

SHALOM *y'all*

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



EXPLORING EDUCATION

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ON THE COVER:

The ISJL Education Team balances a lot to keep supporting, connecting, and celebrating with our communities!

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EDUCATION IS...

VITAL. EXCITING. VARIED. FUNDAMENTAL. A central facet of Jewish life. Something we can share with one another throughout our lives. Education is all of these things—and it's also the theme of this issue of *Shalom Y'all!*

When we began to roll out our new strategic plan last year, one of the biggest changes at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) was our shift from six programming departments to three core service areas: **Education, Culture, and Spirituality**. Throughout 2022, each issue of *Shalom Y'all* will share work, insights, and information through the lens of one of these three areas. We're dedicating this first issue to Education.

There is a quote from *Pirkei Avot* ("Ethics of the Ancestors," a seminal Jewish text compiled by rabbis in the 11th and 12th centuries) that sets exactly the right tone for this issue: "Ben Zoma says: Who is wise? The one who learns from every person" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1). This is our philosophy at the ISJL. We are constantly learning from our partners, communities, board, staff, and supporters. Everyone we encounter is part of our ongoing education.

In this issue, you will find updates from all of our service areas—and several of our supporters and partners—all sharing how their work at the ISJL or their connection to the organization is shaped by the core concept of education. From how our own educational experiences shape our connections to Jewish community to what educational philosophies inform our approaches to teaching and learning, the centrality of Education shines in a multitude of ways throughout these pages.

Here's to lifelong learning!

L'shalom,
The Board & Staff of the ISJL





Michele Schipper
CEO

THE OLD ADAGE “YOU LEARN something new every day” certainly rings true for me, particularly from the vantage point of my position at the ISJL. When asked to reflect on our core service area of Education, I actually found myself overwhelmed. Day in and day out, I am learning from our team, our partners, our programs, our presenters—it’s hard to even know where to begin!

For example, I started writing this message not long after our most recent text study led by Rabbi Caroline Sim. Held over Zoom as a live and interactive experience, participants from all over can come together to engage with the text and connect with others in a meaningful moment of Jewish learning. It’s something we only started doing this year, which you can read more about in Rabbi Sim’s article—and I invite you to join us for these ongoing, free, community-enriching study sessions.

A few days later I was enjoying the latest episode of the ISJL Virtual Vacation, learning about how Jews became involved in the southern scrap metal business. There’s so much to learn about our history, and it sheds light on many complex and important aspects of our past and the American story. I learn something from each episode.

Of course, whenever I need to find out more about a southern

Jewish community, I find myself heading to the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. It’s a resource that has taught me so much over the years. I remember being particularly moved when the Encyclopedia helped me to learn more about the Jewish community of Clarksdale, Mississippi, where my mother was raised.

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"THERE'S SO MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT OUR HISTORY, AND IT SHEDS LIGHT ON MANY COMPLEX AND IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OUR PAST AND THE AMERICAN STORY."
.....

We also bring so many terrific guest educators into our communities. Hearing the words of a learned scholar like Dr. Joel Hoffman or listening to beautiful Jewish music with artists such as Julie Silver and Dan Nichols roots me deeply in Jewish culture and always gets me thinking about how much more I want to learn and experience.

That’s already a lot of learning—and I haven’t even mentioned our actual Education initiatives yet!

Our Education services are varied and robust. I used the ISJL’s curriculum in my own classroom when volunteering as a Sunday school teacher at my congregation

several years ago. I feel so fortunate to have the partner-perspective when it comes to how valuable that curriculum support can be, especially alongside the collective enrichment the ISJL offers when it comes to classroom management, teaching techniques, literacy, and more. The Education team recently started coordinating professional development opportunities with Jewish luminaries such as Dr. Ron Wolfson, Dr. Bruce Powell, and Dr. Kathy Simon—free for our Education partners, and low-cost to anyone who wants to participate over Zoom from anywhere in the world. We are making Jewish Education exciting, engaging, and accessible... from right here in Jackson, Mississippi.

One of the reasons we publish *Shalom Y'all* magazine is to educate our supporters about the impact their donations have as they support our amazing work. We need our committed network of donors to make all of this happen: Education, Culture, and Spirituality. I am grateful for all of our supporters and hope that every reader is inspired by the ISJL’s work and will continue their support. It is an incredible opportunity to continue learning and growing together, and I intend to continue fully embracing my own education, every day.

Be well!

FROM THE CEO



Jay Hesdorffer
ISJL Board Chair

I GREW UP IN JACKSON, Mississippi. I went to Sunday School every week, and, well... it wasn’t exactly the most exciting aspect of my childhood. I dreaded heading to the synagogue on Sunday mornings. Our volunteer teachers tried to make the classes interesting, but I think it was a pretty rough experience each week—for the teachers, as well as for us!

When I was growing up, there was no ISJL. No organization providing curriculum, or supporting our teachers, or sending Program Associates to make our Sunday mornings fun and interesting. How much better might my memories of Sunday School be if we had been connected to an organization like the ISJL, and a whole network of

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"HOW MUCH BETTER MIGHT MY MEMORIES OF SUNDAY SCHOOL BE IF WE HAD BEEN CONNECTED TO AN ORGANIZATION LIKE THE ISJL, A WHOLE NETWORK OF PARTNERS SHARING THE SAME JEWISH EDUCATION EXPERIENCES?"
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partners sharing the same Jewish education experiences?

When the ISJL was going through our recent strategic planning process, we had to truly distill what our organization provides. Today, the ISJL is comprised of three service areas: Education, Culture, and Spirituality. So why did Jewish education make it into the top three?

Because the southern Jewish communities we spoke to, surveyed, and forged deep relationships with told us it’s their most critical need.

Prior to the strategic planning process, the ISJL embarked on a Listening Tour throughout our region to find out what was most important to the communities we serve. When asked what resources they needed, the answer was loud and clear: “education, education.” They wanted curriculum. They wanted visits from Program Associates. They wanted to be part of a network of support. They wanted not to be alone.

If not for the ISJL, who would be reaching kids in small southern Jewish communities? We are reaching them—serving thousands of students and hundreds of teachers, every single year. Thanks to the ISJL, they are supported. They know there is always someone they can call. They have the information they need. They have a vibrant curriculum. They have our talented and enthusiastic Program Associates to breathe life and energy

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

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"AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT THE ISJL IS DOING. HELPING THOUSANDS OF KIDS JUST LIKE ME DISCOVER WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH AS THEY GROW UP IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE SOUTH."
.....

into Jewish learning and give kids a chance to experience pride in their Jewish identity.

It may not sound like much, but it is everything if you’ve never had it. For me, the only way I could be proud of being Jewish was to learn what being Jewish was all about. Thanks to my family, camp, and the experiences I’ve had as an adult, I have a strong Jewish identity today. But it would have been tremendous to have a more meaningful, interconnected religious school experience. And that is exactly what the ISJL is doing. Helping thousands of kids just like me discover what it means to be Jewish as they grow up in communities across the South.

Thank you for supporting the work that we do.



ON THREE THINGS ISJL EDUCATION STANDS

RABBI MATT DREFFIN
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Upon three things the world stands: On Torah, on service (prayer), and on loving kindness. (Pirkei Avot)

THE RABBIS TAUGHT THAT there are three things that sustain the world—three things upon which we “stand:” Torah, prayer, and acts of loving-kindness. “Torah” is Jewish shorthand for, of course, education itself. Learning is at the heart of Judaism. I would offer that just as the world stands on three clear principles, so too does the Education service area at the ISJL.

The first principle is meaningful engagement. We are committed to making content that is engaging and dynamic. We never want someone to walk away from spending time with any one of our staff saying “Oh man, that was boring,” or “They were very nice, but I really didn’t get what we were doing there for an hour.” One of the ways in which we make sure we are being engaging is to think about different learning styles and different ways of presenting material for our learners. Our team spends several months in the summer preparing ourselves to go into communities—whether virtually or in person—to have a handle on some basic teaching and

group leadership skills to ensure that no part of a session is dull. Paying attention to the needs of the different learning styles is one of the big concepts we teach. We want to make sure visual learners are getting to see things; we want to make sure auditory learners are hearing and talking about things; and we want to make sure kinesthetic learners are moving—even feeling—the content. By paying attention to these three main learning styles, we will never be stagnant. We will never spend an extended period of time doing the same activity until it feels rote.

The second principle is “never assume.” We never want to make assumptions about knowledge. A lot of times, Jews will enter into “Jewish spaces” and think that everyone in attendance has the same level of Jewish education, similar backgrounds, and a shared Judaic language. They think everyone else knows the difference between a *schlemiel* (Yiddish for “fool”) and a *schlimazel* (Yiddish for “person with bad luck”); they



Opposite page: A religious school student helps set up his mom’s lesson. Top left: Students at Jackson’s Beth Israel Congregation. Lower left: Collecting tzedakah during Sunday school. Below: Youth group game night with Program Associate Landon Crawford. Bottom: Families show off their Shabbat paintings.



assume that everyone in the room has a family gefilte fish recipe; they ask for folks to lead the Shabbat blessings under the impression that everyone knows the order of candles, wine, and bread. By never assuming knowledge, we ensure that everyone feels a sense of belonging. We welcome everyone equally, empowering everyone to feel like they, too, can be successful learners.

The third principle is relevance. This third value—one no less critical

than the first two and in line with Jewish tradition—is to make the breadth of Jewish texts and wisdom relevant to the current times. What a lot of people may assume is that Judaism is an ancient and stagnant religion. That assumption couldn’t be further from the truth; our teachers of old and the great sages of the present have always grappled with what the Torah can teach us about how to live our lives in the present. We want our learners to feel like the world of our ancestors

is not perpetually in a faraway time and in a strange language; rather, it is a fountain that can be renewed as we navigate new situations, new transitions, and new phases of life.

With these three values in mind, we are ever-evolving as the landscape around us shifts and the needs of our partner communities change. Please reach out to us any time—we’re always happy to talk about our educational philosophies, as well as the nuts and bolts of our education resources.



To learn more about Education at the ISJL, email jewisheducation@isjl.org.

Who knows one?



FOCUS ON FAN

WHO KNOWS (MORE THAN) ONE?

RACHEL GLAZER

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE reason that we're so grateful for our ISJL "FAN" folks! The ISJL Fellow Alumni Network (FAN) is a group of over 60 former ISJL Fellows whose paths have taken them all over the country in a variety of fields, but who all got their start at the ISJL. As the position has evolved (hello, ISJL Program Associates!), so too has the network. What was once an annual "where are they now?" email has grown into a mentorship program, an organizing unit for in-person retreats, an active Facebook group where countless *simchas* (happy moments) are shared, and a venue for former ISJL Fellows to reconnect with their partner communities and share their love of southern Judaism.

In case you missed it, FAN hosted a fundraiser for the ISJL this past October with Who Knows One?, the online, live-action, laugh-out-loud

Jewish geography game hosted by Micah Hart. Former ISJL Fellows and ISJL education partners competed in a race to find "The Chosen One."

Folks from across the country tuned in to support one team or roadblock another by pledging donations live. Through these donations, teams gained game-making advantages while also contributing to the ISJL's mission of supporting, connecting, and celebrating Jewish life in the South. Talk about a winning move!

Between seeing community partners from all over the region to the nail-bitingly close rounds as our contestants raced to find the Chosen Ones, it was an unbeatably fun evening. You can still view the recording on our Facebook page, and it's never too late to visit www.isjl.org/donate and support our work!

As with any fundraiser, this event

involved much more than the few hours we saw live online. A team of FAN members met weekly for two months leading up to the event—a labor of love to help the ISJL and give back to the organization, as well as to catch up with ISJL staff and other Fellow alumni.

With leadership from Lauren Fredman (ISJL Education Fellow 2010-2012 and current co-chair of the FAN development committee), and Rachel Glazer ISJL (Community Engagement Fellow 2016-2018 and current ISJL Assistant Director of Education), a committed FAN team planned the logistics of gameplay and pledges, reached out to potential contestants and "super-connectors," and helped track donations during the night of the event. Michelle Chajet (ISJL Education Fellow 2010-2012) joined Micah to act as a ring leader of

the circus, providing running commentary that kept us laughing throughout the evening.

When asked why she volunteered for this event, Shira Muroff (Education Fellow 2016-2018) said: "I've loved informal games of Jewish geography my whole life, and getting the chance to pop up on some games of Who Knows One? during the past year because of my southern connections was a lot of fun."

Other members of the planning committee spanned cohorts from

2009 to as recent as 2020. Shira shared: "Having the chance to plan our own Who Knows One? game with other former fellows was a great way to reconnect with the larger FAN group. Lauren was even my FAN mentor four years ago!"

The chance to connect resonated with Lauren, too: "I really enjoyed seeing old friends and getting to know other alumni much better. It makes me want to have another FAN reunion soon!"

The connections didn't stop at the

planning stage, of course. "It was so much fun to see former Fellows and education directors, who may have never worked together in the past, turn into competitive teammates together during the call," Shira recalled. So often, educators and rabbis spend their time setting up games for others; what a treat it was to see them in the competitors' seats! All told, the event raised more than \$3,000 for the ISJL—and even better, reminded us all of how many people we know and love in our far-flung but incredibly interconnected community.

Special thanks to...

Lauren Fredman, Shira Muroff, Michelle Chajet, Jay Debrow, and Alex Glass for organizing this fundraiser, and to Micah Hart for hosting such a joyful event. Thank you to the contestants for being such good sports during a wild ride of a game: Abby Klionsky (ISJL Education Fellow 2014-2016), Rachel Katz (ISJL Education Fellow 2017-2019), Alachua Nazarenko (ISJL Education Fellow 2013-2015), Mandy Farb Herlich (ISJL Education Fellow 2007-2009), Sheryl Eskowitz, Rabbi Bess Wohlner, Helaine Braunig, and Rabbi Gideon Estes.

We'd also like to thank the super-connectors for volunteering their time and networks to make this game extra special: Beth Kander-Dauphin, Rabbi Andrew Terkel, Rabbi Lex Rofeberg, Rabbi Matt Dreffin, Rachel Stern, and Macy B. Hart. Our title sponsor was Behrman House, with additional sponsorship from the Enterprise Holdings Foundation.

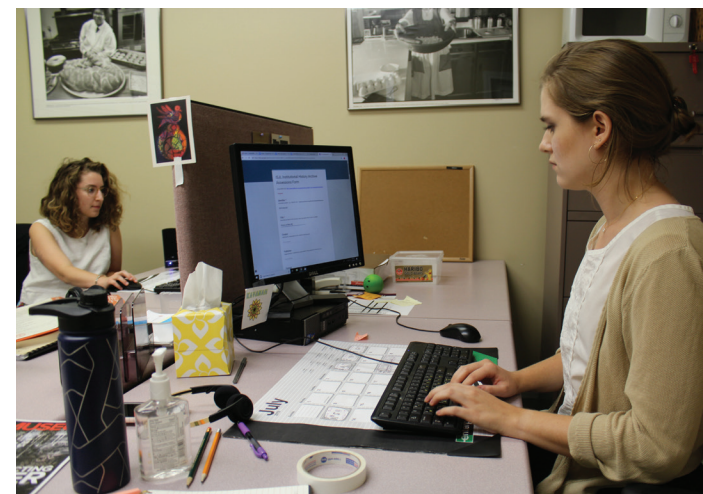


ENTERPRISE HOLDINGS.





Learning in the ISJL Institutional History Archive in the summer of 2019.



Top left: A view of Nora's office from the doorway—where many of her favorite conversations happen. Bottom left: ISJL Public History Interns Rose Steptoe (right) and Mimi Brown hard at work in summer 2019. Right: One of Nora's favorite places to learn and teach is Jackson, Mississippi—she hammed it up on Jackson's Museum Trail as she oriented the new Program Associates to life in our city.

HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

ALWAYS LEARNING AS WE GO

NORA KATZ

DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

IN MY WORK PRODUCING THE ISJL Virtual Vacation and leading Southern Jewish Heritage Tours across our region, I often get to be an educator—sharing stories about what it's like to live in and love the South as a Jewish person. But some of my favorite moments in my job have been ones where I get to be a

student—of this region, its culture, and its diverse history.

Interviewing scholars, public historians, and local experts for the ISJL Virtual Vacation—in addition to doing research for the episodes—offers me constant opportunities to learn. Traveling through the South with our tour groups, I get to take

a step back from my role as a tour guide and learn alongside my fellow travelers as we meet with folks on the ground who are doing the work of preserving and interpreting our region's history.

I especially enjoy being part of a community of learners, a group of students putting our heads together

to wrestle with complicated ideas. This is one of the many things I love about working alongside fellow ISJL public historian Dr. Josh Parshall—so many ISJL Virtual Vacation episodes, tour ideas, Encyclopedia articles, and lecture topics have been ironed out while one of us is standing in the other person's office doorway.

During the Public History Internship that Josh and I co-lead, we have weekly seminars with our interns, taking the opportunity to reflect on the work we're doing in the context of the fields of southern Jewish history, public history, and other academic disciplines. We often start with the same two pieces of writing. The first is Adrienne Rich's "Split at the Root," a 1982 essay about Rich's experiences wrestling with her Jewish identity.

Rich writes vividly about the tension between the northeastern Jewish identity she inherited from her father, and the southern Protestant identity she inherited from her mother. Rich describes the challenge of growing up without really knowing or identifying with her Jewishness, and the profound betrayal she felt at her father's lack of openness about his religious and cultural background. The conclusion of her essay comes with no easy answers, no sweeping generalizations about how she might come to terms with the intersecting parts of her identity—white, female, Jewish, Protestant, lesbian, poet. "I know that in the rest of my life," she writes, "...every aspect of my identity will have to be engaged."

I love sitting with each year's new

crop of interns, poring over Rich's profound recollections of her early life. While discussing this essay, we work together to establish our own understandings of key concepts in southern Jewish public history work: memory, identity, commemoration, and struggle.

The second piece of writing that we often discuss is Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's "The Long Civil Rights



Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” a seminal essay in which Hall expands the traditional boundaries of the Civil Rights Movement, positioning it not as a discrete historical moment that began with *Brown v. Board* in 1954, but an ongoing struggle that began long before the 1950s. Hall asserts that taking this long view of the movement gives us important context for the current struggle for racial and economic justice—a fight that is far from over.

As the author of “The Long Civil Rights Movement” and the founding director of the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill, Hall has had an outsized impact on the ISJL’s public history initiatives. It is impossible to research or interpret the history of the South (or the United States) without a particular focus on race and racism, or the intricacies and complexities of the

Top Left: The November 2020 ISJL Virtual Vacation episode “It’s Time to Stand Up and Be Counted” drew inspiration from Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s concept of the Long Civil Rights Movement. Bottom left: Nora Katz learning with Southern Jewish Heritage Tour participants outside of Selma in February 2020. Below: Eagle-eyed viewers caught these research materials in the background of the ISJL Virtual Vacation episode “Southern Jewish Restaurants.”



Civil Rights Movement. Hall’s words are with me in every ISJL Virtual Vacation episode and on every Southern Jewish Heritage Tour. The ISJL’s oral history program owes a tremendous debt to Hall’s work capturing the stories of southerners for the past several decades.

Dissecting this essay with our interns gives Josh and me a chance to offer something of a mission statement for our work, and sets our new staff members up to work alongside us with shared values and ideals. Taking a long view of the struggle for justice in America and uplifting the voices of oppressed and marginalized people is a cornerstone of the stories we tell and the projects we share.

Returning to these texts year after year gives me new ideas, new insights, and new inspiration. I always say that the best teachers are the ones who are still learning—who know how to explain tough concepts and ideas because they are still wrestling with them themselves. To do that in the company of others is a tremendous challenge and a profound gift.

Enjoy the ISJL Virtual Vacation, and shoot me an email to talk about planning a Southern Jewish Heritage Tour sometime, as safety and schedules allow. I can’t wait to learn with you.

Clockwise, from top: Learning from Benjy Nelken, curator of the Greenville History Museum and the Hebrew Union Temple Century of History Museum in Greenville, Mississippi; Nora’s 2019 Conference session “Hit the Road, Jews!” was about experiential learning in the Jewish South; Nora and Josh leading trivia at the 2019 ISJL Education Conference; Learning from historian and educator Dr. John Plump on a Southern Jewish Heritage Tour of Birmingham.



You can catch up on our past ISJL Virtual Vacation episodes (and sign up to receive updates about the series) on our website: www.isjl.org/virtual-vacation. If you’d like to share why southern Jewish culture matters to you, email us at heritage@isjl.org.

HISTORY

A RETURN TO CAMPUS

DR. JOSH PARSHALL
HISTORIAN



I LOVE BEING ON A COLLEGE campus. Ever since I first enrolled in college, I found higher education environments energizing. Working as a public historian for a non-profit organization rather than teaching in a university setting means that I no longer spend hours a week in a classroom or walk across a grassy quad to get to my office. But I do get to deliver lectures at colleges and universities, make guest appearances in college classes, and assist students with research projects. These partnerships with schools and students provide some of the excitement of academic life, especially when I can draw insights and inspiration from the work that other scholars are doing in their

own areas of interest.

I sometimes visit colleges and universities to present in public lecture series. These talks are similar to events at synagogues or community centers, but the presence of students and faculty in the room increases the diversity of the audience. Speaking to and fielding questions from younger (and often non-Jewish) attendees helps me to consider what is important about southern Jewish history from different perspectives and how it relates to other fields. It is also a great reminder not to assume that my audience has extensive prior knowledge of either southern history or Jewish culture and religion.



The Jewish history of Mobile, Alabama, is near and dear to locals.

In addition to lectures, I have had the privilege of joining class sessions, both in-person and remote, at a number of institutions. Whether I'm participating remotely in a food studies class at Boston University or in person at a Prisons-to-College Pipeline course at Central Mississippi

Correctional Facility, spending time in classrooms allows for more open discussion and opportunities to hear from students about their own interests and experiences. Classroom visits also give me a chance to promote the ISJL's paid summer internships in public history.

My most in-depth conversations with students happen when someone—usually a graduate student—contacts the ISJL about thesis or dissertation research. In addition to my professional role at the ISJL, I am currently the Vice President of the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS), and I make it a point to welcome new scholars to our subfield whenever possible. Whether I am best able to help by referring a student researcher to another institution, by making copies of a few pages of historical materials, or by encouraging them to visit the ISJL for more in-depth research, it's interesting to learn about new projects in southern Jewish history.

As a companion piece to this article, I'm including some brief reflections from my recent trip to the University of South Alabama in Mobile. And, if you are associated with a school or department that would be interested in the ISJL's historical work, please be in touch; returning to a campus setting is always inspiring.



Above: Dr. Josh Parshall speaks at the University of South Alabama. Top: Attendees at the event.

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY AT SOUTH ALABAMA

IN NOVEMBER 2021, I SPOKE AT A reception for the Jewish Mobile Oral History Project (JMOHP) at the University of South Alabama (USA) in Mobile. The JMOHP is an ongoing collection effort headed by Deborah Gurt, Interim Director of the McCall Library at USA, that aims to preserve memories of Jewish Mobile past and present.

Deborah first approached me about speaking at an event for the oral history project before the pandemic struck. After significant delays, it was a treat to learn about the interviews, visit in person, and speak to an audience of students, staff, and community members about oral history in the Jewish South. Using examples from the Mobile project



and the ISJL Oral History Collection, I talked about the strengths of oral history as a research method, the significance of developing a local Jewish history archive as part of a

university library system, and the particular usefulness of oral history in the study of southern Jews.

As always, I enjoyed spending time with the diverse participants that an on-campus event can attract. After the formal presentation I chatted with attendees, and everyone enjoyed a selection of delicious Jewish baked goods. Student workers encouraged conversation by running conversation stations around a set of posters, each of which featured selected quotes from the oral history collection. It was a pleasure to be back in Mobile, and I'm looking forward to hearing more from the Jewish Mobile Oral History Project.

To learn more about southern Jewish history, email history@isjl.org.



Our recent concert with Dan Nichols drew participants from 10 states.

CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

CULTURAL PROGRAMMING FAQ

ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

With the theme of this issue being “education,” there are so many aspects of the ISJL’s cultural offerings we could focus on—after all, many of our presenters are educators! And, of course, one of the best ways to learn about a culture is through its stories, music, and creative contributions. However, with a lot of programming on the horizon, I wanted to take the opportunity to educate new and returning *Shalom Y’all* readers about what it is that the ISJL does when it comes to our Culture service area, and what our offerings look like today. So here are some frequently asked questions and answers to ensure everyone knows how we can help connect your community with cultural programming... with a special focus on educational events!

Q: Who can take advantage of ISJL cultural programs?

A: Any and all congregations, Jewish Community Centers, Federations, and other entities throughout our thirteen-state region! We have partnered with universities, churches, and more. The only requirement is that our partner organization be located in the South.

Q: Are ISJL cultural programs still being offered on Zoom, or are there in-person options as well?

A: Yes and yes! We are excited to offer remote programs, which draw in large and geographically disparate crowds (our incredible Chanukah concert with Dan Nichols in 2021 included organizations from ten states!), and as safety and

community circumstances allow, we are excited to put our presenters on the road as well.

Q: What does booking an ISJL cultural program look like?

A: A simple email (sent to akientz@isjl.org) gets the conversation going! You’ll get all the costs and details up front. We make it as easy as possible for any organization to participate—we coordinate dates, provide marketing materials, and more!

Q: What’s coming up in spring 2022?

A: Following our first big event with Daniel Cainer in January and Jewish Disability Awareness Month programming with Nick May in February, there’s more great

programming ahead this spring. On March 10th, we’ll celebrate Purim with a pre-Purim Zoom comedy show featuring Dave Goldstein. April is filling up quickly with Yom HaShoah events—email akientz@isjl.org or visit the Presenters Roster on the ISJL website to learn more!

Q: How can smaller congregations take advantage of these programs?

A: We work hard to ensure that communities of all sizes can participate in ISJL programming. Overall costs, shared with multiple partners, are much lower than congregations or organizations coordinating solo—and if even those costs are a barrier, just be in touch with us to discuss support and options.

Q: What is “educational” about the ISJL’s cultural programming?

A: We offer many scholars on just about any topic one could imagine. Often our partners book our presenters for Jewish lecture events and scholar-in-residence weekends. **Joel Hoffman**, an author and lecturer with a focus on mistranslations in the Bible, absolutely loves working in



Above: Ann Zivitz Kientz celebrating during our Zoom Chanukah concert featuring Dan Nichols.

the South and has been to many of our communities over the years, to rave reviews. **Rabbi Josh Garraway** speaks on Jewish-Christian relations through the lenses of text and history. **Jane Larkin** is an expert on interfaith marriage and is a much-requested weekend scholar. **Roy Schwartz**, author of the new book *Is Superman Circumcised?* is also a text and history scholar whose lectures are not only interesting but also fun. **Dr. Eric Goldman** is one of the world’s foremost scholars of Jewish, Yiddish, and Israeli cinema. He is wonderful for a stand-alone lecture, a weekend event series, or even to enhance your film festival. **Rabbi Rachel S. Mikva** is the Herman E. Schaalman Chair in Jewish

Studies and Senior Faculty Fellow of the InterReligious Institute at Chicago Theological Seminary. With a passion for justice and academic expertise in the history of scriptural interpretation, her lectures are fascinating. And of course, the ISJL’s own **Dr. Josh Parshall** is an expert in southern Jewish history, always a popular topic with our crowd.

We really do have something for everyone! Many of our performers are also storytellers and impart a great deal of Jewish education in their shows. While they are in residence in a community, they are often able to spend time on a Sunday morning enhancing the religious school experience, too. Education is woven throughout our culture!

COMEDIAN DAVE GOLDSTEIN "QUEEN ESTHER'S COMEDY NIGHT"

THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 7:00PM CENTRAL

\$300 per organization | Sign-up deadline: February 25th | Contact: akientz@isjl.org



JOIN US FOR A PRE-PURIM, PG-RATED, PITCH-PERFECT NIGHT OF COMEDY!

Book comedian Dave Goldstein for a pre-Purim event that will have everyone laughing out loud! Dave has been praised by *The New York Post*, the *Asbury Park Press*, and audiences everywhere. He co-wrote a Purim play featuring the legendary Tovah Feldshuh for Temple Emanu-El in New York City. Dave’s comedy special "Isn't It Obvious" was just released to rave reviews on the Dry Bar Comedy app, and he has performed numerous times for our troops and veterans, including as the headlining comic on a tour of U.S. Army posts in Europe.

To learn more about the ISJL’s Cultural Programming, email programming@isjl.org.



Above and right: Rabbi Caroline Sim leads worship services and text studies across the South.

TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES

RABBI CAROLINE SIM
DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES

LEARNING IS CENTRAL TO Judaism and being a Jew, both spiritually and culturally. In the *V'ahav'tah* ("and you shall love") prayer, we are commanded to teach our tradition to our children, and to take it into our own hearts as well. Teaching and learning play such an integral role in Judaism that we are known as the "people of the book."

Learning is a lifelong pursuit and blessing. With that in mind, the ISJL's Spirituality service area has endeavored to provide many meaningful opportunities for learning, especially when our normal avenues for Jewish educational opportunities have been closed to us. During the past year, many synagogues were not able to meet because of the pandemic. For many,

this disrupted the normal schedule of services and Torah study in their congregations. With that in mind, the ISJL began offering bi-monthly text study on the *parashat hashav-uah*, the weekly Torah portion.

The ISJL's text study reached participants who might normally have attended Torah study in their own congregations. But it also allowed Jews to connect with each other across multiple communities, and exchange ideas across the South. In any given text study, people from several states and multiple congregations are in attendance. Even after the vaccine became available and some synagogues began to meet in person again, many chose to keep coming to the ISJL's digital text study in addition to the

Saturday morning text studies at their home synagogues. We were able to develop a small but enthusiastic community dedicated to learning. While there remains a core group of participants, often there are new people who pop in as well.

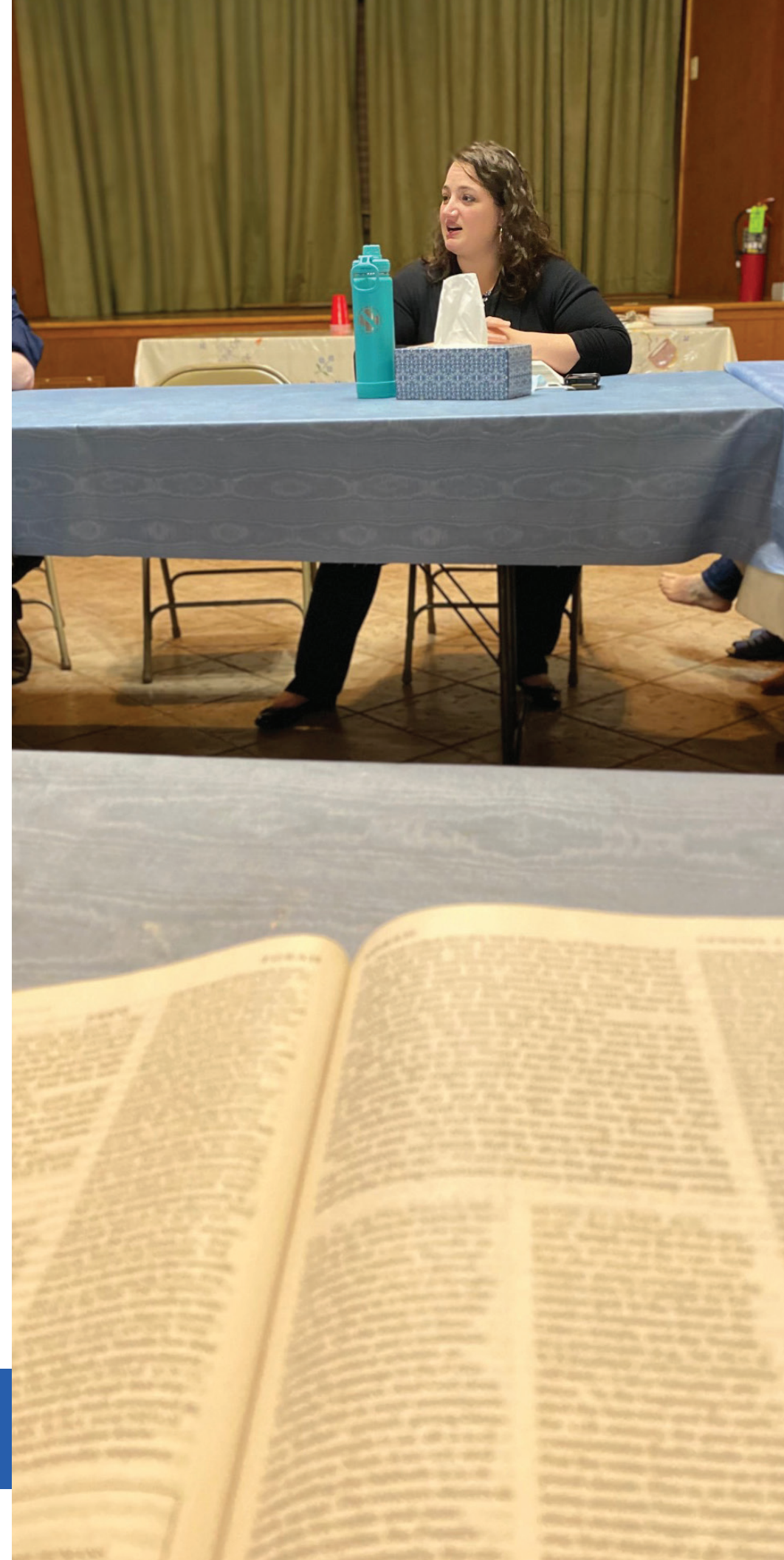
One of the most intriguing things about these classes with adult learners is the incredible moments we get to have engaging with the text as adults. Even for those who learned about the Bible growing up, many haven't really touched the subject since the time of their *b'nei mitzvah* (Bar or Bat Mitzvah; becoming a Jewish adult). This also means that the only way they learned about the Bible was as a child, from a child's perspective. Many of us learned a slightly altered

version of biblical events, as there are some subjects that are not age-appropriate, and therefore have to be modified or omitted to fit younger students' curricula. This is one of the ways we safeguard our children in learning. However, that means that many times, people in text study who are now learning the text as adults are completely unaware of certain events in the Bible, or are surprised when the story they learned as a child is not completely the same as the story we read in text study.

This provides us with the opportunity to re-engage with the text as adults, with an adult mindset and an adult set of analytical tools. We can compare and contrast different sections of the Torah with each other to look for similar structure or descriptions. We can see where the Torah refers back to itself, or assumes the reader is familiar with other parts of the narrative. It also allows us to consider the text with the emotions and experiences of adults. We can empathize with some of the characters because of our own lived experiences.

Even stories that we are familiar with benefit from additional study. We have a deeper capacity to engage with tricky passages and extrapolate new meaning. Through challenging the text we challenge ourselves, and grow in our faith and understanding. Through studying together, we nourish our cultural drive for lifelong learning, and create new connections in the wider Jewish community. I welcome any of you to join in on our future text study sessions; follow the ISJL on social media or join our Taste of Torah weekly email list to get the links for each live, interactive session held over Zoom.

To learn more about the ISJL's Spirituality service area, email rabbi@isjl.org.



OUR SUPPORTERS



FEATURED DONORS: LAUREN FREDMAN AND JOSH ROGOFF

RISA KLEIN HERZOG
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

SITTING DOWN TO VISIT WITH Lauren Fredman and Josh Rogoff, it's easy to have hope in our Jewish future! More than a decade ago, Lauren accepted her role as an ISJL Education Fellow and moved to Mississippi. Her now-husband Josh joined her for that journey, and their time in Jackson had a big impact on them. Years later, their commitment to the ISJL and the communities they connected with while living down South is still near and dear to their hearts.

After her time at the ISJL, Lauren went to the Hornstein Graduate program at Brandeis University, worked at the I.J. and Jeanné Wagner JCC of Salt Lake City for six years, and now works for the state of Utah while serving as a Jewish communal volunteer. Josh, a graduate of Drexel University, is an engineer at bioMérieux Diagnostics. Together they are parents to an adorable toddler. Here's what



Lauren Fredman (far right) with her Fellow cohort, known as the "Fab 5."

Lauren and Josh had to say about the impact of the ISJL on their lives and on the lives of others.

Thanks so much for taking this time to talk with me. To get us started, tell me a little more about your connection to the ISJL.

Lauren: I served as a Fellow from 2010 to 2012. It was such a transformative experience for me personally and professionally, and we have so many fond memories from our time in Jackson. Through the FAN network, we have been able to stay connected to the ISJL, continuing to grow and enhance friendships and connections.

Josh: I moved down to Jackson to be with Lauren, who was my girlfriend at the time. Lauren worked at the ISJL, and it became my community, too.

Why do you choose to donate to the ISJL?

Lauren: We're very connected to the mission of the ISJL. My time as a Fellow lit the spark within me to work in the Jewish community. It never occurred to me that this could be a career! It shaped who I am as a person and as a professional. I almost didn't pursue the position, due to my fear of public speaking at the time. The ISJL gave me the space to develop and to lead with confidence. I grew in so many ways and gained so many valuable skills! Also as someone who grew up in a smaller Jewish community, I am in awe of the resources that the ISJL provides not only through the

education service area but through the entire organization. The ISJL also introduced me to many of my lifelong friends and was the first home that Josh and I shared together. It totally shaped the next steps in our lives.

Josh: We believe in the mission of the ISJL, especially the education piece. Even though we do not live in the South, we know how important it is to support the Jewish communities throughout the South.

Can you share a past moment of impact and/or a meaningful experience you have had with the ISJL?

Lauren: I fondly remember working with a community in Lake Norman, NC. My ISJL colleagues and I developed a "choose your own Shabbat adventure" program. The goal was to elevate Shabbat, regardless of how much time the family has. One of the families later shared with me that after my visit, they started lighting Shabbat candles weekly. It was so meaningful to me to know that our ISJL program helped them engage more deeply with Judaism.

Josh: It was really fun to attend the first FAN reunion in Jackson. It was inspiring to see how many people are still involved in the ISJL. It speaks to how impactful the organization is.

How do you choose to give to the ISJL?

Josh: We are fortunate enough to have the resources to give through a Donor Advised Fund (DAF). Giving to the

ISJL every year is very important to us.

Lauren: When I learned about DAFs, I thought it was a cool idea to be able to create a charitable fund to support the causes that are meaningful to us. It's a partnership as a family and I am grateful that we are now at a point in our lives where we can give back.

How does the ISJL differ from other causes you support?

Josh: We enjoy supporting social action, Jewish causes, and organizations that we have relationships with. The ISJL fits all of those categories.

Lauren: Many of our gifts go to Jewish organizations and organizations of which we have been a part. The ISJL is special because it was such a big part of our lives that helped us decide who we wanted to become. We have such fond memories of our time in Jackson and have loved it when we have been able to come back and visit. The ISJL was such a great experience and such a welcoming community to us. The mission will always be important to us and the ISJL will always be part of our lives.

And just for fun, what's your favorite Jewish food?

Josh: Bagels and lox.

Lauren: Rugelach from Marzipan in Jerusalem... or brisket for any Jewish holiday, since it reminds me of family!

Everyone at the ISJL is so grateful to Lauren and Josh for their dedication to supporting, connecting, and celebrating Jewish life in the South. With their busy schedules including two careers and a toddler, it's clear how much they care about the ISJL and the Jewish future. Thank you, Lauren and Josh, and everyone who supports the ISJL's ongoing work. I look forward to sharing more conversations as inspiring as this one.

To learn more about supporting our work, email development@isjl.org.

MEET THE BOARD

OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER: ANDREA LEVY

THE ISJL BOARD OF DIRECTORS is critical to the success of our organization. These dedicated leaders devote their time and support to the ISJL throughout the year, and help ensure our ongoing impact. Our board members live all over the United States, and most have strong ties to the southern Jewish community. In this issue, we're eager to introduce you to our newest board member, Andrea Levy, who has also been an ISJL program participant and education partner!

Andrea Levy currently lives in Oxford, Mississippi. Her family moved there in 2020 from Jonesboro, Arkansas. She originally hails from Chicago. She has been married to her wonderful

husband Paul for almost 30 years; their two daughters, Emily (a recent law school graduate, now living in Columbus, Ohio) and Ilyse (a senior at the University of Mississippi) are their pride and joy. An actuary and account executive by trade, Andrea has also long been a devoted community volunteer. Her experiences include serving as Investment Committee Chair at the Jewish Federation of Arkansas and at the Albuquerque Community Foundation. Andrea has also served as Chair of the Life Long Learning Committee of Temple Albert (Albuquerque), lay leader and Board Member at Temple Israel (Jonesboro), and Vice President of Helping Neighbors Food Pantry Board (Jonesboro).

Andrea, why did you initially get involved with the ISJL?

I met Michele Schipper in 2001 in Albuquerque, New Mexico [where we both lived at the time]. When my family moved to Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 2013, I reconnected with Michele [who was then at the ISJL]. Our synagogue in Jonesboro used ISJL services several times. Now living in Oxford, I am excited about being Jewish in Mississippi. I am grateful for what the ISJL does for so many small Jewish communities in the South.

What is your favorite aspect of southern Jewish identity?

I love the warm, intimate feeling of being Jewish in the South. The book *The Jew Store* by Stella Suberman truly illustrates Jewish life in the South. I highly recommend this book!

How has the ISJL helped your community?

While living in Jonesboro, the ISJL helped with the conversion of a congregant. The ISJL arranged to have several rabbis come visit and lead various programs and services. When I was the lay leader of our synagogue, the ISJL sent me Chanukah materials to make our Chanukah program more engaging.

Why do you encourage others to support the ISJL?

The ISJL's support of southern Jewry is critical to keeping small Jewish communities thriving. No one else does quite what we do!



To view the entire ISJL Board of Directors list, visit www.isjl.org/board-of-directors. If you are interested in supporting the ISJL's work or learning more about leadership opportunities, email information@isjl.org.



SPECIAL FEATURE

MAZEL TOV TO THE MUSEUM OF THE SOUTHERN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

MAZEL TOV (CONGRATULATIONS!) to our friends at the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE), who were recently awarded the fifth spot in the Best New Attraction category for the USA TODAY 10Best Readers' Choice travel awards. The category had a diverse list of nominees from across the country, from skate parks and adventure centers to museums and immersive experiences. MSJE, located in New Orleans, took the fifth spot in the top ten list, was the contest's highest-ranked museum, and was also the only nominee from

Louisiana. The Museum investigates the diverse experiences of Jews in the American South from Colonial times to the present day. Through interactive exhibits, artifacts, and stories, the museum dives into a wide array of themes that connect visitors of all backgrounds.

"This award is a huge accomplishment for the Museum to receive within such a short time frame from when we opened in May 2021," said Kenneth Hoffman, Executive Director. "Despite opening in the middle of a pandemic, MSJE has quickly gained

recognition as an important center for cultural exploration and a vibrant tourist destination. The Museum appreciates the support it has received from the people of New Orleans, supporters from across the South, and thousands of visitors from around the world."

While the ISJL and MSJE are two separate entities, the organizations share the same roots, and the same commitment to highlighting the southern Jewish experience. We're always learning from one another, and it's great to see our partners recognized with accolades such as this one!

For more information on the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, visit www.msje.org.

SHALOM

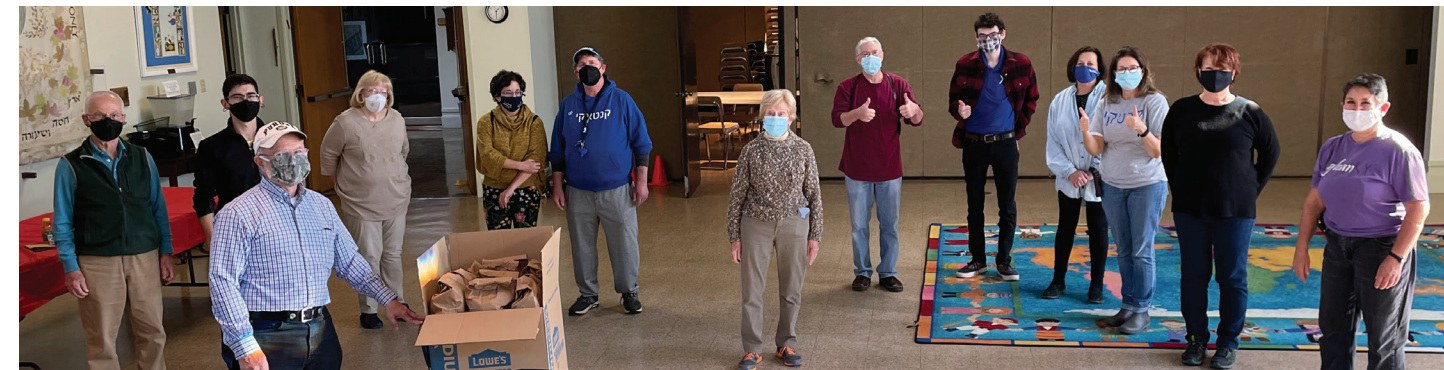


Y'all

THE EMAIL EDITION!

You no longer have to wait months between issues: you can now get a monthly email from the ISJL with insights, updates, recipes, and more! (And don't worry, it's replacing other emails we used to send, so while you'll get MORE news - you'll get FEWER emails!)

Our first email went out in January 2022. If you didn't get it, and want to make sure you get on the mailing list, just email information@isjl.org



GIVING THANKS

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

In these pages, you can see the impact the ISJL has on thousands of people just like you. With deep appreciation, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1 - December 31, 2021.

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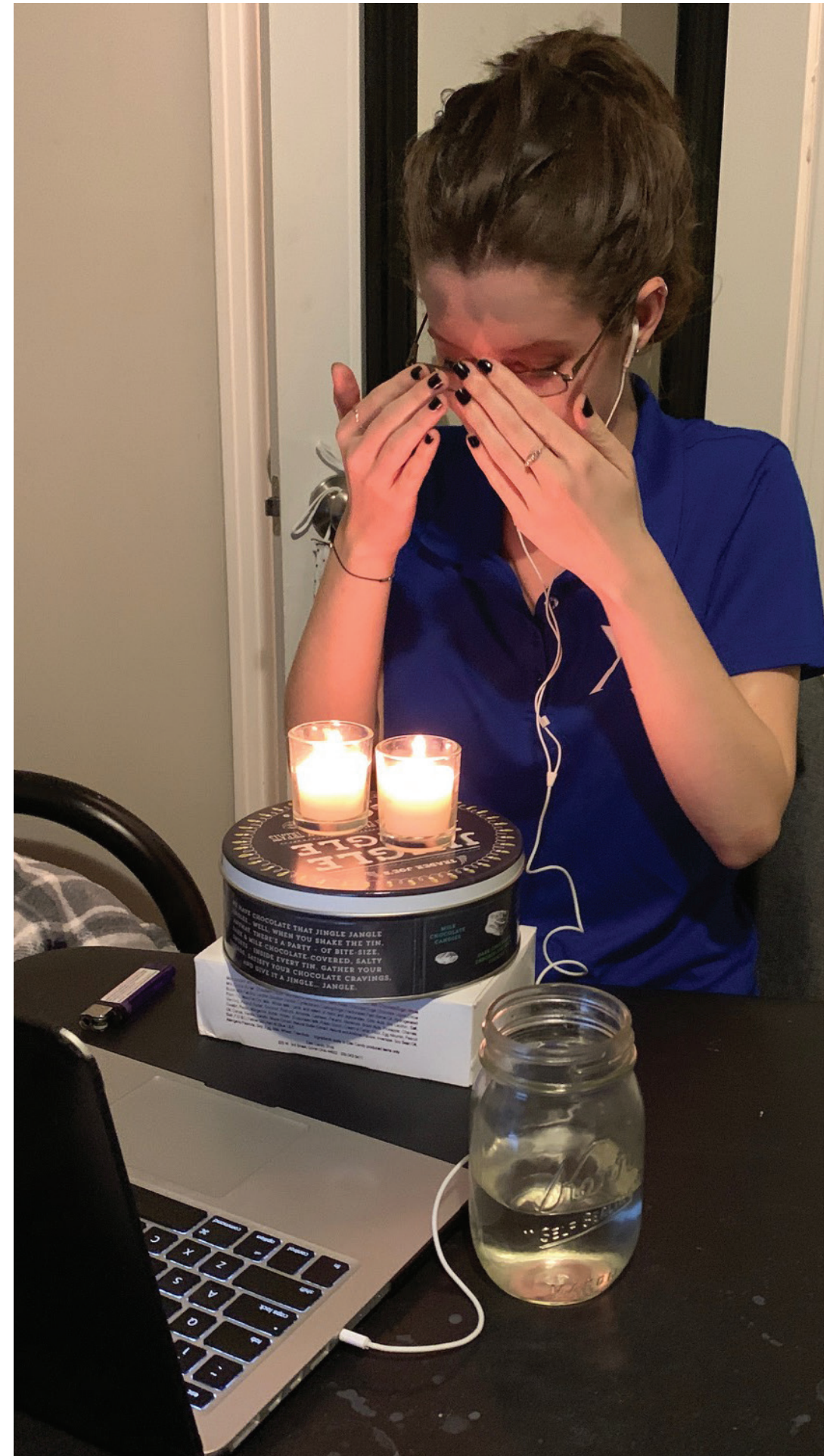
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