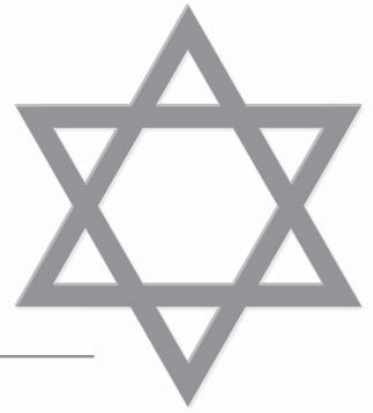




HILLEL

The Star



WASHINGTON AND LEE HILLEL NEWSLETTER
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DECEMBER 2007

Birthright Israel *By Dinah Danforth '10*

Deciding to go to Israel was not a hard decision for me. Growing up with a mother who has lived in Israel at three different points in her life, I always assumed it was something I would do eventually. So when I heard about the *Taglit* – Birthright Israel trip, I knew it would be an amazing opportunity for me to finally go. However, despite the ten hour plane ride from JFK, the excitement of meeting the 39 other Jewish students from across the country, the Hebrew signs lining the streets, and a late night walk on a beach along the Mediterranean Sea, I still felt like I could have been on vacation in the United States.

I didn't really realize that I was in Israel until the third day, when we visited *Tsfat*, a small village in the middle of the Galilee Mountains. Walking on the cobblestone pathways in narrow alleyways, seeing Torahs that were hundreds of years old, and eating falafel in a clearing near the edge of the city, I finally realized that I was in Israel.

From that point, the trip began to really show me what Israel was like as opposed to just being another vacation. We didn't learn just about Jewish culture and history, however. Committed to the Jewish values of accepting and embracing other cultures, we spent time in a Druze village and a Bedouin desert resort, in both places eating traditional food, conversing with natives, and participating in rituals.

Throughout the trip, our leaders continued to ask us whether we felt like tourists. Through the first few days, I answered "yes" without hesitation. But as the trip went on, I realized that visiting Israel was



Dinah Danforth '10 and friends, in Tsfat, a town overlooking the Galilee Mountains.

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not like being a tourist in any other country. From being accompanied for five days by our several Israeli soldier "*hevre*" (friends), to bargaining in the *Machne Yehuda* market in Jerusalem, I found an amazing sense of belonging and similarity to the Israelis. Also, doing the things my ancestors and Jewish community members had done – hiking *Masada* to see the sunrise, floating in the Dead Sea, and praying at the *Kotel* – gave me a further sense of connection to other Jews. While I've never felt ostracized from my religion, or even felt any negative effects of being in the minority, being in Israel made me realize what it would be like to live in a community of Jews. It made me appreciate Judaism and realize the influence it has in who I am. I finally realized that I will never be a tourist in Israel; I will always be welcomed home to a place I belong.

Director's Corner

How can we know if we are making progress in building Jewish community at Washington and Lee University? We have reversed declining Jewish enrollment, drawn Jewish alumni back to their alma mater, engaged the Lexington Jewish community, and awakened greater appreciation on the campus for the value of a strong Jewish presence at W&L. This feels like progress to me!

This resurgence of Jewish life can be seen all over campus. Hillel today is a lively organization, as you can see from the articles in this newsletter. We can be proud of the Jewish life our students are creating.

If you would like to see evidence of just how hopeful and promising the Jewish future is at W&L, then please accept this personal invitation to visit us so that you can see tomorrow's leaders at work. Our students are doing incredible things.

Michael Chabon Speaks at W&L

By Arie George '08

This term, Michael Chabon, the acclaimed author of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, spoke at Washington and Lee. The event was co-sponsored by Hillel, the Glasgow Endowment, and by generous donations from the parents of some of our current Jewish students.

A few Hillel students and W&L faculty thoroughly enjoyed getting to know Chabon at dinner before his talk. He discussed his development as a writer and some of the experiences in his life that led him to become the writer he is today. He also spoke about the events that led to the writing of his latest novel, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*.

We had one of the largest audiences ever for a Hillel event. Chabon's speech was very well received by the audience and campus was buzzing for weeks after he left. This was a great event and we were very pleased to be able to bring such a wonderful speaker to campus.



Audrey Horn '08 Hillel Co-VP and English major, greets Michael Chabon at the book-signing after his talk on October 4th.

The Center for Jewish Life

We have raised \$750,000 to date for the Center for Jewish Life, from 27 individuals or couples. In addition, we have two \$100,000 planned gifts that will benefit Hillel programming. There is great enthusiasm and very positive response to the Center from alumni, parents, and the local Jewish community. — Joan

The prospect of a Center for Jewish Life has created palpable excitement on campus, and I fully share that excitement. But I also have to remind myself, as we search for ways to make that prospect a reality, not to focus exclusively on the building. Sure, the building is important; in fact, it is critical as we move forward in making Jewish life an integral part of the Washington and Lee community, both quantitatively and qualitatively. But I am confident that alumni, parents and friends will step forward to make the building a reality. In the meantime, we continue to work to make Jewish life on campus a vital part

of the Washington and Lee experience today. The "we," of course, is really Joan and the Hillel students. The beneficiaries, however, are the campus as a whole. At the most recent Hillel Board meeting, we heard from Jewish students about their lives, not just their Hillel activities but the full range of their participation in Washington and Lee programs. They hold leadership positions in student government, in fraternities and sororities, and they are active in inter-collegiate athletics and community service. And that's the point--they are Jewish "life" on campus. They are a vital part of Washington and Lee in all respects, not merely as Jewish students or Hillel members. The numbers are still small, and that's where the building can help most, but in the end we need to keep in mind it's really about "life."

Mark Grunewald
Chair, Hillel Advisory Board



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Email-a-thon: students help recruit Jewish students to W&L
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Shalom from the Co-Presidents

By Arie George '08 and Whitney Rothstein '08

Shalom! As first semester is wrapping up, we wanted to take a moment and share with you some of the amazing things that Hillel has done so far this year! As part of getting to know the Jewish freshmen, Hillel kicked off the year with a number of welcome back activities such as: a bagel brunch during orientation week, a trip to the Safari park, trips to Roanoke for High Holiday services, and our annual Break the Fast in Evans Dining Hall. In honor of Sukkot, a few of our students helped to build a Sukkah on campus, and we invited the entire campus community to come and join us for "Pizza in the Hut."

We were honored to have both President Ruscio and Dean Dobin attend September's "First Fridays at Five" service and dinner. It is a treasured tradition at Hillel to invite the President of the University to the first Shabbat service of the year. We also had a great turnout to our Shabbat service over Parents' Weekend. We always love the opportunity to show parents what a thriving organization we are on campus.

Looking forward to the rest of the semester, we have our annual Hanukkah party and finals study break in December. With such a great start to the year, this is bound to be another great year for Hillel at Washington and Lee.



Parents' Weekend: We enjoyed meeting so many families during the Sunday morning bagel brunch and First Fridays at Five Shabbat services.

A Word From the Lexington Jewish Community

I am the father of three children, the youngest being twelve years old.

Until this year, we had to drive about an hour each way to Roanoke or Staunton for Hebrew School/Sunday School. This year has been wonderful, with the start of a Hillel sponsored Hebrew School at W&L. Thanks to the efforts of an Israeli W&L student and a parent from the Lexington community, our children are learning to read, write, and speak Hebrew as well as Jewish history, customs, and culture.

Rather than holding class in whatever space we can find, we eagerly anticipate having a home for our new Hebrew School at W&L once the Center for Jewish Life is constructed.

We are excited about how much significance the Center will have for our Jewish community (on and off campus) and for the Lexington community at large. Thank you for your support !

Mitch Wapner

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Very Interesting Professors

By Adam Hockensmith '08

Hello, my name is Adam Hockensmith, and I am the Hillel Vice-President for the VIP (Very Interesting Professors) Luncheon series. My job is to find interesting professors or other speakers to come and speak to Hillel students about topics in Judaism or ones relevant to Jewish life and affairs.

So far this year, we have had two VIP speakers come and speak on rather different topics. In the month of September, Dana Ragosin, the Israeli Emissary of Richmond, came to campus to speak about Israeli affairs in a talk informally titled "Israel: 101." We had a wonderful lunch at the Sheridan Livery, where Dana discussed her life as an Israeli, her role as the Emissary of Richmond, and additional topics from media coverage in Israel to the birthright Israel program.

The second speaker, Professor Mohammed Kamara from the Department of Romance Languages, spoke about Islamic holidays, his life as an American Muslim, and his experiences growing up in Sierra Leone. His talk provided a great cross-cultural perspective and understanding on Islam, and illustrated for Hillel students some of the similarities and differences between Islamic and Jewish holidays. Moreover, Professor Kamara's description of his childhood in Sierra Leone was very captivating, and provided great food for thought over lunch at the Livery.



Very Interesting Professors luncheon, featuring Prof Kamara

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Community Service

By Graham Sheridan '11

A few weeks ago a couple other Hillel officers and I went to Wal-Mart to purchase clothes for a local child. It was a mission created by the Novak Fund.

The Novak fund is an endowment created so that Hillel may help people in the Lexington and Rockbridge area. A system is in place for people to recommend to Hillel who is in need of Novak Fund assistance. If it is decided that they are indeed a person who could benefit from Novak Fund, such as the local child, action is taken.

In this case, we bought school clothes for a kindergarten girl who probably would not have had decent school clothes otherwise because of her economic situation and unstable family. Arie, Whitney, and I got her several outfits that can be mixed and matched, shoes, pajamas, and warm items for winter.



Students shopped for a local child with funds from the Novack Fund.

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Yom Kippur: The concluding service and break-the-fast was well attended by students, faculty and community.



Seth Feibelman '08 presents a mezuza for the new Center for Jewish Life to Joan at the Welcome Bagel Brunch on September 2nd. Seth brought the mezuza in Israel while traveling on the birthright trip in August.