew out of our realization that we didn't just want to preserve history, we wanted to *ensure a future*.

On a regular basis our staff, our board, and even I, get glowing, sometimes even seemingly over-thetop praise for the work of the ISJL. It's always an honor, but rarely a surprise, because we are proud and aware of how much of an impact we're having (as always, I encourage you to visit our website, Facebook page, or Twitter feed to see just how much we're doing). But the other day, I got a phone call that *was* a surprise. An anonymous donor, from outside of the South, called me out of the blue to say they love what we're doing. Not just that, but they love what we're doing so much that they wanted to help us out. They told me that if we can raise at least \$500,000 by March 15, they'll give a matching grant – fifty cents on the dollar. So if we raise \$500,000, we will in fact have raised \$750,000. If we raise a million, we'll get \$1.5 million.

The work we do is not about dollars, but we cannot do the work we do without the funding to support it. As I mentioned above, all of our departments are up and running. That's six departments: education, rabbinic services, community engagement, cultural programs, history, and museum projects. Each department strives for efficiency as well as efficacy. But the plain truth of the matter is that when you're serving more than a hundred communities and thousands of individuals. it costs money to do so. We have transportation costs, staffing costs, program materials costs, the "non-sexy" costs associated with maintaining our office and dayto-day operations.

As we celebrate our 13th anniversary, our "B'nai Mitzvah" year, we want to continue being able to cover those costs, provide those programs, and do "too much" – which we actually think is "just enough, with more to do." Please consider supporting the ISJL, and pledging your gift by March 10 to help with the matching campaign (you don't have to write the check, just write out your pledge - you'll have until 2015 to pay it out!), and remember that in addition to your financial support, the board and staff at the ISJL are always happy to talk with you about the work we're doing, how it can be replicated in other regions, and how, together, we can not only ensure our past but also ensure our future.

L'shalom,

A Picture of Success

Rabbi Marshal Klaven

The ISJL rabbinic department was established in 2003. A decade later, our current itinerant rabbi and Director of Rabbinic Services, Marshal Klaven, reflects on an important question: what is "success"? And with the help of some pictures – one now historic, one more recent – we can see a glimpse of this meaning.

What does success look like? Does it look like numbers printed on our paychecks, the titles trumpeted before or after our names, the credit conceded to us by our opponents or the accolades of our allies?

No. Success is the next generation embracing the noble heritage of Judaism, passed down to them from the generation before as a priceless inheritance.

Thanks to God and our sacred cooperation with partnering congregations, the ISJL has seen this success time and time again throughout the South, including through our longtime interactions with the 40-member congregation of Temple B'nai Israel in Tupelo, Mississippi. In the late 1980s, photographer Bill Aron captured Temple B'nai Israel's spiritual lay-leader, Marc Perler, in a meaningful moment with one of the congregation's youngest members – a then very young congregant named Elliott Copen.

"I remember it like it was yesterday. Looking up into Mr. Perler's eyes, I felt awe and even a little fear, not knowing if I would ever measure up to this great teacher of our community," recalls Copen, now a grown man.

"But, he did," Mr. Perler confirms. "And not just because he's a little taller than me now."

Rather, Elliott – with the love and support of his congregation – went on to embrace our heritage, living his life in accordance with its eternal values. In fact, though he now lives in Memphis, Elliott often returns to Tupelo, lending his time and talents to his congregational family. That's where I found him the weekend of November 9-11, 2012, as the congregation warmly welcomed me in to celebrate our faith together. After a fulfilling dinner and Havdalah service, Marc and Elliott ascended the *bimah*, took out the scrolls, and faced one another. They stood as they had, nearly 25 years ago, though this time eye-to-eye: truly, a picture of success!

2012 ISJL Rabbinic Services Department Impact

Number of Community Visits: **97**

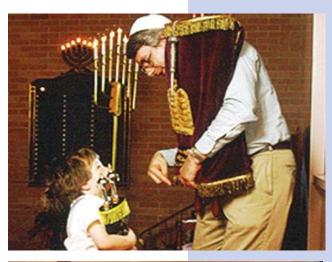
Number of Different Communities Visited: **52**

Number of States Visited: **13**

Number of Program Participants: **5070**

Number of Miles Traveled: **38,893**

ISJL Taste of Torah Subscribers: **1511**





The ISJL's First Department Turns 24

Rachel Jarman Myers

While the ISJL may be celebrating its B'nai Mitzvah year, the museum department is actually celebrating its twentyfourth year. The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE)'s original commitment to documenting and preserving Southern Jewish life eventually grew into what the ISJL is today – but even before the ISJL existed, the MSJE was making its mark, including embarking on a major research and photography project.

As the MSJE was collecting Jewish artifacts, museum project director Vicki Reikes Fox called upon photographer Bill Aron to capture the personalities and places of both diminished small town populations and vibrant larger communities throughout Arkansas, Mississippi and Alabama. In 1991, the museum hired Marcie Cohen as its project director, who worked with Aron on the tours.

Images and stories that came from these tours in 1991-1995 were originally exhibited in the museum, and they currently tour the country as the traveling exhibit Bagels and Grits. Many of these photos also line the halls of the ISJL office. The synagogues, store fronts, and faces of Southern Jewish families watch over the work of the ISJL everyday.

Years have gone by, and some of the people and places featured in Aron's photographs are now long gone. But there are also some communities that are not only still here, but have even grown and evolved since they were last photographed.

Temple Shalom of Northwest Arkansas was once a small group that met in the Hillel house at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Today, they are now over 60 families, have a resident rabbi, and in 2009 built a larger facility for both their congregation and the Hillel.

Congregation Beth Israel in Biloxi, Mississippi was always small, but decided to build a synagogue in 1958 to unite families along the Gulf Coast. After Hurricane Katrina destroyed their building in 2005, the Jewish community regrouped and built a new facility in neighboring Gulfport with the help of larger congregations across the country.

In 2011, I designed a Jewish history exhibit for B'nai Sholom in Brookhaven, Mississippi after they donated their building to be used as a local museum. One day, after I returned to the office from Brookhaven, I looked up from my desk and recognized a photo of the temple I had just visited. As fate would have it, Aron's 20-year-old photo of B'nai Sholom hangs directly across from my office. Since the future of the congregation was uncertain in 1991, Aron took photos of the temple and the remaining members to ensure that the Brookhaven Jewish community would be known by future generations.



Temple Shalom of Northwest Arkansas 1993

2013





Congregation Beth Israel 1992

2013



Temple B'nai Sholom 1991

Thanks to the MSJE's exhibit in Brookhaven, while the congregation is no more, its legacy is being preserved.

If you are an avid CIRCA reader or read our blog, you know that our collection of Southern faces and places did not end in 1995. Each week, out staff continues to create Kodak (or





2013

Instagram) moments while they are serving current Jewish communities. Because of this effort, I'm confident that when we look back in another thirteen years these photos will not be memories of diminished communities; rather, they will highlight communities that continue to grow and flourish.

Programming

Then and Now

Then: Recollections from Lynette Allen

Lynette Allen was the first Director of Programming for the ISJL. She served in the position from 2000-2003.



Admittedly, my decision to leave my position as Director of the San Diego Center for Jewish Culture and come to Mississippi raised more than a few eyebrows. It took some explaining to share my excitement over the vision of being part of an innovative organization that promised to reach Jewish communities previously isolated from the array of Jewish cultural experiences that we had come to offer in our metropolitan areas. In the years leading up to 2000, there had been a proliferation of cutting edge, sophisticated and enriching Jewish expression through the arts. I was intrigued and challenged by the opportunity to bring these offerings to the South.

There was indeed an adjustment to Southern Jewish life. For example, I learned to clarify that I grew up in "the other" Cleveland. (Ohio, not Mississippi!) But more profoundly, I got to know a Jewish community with deep ties to its Southern heritage, along with a commitment and pride in their Jewish identity. I met people who exemplified Southern hospitality and who warmly welcomed me into their homes and enthusiastically supported the work and mission of the ISJL.

The ISJL's programming offerings began with the creation of Jewish Cinema South, a unified cohort of film festivals, executed collaboratively with three communities in the first year: Mobile, Montgomery, and Nashville. Jewish Cinema South proved that we could successfully and efficiently coordinate programming by combining resources and by centralizing the process. By all accounts, Jewish Cinema South succeeded in offering films with Jewish content to both the Jewish population and to the communities at large throughout an expansive area. Jewish Cinema South continued through 2010, ultimately launching film festivals in eleven cities

throughout the region, many of which continue to operate independently. The initial support of the ISJL and the Jewish Cinema South network enabled these festivals to grow and become locally sustainable.

Branching off of the success of Jewish Cinema South, the ISJL used this successful expenseshared model to present other programs, including lectures, concerts, and more. Being at the ISJL in its nascent stage was an amazing experience, and though I've moved back to San Diego, I am richer for having been part of the Southern Jewish experience.



Now: Thoughts from Ann Zivitz Kimball

Ann Zivitz Kimball is the current Director of Programming at the ISJL.

Between Lynette's launching of the department in 2000, and my own tenure beginning in 2011, the Directors of Programming at the ISJL each contributed to the growth of the department with a constant commitment to providing high quality, affordable Jewish programming throughout the region through expense-shared tours. By providing marketing materials and public relations support, as well as handling all travel arrangements and developing relationships with artists and presenters, the ISJL works to ensure that even the smallest of synagogues can experience the same programming opportunities as larger communities.

Most recently, Dr. Ron Wolfson embarked on a ten day tour with the ISJL, inspiring audiences in New Orleans, Alexandria, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Jackson, Mississippi; Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama; and Pensacola, Florida. He delivered twelve lectures in ten days, and imparted his enthusiasm for study and engagement wherever we went. Alone, these congregations might not have been able to bring down this luminary scholar; in partnership with the ISJL, several communities united to share in a program that was transformative for everyone involved, including Dr. Wolfson.

With all of our programmatic offerings, we strive to meet the needs of the Jewish community as well as the community at large. Our programs provide adult education, Shabbat and holiday enhancement, family programming, interfaith outreach, fundraising and fun-raising. As I like to say, "There's something for everyone at the ISJL!"

From MSJE to ISJL: A Coming of Age Story

Stuart Rockoff

The ISJL began as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in 1986. This article traces the evolution of the organization, and shows how changing from a museum to an institute was a natural organizational progression.

In 1986, Macy B. Hart founded the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE) to preserve the physical artifacts and stories of southern Jewish communities that were dving. That May, the Plough Foundation of Memphis donated the money to build the museum on the grounds of the Henry S. Jacobs Camp in Utica, Mississippi. In 1989, the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience was dedicated in a ceremony featuring former Mississippi Governor William Winter and Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Under the part-time supervision and curation of Vicki Reikes Fox, the museum quickly began to document Jewish life in the region, especially in those places where the Jewish community was shrinking. The museum commissioned noted photographer Bill Aron to travel the Deep South, taking pictures of contemporary Jewish life and vestiges of Jewish history in the region. The collection of photographs he produced, "Images of Southern Jewish Life," traveled around the country in addition to becoming the museum's first permanent exhibit. In 1991, the museum hired Marcie Cohen as its full-time project director. Under Marcie's leadership, the museum continued its outreach to Jewish communities in the Deep South, collecting artifacts and oral histories.

In 1992, the museum entered into an unprecedented preservation agreement with Temple B'nai Israel in Natchez, Mississippi. The dwindling congregation owned a beautiful synagogue, built in 1906, and feared that it would be unable to maintain the building into the future. The MSJE agreed to take ownership of the building. As long as the congregation remained active, they would maintain and operate the building; but once the congregation disbanded, the museum would preserve and operate the synagogue as a satellite branch of the MSJE. After the agreement, Marcie put



The Natchez Jewish Experience exhibit was put on display at Temple B'nai Israel.



The MSJE's award-winning Alsace to America exhibit from the summer of 1998.

together a series of exhibit panels telling the history of the Natchez Jewish community, entitled "The Natchez Jewish Experience," which was installed in the basement of the building. In 1994, the museum organized a Natchez Homecoming event, which brought in guest speakers and musicians to celebrate the history of Mississippi's oldest Jewish community.

The next major project of the museum was the "Alsace to America" exhibit, which told the story of Alsatian Jews' immigration to the South. In preparation for this exhibit, the museum hired Dr. Mark Greenberg, the first historian on its staff. "Alsace to America" was placed in downtown Jackson during the summer of 2008. In an effort to encourage visitors to spend multiple nights in the area, museum staff prepared a free guidebook to Jewish sites along the Mississippi River between Memphis and New Orleans entitled "Cultural Corridors." Exhibitgoers were also encouraged to visit the MSJE locations in Utica and Natchez. During the summer of 1998, over 26,000 people visited one of these MSJE exhibits. "Alsace to America" won several awards, including the Travel Attraction of the Year from the Mississippi Tourism Association and the SEMC Exhibit of the Year.

After the summer, a smaller version of "Alsace to America" was installed in the Utica site as the new permanent exhibit space. During its first thirteen years of existence, the MSJE was focused on preserving, documenting, and interpreting the history of Jews in the South. But Macy's ambitions transcended the museum and its preservation of the past.

By the late-1980s, Macy had the idea to create the UAHC Center of Jewish Life – Southern Region as a model for better serving the congregations of the Movement. Macy envisioned a circuit-riding rabbi, who would travel to congregations in the region who did not have rabbinic leadership, as well as a traveling educator, who would work with the religious schools in the region. In 1999, Macy secured grants from the Goldring Family Foundation, the Woldenberg Foundation, Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation, the Samuel Bronfman Foundation, Soref-Breslauer Foundation and others to support the expansion of the MSJE's mission. He also received a \$250,000 challenge grant from various donors, which he supplemented by raising \$216,000 in new gifts. These donations provided the seed money for the newly expanded organization.

In January of 2000, the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience officially changed its name to the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, with an explicit mission to serve the small, isolated Jewish communities of the region that had long been overlooked by national Jewish organizations. Macy left his position as director of Jacobs Camp, which he had held for thirty years, in order to devote all of his energy to the ISJL. In September of 2000, the ISJL held a gala event in New Orleans to officially launch the new expanded organization. During the event, Bill Goldring announced a \$3 million naming gift to the ISJL from the Goldring and Woldenberg Foundations. With this important funding secured, the Goldring/ Woldenberg Institute

of Southern Jewish Life moved forward with its new expanded mission.

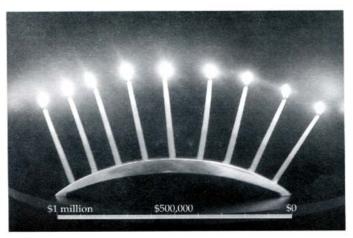
One of the first areas the ISJL expanded into was cultural programming. Lynette Allen came to the ISJL in 2000 to organize cultural events and bring touring artists and scholars to the region. The following vear, Lynette created Jewish Cinema South, partnering with various local Jewish communities to create a network of film festivals that highlighted Jewish themes. In 2001, the ISJL organized "From Spanish Roots: A Jewish Cultural Expo," a weeklong series of events highlighting the heritage of Sephardic Jews in the South.

During 2002, the ISJL worked on a strategic plan that mapped out the organization's proposed expansion throughout the South over the following decade. To help fund these

ambitious goals, Macy initiated a challenge in which a few individual donors pledged to give \$500,000 if the institute could raise another \$1 million. With the help of his small staff, Macy reached the \$2.2 million dollar goal by the October 31 deadline. The successful challenge campaign enabled the ISJL to hire new programmatic staff, including a rabbi, oral historian, educator, two education fellows, and seven summer interns.

That same year, the ISJL hired its first rabbi, Debra Kassoff, a recent graduate of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Rabbi Kassoff was charged with serving the 34% of southern Jewish congregations that did not have a full-time rabbi. The idea of a circuit-riding rabbi was not new – such itinerant rabbis had been visiting small Jewish communities as far back as the 19th century.

Meeting the Challenge



The ISJL announced that it had raised the \$1 million challenge match in the winter 2003 issue of CIRCA

In this sense, the ISJL Rabbinic Department was reviving a "bold, old idea."

The Education Department evolved significantly during these early years. By 2000, the ISJL was seeking to hire a professional Jewish educator, though it would take a few years to achieve this goal. Initially, the idea was to hire a credentialed educator with a graduate degree who would hold training sessions for religious school teachers in the Deep South, focusing on those from small congregations that did not have a full-time educator. The Education Department would create a standardized curriculum with carefully prepared lesson plans to help Sunday School teachers. By 2002, with the department still in the idea phase, Macy decided to use Education Fellows: recent college graduates who would work directly with the congregations in the region.

In 2003, the ISJL moved forward with its education program, hiring Jill S. Jacobs as the interim educator who created the spiral design of the curriculum, and partnering with the **Community Foundation** for Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago under the leadership of Bill Rubin who helped consult and write the curriculum. The plan, announced in the 2003 winter issue of CIRCA, was to write a detailed curriculum, with scripted lesson plans,

and to hire a full-time educator and two education fellows. The concept behind the curriculum was to create a "common body of Jewish knowledge" for supplementary religious school instruction. The ISJL Education Program would be piloted in four states: Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Arkansas, with plans to eventually expand to cover the 13 states of the South. The ISJL planned to hold a "Jewish educational workshop" at the end of the summer during which the curriculum and lesson plans would be presented to religious schools participating in the program. During the summer of 2003, the first Education Fellows, Beth Kander and Amanda Abrams, along with three interns, all of whom were graduate students in Jewish education (two from

the Jewish Theological Seminary and one from Gratz College), wrote the first semester's lesson plans. The first education conference drew 32 participants from ten different communities, who agreed to take part in the first-year pilot of the program.

As the ISJL expanded its work, it continued the mission of the museum to preserve the legacy of the Southern Jewish Experience with a History Department under the leadership of Dr. Stuart Rockoff. A central part of the ISJL philosophy was to take programs into the field, reaching out to the isolated Jewish communities in the South. As Macy wrote in CIRCA in 2003, "our success will be built upon the road trips of our staff." That year, the ISJL's program staff visited 36

different communities, most of which were in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas. Over the next several years, the institute would expand its reach, eventually encompassing all thirteen states of the region. By 2012, ISJL staff was visiting 132 communities in thirteen different states. Building upon the original vision for the museum, the ISJL now works to bolster Jewish life in the region, and to help ensure the Jewish future in the South.



Gary Shapiro of the Community Foundation for Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago teaches at the first ISJL Education Conference in 2003.

The History of Oral History at the ISJL

Josh Parshall

Even before the creation of the ISJL, collecting stories from the Jewish South was an important part of the mission of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE). In fact, the earliest recordings in our archives preceded the museum by several years. Today, we have over 800 interviews from people across the South, representing thirty years of collecting people's stories.

There have been many who contributed to this collection. Carolyn LeMaster, who conducted interviews during the 1980s as research for her book A Corner of the Tapestry: a History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, donated all of her original tapes to the MSJE. By the early 1990s, Marcie Cohen Ferris was conducting interviews for the MSJE while on the road with photographer Bill Aron, who was taking the pictures that now make up the exhibit "Bagels & Grits." Ferris' audio tapes are not formal interviews, but these conversations, often recorded in retail stores during

business hours, stand out because of their candor and spontaneity.

In 1997, Hanna Griff was hired as the museum's first official oral historian. Hanna only stayed for a short time, but she recorded a number of strong interviews and improved the level of audio recording. Mark Greenberg, the museum's first historian, conducted several oral histories, and helped introduce digitally videotaped interviews. Examples of these video interviews were used during the MSJE's "Alsace to America" exhibit. In the late 1990s and into the early years of the ISJL, filmmaker David Sampliner also conducted a number of interviews.

Until 2009, the oral history position at the ISJL was only filled intermittently, which meant an inconsistent expansion of the collection. However, the collection was never dormant, and one highlight from this period is the ISJL's partnership with the Jewish Women's Archive to produce an oral history project with the Jewish population of the Louisiana



Josh Parshall with the ISJL Oral History collection

and Mississippi Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The Katrina's Jewish Voices Oral History Project began filming interviews in August 2006, just a year after the disaster and continued into the spring of 2008. The collection, which includes more than 80 oral histories, provides a unique and important resource for understanding the storm's impact on Jewish individuals and Jewish communities in New Orleans and elsewhere in the region.

Since joining the ISJL in 2009, I have attempted to strengthen the ISJL

Oral History Program by incorporating elements of the collection into our Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, developing a system for storing interviews digitally, and making them available to interested parties. For communities that may have disappeared, leaving no archival record, oral history can be the only way to make sure their legacy lives on. Knowing the importance of preserving this legacy, the ISJL remains committed to collecting stories of the Southern Jewish experience, and making these stories available to a wider audience.

In the Beginning

Helaine Braunig

It's traditional at a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony to hear from leaders in the local community – not only the rabbi, but also Sisterhood presidents, youth group members, and others. So we asked one of the leaders in our education community, Helaine Braunig, a veteran religious school director who has partnered with the ISJL for a decade, to share her thoughts on the ISJL's educational evolution.



Helaine Braunig

More than 50 years ago I was a Girl Scout. I went to meetings, earned badges, and learned some songs that I still remember: "Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, the other's gold." (That may not have been the title, but since that's all there is to it, the title and the lyrics may have been one and the same.) Another song, I do remember by title: "No man is an Island." The lyrics included: "No man is an island, no man stands alone. Each man's joy is joy to me. Each man's grief is my own. We need one another...." Later, as an English teacher, I was able to recognize the source of that song: Meditation 17, by the English poet and Christian clergyman John Donne. You may well wonder what these songs have to do with the ISJL.

More than 30 years ago, I became the educator at B'nai Zion in Shreveport. I was the mother of two young sons (this career pre-dates the birth of my third son), and I was a teacher. I wasn't particularly well educated as a Jew, but I loved to learn, and I wanted my own children to have a good Jewish education. I became familiar with many Jewish publishers and publications, and I put together a curriculum that often worked for our students. However, while the song counseled me that "no man (and I heard "woman") is an island," I often felt like one. Since I had no other professional colleagues in Shreveport, I had no one from whom to learn the skills that I needed as a principal. I read a lot, and I discovered

an organization called CAJE (then it was the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education). In 1981 I went to my first CAJE Conference at Brandeis University, and I learned that I was not alone as a Jewish educator. For many years CAJE sustained me, and our school became one I was quite proud to helm.

Then, more than 10 years ago, I had a call from my old SoFTY friend Macy B. Hart, who had started the ISJL and was now planning his first Education Conference. It was to be aimed at schools without any educator at all, but he said he needed me to be there. I went to that conference, listened to the presentations, and reconnected with a few old friends (remember the "gold" of the Girl Scout song?). I learned about a curriculum that was to be piloted, and I was asked to use it in Shreveport. My veteran teachers were a bit skeptical, but we tested the waters and discovered some elements that we really liked. In addition, we discovered the meaning of "educational partnership," with young ISJL Education Fellows who understood the evolving curriculum and who were eager to visit our community to help teachers understand it as well. I no longer felt like an island. I was connected to a "Southern Jewish mainland" which included an ever-improving curriculum, an ever-improving

conference, and a new "silver" friend, Rachel Stern.

In the last 13 years, Shreveport's partnership with ISJL has yielded relationships that I treasure, curricular elements that I trust, and a conference that I can't wait to attend. The fellows have become my partners: when they make visits to educate or to lead worship or to introduce social action projects, we have fun, but we do serious work. With my many years of experience in the field, I am proud to mentor them; with their youthful enthusiasm and technological savvy, they challenge me to continue to grow. The curriculum has become more complete, more focused on a variety of learning styles, and more user-friendly for new teachers. The conference has brought to our "Southern mainland" some of the really big names in Jewish education, people whose intellect and experience and passion motivate everyone and make it seem not only possible, but easy to educate our children, no matter the size of our congregations.

I congratulate the ISJL on its B'nai Mitzvah year. Like our students who stand before us to read Torah in our congregations, we as educators celebrate the confidence that an excellent Jewish educational program provides. No matter where we live, we are not alone in our efforts to transmit our heritage. The ISJL, once a "silver" friend, has become treasured "gold."

Reflections from a Former Fellow: "A Life-Changing Experience"

Amanda Abrams

We also asked one of our first Education Fellows, Amanda Abrams, to reflect on the impact the ISJL Education Fellowship had on her life and career.

If you had asked me as a child what I saw myself doing professionally as an adult, there was a strong chance I would have spoken about working in marketing, running for political office, or even doing something in a math-focused field. But there was absolutely no chance I would have ever discussed working in the non-profit sector, much less the Jewish non-profit sector. It's not that I was uninterested in the field; I simply had no idea that it even existed. Working at the ISJL from 2003-2005 changed this perspective, and I've since spent the past decade working in the Jewish communal world.

When I first considered applying for the ISJL Education Fellowship, I was working in advertising in New York City. This was the career I had always envisioned for myself – I worked in a large, global advertising agency, spent my time developing strategies for brands that almost any American would recognize and helped develop ads that were broadcast on radio stations and television channels nationwide. As exciting as this all sounded to me when I entered the field, the more immersed I became in my job, the greater personal void I felt. I knew that I needed to make a drastic change but was unsure what opportunities I should pursue. It was at this time of my own "search for meaning," that I encountered the Education Fellowship at the ISJL, and for that I am forever grateful.

When I heard Macy first describe the fellowship, it was just a vision. There were no Education Fellows, no curriculum, no education conference and certainly no ISJL van. Despite the lack of any predecessors or any kind of proven track record from previous fellows, I decided to take the plunge and apply for the fellowship. As someone who grew up in a small town in Mississippi where my brothers and I were the only Jewish kids, the vision of the ISJL's education program struck a personal chord. My parents and grandparents struggled to provide me with a Jewish



Amanda Abrams with Rachel Stern in 2004

education, so much that they drove an hour every weekend for my brothers and me to attend religious school. Being Jewish in a small town is anything but easy, and I felt that by taking the Ed Fellowship, I had the opportunity to possibly make it even a little bit easier for some of the parents who encountered the same struggles that my parents had encountered decades earlier.

I will forever credit the ISIL with my decision to pursue a career in Jewish non-profit management. My experience as an Ed Fellow illuminated the need for strong Jewish professional leaders, and, it led me on the path to where I am today. It's been ten years since I moved to Jackson from New York, and much has changed in those ten years. After my fellowship concluded, I moved to Los Angeles to pursue a dual Master's program, earning my Masters in Jewish Non-Profit

Management from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and my MBA from the University of Southern California. I absolutely loved my time on the West Coast, but missed being in the South and therefore set my sights on Atlanta after graduate school. I began working at the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in 2007, and have been with the organization ever since. I currently serve as the Vice-President of Community Impact, overseeing the organization's community planning, annual campaign allocations, and governance functions. I absolutely love my job, and wake up each day knowing that, through my job, I have the opportunity to make a positive impact on the Jewish world. I will forever attribute to the ISJL my decision to pursue a career in Jewish communal service.

Community Engagement

Malkie Schwartz

What's another Bar or Bat Mitzvah practice? The completion of a mitzvah project – much like the work of our community engagement department.



According to Jewish tradition, thirteen marks the transition of child into adulthood. As adults. B'nai Mitzvah are viewed as independent people who, after thirteen years of training and preparation, earn our confidence in their ability to make wise decisions, keep themselves out of harm's way and secure their basic needs. The ISJL's Department of Community Engagement has designed its initiatives so that, as B'nai Mitzvah, they are able to sustain themselves.

Throughout this year, my three CIRCA columns will highlight some of the strategies we have been using to ensure each program's future success. In the last issue of CIRCA I talked about joining hands with Repair the World to pursue our mutual interest in creating meaningful and impactful service opportunities for Jews. With our focus on the South, we aim to work in collaboration with local congregations to organize projects that meet real community needs. Repair the World distinguishes "service that seems" from "service that matters." The ISJL appreciates that initiatives that truly matter are more

sustainable than "service that seems."

Initiatives that seem to produce goods are more pervasive than initiatives that actually produce good in the world. This is a hard concept to accept. When our youth participate in service, we want them to know that they are most certainly having a positive impact. Yet, we must accept that, unfortunately, wellintentioned service can yield unintentional consequences where the people we aim to benefit are actually hurt in the process. The reason we see so many initiatives where participants engage in "service that seems" is because they are often easier to organize, require less commitment on the part of the service-members and there is little-if anyaccountability to the people we seemingly benefit. The opposite is true for "service that matters" which requires that we become familiar with the opportunities and obstacles that people face before deciding upon an initiative. They require greater investments of time and energy. We must be accountable and inquire whether we have actually made a difference.



The investment in "service that matters" is worthwhile! Participants know when they are actually making a difference and are more eager to be involved where they are truly contributing. We applaud the work of Temple B'nai Zion. The congregation in Shreveport, Louisiana has agreed to adopt a "service that matters" approach. B'nai Zion, like many of our partner congregations, leans heavily on lay leaders who are stretched thin and are often charged with running the Hebrew school, setting up activities and programs for congregants, and so on. However, they have made a commitment to engage people outside of their congregation to help them determine how they can work with local community members and leaders to most effectively benefit the Shreveport community. Shreveport's commitment to "service that matters" has required lots of patience, learning and listening, however, the end outcome will be a program that makes a real difference and will be sustained by congregants who feel like their work is rewarding.

"Service that matters" continues to be at the center of the projects that we are piloting in Jackson:

- T.A.P. (Talk About the Problems): A conflict resolution/peer mediation program is the result of many conversations with local leaders and one principal who, for some time, had been looking for a peer led program that would improve the school environment.
- Read, Lead, Succeed: Students use materials that research has demonstrated improves student literacy. The ISJL was seeking opportunities to address the low literacy rates in our city, state and throughout our country. When a local principal talked about ways in which she'd like to encourage student-reading, we worked together to identify and develop a program that meets our objectives as well as those of the school faculty.
- The Health Express (Environment, Exercise, Eating Well): This initiative was launched in response to the high obesity rates in our schools. When discussing how we might be able to curb the expansion of this problem, we were informed about a health teacher who lacked sports equipment and was looking for innovative ways to teach her students about healthy living. Our idea of involving the students in the research and writing of a health magazine appealed to her and we are looking forward to publishing our first issue before the start of the summer. In addition, we are delighted that the University of Mississippi Medical Center's School of Nursing is working with us on this project because they, too, consider health education to be a priority.

Each of these initiatives has one thing going for them—they matter! While they matter to the ISJL, they are also aligned with the priorities of the students and the administrations we are working with. Adopting the "service that matters" approach demonstrates that we believe that the interests and needs of everyone involved matter---that we as people matter. These programs are sustainable due, in large part, to the degree to which it matters. Please let us know how you and/or your congregations are engaged in service that matters. Also, please contact us if you would like to know how we can work with your congregation to design a service program based on the "service that matters" approach.

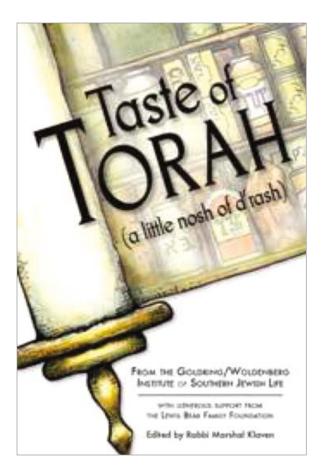
The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience is happy to introduce its newest program, The Texas Jewish Immigrant Experience Traveling Trunk.

This traveling trunk program is a hands-on educational opportunity containing artifacts, photographs, costumes, maps, board games and three lesson plans to teach Texas students about nineteenth century European immigration to the American South and how these Jewish immigrants made an impact on their communities.

This exploration of Texan Jewish heritage leads students to an important understanding and appreciation for our region's culture and diversity. **Three 2-hour lesson plans** explore this topic through multiple disciplines and is aligned with the TEKS curriculum competencies and objectives. The lesson plans are developed for fourth, fifth and sixth grade classes.



For more information on the contents of the trunk please visit our website at http://www.isjl.org/museum/ traveling_trunk.htm . Interested in bringing the trunk to your school? Contact the Museum Project Coordinator, Rachel Jarman Myers at rjarman@isjl.org.



Taste of Torah: A Little Nosh of D'rash

celebrates the ISJL's 13th anniversary! This book is a scrumptious bite into our tradition. With a dash of knowledge from our sages and sprinkles of insight from pop culture, you'll eat up the commentaries from the ISJL's circuit-riding rabbis. You'll also find Jewish recipes with Southern twists, like sweet-potato challah, pecan-pie hamantaschen, and hush puppy latkes. A great gift to satisfy intellectual and culinary appetites! Thanks to the Lewis Bear Family Foundation, all proceeds support the ISJL in our efforts to sustain and strengthen Jewish identity and Jewish values throughout the South. So reserve your copy today – and bon appétit! [Cost: \$18 plus shipping & handling].

To reserve your copy go to isjl.org/peddlers_cart/bookstore.htm

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In Memory of Elaine Crystal

Elaine Gradinger Crystal, a true woman of valor, will be missed by all who knew her. Her work with the League of Women Voters brought Elaine's attention to the difficulties facing the Jackson community surrounding the civil rights movement and school desegregation; she went on to co-found Mississippians for Public Education, a group committed to maintaining a viable public school system for all students. A lover of the arts, she volunteered with many arts organizations, including the Mississippi Museum of Art, Ballet Mississippi, and the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, among others. Millsaps College

invited her to become a Trustee in 1994, and awarded her a Doctorate of Public Service in May 2012. In addition to all of her civic involvement, Elaine was a dedicated mother and wife, and maintaining ties with the extended family was always important to her. She and her husband Manny were active members of Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson. Elaine and Manny were among the first board members of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, and were also among the first board members of the ISJL as the organization transitioned from "museum" to "institute." Elaine passed away in November 2012 after battling ovarian cancer for a decade; she is survived by her children, Lynn and Clay, both of whom currently serve on the ISJL board; two grandchildren; and many friends and family.

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