

SHALOM *y'all*

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



MEANINGFUL MOMENTS

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(AND HELLO TO NEW)
FELLOWS**

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MEANINGFUL MOMENTS ACROSS THE SOUTH

THIS YEAR, THE ISJL ADOPTED A NEW MISSION statement:

The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish life supports, connects, and celebrates Jewish life in the South.

The time was right for this change. We have formally separated from the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience; we recently acknowledged the joyful milestone of our eighteenth anniversary; and in 2020, we will reach our twentieth year of service. So in 2020, which we are calling a “year of vision,” we will dedicate the pages of *Shalom Y'all* to exploring each aspect of our new mission statement and engaging with you to deepen our understanding of supporting, connecting, and celebrating.

Above all, we want the mission statement to meaningfully speak to the work we do together. We want it to inform everything we do. To that end, you'll see the mission statement now included on the back cover of every issue of *Shalom Y'all*.

So stay tuned for more on that in 2020... but what about right now?

As summer warms the South (to put it mildly), we're reflecting on meaningful moments. As we prepared for this publication, each of our department heads reminisced and shared special stories about people and programs across all thirteen states in our region. You'll find those stories in these pages... at least one example from each of our thirteen states!

Speaking of “at least one in each of our thirteen states,” our Listening Tour series continues! We are enjoying all of the ongoing meaningful moments our travels and partnerships bring, all year long. Thank you to our friends, supporters, and all the memory-makers who are with us for this continuing journey.



FROM THE CEO



Michele Schipper
ISJL CEO

MEANINGFUL MOMENTS are at the heart of everything the ISJL does. If you ask me, it's also at the heart of our new mission statement, because supporting, connecting, and celebrating the communities with which we partner inevitably leads to more meaningful moments.

I have the opportunity to not only witness meaningful moments, but also—and even more often—to see what goes into cultivating them. I'm in the office, watching with pride as new Education Fellows prepare for their first visit to a community. I get to hear our rabbis practicing High Holy Day liturgy or Passover songs as they prepare to hit the road to lead worship experiences across the region. I hear snippets of phone calls as arrangements are made for home hospitality, coffee meet-ups, family programs, and more.

Sometimes, meaningful moments materialize on their own. But in my experience, more often

they are the culmination of good conversations, strong relationships, and preparation that ensures everyone can come together, feel welcomed, and be open to shared experiences that can be life-affirming and even life-changing.

Many of the ISJL's biggest fans and supporters have experienced meaningful moments with our staff. But for others, the chances to directly experience our impact are few and



I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO NOT ONLY WITNESS MEANINGFUL MOMENTS, BUT ALSO—AND EVEN MORE OFTEN—TO SEE WHAT GOES INTO CULTIVATING THEM.

far between. Our Board of Directors is nationally comprised; while most have southern roots, many no longer live in the South. Our board members live in California and New York, North Carolina and Texas, and everywhere in between. We gather in person twice a year to

conduct business; emails and video and phone calls keep us in touch throughout the year.

Because the majority of our board members now live outside of our service area, they are not attending services led by our rabbis, or teacher trainings led by our Fellows, or service-learning module sessions run by our Community Engagement team.

Yet they still “get it.” They find meaning in supporting the work that we do, even when they are not direct beneficiaries of it.

To me, that is a true mitzvah: supporting the cultivation and delivery of meaningful moments to others, even if you will not be there to witness the moment itself. Having faith in the work of our Jewish professionals, having a great love for communities that are geographically distant, believing that all of this support, connection, and celebration truly matters... to me, all of this is truly embodying the notion that *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh* (all Jews are responsible for one another).

So I would like to thank our Board of Directors, near and far, for their commitment to ensuring that southern Jewish communities



TO ME, THAT IS A TRUE MITZVAH: SUPPORTING THE CULTIVATION AND DELIVERY OF MEANINGFUL MOMENTS TO OTHERS, EVEN IF YOU WILL NOT BE THERE TO WITNESS THE MOMENT ITSELF.

will never falter in the creation of meaningful moments. Thank you for empowering our staff, and our partner communities, to support, connect, and celebrate one another. Your dedication brings our mission statement to life, and to me, that's truly meaningful.

Michele Schipper

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Rachel Reagler Schulman
ISJL Board Chair

AFTER LIVING IN Highland Park, Illinois, for almost 30 of my 55 years, I feel like I am “from” Highland Park. I have owned homes, raised my children, and developed life-long friendships here, in a community I love. However, Wynne, Arkansas, is my first home and Hot Springs, Arkansas, my second—and they, too, will always be “where I’m from.”

I am often asked what it was like growing up Jewish in Wynne, Arkansas. When people ask “How big was your synagogue?” I laugh and reply, “What synagogue?” before explaining that we attended synagogue and religious school at Temple Israel in Memphis, Tennessee.

During most of my time in Wynne, the Jewish population was 10 people (not families; individuals!) and we were a tight-knit bunch, especially since 5 of us lived together in my home! Sadly, today Wynne’s Jewish population is zero; my parents, my brother, and his family relocated to Hot Springs,

Arkansas, over thirteen years ago and joined a wonderful and welcoming Jewish community at Congregation House of Israel (CHI).

Everyone in the family became a part of the Jewish community in Hot Springs. It was amazing, as it was something my family never had the opportunity to do previously due to proximity. But suddenly, with a synagogue right there in their own town, my mother and sister-in-law became active in the Sisterhood and Temple Board. My brother not only became a leader



“WHEN PEOPLE ASK ‘HOW BIG WAS YOUR SYNAGOGUE?’ I LAUGH AND REPLY, ‘WHAT SYNAGOGUE?’”

in the congregation but also served as the religious school teacher for a decade, teaching his own children and the other children in the community.

If you had ever told me at any point in my life that my brother would teach religious school to anyone, I would have said you were

crazy. However, with the help of the ISJL, the incredible Education Department, and its amazing curriculum, not only did David teach religious school but he also taught Hebrew and attended numerous Education Conferences.

My brother’s family hosted multiple Education Fellows during their visits to Hot Springs, so the children benefitted from personal relationships with and exposure to young Jewish professionals. Some of these relationships with the Ed Fellows continued and grew between the individuals and the CHI congregation long after the ISJL Fellowship ended. Lex Rofeberg, who served as CHI’s Education Fellow, returned to CHI as the cantorial soloist at High Holiday services for many years.

I think about the labor of love my brother performed each week for all those years teaching religious school. I have always appreciated and respected the work of the ISJL—I serve on the Board and believe in the mission with all of my heart. However, my brother’s accomplishment fills me with a sense of pride that is different and distinct. From generation to generation, we did what we had to do. For my parents, that meant



“EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY BECAME A PART OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN HOT SPRINGS. IT WAS AMAZING, AS IT WAS SOMETHING MY FAMILY NEVER HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO PREVIOUSLY.”

driving to Memphis each week to ensure that we would receive a Jewish education.

For my brother, it meant connecting with the ISJL, using the ISJL curriculum, and being empowered to teach the children in his community—including his own. What is more meaningful than that?

Please help us continue to provide meaningful experiences all over our thirteen-state region. Thank you for all the meaningful moments we’ve shared thus far!

Rachel R. Schulman

FELLOW FAREWELLS:



Carly Abramson
(Education)

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I expected to simply keep my head down, do my job, not make many friends, and take this time to prepare for cantorial school. About a month in, I quickly realized that this was not the case. I made some of my closest friends while at the ISJL, and they didn't let me keep my head down for a second.

My favorite fellowship memory...

I think my best memory as an Ed Fellow was probably our Education Conference way back in 2017. It was my birthday, and I was in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel with Ed Fellows Harrison Bleiberg and Gabi Cohn. Cultural Programming presenter Joe Buchanan had just finished performing, but still had his guitar in hand. Gabi and Harrison encouraged me to introduce myself and share my music with him. I will never be

able to thank them enough, because without doing so, I would have never been able to crash Joe's tour, I would have never been featured on his second album, and I would not have discovered the impact of my own music. So thank you Gabi and Harrison, thank you Joe Buchanan, and thank you ISJL for exposing me to such incredible opportunities.

What I am doing next...

is actually closely tied to my favorite memory. My performances with Joe Buchanan have been posted all over social media and they happened to catch the right person's attention. The incredibly talented musician/cantor Abbie Strauss reached out to me on Facebook and told me that Temple Israel in Memphis would be the perfect fit for me. Next thing I knew I was signing a contract to become their Music and Education Specialist!

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I did not expect to be challenged in such a unique way. I was no stranger to Jewish education and travel, but I had never taught or traveled like I did during my first summer visit cycle. In the span of two weeks, I drove over 2,500 miles and visited 10 states. I also did not expect the amount of writing that I would have the opportunity to do for MyJewishLearning. The biggest surprise came when one of my first articles, "The Man With the Swastika Tattoo," made the front page of MyJewishLearning, and was shared several hundred times on Facebook.

My favorite fellowship memory...

After our first year, Sierra and I identified a need for a more formal Adult Education curriculum. After

creating a detailed plan, having many meetings, and creating the scariest Google Sheet of my entire career, the proposal was accepted and our entire team began work on the curriculum. Seeing the progress that has been made since then has been the highlight of my career so far, and truly shows how the ISJL is unlike any place that I have ever worked; we had an idea, we got the support, and now it is a reality. I hope that all of our partners appreciate and use our new curriculum in their respective communities!

What I am doing next...

I will be serving as the Assistant Director of URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy East, working year-round to facilitate unique and engaging STEM programs for Jewish youth.



Harrison Bleiberg
(Education)

MEMORIES AND NEXT ADVENTURES FOR THE 2017-2019 ISJL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION FELLOWS



Sierra Debrow
(Education)

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I did not expect to find as many “homes” as I did over the past two years. I knew that I would be working with various communities throughout the South, creating and implementing programming for them. However, with each visit, I found myself becoming deeply connected to the places and people I met along the way. The narratives that people shared opened my eyes to the rich and diverse histories of the South. I found that the words of Rabbi Larry Milder’s song are true: “Wherever you go, there’s always someone Jewish.” More than that, there are always opportunities to create meaningful Jewish moments together.

My favorite fellowship memory...

I was fortunate enough to serve one of my communities for both of my

years as an Education Fellow. The Education Director and I planned the visit to be Dr. Seuss-themed—everything from the Friday night *d’var* to the Sunday morning programs was planned with whimsy and rhyme! I loved getting to plan such an action-packed weekend, come up with out-of-the-box programming, and share some of my favorite childhood books—all with a community that I felt incredibly connected to. It was hard to leave, but we plan to keep in touch!

What I am doing next...

I will be pursuing my Master of Social Work (MSW) at Washington University in Saint Louis and working as the Outreach Coordinator for a storytelling and advocacy organization called Transilient.

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I was unsure about how I would fit in with the rest of the Fellows. I came to this fellowship from a different background than most; I have a degree in chemistry and sociology, without previous work in the Jewish field. But I learned about my own Jewish identity, learned about the Jewish community, and made friends I’ll never forget.

My favorite fellowship memory...

I love feeling like a team. There have been so many great moments of just “being a team,” but Thursday afternoons stand out. Everyone is helping out with visit prep. It’s this energizing weekly window where we are all working together as a unit.

What I am doing next...

Preparing to go to medical school! Woohoo!

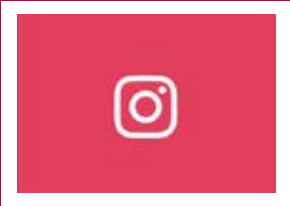


Kesler Friedman
(Education)

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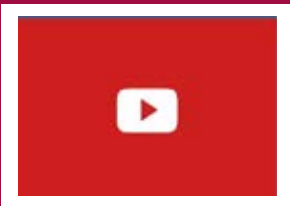
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myjewishlearning.com/southern-and-jewish



Rachel Katz

(Education)

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I came from a strong Jewish background and was really involved in many aspects of Jewish life, but didn't know too much about southern Jewry. I was surprised at how much I immediately learned by doing when I joined the ISJL team.

My favorite fellowship memory...

The Education staff's wrap-up meeting after the 2017 Education Conference is a memory I'll never forget. It was such a great moment; after all the work that went into conference planning and all the intensity of the three-day conference, it was just a great moment. It really felt like the first thing we had accomplished together as a team.

What I am doing next...

I will be the Program Director at URJ 6 Points SciTech West in California.



Hannah Klegon

(Education)

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I really had no idea what to expect. I didn't expect to grow as much as I did. Moving across the country to the South has been one of the hardest, most challenging, and most rewarding experiences I've ever had. I learned so much about myself and I'm eternally grateful for that.

My favorite fellowship memory...

Traveling all around, we get to stay with so many different people. My favorite memory of the two years was being able to go behind the scenes at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. I was staying with someone who was an engineer there, and we went to Mission Control. To make the day even cooler, we got special permission to be on the floor of mission control, a place you can only go with permission from the Flight Director. It was an amazing experience, and something I would never have been able to do without the ISJL.

What I am doing next...

I'll be attending DePaul University in Chicago to earn my Master's degree in School Counseling and eventually become a guidance counselor!



Lizzi Meister

(Community Engagement)

When I first arrived at the ISJL...

I am a journalist, so I have the benefit of looking back at my writings to see exactly how I was feeling right before starting my Community Engagement Fellowship. Here is one such musing from three weeks before I started my job:

"I will be scared at first, but that is okay. I can be terrified now, but optimism is one of my favorite qualities of myself, so I darn well better own it. Mississippi could be scary, but that is okay, because there will be people who aren't. Because there are welcoming people everywhere."

The best part of getting to reread my thoughts is that I was right—the change from undergrad in

Vancouver to working in Jackson was hard. Thankfully, the ISJL and the folks I met and worked with in Jackson made this one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

My favorite fellowship memory...

As a CE fellow, I get to teach some of the sweetest kids in the South. While I love getting to travel the region and teach all ages—from people in a retirement community to preschoolers—my favorite thing is being rooted in Jackson and really getting to dig into my local community. Often, the students we reach in one program will come to our other programs, which means I get to see them thrive in various contexts. A smart, energetic girl

who participated in Our Reading Family had some struggles with older students... and she went on to thrive in our Literacy Achievement Bonanza (LAB) program! One of our volunteers discovered that our LAB classroom assistant is a skilled problem-solver; he just completed training to be a TAP (Talk About the Problems) program mediator through our program in place at his high school!

What I am doing next...

I will be starting at the University of Washington's Master's of Museology program. I am excited to make museums inclusive places of dialogue and community gathering through education and innovative programming.

WELCOME 2019-2021

As we bid fond farewells to the Fellows completing their two years with the ISJL, we're also excited to welcome new team members!



Paige Beame

Paige Beame is originally from Boca Raton, Florida. She is a recent graduate of Florida Atlantic University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts in Jewish Studies and Sociology. In her free time you can find Paige cooking and baking, working out at OrangeTheory, relaxing outside, or watching Netflix. Paige says: "I am very excited to start this new journey with the ISJL!"



Ava Gadon

Ava Gadon spent the past four years in Washington, D.C., studying at American University, where she earned a degree in International Studies. She has worked in Jewish education as a teacher or teacher's aide for six years and was a camp counselor at Appel Farm Arts and Music Center for two summers. She was born and raised in South Jersey, where she grew up at the beach.



Isaac Gamoran

Isaac Gamoran hails from the suburbs of Chicago and D.C. A 2018 graduate of Macalester College, he studied Geography with an Urban Studies concentration. Isaac recently completed NASA DEVELOP, a 10-week internship program. He spent many years working as a songleader at Reform Jewish summer camps, led services for the Macalester Jewish Organization, and loves playing tennis. Isaac cannot wait to start supporting Jewish communities across the South!

FELLOWS!

Meet the 2019-2021 ISJL Education Fellows.



Julia Kunis

Julia Kunis is a recent graduate of Hunter College, where she majored in Anthropology. Her curiosity led her to this fellowship, which she's approaching with a lot of excitement. Julia says: "I consider myself a 'forever student.' I'm eager to keep finding different ways to learn and grow. I believe that mindfulness is the key to success, and I am excited to start my mindful journey as an Education Fellow!"



Rena Lubin

Rena Lubin earned a B.A. in Religious Studies with a minor in History from the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She served as an Oral History Intern at the Jewish Women's Archive, worked as a substitute teacher at the Asheville JCC, and hopes to pursue a career in museum education. She has researched the representation of Jewish women in American popular culture, and is an aficionado of Harry Potter and '90s TV dramas.



Margo Wagner

Margo Wagner grew up in Colorado and recently graduated from Indiana University with a Bachelor's degree in Jewish Sacred Music and a Minor in Hebrew. She loves fostering connections to Judaism through singing, percussion, and guitar. Margo says: "I feel so honored and excited for this opportunity to start my adult journey in Jackson, Mississippi, as an Education Fellow for the ISJL!"



EDUCATION

CAPTIVATING CONFERENCE COMMENTS

BY RABBI MATT DREFFIN

ISJL DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

OUR BIGGEST EVENT OF the year is the annual Education Conference. In late June, we gather representatives from our southern Jewish communities to pray, learn, sing, laugh, and—perhaps most importantly—nosh together. Education partners can come from any walk of life, working hard in the rabbinate, dedicating their time as teacher-parents in the classroom, or even volunteering as teen *mad'richim* (counselors) who want to improve their skills before the next school year. Based on the evaluations we put out each year, there are any number of highlights that contribute to meaningful moments for our participants. I find a smile creep across my face as Fellows share these exclamations aloud.

Our keynote presenter for this year, who I am sure will illuminate the room with insightful tidbits for religious school, is Brad Cohen. A dynamic educator in Baltimore, his focus on interactive and exciting learning settings will certainly pique everyone's interest. Our entertainers for the conference, The Bible Players, will undoubtedly get our tear ducts working overtime as they

hit us with their gut-busting brand of humor. Some of our participants will write about how they finally got to dive deep into what it means to be a “small” community in one of our tracks, and that solo educator in rural South Carolina can get a chance to do some intense study with a nationally-renowned speaker.



GETTING TO PROVIDE SPACE FOR BOTH STAFF AND PARTICIPANTS TO MAKE EDUCATION GREAT IS AN HONOR AND A PLEASURE.

Of course, some of the most compelling and consequential occasions occur when we sit down to eat with our diverse community members. Strategies are shared, techniques are told, and perplexing problems are deciphered.

For me, personally, I am usually too busy thinking about running sessions and problem solving to truly absorb what is happening and to have a personal moment. However, a time at the conference always

comes to give me that exciting, hair-raising “ah-ha!” moment. On Tuesday morning, we run sessions called “experimental *min'yanim*,” where we take true risks in running worship services. The Education team brainstorms some of the wackiest ideas ever, and then the Fellows each develop their programs over the course of two months. Past examples of experimental *min'yanim* include the Minions *Min'yan* (yes, like from *Despicable Me*), a yoga *min'yan*, a *Project Runway*-inspired *min'yan*, and more!

Every year, after these poignant and personal experiences, Fellows rush to me to confess how something went totally awry, or they articulate how they improvised on the spot to make it all come together, or to share an unexpectedly moving moment that unfolded within the worship time.

Those number among my most meaningful moments—but just getting to provide space for both staff and participants to make education great is an honor and a pleasure. As this issue goes to press, we're a month away from the conference—and looking forward to sharing many more meaningful moments with all of you in Jackson soon!

To learn more about the ISJL's Education Department, email Rabbi Dreffin: mdreffin@isjl.org.



SWEET SURPRISE: CONFIRMATION IN COLUMBUS

BY RACHEL KATZ, 2017-2019 ISJL EDUCATION FELLOW

ON MY FINAL OF SIX VISITS TO Columbus, Georgia, I was feeling emotional. While most Fellow assignments last for only one school year, I had been Temple Israel of Columbus's Fellow for two full years and created a wonderful and meaningful relationship with the community. I knew that saying goodbye would be far from easy.

In particular, I became very close with the two confirmation class students, Cassidy and Lydia. Every time we saw each other, it was as if no time had passed. I also became close with Ronnet Rice, the religious

school principal, and her family. My trips to Temple Israel became more like "family gatherings" than "work."

On the Saturday of my final visit, Ronnet was telling me all about the girls' confirmation class and the remarkable project that had come from it. I asked Ronnet when the confirmation service was going to be, to which she responded, "May 17th.... Oh! You need to be there! We won't tell the girls you're coming. They'll be so surprised!"

I knew she was right—and knowing I'd be back one more time made my farewells on my last

"official" visit a little easier. On my final Sunday, as I was packing up the car to head back to Jackson, I was making my round of goodbyes. When I said goodbye to Cassidy, she began to cry and gave me a huge hug. She thanked me for my kindness and the relationship we had built throughout the past two years. Little did she know, I'd be back!

A few weeks later, I showed up for their confirmation to surprise them—and it was one of my most amazing moments ever. I'll never forget it. It's exactly why I took this job.

FOCUS ON FAN: WELCOME NEW FAN MEMBERS!

ISJL Community Engagement Associate Rachel Glazer (CE Fellow 2016-2018) was on hand to welcome new Fellow Alumni Network members into the FAN fold at the farewell breakfast in Jackson in May. We're excited for Carly, Harrison, Sierra, Kesler, Rachel, Hannah, and Lizzi to be part of all the FAN adventures ahead. Stay tuned!



WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY TO SUPPORT SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE



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

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

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

How can the ISJL help?

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

**The ISJL's Legacy Giving program can help you meet your planned giving goals.
To learn more, visit www.isjl.org/planned-giving or just email kander@isjl.org.**

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS IN VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

BY RABBI AARON A. ROZOVSKY

ISJL DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES

CONGREGATION ANSHE CHESSED in Vicksburg, Mississippi, holds a special place in my heart. Maybe that's because it's only 45 minutes from the ISJL office. Maybe it's due to its historic significance. Maybe it's because it was the first synagogue I visited on behalf of the ISJL. More than anything, though, the congregation is special because of its people and what they represent.

A once-thriving Jewish community, which in 1927 boasted 467 people of the faith in its ranks, the Vicksburg Jewish community now numbers fewer than 10. Their spirit, however, remains as proud, welcoming, and committed as ever. It's because of congregations and congregants like those in Vicksburg that I am proud to be part of the ISJL team.

One of my most cherished moments with Anshe Chesed took place this past September when I led Rosh Hashanah services there. Although there were only eight Jews present (including my mother and brother who flew in to celebrate the new year with me), there were 48 people filling the sanctuary.

The reasons so many Vicksburg friends and neighbors came to worship with us were varied, and each story I heard left me humbled. One gentleman told me that a member of the synagogue had bailed out his grandfather during the Great Depression, and coming to celebrate with the Jewish

community was his way of saying "thank you." A kind Southern Baptist lady told my mother that one of her grandmothers was Jewish, and that she had brought her teenage sons with her that day because she wanted them to know their heritage. Another man told me that to him, Anshe Chesed was as much a part of Vicksburg as the National Military Park (which draws in half a million visitors every year), the Biedenharn Coca-Cola Museum, or the Mississippi River itself.

The role of Anshe Chesed's friends and neighbors goes beyond

simply attending services: the local Methodist church provided the choir, and on Yom Kippur a local Methodist dentist and longtime friend and supporter of the synagogue chanted one of the most stirring renditions of El Malei Rach'amim (a prayer for the departed) that I have ever heard.

Working for the ISJL, meaningful moments abound. Leading High Holy Day services in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and seeing how friends and neighbors truly embrace the small but mighty Jewish community there, will always be a highlight of my experience at the ISJL.





HISTORY

TALES FROM TALLAHASSEE

BY DR. JOSH PARSHALL

ISJL DIRECTOR OF HISTORY

WORKING AS A PROFESSIONAL historian can mean a lot of solitary time searching for sources, reading other historians' work, sorting through historical records, or crafting new historical writing of my own. I don't actually like solitude, however, so some of the most rewarding moments in my job come when I get to solicit stories from, or share information with, other people.

Last year I was fortunate to do just that on two separate trips to Tallahassee, Florida. In July 2018, the summer history interns and I stopped in Tallahassee toward the end of our week-long trip through the Florida Panhandle. We received warm hospitality from Loyce Sulkes and Gary and Wendy Sokolow of Temple Israel. Because we already had a fair amount of information

on Temple Israel, we focused our research efforts on the Conservative congregation, Shomrei Torah. We met with congregation president Monte Finkelstein and a few other members who gave us access to synagogue records and told us about their experiences in Tallahassee. These casual oral history recordings gave us a personal look into the founding and development of Shomrei Torah, as well as a general sense of Jewish life in Tallahassee. It was a warm and productive visit.

Two-and-a-half months after my first visit to Tallahassee, I returned at the invitation of the Tallahassee Jewish Federation. I adapted my general overview talk, "Southern Jewish History on One Foot," to employ a number of Florida

examples from my recent research, and the event drew a good crowd to the Shomrei Torah sanctuary. The Florida material illustrated Jewish history in the South well, and my focus on the state seemed to interest the attendees. After the talk, I enjoyed dinner with some of the attendees, and I got to hear more about the local Jewish community.

These interpersonal connections helped inspire me as I worked to finish up the thirteenth and final state launching in our online Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. I'm proud to announce that Florida will be available this summer, so wherever you are, you can explore the fascinating history of Jewish life in the Sunshine State.

Want to learn more about southern Jewish history? Have something you'd like to share?
Always glad to hear from you. Email Dr. Parshall: jparshall@isjl.org.

FLORIDA GOES LIVE IN JUNE!

Florida is joining the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities (ESJC), our free online archive profiling every Jewish community that has ever existed in the South. Here are some at-a-glance details...

FLORIDA ENCYCLOPEDIA FAST FACTS:



The community coverage stretches from Pensacola to Miami Beach. →



This brings the ESJC to a total of nearly 300 essays from 13 states.

The new ESJC section includes 24 new articles documenting Florida's Jewish communities.

→ Some of the oldest examples of Jewish life in Florida might surprise you: Pensacola, which attracted a small Jewish population in the 18th century, and Micanopy, where Moses Elias Levy attempted to start a utopian Jewish agricultural colony in the early 19th century!



← Less surprising is the population density in South Florida: Broward, Palm Beach, and Miami-Dade Counties are collectively home to 471,000 full-time Jewish residents (and more than 50,000 part-time Jewish residents). The three-county area also represents the sixth-largest Jewish community in the world, and includes 8% of all U.S. Jews, making it the second-densest area of Jewish settlement outside Israel (after New York).



HISTORY & HERITAGE INTERNS

This year, the ISJL's departments of History and Heritage & Interpretation are excited to be co-sponsoring and co-supervising two summer interns. The interns will immerse themselves both in

historical research and heritage programming, working directly with Nora Katz and Dr. Josh Parshall. Please join us in welcoming our two summer 2019 interns, Mimi Brown and Rose Steptoe!



Mimi Brown

Mimi is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College where she studied modern Jewish and Middle Eastern history. She is currently working towards a Master of Arts in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University where she primarily studies twentieth-century Jewish history. Her most recent research project focuses on the World Sephardi Congresses and their relationship to the World Jewish Congress in the early 1950s. Raised in North Carolina and currently living in Nashville, Tennessee, Mimi looks forward to engaging

with the history and culture of southern Jewry during her time at the ISJL and hopes to contribute to the Institute's historical resources on southern Sephardic Jewish communities.

Rose Steptoe

Rose is a recent graduate of the University of South Carolina Honors College with a B.A. in English and History. During her time at USC, she worked as a writing tutor and wrote for the university's magazine. Her previous historical work includes writing and research for a digital archive documenting the history of a Nicoleño woman's life in southern California, as well as research for a documentary feature about Gullah culture and land loss in South Carolina. Rose has spent time studying both Jewish and southern history as an undergraduate and is excited to explore the intersection of the two during her internship with the ISJL. As a lifelong resident of Columbia, South Carolina, Rose is ready to see what Jackson has to offer. In her free time, she enjoys watching films, crafting, and hanging out at local coffee shops.





HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

“WHAT CAN I DO? HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?”

ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS ON THE ROAD

BY NORA KATZ

ISJL DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE & INTERPRETATION

“FOR MANY OF US THE MARCH from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.”
– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

This February, I led a group of 52 people from Temple Emeth in Teaneck, New Jersey, on a Southern Jewish Heritage Tour through Atlanta, Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery—sites at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement.

I spoke to trip leaders Lynn and Steve Chaiken and trip participants Amy Abrams and Arnie Graber about the tour. I wanted to know what drew them to the

Deep South to learn about this history. I wanted to know what surprised them, and the lessons they took from the experience.

Lynn told me that the congregation sought a Civil Rights tour because issues that sparked the Movement are returning to our national conversation—issues like white nationalism, racism, mass incarceration, and voter suppression. For her, it was about “trying to be better advocates.” Steve concurred: “Given the political climate now, lots of people are out there saying “What can I do and how can I learn more?””

In many ways, the experience fostered empathy. Lynn remembers choking back tears at a lunch counter

at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta: “You really start feeling what people went through and how hard they fought...”

Lynn was struck by the contrast between her long-held vision of Jewish empathy (embodied in *tikkun olam*, the Jewish concept of repairing the world) and new learning about Jews’ complicity in racism, oppression, and segregation. “You think, ‘Oh we’re so special, because we don’t think of the world in the way that other people do,’ and then you learn, well, ‘You’re not so good, so maybe you can improve it.’”

There are moments of despair on a trip like this. Arnie described the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, a memorial



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to victims of lynching: "It just expands in front of you, how many people, how many places, how recent... I kept getting struck by how much of this happened in my lifetime... We like to think that there's been so much progress, and the worst of it was so long ago, and a war was fought, and so on, and then you realize, 'No, it's still fresh and new.'"

Steve agreed: "...You don't know the intensity of it or the incredible extensiveness of it and how pervasive it really was. This trip put it all together in terms of how real this is."

My own deep emotional connection to the stories I was sharing hit home as I led the group across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Together, we read the words of leaders who marched in 1965 and traced the history of the march through the physical spaces where it occurred.

Standing on the steps of Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, where Civil Rights workers like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, Diane Nash, James Bevel, and others gathered to mourn, celebrate, organize, and begin marching to Montgomery, Temple Emeth's Rabbi Steven Sirbu led us in a prayer from the African American Heritage Hymnal:

"May God help us to exercise more seriously our right to vote and our pursuit of equality. God strengthen us in the ongoing struggle for freedom, civil rights, and justice."

We got on the bus and followed Highway 80 back to Montgomery, where an impromptu rendition of "We Shall Overcome" rang out as we passed the City of St. Jude, the last campsite on the path of the marchers.

Standing on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol in 1965, after four days of walking in driving rain and sweltering heat, calling on the nation to bear witness to the oppression of African American voters, Dr. King was optimistic. "Our feet are tired," he cried. "But our souls are rested... We are on the move now... We are moving to the land of freedom."

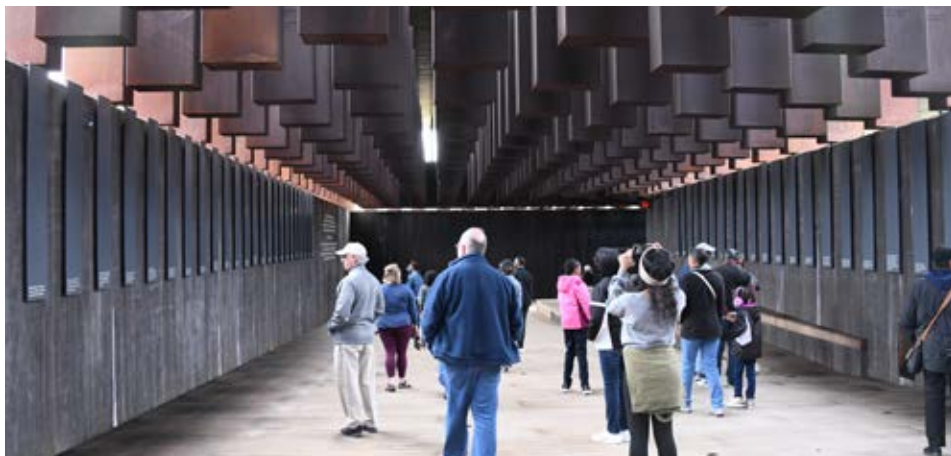
Fifty-four years later, our bus slowly turned through Court Square and up Dexter Avenue in Montgomery. The setting sun illuminated the dome of the building in front of which Dr. King spoke those words. Sitting at the front of the bus, almost at a loss for words myself, I took comfort in Dr. King's: "The road ahead is not altogether a smooth one. There are no broad highways that lead us easily and inevitably to quick solutions. But we must keep going."

"Southern hospitality is not

a myth," Arnie says. "...And that gives you cause for hope. That as bad as things were in the history that you're looking at, maybe enough people are fundamentally decent that we can get past this."

Asked if he had any guidance for people considering planning Southern Jewish Heritage Tours with the ISJL, Steve's advice was simple: "Don't be scared. Go do it."

"It's a worthwhile trip," Arnie added. "People should see these things and hear these stories and get this sense of dimension." Amy agreed: "[You] get the sense of what grassroots organizing can accomplish... It starts on a very small scale, and it can accomplish great things."



Top: Nora Katz, trip leaders Steve and Lynn Chaiken, and Rabbi Steven Sirbu in Selma.
Bottom: Participants exploring the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

"ASK"-ING, ANSWERING, AND ACTING HONESTLY IN HOUSTON

BY RACHEL GLAZER

ISJL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ASSOCIATE

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE education starts pretty early. Most of us recall gleefully clapping to the song "If You're Happy and You Know It" from a very early age. However, the first and second graders at the William S. Malev Schools for Religious Studies of Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston, Texas, were caught off guard when I asked them to sing it a little differently:

"If you're angry and you know it, stomp and pout! Harrumph! If you're frightened and you know it,

hide away! Egad! If you're gloomy and you know it, then your face will surely show it..."

Students are rarely encouraged to express their tougher emotions in such a transparent way. We teach kids to pack away their larger feelings, or at the very least present them in a more palatable fashion. By inviting our students to be honest about how they wish they could react sometimes, I was able to move forward with how those feelings drive their reactions and experiences.

Although I stuck to the five basic emotions named in the Pixar film *Inside Out*, these participants quickly demonstrated their extensive understanding of how the interplay of conflicting emotions can shape their experiences. As we learned about different ritual moments in the Jewish life cycle, participants aligned themselves on our Rainbow of Emotions and discussed how, for instance, celebrating the *bris* or *brit milah* of a new family member might elicit joy, anger, fear,



IT REMINDED ME THAT WE GROWN-UP FOLKS NEED TO GIVE STUDENTS THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THEY DESERVE AS WELL AS THE TOOLS THEY NEED WHEN IT COMES TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS.

sadness, and even disgust—all at the same time! Just as they would be happy to welcome a new life to their home, they were worried that the attention from other relatives might now be split between them and the baby. They expressed concern that the constant crying and unpredictable bodily functions would be annoying and unbearably icky. They bemoaned the simple melancholy of having to share.

It reminded me that we grown-up folks need to give our students the acknowledgement they deserve as well as the tools they need when it comes to difficult conversations. They are highly perceptive of complex emotions, even if they have not yet learned the nuanced vocabulary to express it. That’s where we come in—by acknowledging their emotions, be they “positive” feelings like joy and tenderness or “negative” ones like frustration and guilt, we can help them handle these feelings productively.

If we ask, answer, and act honestly, it helps us all. That is the meaningful truth I hope our ASK (Act, Share, Keep) learning module conveyed while I was in Houston.

The basis of all of our work in the Community Engagement

Department is empathy. To understand another person, you must recognize similarities as well as differences. This is essential to building compassion and serving individuals and communities with intention. When resolving conflicts, improving academic outcomes, or protecting the rights of those in our community, we must commit ourselves to understanding others and seek to serve in ways that fit their needs.

This is a conversation we have in almost every community we visit. We open up dialogues in schools about how staff can listen to students and empower them to come up with peaceful solutions to peer-to-peer conflicts through our TAP (Talk About the Problems) mediation program. In our literacy programs, we train volunteers and staff members to meet our students where they are and engage them in literacy through activities that speak to students’ interests. We aim to address our participants’ and partners’ perspectives and experiences every step of the way.

Given the scope of the Community Engagement Department’s work, it is no surprise that we have over 100 community partners. We have found that building partnerships is essential to ensure that we continuously represent the needs of the community. Otherwise, it could be easy to do what we *think* people want from us, rather than what they actually need. We maintain open lines of communication so

that we are never working alone.

We also know that the needs of a congregation in Louisiana could be very different from those of an interfaith group in Virginia. As we bring our Jewish social justice modules in the ASK program to new communities around the South, we commit ourselves to learning about the local context so that our support is effective.



...IT COULD BE EASY TO DO WHAT WE THINK PEOPLE WANT FROM US, RATHER THAN WHAT THEY ACTUALLY NEED. WE MAINTAIN OPEN LINES OF COMMUNICATION.

Our programming is a tool to help process any moment in which one might need to step back and acknowledge complex feelings. For example, when implementing the module Turning Ritual and Mental Health Inside Out with older participants, the application of empathy and emotional intelligence might be for very different life events, such as buying a new house, starting college, or changing family dynamics.

Each of us is responsible for one another—*kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*. We have a communal obligation as well as a drive to be there to support you and give you the tools to support each other.



*Batsheva performs
in Greensboro.
Image courtesy
Ivan Saul Cutler.*

CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

CULTURAL CONNECTIONS IN THE CAROLINAS

BY ANN ZIVITZ KIENTZ

ISJL DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING

ONE OF THE WONDERFUL things that the Programming Department is often able to do is coordinate shared-expense tours for communities of all sizes in our region. Once a presenter is booked in one city, it's cost-effective and joy-enhancing to add on a few additional stops "in that neck of the woods" to take advantage of the presenter's proximity.

Recently, the ISJL has partnered with communities in North Carolina and South Carolina in concert (pun intended) to make several multi-stop visits possible. In fact, between fall 2018 and spring 2019, six communities in the Carolinas have

engaged presenters from our ISJL presenters roster!

Greenville, South Carolina, held its inaugural Jewish Film Festival and engaged film critic, historian, and educator Dr. Eric Goldman to enrich the experience. Osnat Rosen, the film festival's president, commented after the weekend, "We had a wonderful festival weekend. I can't thank you enough for introducing us to Dr. Eric Goldman. He was the perfect fit for our festival. We all enjoyed his presence, [appreciated] his added value to the Festival, and...were inspired by his speeches and lectures. We got a lot of good feedback and requests to

bring him back to Greenville. Thanks again to you, the ISJL, and to Dr. Eric Goldman."

While Dr. Goldman was in the area, we booked a shared-expense lecture at Beth Shalom Congregation in Columbia, South Carolina. The turnout for his program on "The American Jewish Story Through Film" was fantastic. Dr. Goldman commented, "The warmth that I feel when I speak at a southern Jewish community is like nowhere else. Where else in America does one get off the plane to be greeted by strangers with a 'Good Morning!' or 'Good Evening!?' Only in the South!"

To learn more about the ISJL Programming Department, email Ann Zivitz Kientz at akientz@isjl.org.

Yom Ha'atz'ma'ut inspired two communities to engage concert performers. Joe Buchanan gave a stellar concert at Beth Meyer Synagogue in Raleigh, North Carolina. When I asked how the concert turned out, Joe happily told me, "They gave me a standing ovation and asked for an encore!" and Religious School Director Cathy Kaplan declared, "It was awesome!"

After the concert, Joe met up with ISJL Education Fellow Carly Abramson for a Shabbaton in nearby Sandhills Jewish Congregation in Jackson Springs, North Carolina, for another expense-shared programming opportunity. "Having Joe and Carly come to lead a special Shabbaton weekend was fabulous," said Michelle Goetzl. "Our congregation is still buzzing about it."

Batsheva also performed a Yom Ha'atz'ma'ut concert at Temple Emanuel in Greensboro,

North Carolina. Rabbi Andy Koren commented to me the next day, "The program was fantastic. We loved the way that she weaved story, history, and music. I only heard positive feedback!" Batsheva also added that she was delighted with the turnout and the lovely standing ovation at the end of her concert.

I love engaging with our southern congregations. It gives me, under the auspices of the ISJL, an opportunity to develop new friendships and enhance the experience of southern Jewish Life. Each time a program is on the road, whether it is in a new community or somewhere we have been before, I feel a sense of pride and gratitude just to be a part of it all. The recent connections in the Carolinas are just a few of the many examples of meaningful moments in my work for the ISJL. Let's make some new memories together in the months ahead!

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT ISJL CULTURAL PROGRAMS

“

JOE BUCHANAN IS A GENUINE, SOULFUL, AND TALENTED ARTIST.

His personal story deeply resonated with me as a convert and his music compares to any top country artist of today.

I'M FOREVER A FAN.

-Tammie G.

“

SINGIN' AND PRAYIN' ON YOM HA'ATZ'MA'UT WITH JOE BUCHANAN WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE.

I especially enjoyed his take on Hashkiveinu, and the vibe in the Beit Am was awe-inspiring. Although I have heard many of his stories before, **the way he wove his life experiences and music together was inspirational and beautiful;**

I hope he brings his troubadour roots style and singable melodies back to the Triangle very soon.

- Beth F.

“

It was incredible having Joe Buchanan join The Ruach at The Rabbit Hole here in Charlotte, NC, for The Shabbat Experience in November.

HIS MUSIC IS FROM THE HEART AND SO UPLIFTING! WE CAN'T WAIT TO BRING HIM BACK TO TOWN.

- Peter Levinson,

Lead Guitar and co-founder of The Ruach Band



Joe Buchanan with the Ruach Band.

Meaningful Moments Around the Region

TULSA, OKLAHOMA,

is the home base for Eric & Happie, the lovely duo featured at the 2018 ISJL Education Conference. Their songs bring people together in sweet harmony, bringing new meanings and new melodies to traditions and ideals.



SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA, has become the ISJL's unofficial "pilot city." From Education to Community Engagement, Cultural Programs to Heritage and Interpretation participation, this community has embraced everything we've brought their way, and we're grateful for all the insights and inspiration they've provided over the years!

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, is home to one of our largest religious school partners, Temple Israel—which is also where Education Fellow Carly Abramson will be on staff starting this summer. We love the small-world, big-impact connections fostered by our Fellows as they travel through the Jewish South.



ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA, is where the first-ever US Coast Guard Cutter named after a Jewish person was blessed. The USCGC Nathan Bruckenthal was named in a ceremony where ISJL Director of Rabbinical Services Rabbi Aaron Rozovsky gave the benediction; a meaningful moment for all.



MEET THE BOARD

I SJL BOARD MEMBER SPENCER Simons grew up in Kentucky, but now calls Boston home. Read on to learn more about this great member of the ISJL family!

Where did you grow up, and what was Jewish life like there?

I grew up in Ashland, Kentucky, which is on the Ohio and West Virginia border. Kentucky is a beautiful and friendly state! The Jewish community in Ashland was more like an extended family than a congregation. Our family owned a clothing department store, and we were very well-respected and felt integrated into the local landscape. Many members of the Jewish community owned local businesses. As a kid, I used to walk through town and can still remember the name of each business and proprietor. I believe that there were at least twenty different Jewish owned businesses. Holidays were always special with many community celebrations. When the student rabbis would come for Friday night services, they would often stay with my family.

Arthur Starr was one of those rabbis, and he ended up officiating at my wedding thirty years later. Today, my great-aunt is the last remaining member of the Jewish community in Ashland, and at age 85, she is still running her retail business.

What led you to join the ISJL Board of Directors?

I had an interest in preserving the history of the Ashland Jewish community, and I also very much believe in the need to provide Jewish education and rabbinical services to underserved communities in the South. When I learned about the ISJL, I reached out to Macy Hart about the possibility of underwriting an oral history project related to the history of the Ashland Jewish community. I am very passionate about the mission of the ISJL. As the population continues to shift from small communities to major metropolitan areas, the need for the ISJL's services has increased. The ISJL provides a virtual synagogue for smaller communities, and unites communities of all sizes. Serving

on the board has allowed me to connect with many wonderful people, making new friends and sharing ideas and life experiences together. I am truly inspired by the staff of the ISJL and feel fortunate to be part of the organization.

Where do you live now, and what other projects and endeavors are keeping you busy?

I have lived in the Boston area for thirty years. My wife Debra and I have a son, Michael, who is a junior at Purdue University majoring in Mechanical Engineering, and our daughter, Audrey, will start at the University of Michigan this fall and plans to major in Neuroscience. We have two beagles, one of which we rescued from a medical research laboratory. I own a business development consulting firm focused on the semiconductor industry, which keeps me busy but has allowed me the opportunity to be on the forefront of newly developed technologies and to travel extensively.

THE SUSAN & MACY B. HART FUND



Macy & Susan

In April, we launched an important and meaningful organizational endeavor—the Susan & Macy B. Hart Fund for the ISJL. The fund was formally announced at Macy's retirement event, held at the Mississippi Museum of Art. The venue was filled to capacity, crowded with friends and family from every stage of the Harts' bustling life. Laughter, stories, and memories were shared by all who attended.

The evening was a wonderful milestone in and of itself, but truly rooting it in meaning was the establishment of the fund for the ISJL named after the Harts. Macy, as founder of the organization, always with Susan by his side, has created a lasting legacy for the southern Jewish community. The Susan & Macy B. Hart Fund will be a perpetual way for us all to honor their work, while supporting the ongoing impact of the organization they so love.

Thank you to the more than 400 inaugural donors to the Fund, all of whom are acknowledged in the Donors section of this issue and on our website. You can contribute to the Fund at any time online (www.isjl.org/donate), by mail, or by calling the ISJL office at 601-362-6357.



Susan Rockoff with Ann & Chris Kientz



Elaine & Michael Gutenstein



A Delta reunion!



Cocktail Hour schmoozing



Macy B. Hart with Rabbi Gary Zola



Lizzi, Ava, Becca, Shirley, and Gary



Camp friends forever!



The Hart Family



D'Lo Trio



INAUGURAL DONORS TO THE SUSAN & MACY B. HART FUND

The list below reflects all contributors to the initial establishment of the Susan & Macy B. Hart Fund for the ISJL (gifts made through April 30, 2019). We look forward to adding many more names to the list of supporters who contribute to this Fund, paying tribute to the Harts and helping ensure that the organization they hold dear continues to carry out its vital work.

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