



THE **REPORTER**

WOMEN'S AMERICAN ORT

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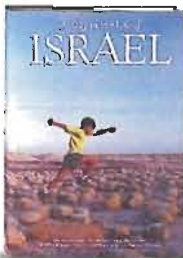


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**W**hile the Jewish people may boast a long and established history, one word that still seems to best epitomize the unpredictable narrative of our past is "transformation." Upon reading the tale, we discover a story of remarkable evolution.

We can trace the migrations of entire communities as they were displaced from country to country, taking with them customs and rituals, philosophies and folklore. In other instances, assimilation, intermarriage or forced conversions caused an intermingling of Judaism with other sects, creating a patchwork culture that little resembles its original form. In yet other times and places, governments forced Jews to bury their precious religion deep within themselves, a dormant kernel to be freed at a more auspicious time.

Regardless of external factors, Jews have adapted their faith, their communities and themselves. Despite these transformations — or, perhaps, as a result of them — our people are among the oldest still practicing and flourishing today. In this issue of *The Reporter*, we pay homage to this ever-changing, ever-progressing face.

In "Black Jews: Changing the Face of American Jewry," Miriam Rinn discovers an often overlooked part of America's Jewish population. Through her investigation, Rinn learns that the integration of thousands of African-American and biracial Jews into what has been until now an overwhelmingly white population stretches the popular image of the Jewish community's homogeneity to the edges.

Writer Alice Sparberg Alexiou explores another transforming community. In "The Hungarian Renaissance," she travels to Budapest to meet members of the Jewish community in a city where a long-hidden culture is suddenly reemerging after the horrors of the Holocaust and years of oppression at the hands of a communist regime.

In the Hungarian capital, synagogues are being reno-

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ated, and the 119-year-old rabbinical seminary in Budapest — the only one in Eastern Europe — is once again training a new generation of religious leaders for Hungary. Entire sections devoted to Judaica are now prominently displayed in the bookstores along Vacu ut, Budapest's chic commercial strip, and the city offers four major Jewish newspapers — as many as New York City. This rebirth is startling when one recognizes how low a profile Hungarian Jews maintained for so many years.

Sara Nuss-Galles' article, "A Glance Back 50 Years" is an investigative piece about the role ORT played in the

life of a community undergoing a total and devastating transformation: the survivors of the Holocaust. In her feature, those who lived in DP camps after the war discuss the ORT training they received, and how the skills acquired during those dark days were employed as they left behind their European roots for new lives in the United States.

Even our cover subject is a catalyst for change. In "Alice Shalvi: Redefining the Role of the Israeli Woman," writer Ruth Seligman discusses the role of women in Israeli society with this former principal of a small experimental high school for girls and founding member and chair of the Israel Women's Network, an advocacy group that has put lobbying for women's rights on the Jewish state's parliamentary map.

Finally, Gil Kezwer's "Yichus: In Search of Jewish Roots" delves into the subject of Jewish genealogy, an area showing dramatically increasing interest. A trend of the '90s and one of the fastest growing leisure activities in the Western world, there are now 54 Jewish genealogy societies worldwide and books on the subject abound. These, however, are just some of the sources where Jews curious about their ancestral roots — and the striking transformations their own kin have undergone — go to seek answers. As part of the worldwide family, we recognize that we, too, are an integral part of that long and established, yet constantly adapting and evolving, Jewish history.

We invite you join to us as we celebrate the successes of a people that met — and continues to meet — the challenges of history.

— DANA B. ASHER

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By SANDY ISENSTEIN,  
WOMEN'S AMERICAN ORT  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

**W**ith school just out and the temperature beginning to rise, it's hard to imagine that autumn is around the corner. But, for many of the leaders and staff at Women's American ORT, October looms large, even in the dog days of summer.

What's the big happening captivating our attention? October 26 to 29 is the date of our 33rd Biennial National Convention, an assembly that undoubtedly will endure as a benchmark in the reinvention of our organization. At this dynamic meeting, members of Women's American ORT will review and discuss what is perhaps the most dramatic set of organizational changes since its founding in 1927.

These critical deliberations will take place against the backdrop of impressive speakers (including celebrated journalist A.M. Rosenthal and organizational directors from around the world), a visit to Chicago's Zarem/Golde ORT Technical Institute, chats with students studying at ORT schools in the U.S. and abroad — and the skyscrapers of the Chicago skyline. As National President and a resident of the Windy City, I personally invite all members of Women's American ORT to attend this

groundbreaking convention, whether as delegates or as guests for the weekend and all that it offers.

In some ways, this convention is the culmination of a two-year journey. Long before that two-year mark, however, our leaders knew that in order for Women's American ORT to continue to fulfill its mission — to carry on with the strength and success it has enjoyed in years past — it would have to confront the same realities that all volunteer organizations face today. Women have entered the work force in droves. Volunteer time is scarce. Recessionary spells have made discretionary income a more valuable commodity than ever. Like every organization that depends on the time and philanthropy of its members, restructuring to meet ever-evolving needs is more than a priority, it's a hard-and-fast rule.

So, in July 1993, a consortium of management experts was commissioned to conduct an organizational audit. After presenting its findings to our National Executive Committee, a series of conference calls, regional hearings and other methods of dissemination were employed to educate the country's membership to the report's conclusions. A copy of the organizational audit is available from Women's American ORT's National Office for any member interested in reviewing it.

It was, indeed, the paradigm of democracy in action. In an organization run by its membership, it was essential that as many members as possible understood the momentous venture we were about to undertake.

The report's major proposals were adopted at our last convention, held in Miami in 1993. The ratification of these recommendations enabled

Women's American ORT to revamp its basic structure of governance beginning in 1995, creating the leanest and most effective leadership module possible.

The changes will be dramatic. The present National Executive Committee of more than 60 members will become an Executive Committee of 14. A National Board numbering almost 600 will be replaced by a Board of Directors of 35 members. A House of Delegates with proportional representation from every chapter will attend each convention, which will be held triennially, and term limits will be imposed. There will be limited standing committees; rather, many committees will be created for a defined period of time to address specific needs and projects.

We expect that this exciting reorganization will, in turn, have a considerable effect on many issues facing Women's American ORT. Perhaps most importantly, it will release critical funds for the ORT schools and programs as well as money to support chapter servicing. Term limits should result in a "fast track," expediting the next generation's progress into leadership positions. Streamlined governing bodies will be able to confer faster and make decisions with far greater productivity. Finally, this new framework will require less meetings and a far more flexible time commitment, a critical factor for today's busy woman.

In order to help reach these goals, the organizational audit also emphasized the need for a long-range strategic plan to guide Women's American ORT into the future. By September 1993, with the assistance of a human resources consulting firm, the National Executive Committee had un-

dertaken this endeavor. The long-range strategic plan — targeting areas running the gamut from leadership development and fund raising to advocacy on educational issues and membership — will be presented to the delegates at the 1995 convention for adoption.

At this time, I appointed a transition team — made up of lay leaders and professionals — to examine methods of implementation. In addition, the organization's leadership already has devised further innovations, including a direct mail campaign for members-at-large; a special fund for local "recruitment grants"; and a National Structure Committee which has been traveling throughout the country analyzing each area's strengths and weaknesses. One recent success of which I am most proud is the President's Young Leadership Council, composed of an exemplary group of women in their 20s, 30s and 40s, each of whom has undertaken a notable, innovative project in her home community to benefit Women's American ORT.

All major changes seem daunting — even frightening — at times. But, with this transformation comes tremendous possibilities for Women's American ORT, and that makes the changes exciting and, for me, wonderfully inspiring. I hope that as you learn more about our new path, you, too, will gain inspiration in all that our organization can, and will, achieve.

Come join us from October 26 to 29 as together we ensure that Women's American ORT will flourish tomorrow and create an organization where we as its current — and future — leaders will secure its strength, its mission and its success.

**T**o know Alice Shalvi is to know that this warm, soft-spoken woman is a grandmother of 15 as well as a charismatic leader. It is to know she is an eloquent speaker who has made an indelible mark on the Israel she loves and on the society whose flaws she sees and strives to redress. To know that she is a Shakespearean scholar of note and a respected professor of English literature. Principal and moving spirit for 15 years of a unique high school for religious girls and founding member and chair of the Israel Women's Network — an advocacy group that has put lobbying for women's rights on the Jewish state's parliamentary map — Shalvi is, to those who know her, a woman of remarkable vision.

But, this morning, getting to know Shalvi is to know her as a gracious hostess. I arrive a bit early to her Jerusalem home, but she is unflappable, warmly ushering me into her house and questioning my preference for coffee or tea. As she boils the water, I settle into a comfortable living room, brimming with books and scattered with tables and rugs. Shalvi, dressed in a casual sweater and a pair of slacks, brings in the tea and we begin to talk.

Born in Germany, Shalvi and her family emigrated to England when she was seven. Seeds of the activist she would become were sown in a home where her parents were united in their common readiness to help others. "My father, a great humanitarian and a profound Zionist, was constantly involved in community and political affairs, while my mother, home-oriented to a 'T,' kept a truly open house where everyone was welcome."

Shalvi is also the product of a very sound egalitarian education, both at a

## BY RUTH SELIGMAN

"good girls' school" and at Cambridge University, where she majored in English literature, receiving a BA with honors as well as an MA. The philosophy espoused at Cambridge — that there is nothing women cannot achieve — was a fundamental principle shared and supported by her parents.

Sociologist Naomi Nevo was a contemporary of Shalvi's at Cambridge. She maintains that even as a young woman, Shalvi possessed a charisma that belied her years. "There was something about her, a look on her face, and you knew that she was remarkable. She spoke very softly, never raised her voice, and was never rude; yet she was invariably very effective in getting her point across."

The year 1949 saw Shalvi in the newly-established Jewish state, where she joined the faculty of the English Department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, retiring in 1990 with the rank of associate professor. In the late '60s, she was a member of a group which investigated the discriminatory treatment given women academicians.

"We took our findings to the rector who met us with complete understanding. And much was corrected, including the nepotism ruling which forbade husbands and wives from working in the same department, a law which invariably worked to the disadvantage of the wife," she remembers.

An outspoken feminist who believes in the equality of opportunity, rewards and status, Shalvi also sees feminism as a transformation ideology, one which wishes to see a different world order where no area of knowledge or experience is

made inaccessible to women on grounds of gender — "a kind of sexless society" as she deems it. Yet, with a realism that has always tempered her idealism, Shalvi feels that women do have special qualities of caring and consideration. "Ultimately in this social transformation, we would have a society in which men would be more like women, rather than women becoming more like men."

Such observations of women have long driven Shalvi. Her doctoral thesis — "Renaissance Concepts of Honor in Shakespeare's Problem Plays" — led her to explore how the Bard perceived women. She believes that he was quite ahead of his time in discussing the relationships between men and women, and by comparing his work to other contemporary texts, to the didactic polemics of the time, Shalvi feels that she may have been the first person in Israel to engage in feminist analysis of literary texts. "In analyzing *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, I reassessed the character of Cressida, seeing her as a victim of a male-dominated world, a pawn sent off against her own wishes to the military camps. In so doing, I challenged the critics who had seen her as whorish."

While at the university, Shalvi was also raising her family of six — three boys and three girls. Dissatisfied with what she saw as traditional and narrow methods of education in Israel, particularly religious education, she found herself the principal of Pelech, a small experimental high school to which she had sent her two older girls, that was on the verge of closing. Shalvi stepped into the role of principal, volunteering her services.

Deeply and profoundly religious, Shalvi espouses an Orthodoxy that is neither rigid nor institutionalized. In her commitment to Judaism and Jew-

# Alice Shalvi



**Redefining the Role of the Israeli Woman**

ish law there is a place for everyone. To Pelech, Shalvi brought this enlightened value system of liberalism and tolerance.

“There never was a school like it,” maintains Esther Pinchover, the mother of one of Pelech’s students. “Professor Shalvi knew that in the larger scale of Israeli life, religious girls were not very important. She saw the need to open them to a whole new world of opportunities and options; she showed them that there was nothing they could not achieve.”

Pinchover lauds Shalvi for breaking new ground, proving that an Orthodox school can be something different. As principal, she possessed the uncanny ability to show the girls how to develop their powers of curiosity and individuality, how to apply themselves in new and creative ways. As Pinchover and



Alice Shalvi and her husband, Moshe

religious school to arrange meetings between Jewish and Arab students. “We definitely served as a model,” says Shalvi proudly. “Many of these innovations are now established practices in other schools.

“And today, more and more women are studying and teaching Torah at a higher level, studying Talmud, Jewish thought and *halacha*, not as epicureans, but seriously and thoroughly. By demonstrating that women are capable of such study, Pelech contributed to this movement.”

giving the issue far more extensive coverage. The Israel Women’s Network recently held an all-day conference with army officers on the role of women in the I.D.F. (Israel Defense Forces). TV stations covered the gathering, with scores of reporters in attendance. According to Shalvi, this wouldn’t have been the case five or six years ago.

The Israel Women’s Network has never swerved from its original three-fold plank of political lobbying, consciousness-raising and education. “Much of our effectiveness comes from the way we work as a coalition. When we came to the rabbinate to discuss problems faced by *agunot* (women whose husbands refuse to give them a *get*, or Jewish divorce), we represented all sides of the spectrum from that of Orthodox women, who believe as do I that solutions can be found within the halachic framework,

**“Ultimately in this social transformation, we would have men would be more like women, rather than women becoming**

other parents know, Pelech has produced a generation of women who today are clearly the leading women in intellectual Jewish life.

Shalvi herself counts Pelech as her greatest achievement. It was the first school in Israel to introduce a course on ecology when the subject was virtually unheard of and certainly not taught to students, a pioneer in developing a program of professionally supervised volunteer work in the community, as well as an academic institution maintaining a school parliament where students took responsibility for deciding issues usually within the province of teachers and administrators. Pelech was also a trailblazer among religious schools in creating a curriculum of family studies that included family planning, child psychology and the parental role in child development. Equally impressive, it was the initial reli-

**T**he achievements of the Israel Women’s Network — another of Shalvi’s great accomplishments and the one for which she is perhaps best known — are as significant as those of Pelech. The network has influenced political policy, and serves as such an impressive resource that M.K.s (Members of Knesset, Israel’s parliament) often come to the group for help in formulating legislation.

“When we began 10 years ago, people questioned the need for a lobby for women’s rights. Today, most understand how far from satisfactory is the position of women in Israel and that the inequalities and discriminatory practices must be dealt with,” Shalvi contends.

The network has also had a significant impact on the media. Just as many M.K.s now take the issues of women’s rights seriously, so too does the media which is

to radical feminists who see the solution only in civil marriage and divorce.”

Indeed, Bar-Ilan University professor Dafna Izraeli agrees that one of Shalvi’s greatest strengths as a leader is just that: her ability to bring together diverse groups of people. “Just as at the network women learned to dialogue and communicate with one another, so in the Knesset we now have women M.K.s cooperating across party lines,” Izraeli says. “On many an occasion they give priority to women’s issues over party positions — and that is really impressive.”

Shalvi, however, is not resting on past laurels. Energetic, hardworking and ambitious, she is constantly assessing current needs and seeking ways to respond. Two of her driving priorities are environmental preservation and getting more women into government and top-level positions everywhere. Accordingly, Shalvi



is particularly disturbed by the lack of women on the peace negotiation teams. "We have a critical mass of women with experience in dealing with Palestinians, for they have been meeting with Palestinian women for years on an ad-hoc basis. Although these women have constructive ideas, they are not being consulted."

**H**ow does Shalvi accomplish so much? Moshe, her American-born husband of 44 years, claims that his wife has an extraordinary capacity for doing many things at the same time. Shalvi, in turn, answers the question by pointing to her husband.

"You have to be persistent even if everyone is against you; for this you need a great deal of self-confidence, which I don't always have. However, in this area, Moshe is invaluable," she states. "I check out my ideas with him and measure my convictions by his reactions. If something is worth fighting for, he gives me the strength and encouragement to pursue it."

"I have always been involved in everything Alice does and vice-versa," says the husband of this remarkable woman who,

the network. "Without Moshe," she concedes, "I couldn't have managed."

There is no doubt that Moshe Shalvi is deeply committed to promoting and advancing his wife's activities. Using his considerable skills and experience, he gathers material for her, edits her speeches, acts as "social secretary" by taking messages and managing her calendar, and above all, stresses Shalvi, actively encouraging her to do what she believes to be most satisfying and most essential.

"With all due humility I'm a person who is constantly seeking to change and improve the world. And I always enjoy what I do," she says. "Yes, I am blessed and fortunate to be able to lead a life I find so happy and satisfying. And, hopefully, I will be remembered as someone who, like my parents, cared about other people."

The doorbell rings — another appointment, another shifting of gears. Moshe Shalvi stands with me on the sidewalk as we wait for my taxi. He tells me that he is now seeking a publisher for a new encyclopedia he is preparing, the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*.

The significance of this project does not escape me.

*Ruth Seligman, a freelance writer living in Ramat Gan, Israel, writes for numerous publications in Israel and abroad.*



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in his way, is as outstanding as she. Illustration and production editor of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and editor of the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, he is also a writer and man of ideas with an additional wealth of practical skills — from computer expertise to cooking. In 1975, when his father had a stroke, Moshe stopped working outside the house and agreed to take care of both his family as well as his father who came to live with the Shalvis. While he had always been involved in child care responsibilities, Moshe Shalvi began to assume many of the household chores, especially taking over all of the cooking and much of the marketing.

This "role reversal" came at a time when Alice Shalvi had taken over at Pelech, requiring her to be away all day. Then, when she became involved with the Israel Women's Network, she had three major commitments: the university, Pelech and



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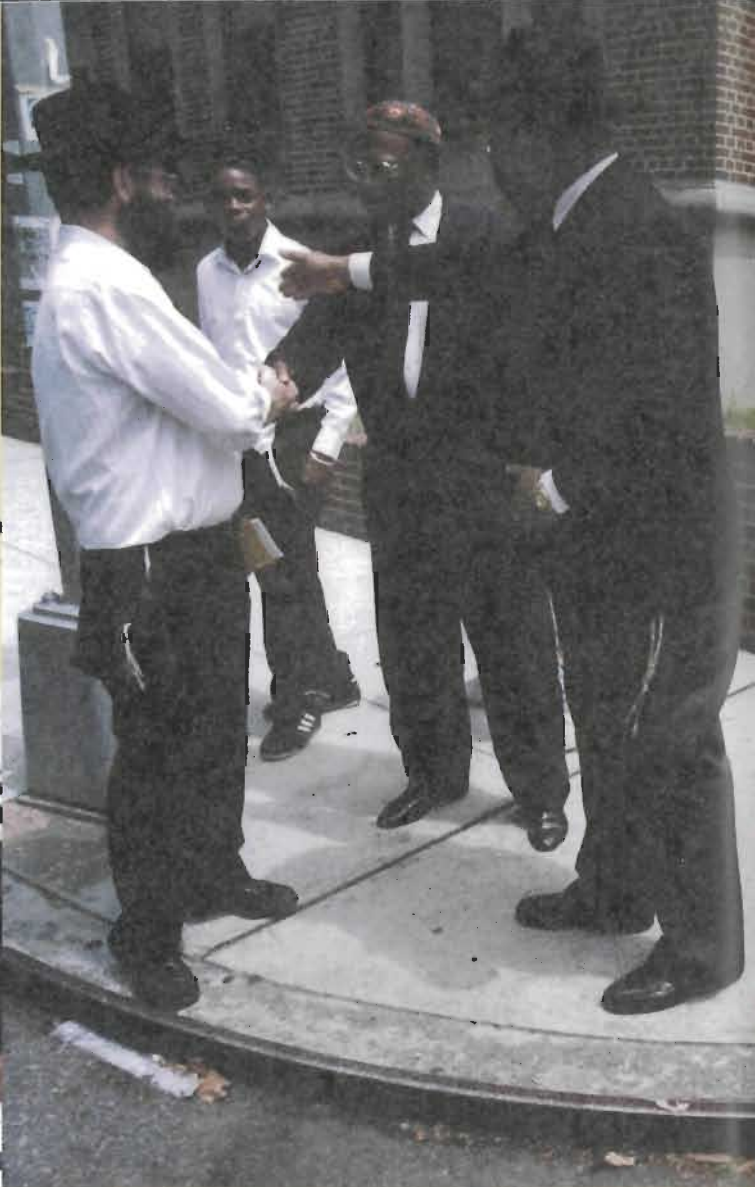
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Above left: Rabbi Shlomo Levy (left), with his father, Rabbi Levi Ben Levy, at Beth Elohim in Queens. Below: A service in the temple. Above right: Diversity in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.



# Black Jews: Changing the Face of American Jewry

BY  
MIRIAM RINN

**K**aren Picquet, a 26-year-old black woman from Florida, converted to Judaism two years ago when she was a student at the University of Florida. After many years in Catholic parochial schools, Picquet was astonished to find herself in a diverse college community. Half the girls in her first dorm were Jews, and she accepted the invitation of one to attend High Holy Day services.

"It was the first time I actually felt God's presence," shyly explains Picquet, who knew she wanted to learn more. A Conservative rabbi in Orlando was most welcoming, and Picquet felt immediately at home. "From the first day, I felt wonderful," she says, adding that the day of her conversion was the happiest one in her life to date.

Although her mother was a devout Catholic — her family attended church regularly — Catholic theology did not satisfy Picquet in some essential way. Still, her mother's deep faith has left a lasting impression. "I would not be as observant in my practice of Judaism if it were not for her."

Today, Picquet studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City and while she always has had to deal with her share of racial discrimination, now she must cope with anti-Semitism as well. Her first experience with religious prejudice came about when she was visiting

relatives in Jamaica. She decided to attend services at the small synagogue in Kingston, and as she walked out the door, a Jamaican native spotted her and began to scream obscenities.

"I can understand where both [Jews and blacks] are coming from," Picquet posits, and she acknowledges that it hurts her when friends ask her to choose one group over another. "There are times when I feel torn."

**T**here's little argument that the face of America is changing. With immigrants streaming in from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the image of the freckled blue-eyed blonde who once commonly represented the "all-American girl" is no longer. Likewise, the Jewish community boasts a relatively newfound diversity as well, as seen in the Syrian shuls or boutiques owned by Iranian Jews that can be effortlessly found by opening up a big city phonebook.

But while Sephardi Jews have become commonplace in the American Jewish population, there's still a group largely unrecognized in the melting pot of Jewish communities. Today, Jewish heterogeneity has been stretched even further, as thousands of African-American and biracial Jews integrate into what has been until now an overwhelmingly white population.

"We're who America's becoming," Robin Washington, the Jewish editor of Boston's African-American weekly *Bay State Banner*, announced at a symposium on being black and Jewish held at Brandeis University in the spring of 1994.

Robin Washington, the son of a white Jewish mother and an African-American father, is one way the American Jewish complexion is deepening. Another is through African-American converts to Judaism, such as Karen Picquet and New Jersey resident Chaim Fraser. There are also dark-skinned Jews who may have immigrated from Morocco or other North African countries. Another, often controversial group of America's black Jews is the large Falasha community scattered across the country. These black Hebrews, as they often call themselves, trace their Judaism to Ethiopia, the West Indies or the original tribes of Israel. Highly observant, they have until now been only marginally involved with the larger Jewish community and are regarded with some skepticism by mainstream Orthodox and Conservative rabbinic groups, who are doubtful that they are valid Jews by Jewish law. According to *halacha*, a person becomes a Jew by being born of a Jewish mother or converting through an approved process.

Washington makes no such distinctions. "My interest is in the Jews of color of America," he says. All black Jews, whether by birth or choice, will be welcome in the new organization Washington is founding with Rabbi Capers Funnye, religious leader of Beth Shalom B'nei Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation in Chicago, and Michelle Stein-Evers of California. The trio believe there may be more than 200,000 African-American Jews in the United States. The Council of Jewish Federation's 1990 National Population Survey, based on 2,500 randomly selected Jewish households across the United States, offers a more conservative estimate of approximately 100,000 self-identified black Jews in the country. The survey was careful to discard people, such as some fundamentalist Christians, who identified themselves as Jews but had no connection to Jewish life or community, according to research assistant Jeff Sheckner.

Washington is convinced that the National Conference of Black Jews, as his group will be called, will have something important to offer both the African-American and Jewish communities. "We know

we can offer a look at the diversity of the black community,” he comments. “There are more black Jews than there are members of the Nation of Islam.”

The conference can also help Jews understand that their present methods of dealing with the African-American community — and tensions in that relationship have been high-profile in recent years — may be ineffective. “You don’t deal with your adversary by calling him names,” remarks Washington, whose journalistic career has placed him in the center of black leadership circles.

Washington’s parents were divorced when he was a young boy, and he and his older brother were raised by his mother in Illinois. A civil rights activist, Washington’s mother introduced him to the brightest lights in the civil rights movement. “We were constantly in sit-ins and at demonstrations,” Washington recalls. “We had everyone in the world in our house.”

In that intellectually stimulating and cosmopolitan environment, Washington realized early that there were a great variety of people in the world, including many others like him. All four of his grandparents were college graduates, highly unusual in both the black and Jewish communities of the 1960s, and his paternal grandfather was a Methodist minister.

Although he’d long described himself as a black Jew and was excused from school on Jewish holidays and exempted from singing Christmas hymns, Washington first became fascinated by Judaism in college, where he began to attend religious services with a progressive *havura*-like group. Today married to a Jewish woman, Washington observes kashrut, wears a kippa, and identifies himself firmly as a Jew who is also black. His description of the organization he’s helping to found applies to himself as well: “We intend to be a black organization as well as a Jewish organization.”

**C**haim Fraser, who came to Judaism via a different path, sees himself as totally and completely a Jew and, unlike Washington, feels little connection to the black community of which he was once an involved member. A philosophy major at Harvard, Fraser attended Friday night services and felt an immediate pull toward Judaism. “I loved it right away,” Fraser explains, finding within Orthodox Judaism the calm orderliness he’d missed

during a turbulent childhood in South Carolina and young adulthood in the left wing of the civil rights movement. “Within the Orthodox world, I found a society that worked. [I felt] I was going home.”

Fraser originally wanted to be an Episcopal priest, but “was hijacked by the politics of the ’60s.” By the time he converted to Judaism at the age of 26, he’d already left behind his childhood religion, his adolescent dreams of changing the world, and the milieu of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. “I had left so many social worlds that converting was not a traumatic thing,” and the Orthodox community was “embarrassingly warm” toward him, Fraser remembers, making him feel at once welcome.

Married with three children, Fraser currently lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, a town with both large Orthodox and African-American populations. Those communities have been at odds lately, and Fraser is a member of a black/Jewish dialogue group. Although some blacks see him as a potential ally, Fraser is blunt about his loyalties. “I understand the black community in ways most Jews don’t, but it isn’t *my* community.”

Fraser has found within Judaism a respite from the racism that permeates American society. “Race is not a halachic category,” he points out, and his black/Cherokee heritage has not prevented him from becoming a respected member of his shul and community. “That’s not how we organize our lives. To the extent that people are caught up with *halacha*, my race is irrelevant.” Fraser believes strongly that Orthodox Judaism is a self-sufficient lifestyle, one that has to be accepted totally. “Conversion is a break. It has to be in order to be successful.” It would be a mistake, he thinks, to encourage black — or any other — Jews-by-Choice to believe they can live in two worlds.

**B**esides born Jews and converts, who merge imperceptibly into American mainstream Jewry, another group of black Jews exists at the edges. On the East Coast, congregations of African-Americans — tracing their ancestry to the *marranos* who settled in the West Indies after the Spanish Inquisition — pray in Hebrew from a Sephardi prayerbook, avoid pork and shellfish, and use separate dishes for meat and dairy. Some send their children to religious day schools, others do not.

Some incorporate elements of the African-American Christian tradition into their services such as rhythmic handclapping and emotional hymns, while others don’t. Most maintain close ties to the Ethiopian Falasha community, according to Hailu Paris, who was adopted by an Ethiopian Jewish family in the 1930s.

“Black Hebrews have maintained a separate identity because the whole Jewish community has not been as welcoming as Rabbi [Irving] Block,” notes Paris, who is the chazzan at Congregation Mt. Horeb in the Bronx.

Block, a white rabbi who in 1954 founded the Brotherhood Synagogue in New York, has long been a champion of the black Hebrews. He has worked with leaders of the community for over 40 years, since his student days at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform movement’s rabbinic seminary. “Here is a group of people who are passionately attracted to Jewish life,” Block remarks. “If the Reform movement can call [offspring of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers] Jews, why can’t I call [black Hebrews] Jews?”

To those who may deny the validity of black Hebrews, Block asks them, “Are you Jewish?” When the response is affirmative, he answers, “Prove it to me.” When no response is quite adequate — indeed, the rabbi will simply have to believe his conversation mate — he retorts, “I’ll have to take your word for it, you say? Then why shouldn’t I take the word of a black Hebrew, who also considers himself Jewish and practices Jewish observance?”

Rabbi Eliezer Brooks, who received his ordination from Beth Midrash L’Rabonim in Brooklyn, was born and raised in Panama in a small community that referred to itself as Hebrews. A colleague of Rabbi Block, he believes that the black Jewish population in the West Indies resulted from the mingling of Portuguese and Spanish *marranos* and *conversos*, who arrived in North America in the late 15th century, with the African slaves who began to appear in the New World at the same time. Those hidden Jews may have taught their slave mistresses or wives their customs and beliefs, and informally converted them to Judaism.

“A lot of the people who were slaves [in the United States] were Jews ancestrally,” Brooks said. Like the Ethiopian immigrants to Israel, American black Hebrews are deeply insulted by demands that they un-

dergo conversion before they're accepted as Jews, Brooks says. He hopes that wider familiarity with the community will bring acceptance. "We've been hurting so long."

Chicago's Rabbi Capers Funnye did not let any sense of hurt feelings stand in the way of his joining the larger Jewish community, however. Although he'd already been converted to Judaism by a black Hebrew rabbi, he underwent a second conversion in 1985 by a *beit din* of Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. He was inspired, he said, by the story of a white Jew who encountered the Jews of Ethiopia. When he told them he was a fellow Jew, the Ethiopians didn't believe him. There are no white Jews, they said, believing themselves to be the last of the Jewish people. "What do I need to do to be a Jew in your eyes?" the white man asked, and then followed their conversion practices. If it made his Orthodox and Conservative colleagues more comfortable, Funnye had no objection to following their practices.

"Many black Jews come to Judaism and feel they are *ba'al teshuva*," Funnye explains, using the Hebrew term for Jews who rediscover — or return to — their religious heritage. Regardless of how blacks discovered Judaism, he believes there are thousands of African-American Jews who are longing for connection. "All across the country there are people of African-American descent, some biracial, who are feeling left out."

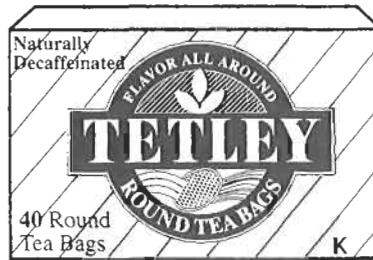
Funnye's own congregation started in Chicago in 1913, making it the oldest black Hebrew congregation to his knowledge. Although he's affiliated with the Israelite Board of Rabbis and is on the board of directors of the American Jewish Congress, Beth Shalom has never applied to join any of the mainstream synagogue associations. His congregants don't need to belong to an association to feel comfortable as Jews, Funnye contends. "We have people in their 70s and 80s whose children and grandchildren have known only Judaism."

Both Washington and Funnye believe strongly that African-American Jews are the one group that can effectively speak to these increasingly fractious groups. "Black Jews can bring a sense of shared experience. They can be a bridge," Funnye maintains. "Black Jews offer a dynamic opportunity to link these two communities."

*Miriam Rinn, a New Jersey-based freelance writer, has had her work appear in The Forward and The New York Times.*



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I am rushing, map in hand, along Korut Erzebet, one of Budapest's main thoroughfares. Without warning, an elderly Hungarian, a congenial sort with an open smile and friendly demeanor, is walking beside me. "Where are you going? Can I help you?" he asks eagerly. "I like to practice my English." The old man quickly apologizes for its quality. "Poor," he states, clearly expecting me to protest. To his pleasure, I do.

By then, having been in Budapest for nearly two weeks, I know my way around. But I don't have the heart to refuse his gallantry, so I show him my destination on the map, a street that leads into the Jewish quarter. The man seems satisfied, as if he has found something he was looking for. After he points the way, he tells me matter-of-factly, "And I am Jewish, I was in Dachau."

"I'm Jewish, too," I tell him. He smiles, as if to say, "Of course you are, I knew it as soon as I saw you." He wishes me a pleasant time and hurries away.

An amiable exchange between tourist and citizen, indeed. But one which prior to 1989, the year the infamous Iron Curtain crumbled, most likely would not have occurred.

Jewish life in Hungary, traumatized by the Holocaust and suffocated under communism, is suddenly reemerging. Some speak of a "Jewish miracle." Synagogues are being renovated, and the 119-year-old rabbinic seminary in Budapest — the only one in Eastern Europe — is once again training a new generation of religious leaders for Hungary. Entire sections devoted to Judaica are now prominently displayed in the bookstores along Vaci ut, Budapest's chic commercial strip. In one, a Jewish magazine, *Szombat* ("Shabbat"), published by the Hungarian-Jewish Cultural Society, features an article about Philip Roth. And, one needn't delve into books to learn about culture and religion: Budapest has four major Jewish newspapers — as many as New York City.

Restaurants and establishments catering to the Jewish palate also abound. Most are situated around the Wesselenyi ut, a street that winds through Erzebetvaros, Budapest's old Jewish quarter, and offer dishes like goose soup with ginger-flavored matzah balls, cold goose liver in fat, and *flodni*, an irresistible pastry with layers of prune, apple and poppy seeds.

While most of Budapest's Jews no longer live in Erzebetvaros, it remains the center of Jewish life. Its narrow streets are filled with reminders of a sometimes devastating past: As elsewhere in Budapest, many of the grimy apartment buildings here are still decorated with bullet-holes, souvenirs of World War II and the '56 Uprising. The lobbies are

only one of many projects with which the Joint has been involved. Another was the building of a state-of-the-art community and computer center — in cooperation with ORT and Budapest's Jewish community — that is electronically connected to Jewish libraries all over the world through ORTnet.

As much a part of this Hungarian-Jewish renaissance is yet another post-communist phenomenon: the opening of the glatt kosher Hanna, where a hoary-headed man with a long white beard and yarmulke sits in the kitchen, chopping sorrel. The eatery, which maintains the atmosphere of a

# The Hungarian

## THE JEWISH COMMUNITY REDISCOVERED

decorated with stained-glass windows, the blue, yellow and red panes arranged in Jewish motifs. They lead into romantic inner courtyards, their peeling stucco facades in shades of butterscotch, outlined with black wrought iron banisters. The Germans made this Jewish quarter into a ghetto in November of 1944, crowding as many as 65,000 Jews into the small area.

Next to the huge, Moorish-style synagogue on Dohany ut, now covered with scaffolding, is a courtyard — Heroes Cemetery — where thousands, shot or dead of disease or starvation, were buried in mass graves. Adjacent to the burial site is a Holocaust Memorial by Hungarian sculptor Inre Varga, in the form of a huge silver weeping willow, each individual leaf inscribed with the name of a victim.

Varga's monument was erected in 1987, two years before the fall of communism. Before then, any mention of the Holocaust was taboo; since then, the Budapest office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has set up the first support group for survivors in Eastern Europe. But that is

kibbutz dining room, is named for Hanna Senesh, the young Hungarian-born Zionist who parachuted into Hungary on a rescue mission and was murdered by the Nazis.

Remarkably, this celebrated heroine — the star of Jewish legends — virtually was unknown among Hungarian-Jewish youth until recently. Upon hearing her story, their reaction was "It never happened, it's an Israeli myth!" Time certainly can change perception. Jewish students, in conjunction with the Joint office, recently presented a play about Hanna Senesh, and the Hanna restaurant has become a local hangout for students from the American Endowment School, founded in 1990 with help from American Orthodox Jews in conjunction with Toronto's Reichman family.

The American Endowment School is but one of three Hebrew day schools, all of which report growing enrollments. All three have received ORT technology and science courses, teacher training and curriculum development; science and technology laboratories have also been supplied. The three schools have

also been hooked into ORTnet through the Jewish community center, providing access to tremendous Jewish resources from all over the world. The Anne Frank School, the only Jewish school that functioned under communism, is "neologue," a designation that corresponds roughly to Conservative. The academic institution taught more than 1,000 students a year before the German occupation, when the Nazis turned it into a military hospital. Under communism, the school became a state school. Today, the Anne Frank School is filled to capacity.

The Lauder School, which defines itself as a secular Jewish institution and accepts non-Jewish students, was also

founded in 1990 with help from ORT, and is now supported in part by the U.S.-based Lauder Foundation. "Ninety-five percent of the children at Lauder are not religious," Peter Etendi, the young deputy head of the high school, states in excellent English. "The kids came to this school knowing nothing about Jewish life. But their parents are sorry they lost those traditions."

There is hope that the losses are not irrevocable. At the Jewish schools, Hebrew is required, and Jewish educators speak of the parents' enthusiasm for Jewish education. Moshe Jagoda, director of the Joint office, and Hilla Zemer, its program director, show visitors a video of a Jewish camp established by

the Lauder foundation in 1989 for children from all over Eastern Europe. That camp in Szarvas, some three hours southeast of Budapest, has become so popular that there are now more applicants than space for them.

"Every year they study a different topic. Last year it was the life cycle," explains Zemer as a film of kids from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary touching a Torah for the first time, celebrating a collective bar mitzvah, and staging a mock chasidic wedding flashes on a video screen. Other educators avidly discuss student programs in Israel where, for the first time,

**BY ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU**

young Hungarian Jews are spending their summers on kibbutzim.

Despite the resurgence in interest and pride, however, the vast majority of Hungarian Jews have no intention of making aliyah. They consider Hungary their home.

**A frum woman strolls through the Jewish quarter**

# Renaissance

## ERS ITS ROOTS IN BUDAPEST



PHOTOS: ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU



Each leaf of the Holocaust memorial, sculpted by artist Imre Varga and situated next to the Dohany synagogue, is inscribed with the name of a victim.

There were Jews already living in Budapest in Roman times, when the city was the site of a large fort called Aquincum, of which extensive ruins still exist. That was long before the Magyars arrived, bringing with them their strange, non-Indo-European language. During Hungary's cultural and economic heyday at the time of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Jews were so numerous in Budapest — making up nearly one quarter of the population — that Hungary's capital was sarcastically dubbed “Judapest.” The Hungarian Jews flourished during this period, both economically and artistically, and along with their successes came their assimilation. Many converted to Christianity or intermarried or, at the very least, “Magyarized” their Jewish names. Like their German brethren, these “enlightened” Jews thought of themselves as Hungarians first.

But assimilation in Hungary, as elsewhere, in a large sense failed. Over half a million of the country's Jews died during the Holocaust. The Germans, however, did not occupy Hungary until the end of the war; consequently, they had time to murder “only” half of Budapest's Jewish population — then about 185,000 — before being forced to flee the invading Red Army.

Hungary today has the largest Jewish population in Central Europe, with the majority living in the nation's capital. Their exact number is unknown, with wildly differing estimates ranging from 57,000 (cited in the latest American Jewish Congress Yearbook) to the 300,000 reported by the Jewish Agency. The most frequently mentioned figure is 80,000 to 100,000. To take an accurate census seems impossible: Would one count those who are partially of Jewish origin, or the Jews who converted, or Jews who would not care to identify themselves as Jews?

It is a complicated question at best. The assimilation that was long a fact of Hungarian Jewish life became even more urgent under communism, when all religion was firmly sup-

pressed. A person had to deny his or her Jewishness to get a party position or a job promotion. Many parents were afraid to circumcise their newborn sons. One boy, Andras, didn't know he was Jewish until a classmate, whose parents had known the child's family for years, told Andras he had to play Judas in the school's annual Easter pageant.

“You couldn't even say the word *Szido* [Jew] out loud. If there was a funeral, Jews wouldn't say, ‘I'll see you

at the Jewish cemetery,’ but ‘I'll see you at the cemetery on Kozma Street,’” says Dr. George Lippner, principal of the Lauder School. Consequently, two generations of Hungarian Jews grew up without any Jewish education, without lighting candles on Shabbat or fasting on Yom Kippur. To offer courses in Hebrew and Jewish studies, Budapest's three Jewish day schools have had to import teachers from Israel and the United States.

Two of those teachers are Zvi and Blimi Lampel, a young Orthodox couple who returned to New York in June 1994, after spending a year at the American Endowment School. When asked how many Orthodox families live in Budapest, Blimi Lampel doesn't hesitate to come up with a number.

“There are 15 young families,” she answers, “not counting the older people.” She adds that most of them are newly Orthodox. Some are converts from Christianity; others from completely assimilated families. Some had one Jewish grandparent.

Hungary today has the largest Jewish population in Europe, with the majority living in the capital.

At American Endowment, the vast majority of the parents were not Orthodox.

When asked why they are sending their children to an Orthodox school, she smiles. “Nobody knows! Never would I have imagined...one draw is learning English. And then, there is Jewish pride. Many are on their way to becoming Jewish; Jewish children are gaining interest in Judaism. They are not well-educated in their religion so they take on the externals. They wear beards, and chasidic-type clothing. Often the kids are fascinated with chasidism, maybe because they were brought up to hide their Judaism, and now it is something identifiable. At the same time, they are struggling to keep kosher.

“We left with a heavy heart, because a lot of students became



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GRACE FALK  
PAULINE FALK  
CANDY FAMILANT  
SIMA FAMILANT  
BARBARA FEIFER  
KAREN FEIN  
ERNESTINE FEINLAND  
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AVA SILBER FELDMAN  
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ROBIN FELDMAN  
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GLUCK  
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FAE HOFFMAN  
BETTY HOFFMAN

BETH HOFFMAN  
DEENA HOFFMAN  
MARCIA HOFHEIMER  
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EVA OGULNICK  
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BEVERLY PASTERNAK  
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BARBARA PATISH  
RHODA PAULL  
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BARBARA ANN  
PEARLMAN  
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DOROTHY POLAYES  
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 TANNENBAUM  
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 BLOSSOM TRUSTMAN  
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 JOANNE TULIN  
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 CAREN WEINBERG  
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 WEINBERGER  
 SUE WEINBERGER  
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 FANI WEISSMAN  
 LINDA WEISSMAN  
 NANCY WEISSMANN  
 ROSE WEISZ  
 LEE G. WERTHEIMER

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observant and they need our help. But I feel optimistic about Jewish life in Hungary.”

The impulse of some Hungarian Jews to return to their roots is not surprising, viewed in the context of the fall of communism. All over Eastern Europe, feelings bottled up for more than 40 years spilled over; included among the nationalistic and religious fervor was the inevitable anti-Semitism. During the 1994 election campaigns, newly emerged right-wing parties such as MIEP, The Party of Hungarian Truth and Light, voiced complaints about the Jews owning Hungary. A magnificent memorial to Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who in 1944 saved the lives of thousands of Budapest Jews, was defaced. Graffiti in the form of Jewish stars often turned up on campaign posters for the liberal candidates, who were supported by many Jews.

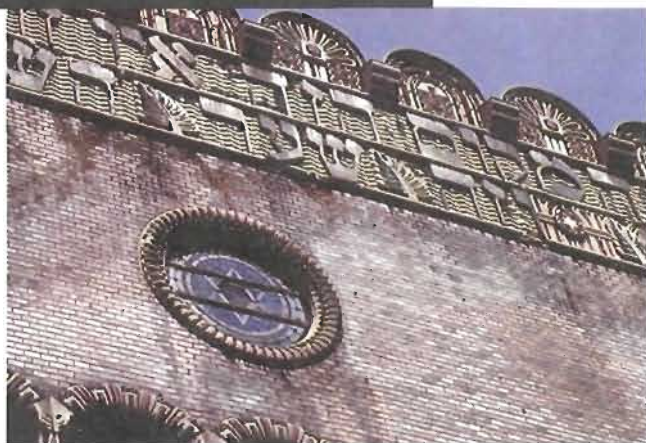
Happily, no rightist parties had enough support to win seats in Parliament, and Hungarian Jews breathed a sigh of relief. For the moment, it appears most Hungarians reject anti-Semitism. The “secular Jewish” Lauder school estimates that 20 percent of its students are not Jewish. According to teacher Aggi Cardosz, a rabbi’s daughter, gentile parents have told her they send their children there because they don’t want them to grow up with anti-Semitic feelings.

So for now, the Hungarian Jews feel reasonably secure. They are not afraid to let their presence be known in Budapest, which they feel is their city and of which they are justifiably proud. For the first time in four decades, they can experience the joys of their heritage in their homeland, a place where Jewish history has a long and often tumultuous history.

And, they’re eager to share it with the Jewish visitor, stopping them on their streets, and guiding them to the Erzsebetvaros, for a steaming bowl of goose soup with matzah balls.

*Alice Sparberg Alexiou is a writer living in New York. Her work has appeared in Moment magazine and the Jerusalem Post, among other publications. She is currently working on a book chronicling the experience of a Righteous Gentile in war-time Budapest.*

population in Central  
nation’s capital.



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Col. Harry D. Henschel, vice president of Bulova Watch Company and national chair of the Jewelry Division of the United Jewish Appeal, watches the work of two Jewish foundrymen in an iron foundry set up by ORT in Germany's American zone.

# A GLANCE BACK 50 YEARS

## ORT STUDENTS SHARE THOUGHTS ON THE TRAINING THAT CHANGED THEIR LIVES

BY SARA NUSS-GALLES

In 1945, when the indescribable horror of World War II ended in Europe, the needs of the Jewish people were enormous. Ravaged survivors were liberated from concentration camps, individuals streamed from hideouts in woods and cellars, and refugees with neither home nor family could be found everywhere. The world responded with food, clothing, medical supplies — the necessities of life. The mission of ORT, however, was different: It was oriented toward the future, a view that had become a luxury many could ill afford in the struggle to survive. Yet, it was precisely that path and vision for the future that was needed in order to continue.

In displaced person's camps, in cities and towns across Europe, wherever refugees were massed, ORT arrived to introduce this vision of tomorrow through self-sufficiency. Training centers were established so that each person could become self-reliant, earn a living, and go forward into the world — wherever that might be —

with confidence and restored dignity. Speaking recently with a handful of the tens of thousands of participants in ORT programs from 1945 until the early 1950s, this was the theme that former students repeatedly expressed.

The year 1945 found 15-year-old Carol Redlich in the displaced persons (DP) camp set up in the military barracks of the former Nazi concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen. Each morning, Redlich and other young people in the camp attended high school, while the afternoon was dedicated to classes in the ORT trade school. "The funny part was that I didn't want to spend more time in school," she confides. "But my friend, who was like a mother to me, made me go."

Instructors — some of them Jews from what was then called Palestine — taught dress design and sewing. Eventually, these students were able to design and sew clothes for the younger children. Redlich trained

In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Europe during World War II — and in recognition of ORT's role during this time of transformation — *The Reporter* offers in this issue the second of a two-part series. The first article, in the Spring 1995 issue, featured an excerpt from the memoirs of Jacob Oleiski, an ORT leader instrumental in the organization's introduction into the DP camps. In this second piece, writer Sara Nuss-Galles talks to individuals living in the United States who were educated by ORT in those camps half a century ago. Some continue to practice to this day a trade learned long ago; others used the skills to get to America and find employment, later moving on to other fields and endeavors. Regardless, all have vivid memories of the experience.

When Nuss-Galles was approached with this assignment, she did not realize how close to home it would prove. In the 1930s, her father, Herman Nuss, learned of an organization in Warsaw that helped young Jews obtain training for a chauffeur's license.

"At that time," Nuss related to his daughter, "a Jew like me had as much access to a car as I would have now to pilot an airplane — and certainly no money to pay for the schooling." The organization was ORT, which subsidized his attendance at the Marjana Reczko Driving School, where he learned mechanics, first aid and driving. During the war, these skills repeatedly contributed to his own and his family's survival by making him useful to the Russian army, first in Russian-occupied Poland and later, in Siberia and Central Asia.



This cobbler's shop in Paris, sponsored by ORT and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) trained some 250 workmen and women every three months. The shop not only offered Jewish refugees skills in the industry, but provided shoes for destitute Jewish children as well.

Chil Blumstein, left, a native of Poland who took refuge in Russia from the Nazis during the war, smiles approvingly at the first piece of knit goods turned out by his son, Moishe, at a trade school in Paris operated by ORT and the JDC.

for three years, and then joined her aunt and uncle in Paterson, New Jersey.

Her skills almost immediately won her a job sewing jacket parts in a local factory, but the once reluctant student soon resumed her education. A member of Women's American ORT for 30 years (Tampa Ridge Chapter in California), Redlich emphasizes her "kinship for ORT, because it does a tremendous job, and did it then under limited circumstances." Crediting her design and color sense to her early training, Redlich now runs an art gallery/frame shop. Although she never returned to sewing professionally, she has always designed and sewed clothing for herself and her children, her grandchild being the current beneficiary of the ORT skills learned in her youth.

If Henry Friedman had a crystal ball when he was 16 years old, he would have been thrilled to know that he one day would work with robots and automation. But, in trying to get to Palestine in 1945, he was detained in a transit camp in Italy with a pre-war German education and no means to earn a living. ORT representatives who came to the camp assessed the youth's interests and abilities and sponsored his — and others' — enrollment in an industrial engineering school in Rome. "It was like they adopted us; they paid for books, transportation and tuition for two-and-a-half years, and made me what I am today."

Prevented from emigrating to Palestine by the British blockade, Friedman turned to an uncle in New York who procured a visa for his entry into the United States. The ambitious young man soon landed a job as a tool and die maker, but on his first day he was stunned to learn that the numbers on the blueprints read like a foreign language. (The metric system he had used during training was not employed in this country.) Afraid of losing his job, Friedman tracked down an ORT center near Manhattan's Columbus Circle where, that very evening, he received a crash course in the standard system. The next day, he returned to work competent and confident.

In recent years, the Oak Park, Michigan, resident has been a troubleshooter for General Motors, and has developed an avocation as a sculptor of Jewish- and Holocaust-themed works made of found metal objects. Friedman often shares his saga with various groups, maintaining, "This is not an exaggeration: [With] what



I learned in ORT, I could have made a living anywhere in the world.”

And wherever in the world one travels, ORT graduates voice similar sentiments. “I have good memories of ORT,” Margaret Krauss says of her two years of training. Krauss and her friends, mostly displaced teens, attended classes in a large building on the outskirts of Munich, where each room’s class focused on a different trade. Learning was “from the bottom up — how to take measurements, make patterns, run a machine, and put together a garment.” Krauss especially credits the social component of that experience. For youngsters who had lost families and childhood, she contends that “the warmth and friendliness” were critical factors in a transition that helped them put their lives together.

After her training, Krauss came to the United States and soon set out on the subway from the Bronx, “holding a piece of paper with an address in Yiddish, looking for Jewish faces to help me find my way.” She not only found her way, but she landed a job as a piece worker in a shirt factory, where she held a position for several years. These days, the Queens, New Yorker, laughingly insists that, “Now I only sew if I need to fix something.”

Indeed, many ORT students saw the chance to learn a skill as just the opportunity they needed. David Levine, formerly from Lithuania, also found himself in Munich after the war. When word spread that ORT was establishing training schools, the serious young man jumped at the chance. “None of us planned to stay in Germany,” he recalls. “The idea was emigration. We were young, but we knew we needed a trade, something to do.”

Initially, Levine registered for filmmaking and movie projection, but there were not enough enrollees to run the class. So, he turned to auto mechanics, where some 40 students learned to drive and fix cars. Classes were held in an old but well-equipped building that may have housed a trade school before the war. Some Jewish survivors taught classes, but Levine recalls that German instructors were also employed, upsetting some students in the process.

“I had no problem with the teachers; I had an empty head and they could teach me,” Levine asserts. “Each and every morn-

ing, the teacher, Mr. Feistle, entered class and repeated, ‘I was not a Nazi.’” Levine learned a great deal from this middle-aged man, and still has his notes from those classes. On coming to the United States, he initially worked as an auto mechanic, and laughs now as he recalls his distaste at getting his hands dirty.

Eventually the Cincinnati engineer earned college degrees in metallurgy and chemical engineering, receiving two years of math credit for his ORT training. “The nature, physics, chemistry, materials and workings of the engine...these fascinated me and formed the basis of my future.”

Like Levine, many of those young men and women dreamed of driving a car. When Gerard Nuss (the writer’s brother) heard of ORT classes in the Bergen-Belsen DP Camp where his family had moved after leaving Russia, he registered at once. Nuss vividly recalls learning theory as well as receiving hands-on training on an internal combustion engine. A miniature four-cylinder model engine with clear plastic casing enabled students to watch the piston and valve action and the origination of the spark.

When it came time to drive, however, the 14 year old was too young, despite being one of the tallest in the class. He was limited to observing from the back of the truck as older students practiced shifting, accelerating and reversing. The eternally tinkering Northbrook, Illinois, man admits feeling disappointed, but insists that the classes were an extraordinary experience, due in part to the teachers, themselves survivors.

The recently retired jewelry maker and insurance agent lauds other effects of the program. “We learned to be more understanding and how to cooperate; [previously] we had been so involved in surviving, we learned how to relax and be less aggressive.” His early training in how things work made it natural to invent tools to speed the task; Nuss’ workshop is filled with tools he personally creates and modifies. No slogan could better convey ORT’s goal.

Still, if one were seeking the proverbial poster girl for ORT, Lillian Goodman would fit the bill. The Rumanian-born teen was in a DP camp near Naples, Italy, when she heard that ORT was con-

ducting a logo contest. Working together, she and her friends designed a globe overlaid with concentric circles that touched the entire world, symbolic of ORT’s reach. The youngsters’ entry won and they split the generous cash prize.

Fired by enthusiasm, Goodman’s facility for languages led her to serve as a translator for ORT workers and teachers; at the same time, she enrolled in machine knitting and dressmaking, eventually becoming certified in each. Goodman recalls that donations and agencies were common in the camps, “But, when ORT came, it was different. They said they would teach us to be self-reliant and everyone was enthused...they made us feel important.”

When the exuberant young woman received her American visa, she designed and sewed a special outfit in which to embark to New York harbor for her new life. Little did she know that on August 4, 1951, a photographer from the former New York paper, the *Daily Mirror*, was on hand, and the striking new arrival’s picture made the paper. Life moved forward — with work, marriage and family entering the picture. Years later, when Women’s American ORT was opening chapters in Michigan, this Parkwood Chapter member crisscrossed the state, sharing her story, repaying what she considers a “lifelong obligation.”

Perhaps, it is fitting to conclude with the words of Jay Sommers, who was honored at a White House award ceremony in 1981 as National Teacher of the Year. The New Rochelle, New York, resident bears a mantle of teaching credentials and honors that have been garnered during a life which began in America in 1948. Prior to that, the war deposited him in a DP camp in Cremona, Italy.

His recently-published book, *The Journey to the Golden Door, A Survivor’s Tale\**, recreates the world of the ORT school he attended, “the feeling of hustle and bustle that came at a time when people were walking languidly about, and the sound of machinery instilled the seed of hope again. The whirring of the sewing machines...the hissing of the welding guns, the squeaking of the lathes, and the robust voices of the instructors filled us with inspiration, with a strong sense of usefulness.”

*Sara Nuss-Galles is a freelance writer living in Madison, New Jersey.*

\*The Journey to the Golden Door, A Survivor’s Tale is available through Jay Sommers by writing to him at 11 Lakeside Dr., New Rochelle, NY 10801 or by calling him at (914) 235-0624.

# Y I C H U S

## In Search of Jewish Roots

*Gertrude Solnik Rogers spent her childhood in a small town in Ontario wondering about her mother's secret. Who — and where — were her maternal relatives? Her mother never spoke of them.*

"You just didn't ask," Rogers says. "You just knew she didn't want to talk." What she did know was that her mother had been orphaned in Poland (Rogers speculates that both her maternal grandparents died in the flu epidemic that wrecked havoc in Europe in 1919), had received no schooling, and felt tragically deserted by her family. After her mother died, Rogers found an uncle in South America and cousins in France. All it took was a couple of phone calls to start the ball rolling.

Today, Rogers is piecing together the story of her mother's life before she came to Georgetown, Canada, in 1927 with a boatload of orphans at the age of 16. All her mother ever admitted about Rogers' father is that "he left and never came back." One of eight children, her mother was farmed out to a Polish Jewish family to be their servant — leaving her without any form of education. An uncle, who years later survived the war because he was hidden by a Polish Catholic family, sponsored her trip to Canada.

All of this information had to be patched together from snippets of information garnered from newfound relatives, documents from Yad Vashem in Israel, reading *Schindler's List*, visiting the Mormon church in Utah (where hundreds of thousands of records are on microfiche), and going through the papers preserved in libraries, Landsmanshaften groups (mutual aid societies) and cemetery records. In pursuit of her past, Rogers has traveled to Poland, Germany, Israel and the United States. She has found out that some

relatives left Poland for Germany, only to be shipped back to concentration camps in Poland. "I wanted to know why they went to the country of the enemy, but didn't choose to go to Russia." She now knows that 65 relatives died in the Holocaust, who they were, and how she was related to them.

**P**ersonal Jewish identity can be defined by means as diverse as a brunch of bagels and lox to redefining one's spirituality with bits from New Age Kabbalah, from focusing on issues like freeing Syrian Jewry to eating at only kosher restaurants, from living vicariously through Israel as an armchair Zionist to finding religious renewal through a local *havura*.

Another growing expression of Jewish identity is the search for one's roots. Values have changed from the materialism that typified the last decade to an emphasis on family, friends, community and continuity. Genealogy has become a hot topic in the '90s, and it is one of the fastest growing leisure activities in the Western world. The estimated membership in genealogical societies in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia is well over a quarter of a million. There are now 54 Jewish genealogy societies around the world, and five international conferences have already taken place. D.C. Discoveries, the 14th Summer

Seminar on Jewish Genealogy, is slated for Washington this June.

Genealogy is a search for the hidden, the unspoken, the secrets. This study of family pedigrees has become much more than a hobby. For many, it is a passion, practically a way of life.

The reasons for tracing one's family connections are as numerous as the number of searchers. Some take deep pride in assembling large numbers of names for their family tree: One can find amateur genealogists who maintain vast family trees with more than 2,500 names. Some, like Brigitte Dayan of Chicago, are exploring *yichus* — connections to the "blue blood" of the great rabbinical families.

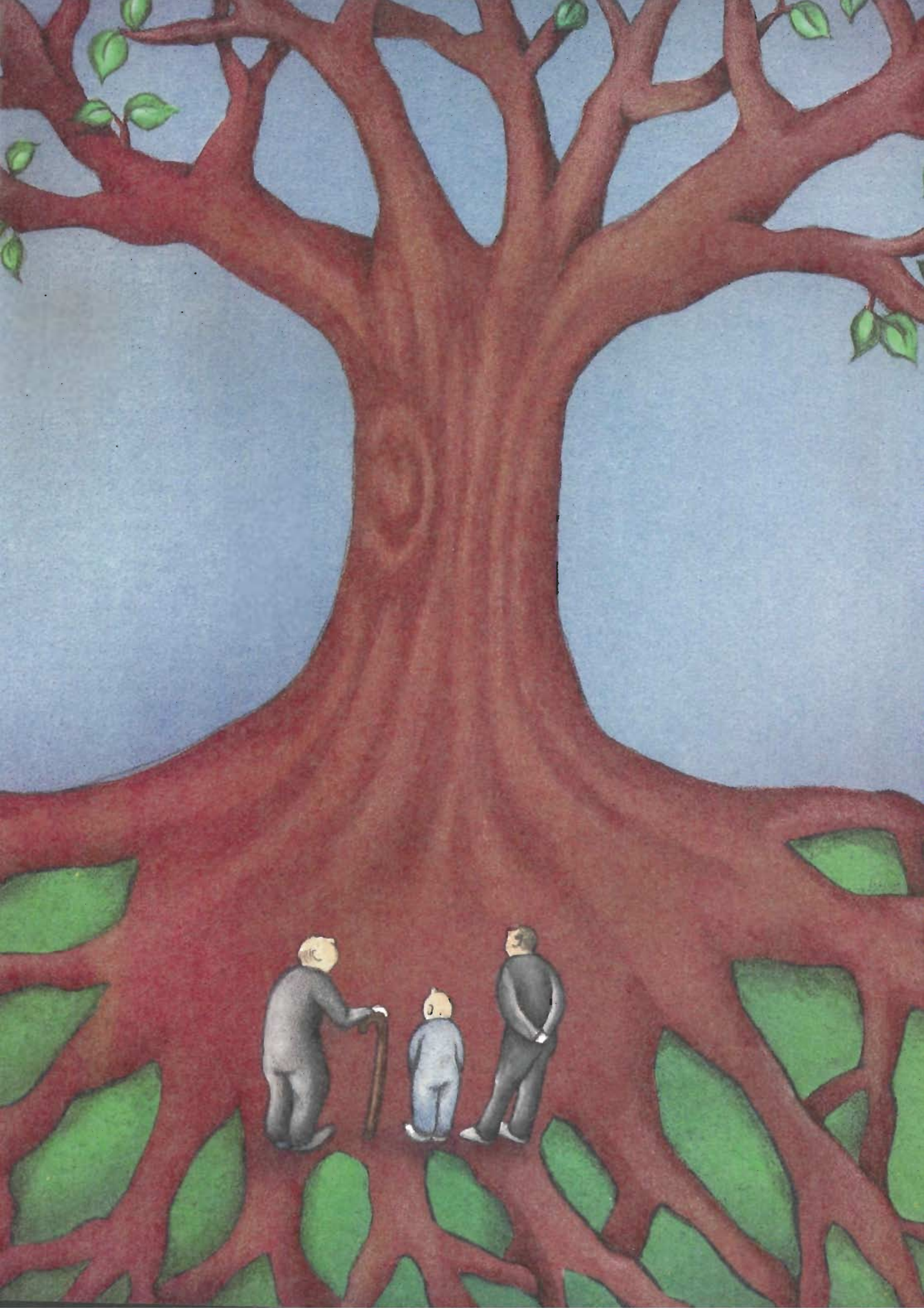
The search for her roots took Dayan, a staff writer for the *JUF News*, the monthly newspaper of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, back to Morocco, where both her parents were born.

Dayan's mother and father — both the oldest of large families — come from long lines of prominent rabbinic families in Morocco. (Her mother's grandfather was a 17th generation rabbi from a Moroccan dynasty.) When visiting the country last October, some of the first places she set out to see were the graves of ancestors.

"It's a Moroccan custom," Dayan explains. "One expresses admiration for someone by visiting his or her grave. You bring a huge meal, a *seudah mitzvah*, to honor the holiness of that person."

Dayan's family follows numerous Moroccan Jewish customs and rituals, and this upbringing peaked her curiosity about

BY GIL KEZWER



visiting the country. Once she got there, she found that it didn't take too much digging to unearth some ancestral history. Upon arriving in Marrakech, her father's native city, she visited the *kollel* (a post-yeshiva study environment). There, one of the rabbis showed Dayan three *ketubot* that her great-grandfather had written and signed in 1934. One of the older men at the *kollel* actually remembered her great-grandfather, who died in 1945. "When I asked him to tell me a little about my great-grandfather," Dayan recalls, "he respond-

ed, 'He spoke very quickly, just like you.'

"To have grown up with stories and to live them and breathe them is one thing," says Dayan, who had long pressed her grandmother and other relatives for their family history, gathering information and tape-recording some of their stories. "To go to the place that gave birth to those stories is another. It was like going back in time."

There are other reasons to research one's family still yet. Some genealogists are trying to go back as far as possible. Anthony Joseph, a family practitioner from

Birmingham, England, who began delving into his family tree when he was only 11, can trace some of the roots of his English family back three centuries.

For still others, the search for family became urgent after the Holocaust. There are those who want to know details of the kin that perished under the Nazi regime, as well as about the ancestors who for centuries lived in countries where hundreds of years' worth of records were destroyed as casually as the family lines.

Peter Cullman is one such individual.

He, his mother and brother spent the war years in the hinterland of Eastern Prussia with several other German women and their children. Cullman had thought his family was relatively unaffected by the Holocaust — until he found out that his mother was Jewish and had survived the war under false papers. His personal search into his maternal roots was an exercise in tragedy.

"You can't stop," he says. "You just have to know. I found out that an aunt and her daughter had committed suicide on the same day in 1941 rather than be deported. I got the name of an uncle who died in a death camp, but I wanted to know where he came from, how he got to the camp. Was he moved between camps? What was his serial number? It evokes a lot of trauma, but you can't stop because you just have to know."

Whatever the motivation for the genealogical search, the quest is often frustrated by missing documents destroyed by the Germans at the end of World War II, by official papers lost in the numerous immigrations across continents or by time itself. Closed doors, however, do not seem to discourage the sleuths. If

**I** Interview living relatives to find out as much as possible concerning family origins (from which *shtetl* in Eastern Europe, as is the case of most American Jews, who are Ashkenazi), what family names were before they became anglicized at Ellis Island, "who begat whom," and any other details, reminiscences and clues they can provide. One's search will be easier with an unusual family name, but there are numerous spelling variations for both surnames as well as for European towns. Try all phonetic variations. For example, the writer's family in Canada spells its surname K - E - Z - W - E - R, while relatives in the United States use K - I - S - V - E - R.

**2** Go through all available family documents. Sephardi families often entered their family tree in a passed-along Bible. The wider the network, the higher the probability that "gold mines" will fall into one's lap — whether it be old family photo albums, a collection of short biographies of family members someone else once wrote, or even an already existing family tree.

**3** Join the local Jewish genealogical society; there are 54 worldwide. Historical societies and general genealogical societies will also offer a wealth of information and support.

**4** Official records in town halls, registrar offices, libraries, archives, cemeteries and census offices offer information on births, marriages and deaths. These records are very basic and easy to access, but can be time consuming to accumulate. Expect to spend a pocket full of change at the copy machine.

**5** Newspapers and magazines of the time, both in the Jewish and non-Jewish press, can be very informative if one's family has roots in England or the United States. Anthony Joseph found a lengthy column in the August 1810 issue of *Gentleman's Magazine* describing the unusual wedding of his ancestors, Jonas and Rosceia Lazarus in Manchester, England.

## OUT ON A LIMB

### Climbing One's Family Tree

**6** If one can establish a connection to the famous rabbinical families, there are very good records available. For example, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher rebbe, traced his roots back to Prague's famous Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1525-1609) who fashioned a golem to protect the ghetto from anti-Semitic plots.

**7** The records collected by the Mormon church in Utah can be accessed through local Mormon offices in most major American cities. The Mormon microfiche collection is the most extensive in the world.

**8** Give Israeli resources a try. In Jerusalem, Yad Vashem's Hall of Names has accumulated testimonials (details given by survivors of people killed in the Holocaust) of over three million people. The Israel Genealogical Society is where the Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions come together and "mixed marriages" between the two can be traced. The Dorot Genealogy Center at Beth Hatefutot (the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv), has a data base of 900 Jewish family trees.

**9** Many amateur genealogical sleuths are traveling back to Eastern Europe, which has opened records since the fall of the Iron Curtain, to trace their families — and finding the trips worthwhile.

**10** Check out some of the numerous resource books and dictionaries on Jewish genealogy available at bookstores and libraries. A recent publication, *From Generation to Generation: How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Family History* by Arthur Kurzweil (Harper Collins, 1994), is a great primer for those starting out. Source books like Alexander Bieder's 760-page *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, published in 1993 by the New Jersey-based genealogical publishing house Avotaynu Inc. can be of tremendous assistance in research. A sister volume, the *Dictionary of Polish-Jewish Surnames*, is due out shortly.

— GIL KEZWER

anything, they make fitting together the pieces of the puzzle even more intriguing.

An issue in genealogical circles that is gaining prominence is balancing freedom to information with the need for privacy. "This can be a very fine line at times," believes Joseph. Evidence over the centuries has been covered up to protect *mamzerim* (illegitimate children), suicides, intermarriages, adoptions, insanity, genetic and sexually transmitted diseases, and non-marital relationships — all the skeletons in any family closet. At the Dorot Center in Tel Aviv, where people enter their family trees into a large computer network, there is a sealed field to enter delicate information, but even this comes with no real guarantee.

From the outside, genealogy can seem a macabre occupation. While going through his late father's papers, Anthony Joseph came across a copy of a letter his father had written in 1955 to a member of the London Society of Genealogists in the attempt to enlist his support for Anthony joining the Society at a very early age. "You, of course, do not know him personally," wrote his father, "and I can only give you a father's biased opinion, that, apart from this odd kink about genealogy, he is quite normal, intelligent and even a personable young man." Once young Anthony's membership problem was solved, his father

There are those  
who want to  
know details  
of the kin  
that perished  
under the  
Nazi regime

thanked his colleague and wrote, "Anthony does not mind where he searches; I am the one who shudders when someone whom I have known with loathing for years is presented as a distant relative....My present relief is that he is now concentrating on his mother's family!"

But despite the curious stares from those not in the fold, genealogy is providing the lonely with families, the inquisitive with answers, and the rootless with a sense of belonging. Cullman gets 25 New Year's cards each Rosh Hashanah from relatives whom he has never met. Rogers is forging links with family in Australia, the United States, Canada and France. Joseph traced down a fourth cousin when he was 14 — and married her at 21. (After his wife's premature death at the age of 45, he had not planned to remarry. Then he met his second wife through a shared genealogical interest and wed her four months later.)

"I have enjoyed enormously tracing my family tree, charting their lives and fates and stringing them all together into their genealogical interconnecting relationships," Joseph explains. "It has given me a sense of 'permanence' when faced with the knowledge that all life must depart and everything is finite."

*Gil Kezwer lives in Toronto, Canada, and writes extensively about Jewish affairs.*



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Peace on earth, love in our hearts, Happiness in your life. Our wish for the New Year.\*

5756

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May this Rosh Hashanah usher in a time of peace.\*

WOMEN'S AMERICAN  
ORT

# CIVILIZATION AMONG THE RUINS



Photojournalist Edward Serotta's pictures capture the Jewish community of Sarajevo

I know I am among civilized men because they are fighting so savagely," Voltaire wryly said of late 18th century France. Indeed, the droll observation rings with a note of truth, especially today as civil war in the former Yugoslavia brutally rips apart the country, once a toast of Europe with its elegant resorts and cosmopolitan cities.

Photojournalist Edward Serotta spent the years both before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain capturing the lives of people in that country and others in Central Europe. In February 1994, Serotta returned to shattered Bosnia-Herzegovina at the request of Jewish friends in Sarajevo. There, he caught on film a remarkable anomaly. For the first time during a European war, the Jewish community was—and is—protecting, even saving, its neighbors, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Serotta's photographs are the product of 31 days documenting Jewish life during the Serbian siege of the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Today, they are the focus of a traveling exhibition, "Survival in Sarajevo: How a Jewish Community Came to the Aid of Its City," on display from April 9 to August 6 at the Spertus Museum, part of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, a center for learning and



culture in Chicago. The exhibit, curated by the Jewish Museum of Vienna, is being circulated in the United States by the Judah Magnes Museum of Berkeley, California. It is sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago.

The journey was spurred by Serotta's desire to observe the torrent of nationalism with its images of "ethnic cleansing" overrunning Bosnia-Herzegovina's untraveled road to democracy. But perhaps even more so, he felt compelled to wit-

ness how the Jewish community — which had survived the horrors of the Holocaust a mere half century ago — would react to this war, the first on European soil since 1945. His stark photos pay tribute to the responsiveness of Bosnia's tiny, but resilient, Jewish community, documenting the work of La Benevolencija, an organization supported by the London-based Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief (CBF) and other Jewish aid groups.

The CBF has gained recognition as one

of the most effective aid agencies currently functioning in the wounded city. Operating out of a synagogue, the multi-ethnic team of 54 volunteers — 24 of whom are Jews — is credited with providing food and medical services, running a first-aid facility, and operating its own post office and two-way radio station, often the only connection to the outside world. Its services have helped numerous citizens of Sarajevo, Jew and non-Jew alike.

"People learn very quickly that they have to stand together and help each other in ways that they never had to before," says Serotta, who was born in Savannah, Georgia, and has had his work appear in *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Die Zeit* and *The London Independent*.

In his photos, Serotta captures in black and white the suffering, determination and even hope on the faces of his subjects. One who made a lasting impression on the photographer is a 13-year-old Muslim boy named Denis, a ward of Sarajevo's Jewish community. Serotta first photographed the youth working as a water boy for the Jewish community, and later, shedding tears on a bus en-route to Israel. When an Israeli immigration official, asking him to produce his papers, inquired if he was Muslim, Denis replied, "I'm nothing. I'm human."

"There's no system that works," believes Serotta, who today lives in Berlin, where he organizes the Central Europe Center for Research and Documentation. "Therefore, you have to help your neighbors and your neighbors help you. And that creates a certain type of solidarity."

Perhaps there, among the savagery, is the true test of civilized man.

—DANA B. ASHER & ELLIE SANDLER



**This page, top: Sarajevo's Jews bring their luggage to the synagogue before their departure on the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee evacuation convoy in February 1994. The city's Jewish community has brought 2,300 Sarajevans to safety; only 1,000 have been Jewish.**

**This page, bottom: One of three Jewish community-run pharmacies in Sarajevo. These drugstores have dispensed about 50 percent of all medicine given out during the siege.**

**Opposite page: Denis Karalic, a 13-year-old Muslim, leaves Sarajevo. Today, he lives in a boarding school in Israel.**



A SAMPLING OF BRAMSON'S TALENTED WOMEN

### NGOs — A Go

The World ORT Union is a member of a high-level consortium — which includes Save the Children and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and is funded by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) — created to encourage and support the development of NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) in Russia and Albania. The WOU is a member through its International Cooperation Department.

The implementation of a network of NGOs is vital to the growth of democracy in the former Soviet Union. ORT will provide training for the staff of the Russian NGOs, as well as develop and distribute relevant materials. To support this program, the ORT centers in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ekaterinburg, Voronezh and Krasnoyarsk will be enhanced and additional consultants provided to handle the program's requirements.

The World ORT Union's experience in Russia, its ORT-net systems and its expertise in information technology training will be crucial in the establishment of a central project office (MOSCOP) in Moscow. During the estimat-

ed five-year term of the project, 23,000 Russians will be trained under the World ORT Union's guidance.

### CARACAS COMMUNITY

ORT Venezuela supports the Caracas Jewish community schools, providing creative education, natural science and technological studies for primary schools and computer science and biotechnology in the high schools.

The computer science center, established in 1986 at the Community High School, was recently upgraded and a new center was inaugurated there. A biotechnology laboratory was also established.

### ORTNET DISPATCH

The Information Technology Department of the World ORT Union is in the process of developing the first module of a Hebrew language course called "Discovering Hebrew." The finished product will be available on the World Wide Web.

The Web is based on hypertext, a method of presenting information by linking words to other words, which in turn are connected to still more words. The links can also involve graphics or sound, all

arranged on a "page" on a computer screen captured from an Internet source. Through this high-tech interaction, students will be able to learn Hebrew in ways not even imagined only a few years ago.

### IN CONCERT: BRITISH ORT

A concert of Russian music held in London in December has won acclaim both critically and as a successful fund-raising venture. The program included the chorus Cantata from Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*, and the proceeds are being used to support the ORT school in Moscow.

Conducted by celebrated Kirov Opera conductor Valerie Gergiev, the concert was presented by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall. A reception, under the patronage of Sir Isaiah and Lady Berlin, was held following the concert at which the guest of honor was His Excellency Anatoly Adamishin, Ambassador for the Russian Federation to the Court of St. James.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The numbers are in! In the 1993/94 academic year, a total of 251,973 students — studying full- or part-time or attending seminars or short courses — received training through ORT.

### CELEBRATING WOMEN

The Bramson ORT Technical Institute in Forest Hills, New York, marked the 14th annual Women's History Month with a grand event on the theme "Promises to Keep: Women in Business and Industry." Sandra Lautenberg, program manager of the New Jersey Transit Authority, was keynote speaker at the March celebration, joined by Parvine

Motamed, director of ORT Operations USA, who opened the program.

The celebration of women and their professional accomplishments also featured a fashion show, highlighting career fashions and titled "Dressing for Success." Bramson's event culminated with the awarding of prizes to the winners of the school's annual writing contest on the topic, "Promises to Keep: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow — The Role of Women in Business and Industry."

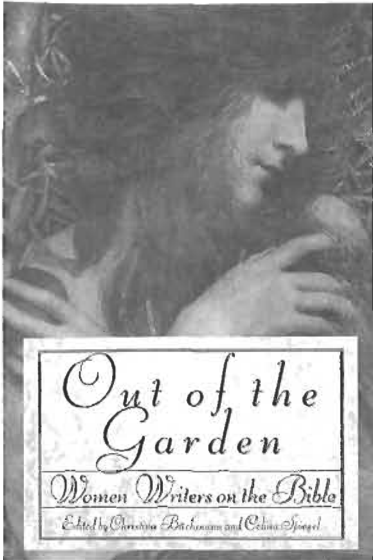
### FLORENCE S. ROSENTHAL MEMORIAL FUND

In memory of Women's American ORT's distinguished Honorary National President, the organization has established a Florence S. Rosenthal Memorial Fund. After much thought, and in consultation with the World ORT Union, contributions to this fund will be used to honor her commitment in a very singular way.

ORTnet, ORT's computer network that connects to the Internet via the World ORT Union headquarters in London, is accessible to some 20 million worldwide Internet users. Any user who seeks information on Jewish education on the Net is referred to ORTnet. Once into the ORT-net menu, topics in Jewish education may be selected. As the screen headed "Educational Resources" is called up, Florence S. Rosenthal's name will appear with the subsection titled "Jewish Education."

In this way Rosenthal, who cared so deeply for ORT and for the goals of the World ORT Union — and who was always in step with the progress of the modern world — will be honored as the organization develops programs into the next century and beyond.





**Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible**  
 Edited by Christina Büchmann and Celina Spiegel  
 Fawcett Columbine, 1994  
 \$23.00

**Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story**  
 Edited by Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer  
 Ballantine Books, 1994  
 \$23.00  
 Reviewed by Amy Gottlieb

Since the 1987 publication of *Congregation*, an anthology of essays on the Bible by prominent writers, modern commentary on traditional Jewish sources has become an impressive genre of its own. In two new works, *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible* and *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*, a sumptuous array of women's commentaries are presented. In a tradition in which women's voices were banned from the *beit midrash* (the yeshiva study hall), these books emphatically prove that the insights women bring to the Bible can revitalize our relationship to the text.

In her essay in *Out of the Gar-*

*den*, scholar Ilana Pardes notes that female characters have a limited textual life span in the Bible. With the exception of Eve, most biblical women appear on stage when they are in a position to marry, and their stay there is generally determined by their maternal positions and the status of their sons. Most of the commentators in this volume flesh out what is not directly spoken of in the Bible, and through close textual analysis, midrashic imag-

ination and personal reflection, find ways to bring the women back into the story and remake it.

This is particularly well-rendered in a series of essays on Genesis. Rebecca Goldstein offers a probing look at Lot's wife and the reasons why God made her into a pillar of salt; Norma Rosen presents a midrash on Rebecca in which the matriarch examines the effects of the *Akedah* (the binding of Isaac) on her husband, as well as her own 20 years of barrenness; and Ilana Pardes looks at Rachel in relation to her sister and to Jacob. Taken as a whole, these three pieces present a provocative look at some of the intergenerational family dynamics in Genesis.

The anthology consists of 27 essays and some of the better-known contributors include Louise Erdrich, Cynthia Ozick, Fay Weldon, June Jordan, Ursula Le Guin, Elizabeth Swados, Amy Clampitt, Rachel Brownstein and Lore Segal. The diversity of the authors' backgrounds and faiths is refreshing. Kathleen Norris' essay on the Psalms not only gives an inspired discussion of the Psalms and their relationship to her everyday

life, but offers a glimpse into the lives of Benedictine nuns. Daphne Merkin's essay on the Song of Songs reflects on the expression of sexual desire in the Jewish tradition. In addition to Eve and the matriarchs, there are essays on Sheba, Delilah, Jezebel, Esther and Hannah. Several authors juxtapose reflections on their traditional Jewish upbringings with their seasoned critical responses to the text.

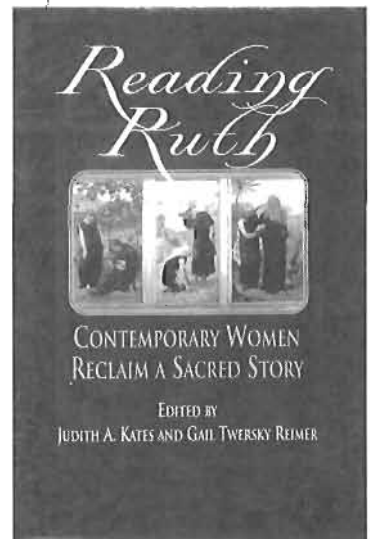
While the sparkling range of *Out of the Garden* gives readers a chance to journey through parts of the Bible with different commentators, *Reading Ruth* offers a more concentrated and intensive reading of one work, *The Book of Ruth*. It is an ideal choice: As the quintessential woman's story, Ruth encompasses a vast spectrum of women's experience, including marriage and childbirth, infertility and widowhood, and women's status in a male world. Forms represented in this collection include essays, poetry, autobiographical meditations, fiction, midrash and an edited *shiur* (oral teaching). The contributors to this anthology are all Jewish; they hail from a wide range of backgrounds: scholars in various disciplines, psychiatrists, rabbis, novelists and poets.

The volume's diversity of forms and voices has a cumulative effect and one comes away from these essays with the pulsating excitement of having been in a wonderfully engaging and challenging women's study group. Included in the volume are Gloria Goldreich's parable of friendship of Ruth, Naomi and Orpah; Rebecca Alpert's lesbian interpretation of Ruth; an exquisite commentary by Cynthia Oz-

ick; and a contemporary dialogue on Ruth by Norma Rosen. Two psychiatrists explore how the story of Naomi and Ruth informed their own professional discussions. Interspersed reflections on the holiday of Shavuot (the festival designated for reading Ruth) are also featured, along with an in-depth analysis of the book's complex relationships and limitations of loyalty.

Both of these anthologies are marked by a kind of intellectual and spiritual daring which is distinct and clearly feminist. In her essay in *Out of the Garden*, Cynthia Ozick writes, "Those who say that Torah offers only 'male models' forget that justice is neither male nor female, but an idea and ideas have no anatomy. Service to Torah can make no woman and no man into a thing of servitude."

With women bringing their voices and sensibilities to the world of biblical commentary, our understanding of Jewish sources is not only enhanced, but a feminist interpretative tradition beginning to unfold. Both *Out of the Garden* and *Reading Ruth* serve as inspiration for readers to toil in the *beit midrash* and help forge this new tradition.



# Islam and Judaism

## Recognizing the Similarities Helps Us Confront Our Prejudices

BY ARI L. GOLDMAN

There are certain dates that you don't forget. Whether you like the peace process initiated on that date or not, September 13, 1994 — the day Yasir Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn — is one of them.

Another is April 19, 1995. On that day, we turned on our television sets and saw rescue workers carrying the bloodied bodies of babies and young children out of the Federal building in Oklahoma City. We may also remember our first reactions, reinforced by the early television analysts: It had to be the work of Muslim fundamentalists.

"This is their handiwork," commentator after commentator said on national television. On the screen before us flashed nightmarish images of Oklahoma City, the World Trade Center and the American Embassy in Beirut. "Just look at the similarities," they said.

The Israelis, especially those opposed to the peace process, drew the same early conclusion and, with it, a lesson: "Now you see what kind of animals we're dealing with."

Of course, it turned out not to be true. The methods of

terror were clearly similar but the apparent perpetrators of the Oklahoma carnage were not Muslim. They didn't have dark skin or foreign-sounding names. They weren't carrying out a *jihad* or holy war against the West. The suspects are just deranged, home-grown revolutionaries with possible links to anti-Semitic hate groups.

For the Jewish community, both in the United States and in Israel, there are many lessons to be learned. Primary among them is that hate comes in many guises. Never can we let down our guard; the terrorist next door can blow us up as readily as the terrorist abroad.

But the Oklahoma tragedy also gives us an opportunity to examine our prejudices. We are quick to blame Muslims, forgetting that the vast majority — and there are close to one billion Muslims worldwide — are as horrified as we are by terrorism and violence.

"We condemn, we condemn, we condemn," the imam of the Islamic Cultural Center in Manhattan told me the day after the attack. "This is not the Muslim way."

One way to break down our prejudices (without letting down our guard) is to learn more about Islam. The Ara-

bic words "Islam" and "Muslim" are from the same root as *salaam*, a word closely associated with the Hebrew expression *shalom*; yet, the Arabic word known to most Americans is "*jihad*." Literally, it means struggle and, according to Muslim tradition, the "greater *jihad*" is the personal struggle to conquer one's evil impulses; the "lesser *jihad*" is to conquer others.

What is more, the concept of *jihad* is not one of the foundations of the religion. Islam, a faith with roots in seventh century Arabia, flourished alongside Judaism for centuries, especially in medieval Spain. It borrowed much from Judaism — and gave back some, too.

Arabic and Hebrew grew out of the same fertile soil, and when the religions are compared, similar words inevitably pop up. In fact, Islam has far more in common with Judaism than either faith has in common with Christianity. Both Judaism and Islam are ways of life expressed in uniform rituals and practices pertaining to diet, calendar and concerns for purity. In Judaism, the way to live is known as *halacha*, which literally means to walk; in Islam, the term is *shari'ah*, literally, the path.

Moreover, Islam is built on Five Pillars, each of which has a cognate in Judaism:

- *Shahada*. Bearing witness to God's oneness and belief in Muhammad as the last of the Prophets. Judaism's creed is expressed in the *Sh'ma*, declaring God's oneness.

- *Salat*. Praying five times a day: early morning, morning, noon, afternoon and night. Judaism requires three daily prayers, also determined by the time of day.

- *Siyam*. Fasting during the daylight hours for the month

of Ramadan. Ramadan is also a time for soul-searching and self-examination, not unlike our Yom Kippur.

- *Zakat*. Obligatory almsgiving. Charity is one of Judaism's highest values.

- *Hajj*. Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime. In the time of the Jewish Temple, pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a central obligation.

Some pundits argue that Jews and Muslims have a historic animosity precisely because we are so similar. After all, we are cousins, fighting over the same legacy of a common father, Abraham.

It would be foolish, of course, to get so involved in understanding the other that we forget how vulnerable we are. All too often Jews around the world and our brothers and sisters in Israel have been subject to hate and violence at the hands of Muslim terrorists. Too much death and destruction has occurred in the name of Islam. But, certainly, Islam has another, more peaceful side, one similar to ours.

On many days, it must seem as if there is no one across the Muslim-Jewish divide we can talk to. Surely, however, in the wake of the Oklahoma bloodbath, Jews can join our Muslim cousins and declare with one voice: "We condemn, we condemn, we condemn."

*Ari L. Goldman, assistant professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, is the author of The Search for God at Harvard.*

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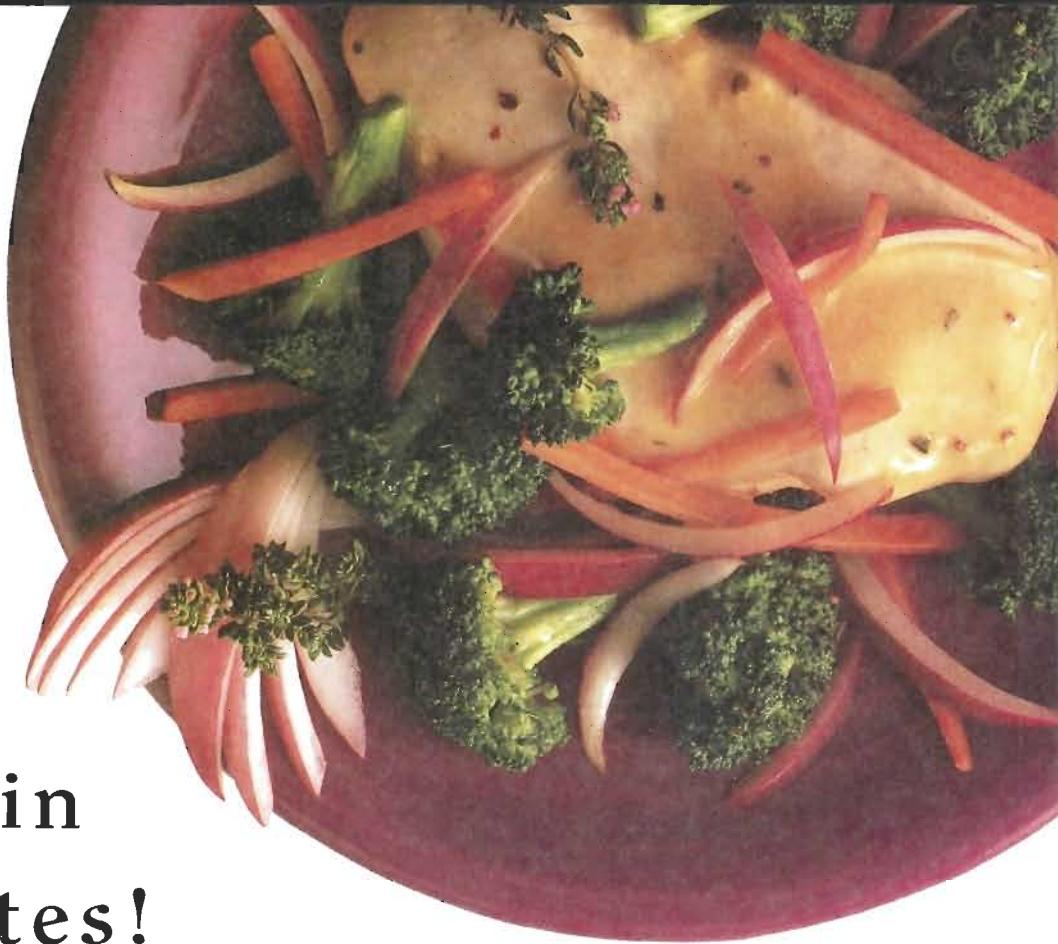
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4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves  
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3/4 cup EACH: broccoli florets,  
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1/2 cup PRITIKIN® Honey Dijon Dressing

1. PREPARE grill or preheat oven to 450°F.  
Tear heavy-duty aluminum foil into four  
12" long sheets.

2. PLACE 1 chicken breast half on each  
foil sheet; divide vegetables evenly over  
chicken. Divide dressing evenly over  
chicken and vegetables.

3. FOLD each foil pocket securely. Grill over  
hot coals 8 to 10 minutes, or place pocket  
on cookie sheet and bake at 450°F. 15 to  
18 minutes.

### Nutrition Information Per Serving:

Calories 200

Total Fat 2g

Cholesterol 65mg

Sodium 220mg

Total Carbohydrates 17g

Dietary Fiber 3g

Protein 28g

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