



**HILLEL**

# The Star



**WASHINGTON AND LEE HILLEL NEWSLETTER**  
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**DECEMBER, 2004**

## Birthright Israel Trip

*By Carly Cowley '07*

Before I went to Israel, Joan sent me an email with the quote, "No one can enter Jerusalem and leave unchanged." I thought it was a nice idea, but I had no idea how true it would turn out to be. I recently took a ten day tour through Israel on a birthright bus, and the experience changed my life. This essay is difficult to write, because I feel that I could never put this trip or what it meant to me in words; but the following is my attempt to clarify exactly how this trip connected me with Israel and a stronger Jewish culture. As I was leaving the United States I wondered how anyone could care enough about total strangers to donate the astronomical funds required for each of us to have this experience. By the time I left Israel, I realized that if I was in a position to give someone else the gift birthright has given me, I'd do it in a heartbeat.

When the plane touched down in Israel an enormous cheer erupted, and with 450 teens on board, it was definitely exhilarating. The initial reception in Israel was very moving and many people were crying. One of the coordinators got up on stage and said something in Hebrew, which he immediately translated as: "We are so glad you're here, Welcome home," and those were the first words we heard in the land of our ancestors. Over the next ten days I began to understand what he meant. I have never felt more accepted or at home in a culture as I did in Israel, and I know my entire bus felt the same way. My birthright bus was #355 a.k.a. "Pissherias". (Everyone named their busses, and since our tour guide

*W&L has participated in the birthright israel (sic) program since 2001. Last June Carly Cowley joined thousands of college students for this expense-paid ten-day journey. Imagine climbing up Masada at sunrise, hiking in the desert, swimming in the Dead Sea, exploring Jerusalem. Following are Carly's thoughts about the trip.*

called bathrooms "pissherias", and since we thought this was very funny, it became our bus name). The group included myself and other college students from the Boston area and from the University of Maryland. Not



*Carly Cowley '07 and new friends on the birthright israel trip in June.*

only did I have an incredible experience and opportunity to see Israel, but I also feel like I made wonderful friends in the process. At first I was nervous that I didn't know one other soul on this trip, but somehow it didn't matter, and by the end of the second day I felt as though I'd known my group for months. We went to Hanokdim, the Bedouin center, and ate dinner under the stars, (we also slept on mats under big tent-like structures, but that wasn't quite as glamorous.) At 3:30 the next morning we woke

up and began our journey to Mount Massada, and by 5:15 we had hiked to the top and were prepared to watch the sunrise. By 10:00 that morning we had climbed up another mountain and played in a natural spring at Ein Gedy, a spa near Massada. After hiking up the mountains it was time for a float in the Dead Sea, and a mud pack that made the AHAVA Dead Sea products so famous. That same day we traveled to Jerusalem and had mifgash. (This term acknowledges the Israeli soldiers who spent the rest of the trip with us.) After about a ten minute break we regrouped and drove up Mount Scopus and had a shecheyanu overlooking Jerusalem. I think that was when I fell in love with Israel. There were over 100 young Jews dancing and singing looking over the holiest and most beautiful city in the world. I can honestly say I've never been happier.

Every day was packed full of amazing events. We rode camels, went to Mt. Herzl cemetery and Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial, and had a relaxing Shabbat over the next two days. My bus also managed to have one great party for Shabbat that lasted well into Saturday morning. While in Jerusalem we visited the Kotel, (western wall) went to the Laila bar dance club, shopped in the Jewish Quarter, and heard Sharon speak at the "mega event." ( All birthright students traveling that week met together in one arena.) At our "mega event" there were about 4,000 birthright participants and it was "the largest Jewish disco in the world."

*CONTINUED ON PAGE 2*

## Director's Corner

*By Joan Robins*

I'm happy to report that Jewish life at Washington and Lee is thriving. Even though our Jewish community is still small, students speak about a strong sense of Jewish identity on campus.

Unlike at many other (mostly Northern) schools, being Jewish at W&L means something distinctive, students say—something to take pride in that makes being involved all the more special.

Faculty Advisor Simon Levy agrees. During a *Very Interesting Professors* dinner last year, he talked about his experience as a graduate student at Brandeis. There it's not unique to be Jewish. He felt more warmly welcomed when he came to Hillel events at W&L. "It's much more interesting to be Jewish at W&L," Dr. Levy told students.

Students come to Hillel for different reasons. Many tell me that Hillel feels like a home away from home. Others like the opportunity to hold leadership positions freshman year. Several who have had very little religious background enjoy going to services. Some students are culturally identified and are more active in community service. I like to watch them all on their unique "Jewish journeys".

*Joan Robins*

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### BIRTHRIGHT TRIP *Continued*

We stayed on kibbutzim, visited Tsvat, and hiked the Golan Heights. There was also an excursion to Kfar Blum which we decided was the Israeli equivalent to Six Flags. However, right in the middle of all our fun we didn't realize how connected we were becoming to each other, and to Israel. I was having a conversation somewhere with three friends and one said, "I can't get over this view," another said, "I can't get over this trip," and finally the last girl summed it up when she said, "I can't get over this country." Whether it was rafting down the

river Jordan or eating falafel in Tel Aviv looking out on the Mediterranean, this was an experience that is truly unforgettable and changed my life forever. Our Israeli soldiers were an integral part of our trip, and we saw what it was like to be a young person in Israel. We came to understand their way of life, and they welcomed us with open arms into their culture. When I saw their passion for their country, and witnessed the change in each of my fellow birthright participants, I knew what many people have been saying since May 14, 1948. Israel will never die. She is a country founded

on pride, passion, and fierce dedication, and as long as there are Jews in the world and a love of peace and democracy, Israel will survive. I definitely did not want to leave, and saying goodbye was very touching. I plan on going back next summer to do the intensive Hebrew Ulpan, and would encourage anyone looking for a Jewish identity, an incredible trip, or simply tons of fun to travel to Israel. As Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlov once said, "Wherever I go, I am going to the land of Israel."

Lehitraot, Carly Cowley

## Hebrew Class

*By Carly Levin '08*

Mi at? Ani Carly! Somewhere inside of me, I knew ten year-old Carly was laughing at me for all of the Hebrew I'd forgotten, but at least, after 8 years, I was finally back in a Hebrew class. Not a week had gone by since I had been lamenting to my roommate about the loss of any faculty I might have once had in Hebrew, when I received an email from Joan. Hillel and the President's office were sponsoring a new, non-credit modern conversational Hebrew course once a week through April, and who better to teach it than a native Israeli, Ronen Kraus? I quickly ran through the Hebrew alphabet in my head. A little rusty, but I was ready to learn.

I wasn't the only one to get this excited about Hebrew. "It's great to have this opportunity for the first time," said freshman Lisa Martinez. "Definitely a good addition to the curriculum," added freshman Rachel Mays. It wasn't long before Ronen had us scribbling out Hebrew script and piecing together simple sentences to converse with each other. We felt so triumphant and accomplished after just one class that Lisa, Rachel, and I continued our Hebrew conversation all the way back to the dorms. Although we'd never admit it, as soon as we had closed our doors, we all took out our notebooks and started to do our Hebrew homework. That's right, homework we couldn't wait to start. I could already tell this was the start of a beautiful friendship.



*Hebrew teacher Ronen Kraus works with students in the new seminar offered this year. -*

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## Community Service *By Justine Dargahi '07*

With the beginning of December quickly approaching we find ourselves in the middle of the Holiday Season, and perhaps the most important time of the year to engage in community service. Hillel is doing as much as we can to make this year's Holiday Season as magical as possible for the families in the Rockbridge area. Earlier in November along with Lambda Chi Alpha and Nabors Service League we organized a Thanksgiving food drive to benefit the local food pantry. We delivered 3,000 empty brown paper bags for Lexington residents to fill with non-perishable goods. Also one of our fearless leaders Leah Greenberg organized a project where Thanksgiving baskets were delivered

to families who participate in the Glasgow Head Start program. Hillel raised over \$300 to help fund these baskets.



*Working at Boxerwood Gardens during the Nabors Fall Service Challenge are Michael Kern '06 and Kelly Hishta '07.*

Earlier in the year we participated in the Nabors Fall Service Challenge. This year's project took us to Boxerwood Gardens and caused us to get down and dirty. There we helped prepare the all-natural water treatment facility for the winter frost and cold. For the rest of the year we are planning on joining with the Literacy Campaign and adopting a classroom, where once a week we will read stories to elementary age children and donate a book to their classroom.

# First Fridays at Five

*By Leah Greenberg '05*

*"I have to give a sermon. What on earth am I going to talk about? What have I gotten myself into?"*

This was all I could think about before I led my first *First Friday* service of the year. I volunteered to alternate leading services with Evan, our student leader from UVA. This dual leadership has made for a very intriguing year of *First Friday* services this year. We began the year with Evan's Shabbat service. As always, he won the crowd over with his beautiful voice and guitar playing. President and Mrs. Burish attended and were truly pleased with the service. Evan went on to tell a story for his sermon. His story made a tremendous impact on the enormous crowd. The moral and message of his story is still discussed by almost everyone who attended the service, and the service was 3 months ago.

To add to the excitement of that first service, we had several VMI "rats" in attendance. These rats have become regulars at Hillel events and entertain all of us with stories of the VMI mess halls and barracks. They have been a wonderful addition to our Hillel community.

Next came the second service, which I had to lead. My nerves were out of control. I could not believe that I had to not only lead the entire service, but also give a sermon. I could not sing and play guitar like Evan, and I did not have the biblical knowledge of Professor Marks. I was scared to death. The service was a bit shaky, but it did not matter because it was our first independent Washington & Lee service. For the first time, we did not have to enlist help from the outside. I was able to reflect about W&L in the sermon, and as a result, people could truly relate to the message. I may not be ready for Rabbinical school, but I can now say I am ready for W&L *First Fridays*.

The attendance this year has been phenomenal. Both community members and students are turning out in record numbers. The Jewish community at W&L seems to be coming together this year unlike ever before. I cannot wait to see what the rest of the year holds for us!

*The Star* 



*Shabbat candles are lit by Tara Rubenstein '08.*



*Leah Greenberg '05 leads Shabbat services at the Alumni House.*

*Students enjoy the antics of Cadet Seth Berkowitz "First Fridays at Five."*



# The High Holy Days *By Arie George '08 -*

This summer as I was preparing for college I thought about many things, including the High Holy Days. This year would be the first year I would be away from home and my usual synagogue for the most important days of the Jewish year.

I was hesitant about going to services in a new synagogue with a different rabbi and a room full of people I had not known since I was born. However, I was assured I would enjoy the experience just as much, and I did.

I began the High Holy Days at Temple House of Israel in Staunton. I went to both the Erev Rosh Hashanah and morning services there. I was told that this was a Reform synagogue, but that the service would be traditional. I was a little skeptical about going as I was used to a Conservative synagogue. I was surprised to find myself enjoying the services very much, especially since I didn't expect a female rabbi.

My next adventure was to Beth Israel Synagogue in Roanoke. As this was a Conservative synagogue, it would be similar to what I was used to at home. I looked forward to Kol Nidre as it is one of my favorite services of the year. I was beginning to realize that I could enjoy the High Holy Days here, in Virginia, with my new Jewish family, Hillel! I returned to Beth Israel Synagogue for Saturday services and was enthralled by the magnificence of the sanctuary and by the cantor's voice.

My first High Holy Days at W&L closed with concluding services for Yom Kippur on campus followed by a break-fast in Evans Dining Hall. These concluding events were a fitting end to my first Jewish New Year away from home. I was able to look around and fully realize that, yes, I did have another type of family here, and yes, it could be as supportive and nurturing as the one back home, in Massachusetts.



*Justine Dargahi '07 practices sounding the shofar before the Concluding Yom Kippur service and break-the-fast. -*



*Students attending the Ne'ilah (concluding) Yom Kippur service held at Fairfax. Members of the local Lexington community joined this service led by Professor Marks. Approximately 70 people attended the service and dinner.*

# Very Interesting Professors *By Kara Lehman '05*

One Tuesday a month, Hillel invites an interesting professor to lunch at the Sheridan Livery for our "Very Interesting Professors" (VIP) lunch series. So far this year we have hosted three Washington and Lee professors: Professor Marks, Professor Goluboff, and Professor Lambeth.

Professor Richard Marks entertained us at the first VIP lunch of the year. He

discussed "A Jew in Thailand and India", which entailed the time he had spent abroad in Asia. In October, Professor Sascha Goluboff informed us of "The Mountain Jews of the Caucasus" and her time in Azerbaijan. Hearing the stories about the host family with whom Professor Goluboff stayed became an interesting part of our discussion. Just last month, in November, John Lambeth, a Professor of Romance Languages, brought to our attention "Anti-

Semitism in France." Professor Lambeth talked about the history of Anti-Semitism in France and its current state.

Hillel will continue to provide these very popular and interesting lunchtime discussions for students to develop an understanding of current issues facing Judaism from around the world.

# Sukkot at W&L



Joel Katz '07 building the sukkah.



Leah Greenberg '05, Greer Johnson '05 and Meredith Marks '05 take a break from building the sukkah.

Joan Robins, Director of Hillel, leads the service and Leah Greenberg '05 shakes the lulav and etrog during the Sukkot celebration. Later in the week, the entire campus was invited to a "Pizza in the Hut" lunch.

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## Cookin' and Callin'



Chef Steve Greenblatt teaches students Todd Martin '05, Victoria Kesselman '07, Carly Cowley '07, and Kara Lehman '06 to cook some delicious Jewish dishes, including stuffed cabbage.



Rachael Levine '07 calls prospective Jewish students during the recruitment phon-a-thon Oct 12.



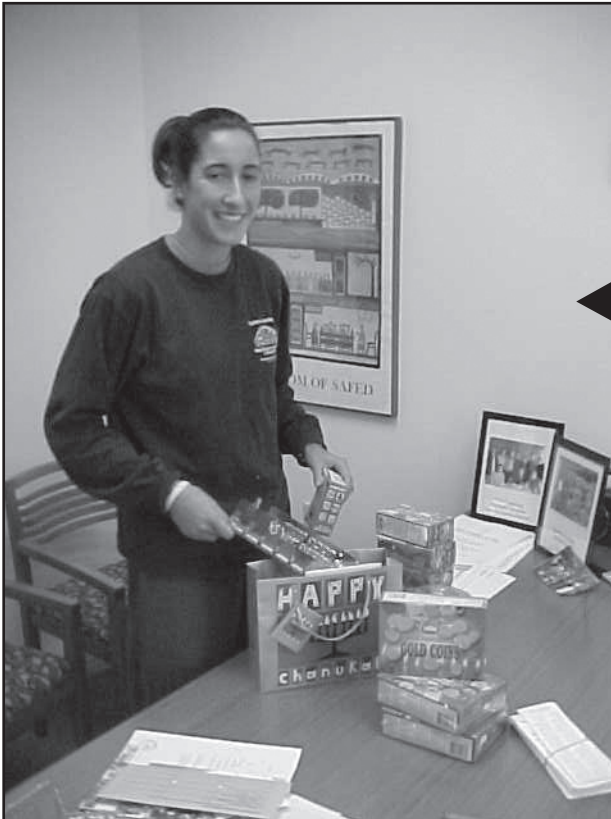


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## Out & About

*Students greet new freshman Max Vilenchik '08 at the Student Activities fair on Sept. 8.*



*Louisa Feve '06 stuffs Hanukkah Study Gift Bags to be delivered from parents to students on the first night of Hanukkah. The bags will be filled with many Hanukkah goodies, including a menorah, candles, cookies, dreidels, chocolate gelt, and other surprises. Other plans for the holiday include a Hanukkah presentation to mentally challenged people at a day treatment center, a Hanukkah Party on Dec. 11th, and enjoying latkes at the midnight snack on Dec. 13th.*

*Parents' Weekend: Audrey Horn '08 and her parents enjoy the Hillel Bagel Brunch Sunday morning, Nov. 7. There were over 70 guests, including parents, grandparents, siblings, students, and even one prospective student.*

