



Another success for CSJO

Last minute emergency does not stop the annual conference



by Karen Knecht

CSJO was scheduled to have their annual conference in Toronto. However, with the SARS scare happening there, it was decided on April 29th to move the conference to Philadelphia. That left us 3 weeks to pull together a conference. We contacted Arcadia University, and as luck would have it, there was an opening. The members of CSJO rallied, both in Philadelphia, as well

as across the United States and Canada, and within three weeks we had a full conference. There were 73 people in attendance. We heard moving Keynotes from Roberta (Rifke) Feinstein, Executive Director of CSJO and from Jodi Goldfinger, the Young Adult representative to the Key Note.

Fran Kleiner and Art Miron pulled together a wonderful program for Saturday night, Judy Seid put together our Oneg Shabbes; Paul Shane, Bob Kleiner, Shariee Calderone, Bennett Muraskin, and many others either presented workshops themselves, or found wonderful workshop leaders. We had two members of Workman's Circle present workshops at our conference. They were so well received, that we are looking to have them present again.

CSJO presented Larry Schofer with a plaque for his many years of hard work as our newsletter editor, as well as his work as our Public Relations Chair. All and all it was a wonderful weekend. The feeling of family was found everywhere we turned. Once again, when faced with a challenge, CSJO rose to the occasion, and a successful event was had by all.

Wonder of wonders!

by Hershl Hartman

The greatest wonder of the 2003 Conference was that it happened at all. A heartfelt *yasher koyekh** to the emergency Philadelphia site committee and to Rifke and Karen for their superhuman effort and accomplishments. What they accomplished was a rich, stimulating Conference bearing no signs of hasty — three weeks! — organization.

The high point of the Conference, for me, was the unveiling of the prodigious curriculum developed by the three Canadian *shuln*. While I have, and voiced, reservations about some of its concepts, I am awed by the thought and effort that went into this innovative compendium of lesson plans and teacher orientation material.

(*In Secular Yiddish usage, the phrase means “congratula-

tions.” Among *khsidim* and other pious Yiddish-speakers, it is pronounced *sher'keyekh* and means “thanks.” I use it here in both senses.)

From the conference **Jews in Russia — in Birobidzhan**

by Larry Schofer

Birobidzhan (BEEro-bee-DJOHN) — the Jewish autonomous region of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. On the border of China. Established under the reign of Stalin, starting in 1928 with 800 men. First families arrived in 1929. 1931-37 over 1,000 foreign Jews came to settle. Most of them left right away.

When Nikolai Borodulin, a native of Birobidzhan and now educational director of Workmen's Circle in New York, showed old movies and slides of the region to a workshop at the CSJO conference in May, the audience might have felt it was watching propaganda material for the nascent kibbutz movement—workers, men and women, happily marching off to work, ready to sing and dance at a moment's notice. But then we looked closer. The children in the photos looked like abandoned orphans; clothing was ragged; things didn't look so great.

And they weren't. Many of the first inhabitants lived in cave-like dwellings dug into the ground. Supplies gradually arrived during the early 1930s, but the migration to such a God-forsaken place (farther from Moscow than New York is from Moscow) was slow. In the mid-1930s the Stalinist purges did not spare the area. The president of the region was arrested; all 5,000 Korean natives were deported; most community leaders and foreign Jews were



arrested and executed.

After World War II a renewed wave of migration from Russia started, and by the end of the 1940s 30,000 Jews lived there. Then came another crackdown on Jews, and all the political and cultural leaders were arrested. 30,000 books were burned.

By the 1970s barely 10% of the local Jews claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue.

And Nikolai Borodulin? He experienced his personal epiphany in 1989 while walking down the street. A friend greeted him with “Happy Holiday.”

“What holiday? The Soviet anniversary celebration [November 7] is 6 weeks away.”

“It’s Rosh Hashona.”

And the native Yiddish speaker answered, “What’s Rosh Hashona?”

Nikolai soon emigrated, studied at Columbia, worked at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and then became the educational director of the Workmen’s Circle.

And now he knows what Rosh Hashona is!

New affiliate and other news

By Rifke Feinstein, Executive Director, CSJO

Dear Friends,

Not that the summer is over, but it’s really close! I hope you had a season of relaxing fun and learning.

It is with great pleasure that I announce our newest affiliate, The Secular Jewish Community School (SJCS) of Oak Park, Illinois.

Elisa Lapine, who I can proudly claim as a former student of mine from the Secular Jewish Community in Cleveland, is the innovator and now principal and president of the group. Amongst her teachers are two former students of Gerry Revzin, from Gerry’s Sunday School in the Chicago area. I guess that what goes around, comes around! We wish all the members and teachers of the SJCS great success in their school and their community. We look forward to meeting many of them at our next conference.

Many of our affiliates have taken a well-deserved rest this summer. Soon, schools will be opening their doors and communities will start meeting again. For many, it has been a hard year...financially and emotionally. I wish all of us better times.

To those communities who have been meeting during the summer, thank you for keeping us informed of your activities. I wish you good programs, as well as growth.

I write this before the Jewish New Year. My wish for all of us is good health, active communities and schools and, hopefully, a year of sholem.

From the conference Remembering the bravery of Jewish resisters



Hershl Hartman

“Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and of the Bravery of Its Victims” — this would be a better translation of the official Hebrew name of what is now generally called Yom Hashoa (the official name is Yom Hashoa u’gvura).

This was the theme of the presentation of Hershl Hartman (Los Angeles Sholem Community) at the CSJO conference in Philadelphia in May. Hershl was discussing how to bring the Holocaust into the curriculum, and he was pointing to what he felt was

a major omission in the general discussion of this topic.

He summarized what might be called the dominant paradigm of Jewish history — the Jewish people had an independent state until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. After its destruction, the prevailing mood of the Jewish people became one of passivity for 1,900 years, culminating in the annihilation of one-third of the Jewish population by the Nazi criminals. Then the State of Israel came, and Jews became warriors and brave fighters again.

Instead, maintained Hershl, we have to look at “resistance” by the Jews, specifically against the Nazis, though he also made reference to the significant role that Jews played in defending the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Resistance in wartime was defined as anything that disrupted the timetable of the oppressors. Such a definition encompasses a whole range of activities, not just the heralded Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

In addition to the many small pieces of resistance found in this way, one can refer to any number of examples of armed resistance, which were chronicled by Yuri Suhl in his 1960s book, *They Fought Back*. Unfortunately, noted Hershl, the Jewish community in the United States and the Zionist historians in Israel like to ignore this book and everything it stands for. — Why?

Hershl maintains that it is the secular, Yiddishist, left-wing bent of most of the resisters that has led to the ignoring of their activities. The mainstream Jewish community leaders prefer not to acknowledge this strand of Jewish history, and thus their emphasis on martyrdom and passivity. He feels that it is incumbent for the CSJO and like-minded organizations to keep alive the memory of resistance through such things as commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He has written several scripts for such observances, and they are available from him via e-mail.

Hershl has also translated a seminal Yiddish article on the resistance by Hirsh Smolar. This too can be requested from him at Hershl@earthlink.net.

CONGRESS OF SECULAR JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

A non-profit organization

An affiliate of the North American Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, a Constituent Organization of the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews

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The Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations - 2003

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CSJO Internet Discussion Group

To join: go to www.yahoo.com
In the search box, type in, "CSJO"
Follow instructions.

To join the CSJO online discussion group on the Internet

1. Go to www.yahoo.com
2. In the search box, type in, "CSJO."
3. The next window will give you two CSJO discussion groups to choose from: one is only for educators ("CSJO-EDU") and the other is the one you want to join ("CSJO"). Click on "CSJO."
4. Complete the form and hit the "Send" button on the bottom.

This discussion group is not moderated, but you will need to be cleared before being allowed to post material. Joan Kurtz, who monitors this group, will send you an email, asking you to identify who you are and with which group you are affiliated. If you are an associate member, just say so in your response and if you are a paid-up member, you will be approved as well.

Judy Seid completes rabbinic program

The ordination of Judith Seid, who is currently the leader of the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah, and Sivan Malkin Maas, who will become the first rabbi of Secular Humanistic Judaism in Israel, will take place on Friday evening, October 24, at the Birmingham Temple during the colloquium sponsored by the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. These two remarkable women will address the Shabbat gathering and will be honored at the celebratory Oneg following the service. Others completing certification in the Leadership Program will also be recognized and honored.

The rabbinic program of the Institute consists of four years of course work and an internship with a secular humanistic Jewish community. Candidates must also complete a rabbinic thesis.

Judy Seid, who was the director the Ann Arbor Jewish Cultural Society for many years before moving to Baltimore, has been a mainstay of the CSJO for many years. She served as treasurer for several terms and continues to be active on the board of directors. Judy is a familiar figure to attendees at CSJO conferences, where she frequently coordinates a workshop for educators and where she has led many a late-night sing.

In Baltimore she was able to create an entirely new group, the Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah, which grows from year to year. Once ordained, she intends to apply to the Baltimore Board



Judy Seid addressing a CSJO group

of Rabbis for membership.

Judy is the author of a number of books published by the Kopinvant Press, including *We Rejoice in Our Heritage: Home Rituals for Secular and Humanistic Jews*, and the songbook *Kumzitz*. Her most recent publication is *God-Optional Judaism*.

Contributions

General Fund

Karen Knecht, CA, with wishes for a speedy recovery to:

Ronnie Carlson

Alan Jacobs

Shirley Klipper

Phyllis Jacobs

Bernice Stein

Gerry Revzin, IL, in honor of Lil Schwartz's new great-grandchild

Gerry Revzin, IL in honor of Karen Knecht's special birthday

Rifke Feinstein, OH in honor of Judy Seid

Rifke Feinstein, OH in honor of Karen Knecht's special birthday and 25th wedding anniversary to Bob

Jesse Gordon, MI in honor of Judy Seid

Oraynu, Toronto, Canada in appreciation of curriculum material sent to them.

Gerry Revzin Scholarship Fund

Rifke Feinstein OH in honor of the marriage of Gerry's grand-

daughter

Special contributions for the publication of Bennet Muraskin's book on secular Jewish heroes:

Rifke Feinstein OH

Bess Katz PA

Ed Klein NY

Larry Schofer PA

Judy Seid MD

Ruth Seid CA

Shane Family Fund

Sherri Taylor & Alberto Falcone, PA

Joan Kurtz, NY in honor of Eli Shane's Bar Mitzvah

Gerry Revzin, IL in honor of Eliezer Shane's Bar Mitzvah

Fundraising for CSJO

CSJO relies on membership dues and donations to its various funds to promote programs of educational, cultural, and social activity.

The Gerry Revzin Scholarship Fund: offered to those members who take courses in Jewish Studies. The scholarship is NOT limited to the International Institute of Secular Humanistic Judaism and may be used for Jewish studies abroad.

The Max Rosenfeld Publications Fund: assists in publishing material on secular Jewishness prepared by our members.

The Harold Gales Community Development Fund: supports staff activity for affiliate groups and potential affiliates in an attempt to encourage new membership.

The CSJO General Fund: covers our administrative and general expenses.

Please send contributions to CSJO, 320 Claymore Blvd., Richmond Heights, OH 44143. Undesignated funds will be deposited into the General Fund. Your generous donations are appreciated and will be acknowledged in our quarterly newsletter.

The Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations is a non-profit organization as defined by section 501 (c) (3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

CSJO activist Rhea Seagull steps down as principal of NJ school



Rhea Seagull

Rhea Seagull has been principal of the Northern New Jersey Jewish Cultural School for a number of years. She has also been an active member of the CSJO board, chairing its publicity committee and participating in many other projects. This letter was distributed to her group this past spring. We will miss her!

As many of you know I am planning to leave New Jersey before year's end and so will be ending more than 24 years of involvement with the Jewish Cultural School & Society

(Suburban Jewish School) as a parent, principal, officer and delegate to other secular Jewish organizations.

JCSS has changed over the years but I hope the central core of concepts, values and practices will endure. When I joined, SJS was an independent folkshule similar to one I attended as a child—steeped in Yiddish and Yiddishkeit. Today, JCSS reflects the broadened outlook of Jewish culture and the linking with other groups—the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations and the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, with its International Institute to train teachers, leaders, and rabbis.

JCSS has remained a community where those who wish to value Jewish culture, holidays, and life-cycle events may do so without prayers. We are a personal niche for agnostics and atheists but also a comfortable home for others who can enjoy the rich variety of education and ceremonies we produce.

We have always been an organization that has treated all members equally: gender, birth, and sexual orientation have never made a difference. Our organization has always been carried on the backs of dedicated volunteers and this is still the case, even as we have become more and more computerized. We have expanded our membership to include households of all ages and we need to tap everyone's energies in order to provide our wide range of adult, children's, and community activities. We need to foster the internal sense of community with more informal gatherings—by neighborhood, by school class, by interest groupings.

My personal concern through the years has been that the broad flavors of Jewish culture and the Jewish secular movement's activist progressive values not be lost as we reprogram ourselves to do more with secular humanistic philosophy and history. In my years with JCSS, our social action emphasis has changed from group action on political and economic policy to individual tzedaka offerings; will members ever again have a collective passionate response to national events? We think of ourselves as part of the Jewish "people" and often call ourselves "Cultural Jews". We therefore have a special responsibility to teach about the many aspects of Jewish life throughout the ages and throughout the world. I helped to integrate these cultural elements (food, dance, music, songs, sayings) from the Yiddish, Ladino, and other traditions into our curriculum and our ceremonies. I hope they are kept and, indeed, expanded.

In sum, my years with JCSS have been full of personal com-

mitment. It is my hope that more of you will also feel this commitment so that JCSS can continue to offer you valuable programs and be viable for future generations.

Rhea makes an offer

Rhea Seagull writes:

I have available via fax or snail mail (not via e-mail) a song in Hebrew -Bakesh Shalom (Search for Peace) written by the late Certified Leader Morris Sukenik. It is set to the melody of "Amazing Grace," which was originally a Scottish folksong before it became a Plantation Hymn and later given new words by John Newton. This shouldn't be bothersome since HaTikvah started life as a Czech folksong.

In any event Morris' Hebrew words and translation has been vetted by Salo Enis and Ellen Muraskin who also contributed her Hebrew font printing to the project. Additionally, I bought the sheet music and fitted the Hebrew syllables to the notes.

My group and Morris' group (Queens SHJ) are using the song for Rosh Hashana.

The non-singable English translation is:

I believe, I believe in brotherhood and friendship.
With all my heart I believe in peace and friendship.
I believe, I believe that peace will come to the world.
The time is near, the time is near, a rest will come.
Between Israel and Arab the war will cease.
And each will say to his neighbor, please forgive.
And each will say to his friend, rid yourself of hate.

Please let me know if you want:

Verses in Hebrew - transliteration and Alef Bet, with above translation

Verses in Hebrew with melody line.

Original sheet music from Amazing Grace so you can have chords and notes..

Write to Rhea Seagull, 662 Prospect Ave., W. Orange NJ 07052.

International Association of Yiddish Clubs 2003 Conference

By Rifke Feinstein

The 8th conference of the International Association of Yiddish Clubs on September 4-7, 2003, was the first one I have had the pleasure of attending.

The conference, held in suburban Baltimore, featured wonderful speakers in excellent *mame-loshn* (mother tongue=Yiddish). There were poetry readings and stories. A workshop on Eastern European Yiddish dialects was received with much laughter and, of course, arguments. But the presenter was able to keep control, no mean feat! I learned so much. Judy Seid (Baltimore), who attended with me, took copious notes. I just sat and let the words flow over me.

The keynote speaker, Gella Schweid Fishman, who is responsible for the new archives of The Secular Yiddish Schools in America Collection housed at Stanford University, spoke in her impeccable Yiddish and exhorted the audience to keep Yiddish alive.

Troim Katz Handler read her own poetry which deals with a topic not often found in every day poetry... "Simche" Love and Sex, Jewish Style! Troim means dream, and it certainly was a

dream come true just listening to her.

Josif Vaisman, the manager of the Mendele Listserv (www.mendele.com – open to all), talked about Hersh Segal, his friends, pupils and the flourishing of Yiddish culture in Czernowitz between the World Wars. It was a fascinating presentation and most enjoyable were the Yiddish poems and songs read and sung by his young daughter, in impeccable Yiddish. She told us later that she studied Yiddish at Columbia University.

Another very enjoyable, and unusual presentation, was by Betty Topper, who is Argentinian-born. Her topic was Yiddish Tango: Buenos Aires to the World. The music and information imparted was fascinating. However, if you want to know the REAL story of the Jewish Tango, ask Judy Seid...has she got a story for you!

Henry Sapoznik, creator of the Yiddish Radio Project and Director of Living Traditions, was the speaker at the Plenary Session. He spoke, at length, of KlezKamp and encouraged people to attend. His Yiddish is perfect!!!

Judy Seid and I presented a program entitled Secular Options in Yiddishkayt. After all the other speakers had given us wonderful introductions in their own presentations, we talked about the literature of Yiddishkayt and the CSJO. There were, happy to say, a number of former and present members of CSJO. We were asked if there was cooperation between CSJO and WC/AR and we were pleased to give examples. We also brought many of our publications to the book store as well as our presentation.

Judy and I weren't able to attend everything, especially since Hans and I left on Saturday afternoon, but what we saw and heard was remarkable. I hope to go again.

The International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism offers

One of the highlights of the Institute's offerings is the ongoing Colloquium, which has several international figures on the faculty:

Colloquium '03: Jews and Non-Jews: The Love/Hate Relationship

October 23-26, 2003_at the Birmingham Temple in suburban Detroit.

The Friday night Shabbat celebration will include the ordination of two rabbis, Judith Seid of CSJO (Baltimore) (see article on p. 4), and Sivan Malkin Maas, the first rabbi of Secular Humanistic Judaism in Israel.

For a brochure listing the schedule of speakers and other details, please contact the office of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (address below).

Seminars offered, both for credit and not for credit:

Antisemitism (co-sponsored by the International Institute For Secular Humanistic Judaism and Or Adam Congregation of Scottsdale, Arizona), November 14-16, 2003

Faculty: Rabbi Sherwin Wine

Sites: Scottsdale Community College, Fairfield Inn, and Valley of the Sun JCC, Scottsdale, Arizona.

Celebration of the Jewish Life Cycle, November 21-23, 2003

This seminar is required for enrolled students in the programs of the Institute. It will include historical background on life cycle celebrations and "hands-on" workshops that will help students create life cycle ceremonies.

Faculty: rabbinic faculty to be determined

SITE: The Pivnick Center for Humanistic Judaism, Farmington Hills, MI 48334

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