



HILLEL

# The Star



WASHINGTON AND LEE HILLEL NEWSLETTER

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## Then and Now

*Ellie Bold '15*

Hillel's Passover Seder at Washington and Lee University attracted more than 100 students and community members, the largest number ever. In fact, the Seder was so well attended it had to be moved out of the three-year-old facility.

"I see a real awakening of Jewish life here because of Hillel and everything that was done to bring it into existence and everything that's being done to make it a vital force in the community," Professor Holt Merchant said.

Hillel is the center for Jewish life on campuses and in communities around the world. It seeks to create a welcoming environment and home for people of the Jewish faith to come together and celebrate their culture with all who want to be involved. The Hillel House at W&L opened in 2010 to revitalize the program.

Jewish faculty recruited Joan Robins in 2001 to help plan events and holidays for Jewish students on campus. Jewish enrollment was around one percent and despite having a Hillel organization on campus, faculty and staff worried about the lack of cultural and religious support for Jewish students.

"We didn't have a place to be on campus," Robins said.

Robins and an ad hoc committee discovered that almost all W&L's peer institutions had an average Jewish enrollment of 10 percent. As alumni and community support for Hillel at W&L grew, Robins moved from volunteering with Hillel to being hired as its first advisor. She also spearheaded the campaign to build a Hillel House on campus.



"Joan Robins came and saw a need for Jewish students, yes, but for the university, too," Merchant said.

Since the house opened in September 2010, Jewish enrollment has increased to four percent—W&L's overall student enrollment is just under 1,800 undergraduate students.

About half of the Jewish students on campus are active in Hillel, but many who aren't as involved come to one of the programs or events during the year. Jewish and non-Jewish students alike are welcome at every event, as are community members. "One of the goals from the very beginning was to make it a place for everybody," Robins said. "My favorite part of Hillel is the community," said Samantha Rosier '14, president of Hillel. "We have the Jewish community of Lexington come to some of our events, which is a wonderful feeling and brand new in Lexington."

On campus, Hillel is preparing to introduce an interfaith office on the second floor of the house. This past February, Hillel

House co-hosted a super bowl party with W&L's Christian student organizations.

"Having only ever been to bar and bat mitzvahs, I had very little experience and knowledge of Jewish culture," said Maggie Weatherly '15, who attended

*Continued on page 2*

## Director's Corner

Last year we instituted Lunch and Learns – time for students to get together in the Hillel House over lunch and discuss various Jewish topics of interest. Some of the discussions we have had included: Jews and Tattoos, Madonna and kabbalah and Splitting Seas and Talking Snakes: Are the stories in the Bible really true?

One of our latest lunch and learns, led by Rabbi Kathy Cohen, titled "Why?", allowed our students to reflect on why they are here and why Judaism is important to them. Students shared, both Jewish and

*Continued on page 2*

## Holocaust Survivor Shares His Experiences

David Fishman '14

On May 1, the Hillel House began its Holocaust Remembrance Week by bringing in a Holocaust survivor, Marcel Drimer. A few students had dinner with Drimer and his wife before the talk began. Candidly discussing a number of topics, aside from Drimer's obviously interesting experiences during WWII, we learned that he earned an engineering degree before coming to America, and as an American he was responsible for building numerous Post Offices in the U.S. The construction of these buildings is another way that his memory will be permanently immortalized.

Presenting to a packed Hillel House Multipurpose room, Drimer told of his experiences as a young child. Born May 1, 1934, in Drohobycz, Poland, which is now a small town within the Ukraine, Drimer spent his 79th birthday recounting his experiences.

Following the German invasion of Poland, on September 1, 1939, Drimer's town initially fell under Soviet control in

accordance with the German-Soviet Pact. It was not until Germany betrayed the Soviet Union, violating their pact, almost two years later, that Drohobycz was occupied by German forces. The following year, August 1942, Drimer, his parents and his sister were forced into the Drohobycz ghetto, where they lived in cramped one-room quarters with barely sufficient food. Although much of Drimer's extended family was deported to the Belzec death camp, he and his family hid in various secret bunkers to avoid a similar fate. Before the ghetto was liquidated, Drimer's father bribed a guard and the family escaped to Mlynki Szkolnikowe, a small village near their hometown.

Drimer and his family remained in hiding until the following year, August 1944, when the Soviet army liberated Drimer and his family. After moving to Walbrzych, he finished high school before leaving for engineering college in Wroclaw. In 1961, he moved to the United States and today he serves as a volunteer at the Holocaust Museum.



Marcel Drimer

An enthralling and truly amazing story, Drimer's talk was followed by cookies and cake in commemoration of his birthday. Undoubtedly, he has lived a profound life, and both his perseverance and story have and will continue to inspire many. The Washington and Lee Hillel is pleased to have had Drimer speaking on campus, and we hope that his and myriads of stories of people who were involved in the Holocaust are never forgotten.

*continued from page 1*

non-Jewish alike, experiences that centered around traditions, culture, and community.

As students were sharing why Judaism was important to them, several students continued to describe how Hillel has been an important part in their college experience. Their responses provided me with an opportunity to reflect on 'Why are we striving so hard to continue to develop and enhance Jewish life on campus?' My simple answer is we are enhancing the college experience. Along with our religious and cultural focus, we are also providing a place for spirituality, education, leadership and social outlets.

But it is so much more than that! It is about all the small things that happen on a daily basis, both inside and outside the building. For example –

When we are out at a *Very Interesting Professor* dinner, and I look over at a student, I am overwhelmed when I see how they are engrossed with what the professor is saying.

My day doesn't feel complete until a student stops by my office to have a discussion – whether it's about an upcoming program, this week's Torah portion or just to say hello.

It is not a Friday evening without students of all faiths joining us in the Hillel

House to light candles, say kiddush and motzi and to sit down for a Shabbat Dinner. Have you ever asked someone what their favorite part of the week is? It is truly amazing to see their smile once you do.

I run into an elementary school teacher who tells me that a child comes into school every day smiling because our students were able to purchase and donate sneakers, clothes, and toys through the *Novack Fund for Jewish Responsibility*.

So, 'Why?' Why is Hillel important? Why are we continually trying to raise money each year? Why do I love my job? Why are you connected to Hillel? Why do students find it meaningful to have Hillel a part of their college experience?

Not only is it because of the programs, events and celebrations. Not only is it because of the religious, educational, leadership and community service opportunities. Not only is it about community. It is about the everyday meaningful experiences and the values of Hillel. *These* are what students will remember and carry with them for the rest of their lives, which in turn will create a better world.

L'Shalom

Brett Schwartz, Hillel Director

*continued from page 1, Then and Now*

the Passover Seder last month. "Passover was fascinating to witness coming from a different background, and despite that, I felt incredibly welcomed."

In addition to inviting all students and community members to Hillel events, the house was designed to expose visitors to traditional elements of Judaism. The main hallway has a Hebrew "Shalom" wall, a traditional hand washing station, a wall made of stone pieces from Jerusalem and a Mezuzah above each doorway. It also boasts a popular kosher café, community kitchen, multipurpose room and study rooms. Brett Schwartz, Hillel Director, is easily available to answer visitors' questions, many of whom have come in to ask about what they've learned in Bible study. Schwartz said Hillel serves as the synagogue for the area. The Hillel House accommodates far more than Jewish holidays, programs and events. "The Hillel [House] has become one of the campus centers . . . the multipurpose room alone in the last year and a half has had over 1,700 programs," said Schwartz.

"Now we have a Jewish community that's real and growing and thriving," Merchant said.

## Latke-Hamentashen Recap

*Joseph Yankelowitz '15*

Thursday, February 28th saw this year's edition of the great Latke-Hamentashen debate. Two teams of faculty, David Sukow and Adam Schwartz for Team Latke, and Alison Bell and Rob Mish representing Team Hamentashen, squared off in a spirited engagement. It did indeed live up to its billing as "highly absurd yet deeply serious."

The hamentashen squad arrived early and began setting up their equipment and getting acquainted with the arena. Mish, director of the Lenfest Center, even took the time to enjoy his first ever hamentash, adding a flavor analysis to his already extensive knowledge on the importance of this dessert.

Team Latke showed up about a half hour before the scheduled starting time. It should be noted that they strutted into multipurpose room in their full academic robes. When asked about this wardrobe choice, Sukow stated that he and Schwartz wanted to reach a proper "level of pompousness" for the debate. Their ploy failed to achieve the intimidation factor they hoped for, however, as Bell countered by donning her archeology gear, including hat, khaki vest, trowel and game face. At that moment, the audience knew they were in for a wild ride.

Schwartz led off his piece with an unconventional move, questioning whether the hamentash represents a worthy opponent for the latke. He took his inquiry a step further, creating a bracket of Jewish foods facing off against each other with the Reuben upsetting the bagel with lox and cream cheese in the final round. Turning back to the argument at hand, he unleashed a flurry of financial analyses demonstrating the economic proof of the latke's superiority. He even detailed the health reasons that make the latke the better food item.

Bell answered Schwartz's challenge with an investigation of her own. Fresh from a wild archeological adventure, she came from the field to show the integral role the hamentash played in human prehistory. The hamentash, she revealed, triggered many of the major achievements in the evolution and development of humankind. Her argument made perfect sense. Standing upright, harnessing fire, using stone tools and developing language make sense only



when viewed through the lens of gathering, cooking and eating wild hamentashen

Next, Sukow stepped up, ready to enlighten the audience on the science behind the latke's superiority. Strolling up and down the stage, Sukow embarked on an eloquent support of the latke. The humble potato pancake, he showed, has contributed to many of the most important discoveries in the history of physics. Isaac Newton's revelation on the theory of gravity came not as a result of a falling apple, which would have seriously injured his cranium, but due to the soft thud of a golden brown latke and the oils it carried. He also brought to light how the shape of the latke elevates it above the hamentash. The latke seeks to emulate the circle, a shape, he argued, nature casts as a step towards perfection. He also made the scandalous exposé of how the hamentash starts its life as a circle, but then willfully corrupts itself through folding. This corruption, he contended, created an envious and regretful hamentash that sought to sully the great latke's appropriate place in the Jewish diet.

Finally, Mish, the first participant to arrive, took his place at center stage. He energetically displayed how the hamentash drove the history of America's unique musical theater history. All of the beloved classics, from childhood favorites to Tony

Award winners, he showed, came as a result of hamentash-related activities and interventions. Mish launched a passionate defense of the hamentash, decrying the false accusations and fabricated statistics Team Latke forwarded. His heartfelt discourse on the hamentash forced each audience member to grapple with his or her identity and, indeed, question the very nature of humanity. Who knew that a series of poorly photoshopped images could evoke such profound emotion?

At the conclusion of this epic slugfest, the time came to crown a winner. A panel of three judges, Naphtali Rivkin, Max Chapnick and Sammy Rosier, left the room for deliberation. After a few tense minutes, they returned with a verdict. The winner, and still champion, of the Latke-Hamentashen Debate was... Team Latke!

After wrapping up the competition, everyone got ready for what Jews do best: eating. Thanks to the efforts of generous members of the Hillel community, a feast of delicious hamentashen and savory latkes waited in the dining room. Regardless of which food they supported, everyone could agree that, though great individually, the two foods together make a pretty good team.

# Passover at W&L

*Ben Brams '15*

On a sunny, late March afternoon, over 100 people gathered in Evans Hall to celebrate W&L's Passover Seder. Students, faculty, community members, non-Jews and guests from VMI were in attendance as we marked Passover here in Lexington. We used an abridged Haggadah that was perfect: it was both informative and expeditious, which a room full of hungry people really appreciated. We sang "Dayenu" and asked the Four Questions and recited the plagues (my personal favorite part of the Seder). The two first-year students who led the Seder, Drew and Emily, did a great job as hosts. With the Manischewitz flowing and delicious charoset lavishly spread onto stacks upon stacks of matzah, it's not hard to see why this year's Seder was a huge success! W&L Dining Services catered the event, and although all the food was absolutely delicious, I have to say that their matzah ball soup was fantastic. Normally, I'm a stickler for my Aunt Bert's famous soup, but Dining Services did well to make me (and I'm sure many others) feel right at home. Just thinking about it actually makes me really wish I had some right now.

The active seniors were also honored and thanked for their four years of hard work. I will definitely miss them, as they are a pretty remarkable group. As I mentioned earlier, people from all walks of Lexington came for our little (well, not so little anymore) Passover Seder, and this is something I think is pretty cool. Not only is it nice to see your friends and perhaps a favorite professor, but it's also a nice way to meet new people from VMI and the



community. It makes me remember how important we are to the city of Lexington and that makes me proud to be in W&L Hillel. The Passover Seder is one of the last few events of the whole year for Hillel, but I think it was definitely one of our best. That being said, this whole year was awesome, so I guess this Seder simply proved icing on the (parve) cake. If you'd like to see pictures from this year's Passover Seder, please check out our Facebook page!



## Student Prospective Fly-In Pilot Program

*Maya Epelbaum '16*

On Jan. 24, 2013, six active Jewish first year students met six prospective Jewish students in the Elrod Commons. Over the next two days, each host adopted a senior in high school interested in Washington and Lee, and schlepped them to and from Hillel sponsored events. Starting Thursday night, all of Hillel was invited to get together at Sweet Things for some delicious ice cream, allowing for introductions and time to enjoy each other's company.

Sweet Things was only the beginning of a jam-packed two days of activities for them. The next day's itinerary involved eating in our dining hall, shadowing classes, meeting athletic coaches and teams, having lunch at Hillel, taking a campus tour, and then, finally, a few hours of free time where

we showed the prospective students our favorite parts of campus.

Sharing the bond I have formed with Hillel here at Washington and Lee not only benefited my prospective student, but also helped me realize how closely Hillel does resemble a family. On Friday evening it was exciting to see our family grow at Shabbat dinner, even if it was only for a day. After the lovely Tu B'Shevat themed service, we celebrated the harvest complete with mangoes, apples, nuts and other fruits.

Fellow host Emily Danzig raves, "It was exciting to show off Washington and Lee and our Hillel to a prospective student looking for the same Jewish connection I have here." Like us, a few of these prospective students were skeptical that at

a small, traditional Southern school whose most renowned building is a chapel could have a thriving Jewish life. Yet by sharing my favorite moments with my new Hillel family—eating in the Sukkah, planning and carrying out High Holiday services, going on service projects and more—I realized that some of the best times I have had and some of my closest friends are because our small, vibrant Jewish population allows us to create strong bonds and look forward to Jewish activities.

While it was sad to see them leave on Saturday morning, this weekend for Jewish prospective students was a great plan and an awesome way for them to get to know an underrepresented but flourishing part of campus. I am excited for them to join in on our adventures next year!

## Superbowl Party at Hillel

*Maya Epelbaum '16*

On Super Bowl Sunday, Washington and Lee Hillel, combined with Reformed University Fellowship and Generals' Christian Fellowship (on-campus Christian youth fellowships), hosted an interfaith athletic extravaganza—Super Bowl Sunday Hillel style. The members of Hillel traditionally gather to watch Sunday night football games upstairs in the Hillel House,

but as the size of the game increased, so too did the size of the hosting party increase. With all three religious groups, not only was great football celebrated that day, but so was the pride and strength of interfaith activity here on campus.

While I wish I could write about the highlights of the game, the crazy halftime show that took the power out, and the

hilarious commercials, to be honest, there were so many awesome people and so much good food that night that I was completely oblivious as to what was actually on the screen. It was a great time and I cannot wait for next year's Super Bowl so I can pretend to know who is playing, while actually just enjoying the food and the people!



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*Thank you to all those who made contributions to Hillel!*

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# Photo Gallery



*Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Kathy Cohen*



*V.I.P. Dinner with Prof. Angel Smith*



*Passover*



*Holocaust survivor Marcel Drimer*



*Passover*



*Passover*



*Holocaust Vigil**Holocaust Vigil**W&L Hillel Seniors*

## Trip to the Holocaust Museum, Washington, DC

### *Zebrina Edgerton-Maloy '16*

In my history classes growing up, teachers would often tell us the basic facts about the Holocaust. They'd tell us about how two-thirds of the European Jewish population was dead after all of those years of genocide. Teachers would talk to us about how Adolf Hitler was the man who spearheaded Germany into anti-Semitism. However, everything that we were taught about the Holocaust was just scratching the surface of how devastating this event truly was. Visiting the Holocaust Museum a few weeks ago made me realize this.

When we were on our way to Washington, I knew that the museum was going to be very informational and quite an emotional experience. However, once I got there, I realized that it was going to be a lot more intense than I originally thought. One of the first things that made me grasp how moving this trip was going to be

when we were given little booklets. Each leaflet had a picture of an individual and his/her description. When we got to a certain floor, we had to flip to the next page and read what that person went through. Doing this made you visualize what that particular person had to go through during the Holocaust.

As we made our way through the museum, each floor, picture, item and video helped paint the horrifying image of the Holocaust. When I saw the video about how Jews were experimented on, I was in shock that a group of individuals can do this to another human being. Seeing some of the paintings and drawings of children really moved me. I could imagine a little kid witnessing the violence of the Nazis but still being able to sit down and draw a picture of their family. Doing so shows how children can still see beauty in such an ugly world.

The exhibit from the Holocaust Museum that hit me the hardest was the room filled with shoes. There were all types of shoes: old ones, new ones, adult shoes and even baby shoes. What's so touching about this room is that the shoes are such a simple, yet very personal item.

Ultimately, my entire experience at the Holocaust Museum moved me in more ways than one. It was also an eye-opener. There are so many events and details about the Holocaust that some people might not know about if they didn't visit the museum. However, by finding out more about these devastating events, such as the Holocaust, people will become more knowledgeable and respectful. A famous quote says, "Knowledge is power". By knowing about what happened in the past, people can prevent such tragedies from occurring again.

## AIPAC Policy Conference

*Jacob Berman '16 and Craig Shapiro '15*

Washington and Lee sent student representatives to The *American Israel Public Affairs Committee* (AIPAC) policy conference for the first time this past March. Jacob Berman '16 and Craig Shapiro '15 joined thousands of other students from hundreds of universities, day schools, and youth groups in Washington. The conference was rich with speakers as professionals and politicians came from around the world to share their insights. Demonstrations of inventions like Dr. Amit Goffer's ReWalk, which allows paraplegic persons remarkable mobility, demonstrated the significance and importance of a strong American-Israeli relationship.

There were informative sessions held throughout the conference which were hosted by students, experts and ambassa-

dors. Attending these lectures helped the delegates gain a more complete understanding of the current situation and status of the state of Israel. Some of the sessions attended by Washington and Lee delegates included Israel's economic relationship with China, leadership on campus against divestment from Israel and Israel's political relationship with North Africa. Along with the serious focus on Israel, there was a beautiful gala that featured prominent Jewish musicians and entertainers for all delegates to enjoy.

The policy conference concluded with attendees visiting every congressional representative to lobby on Capitol Hill in favor of pro-Israel legislation. First, AIPAC delegates were grouped by state to hear their senators' platforms and stances on Israel,

then state delegations were subdivided to do the same process with local representatives. Lobbying was the pinnacle of the conference as it proved that the US-Israel relationship can only be maintained through action.

The opportunity to meet so many other students was enlightening, but the message we learned from them was unfortunate. In speaking with multiple student-body presidents, other campus representatives and Jewish undergraduates from all over the United States and Canada we realize how lucky we are to face virtually no anti-Israel sentiment as students at W&L, and we are proud to be a part of such an accepting community.

## Hillel Hosts Fondue

*By: Lauren Michnick '14*

With the term coming to a close and exams on the horizon at Washington and Lee, I decided everyone could use a study break. As VP of Membership, I hosted a fondue party on Saturday, April 6. Not only was it a way to get more Jewish students to attend Hillel events, but it was also a way to involve non-Jewish students in Hillel activities. All students were welcome at the fondue party as a way to relax before exam week began. About 30 students attended the event, a very successful number since this event was planned in just three days.

The party featured assortments of both cheese and chocolate fondue as well as many dippable treats. We had strawberries, pineapple, marshmallows, graham crackers, pretzels, angel food cake, apples, bananas, oreos and many more tasty snacks. Some students who do not eat fondue even came to this event to join in on the fun and take a break from studying. Because of the great turnout and enjoyment of everyone involved, Hillel may start hosting a fondue party before every exam week!



## Purim at Hillel

*Naphtali Rivkin '15*

Many students got to celebrate Purim with their families this year over February break, but the festivities continued with the Washington and Lee Hillel family the first weekend back to school. Friday night, March 1st, at 4:45 p.m., about a dozen students gathered in the Hillel kitchen dressed in colorful robes and makeshift crowns to run through our parts for that

night's Purim Shpeil. After Friday night prayer services, we performed—and slightly improvised—the Tale of Purim for a crowd of professors, students, faculty and friends. The story was abridged and updated to include some W&L inside jokes. We had a lot of fun with it, and the audience did too. That belated Purim night at the

W&L Hillel was all about the spirit of Purim, “visamachta, vichagecha, vihayita’a ach sameach,” which means “you should rejoice, and you should celebrate, and you should be only happy.” A week after coming back to school from break, we rekindled the spirit of Purim, and were indeed “only happy.”

## Birthright Israel

*Marisol Pearl '15*

Over winter break I was fortunate enough to have the chance of a lifetime: a free trip to Israel. While all my friends were at home resting, I journeyed around Israel with 40 new friends. Never was our Taglit group called “tourists.” Instead we were welcomed with warm arms. Birthright Israel is a not-for-profit organization that sends Jewish students between the ages of 18 and 26 to Israel for 10 days. There is a wide range of programs available for Jewish adults from cooking themed trips to outdoor adventures. I chose Go Keshet, a Reform Taglit-Birthright trip focused around the idea of a connection to Israel. For many people in the group, including myself, this was the most diverse group of Jewish people my age I had been around.

I have always identified with Judaism. I only have fond memories when I think of the years I spent in temple through Hebrew school, training for my bat mitzvah and serving on my senior youth group in high school. Israel was always a word I associated with Judaism but I never imagined myself having the connection I now do to the country. In general I consider myself a “modern Jew” which is a term I use loosely to describe my interest in meeting and learning about my history and religion and my reformed dedication to the Torah. I was not sure how college would play into my Jewish experience. When W&L’s Hillel organized a Birthright trip my first year I realized that Taglit was the natural next step in my Jewish learning. When I found out I would be going this year I was understandably excited, but at the same time, I did not know what to expect. Knowing the mission of Taglit-Birthright I expected to get some sort of Israeli propaganda that promotes the country to my generation. After completing the trip I do feel a much stronger connection to my religion but that connection was

entirely mine, and talking to the participants in my group, each of our connections could not have been more different.

There are plenty of memorable moments of the trip but a select few make me want to travel back to Israel. My favorite part of my birthright experience was meeting five Israeli soldiers and having them accompany us as we toured Israel. Hearing different perspectives on the recent wars and peace treaties, I saw Israel’s history through their eyes, which really was a one of a kind experience. I immediately bonded with a soldier named Hadar who I consider to be like myself in every way—we like the same music, fashion, and celebrities—except for the fact I am currently in college and she, although the same age, is an Israeli soldier. I guess I went into the program expecting to meet Israelis that were super religious and went to temple religiously. In my mind I had associated Israelis with a higher connection to the religion because of their geography but through the trip I learned your Jewish experience is what you want it to be. Although I do not keep kosher or go to an orthodox temple, I am very connected to my religion and heritage. I learned a lot about myself through my week trip. One of our evening activities was to debate what it means to be Jewish. The adjective “Jewish” is one that I use frequently to describe myself but it wasn’t until the activity that I really delved into what I would consider being “Jewish” to be.

Describing my 10-day Birthright trip in one short article is nearly impossible. I could spend hours talking about the Bedouin Tent, Dead Sea or our crack of dawn visit to Masada. Even if you have no connection to a religion, Israel is a moving experience with the sheer amount of history packed into such a small country. I now feel a much stronger connection to Judaism and hope to go back to Israel soon.





# The Star



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