

STEPHEN WISE FREE SYNAGOGUE

COMMUNITY

matters

2010 - 2011 | 5771

SHARING OUR EXPERIENCES



My First Trip to Israel (with 76 Friends)

Lori Schneider

In March, I had the amazing experience of joining the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue congregational mission to Israel. This was my very first time in Israel and for 12 intense days we traveled from the Upper Galilee, almost touching the Lebanese and Syrian borders, to Eilat, bordering Egypt. A visit to the Gaza border and 3 days in Jerusalem rounded out the trip. I was acutely aware of the countries we bordered and of Israel's extreme fragility. I understood on a visceral level the importance of Israel to Judaism. Spending our last morning at Yad Vashem only confirmed the necessity of a Jewish state.

The B'nai Mitzvah Service for Sarah Hirschfield, Sophie Hochwald, Justin

Miller, Kelsey Riffkin and Ben Thier took place in the ruins of a synagogue in the Upper Galilee, dating back to the 4th century. The setting was unsurpassed. Justin, Sophie and Kelsey had attended the ECC and I clearly remember the beginnings of their Jewish education. I recalled their parents as Shabbat visitors on Fridays and it was wonderful to reconnect with grandparents who attended Special Friends lunches and other ECC events.

The continuity of Jewish celebrations came alive as we joined the congregation at Beit Daniel in Tel Aviv for Purim and the megillah reading. The SWFS kids and adults totally embraced the spirit of Purim. *Continued Pg 2*

Living the Mitzvah

Zarkor Trip to New Orleans

Thirteen students in our Zarkor high school program participated in a 4-day mission to New Orleans this past year. This intense, exciting experience incorporated many of the Jewish values our students have been studying here at SWFS. *Continued Pg 2*



Participant Emma Patterson working in the community garden.

My First Trip to Israel (with 76 Friends) (continued from cover)



We visited Safed, a center of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. The Sephardic synagogue and the winding streets presented another town steeped in Jewish learning.

Our meeting with Rabbi Richard Hirsch was a highlight of the trip. The father of our own Rabbi Hirsch, he talked to us about his life, his passions and the state of Reform Judaism in Israel. Now we understand how our Rabbi Hirsch learned to be such a wonderful teacher!

Jerusalem is filled with complexities. The Western Wall has deep resonance in our collective memory which I felt as I shared

a connection to the millions of Jews who came before me.

Shabbat came alive in ways I had never before encountered. In Tel Aviv, I spent the afternoon on a leisurely walk to the beautiful town of Jaffa. Walking by the Mediterranean Sea, I encountered countless people enjoying life at a slow and steady pace. The following week in Jerusalem, we had Shabbat Services at Hebrew Union College, in a sanctuary that faced the walled city. Watching the Jerusalem stone turn pink, singing the same prayers that are sung all over the world, made me feel centered and connected.

Living even a short time in this country of many joys and sorrows helped me understand the perspective of Israelis who are shaped by their deep history and their present day challenges.

Just as importantly, I felt so much during my time in Israel. The immense power of the land surprised me — from the diverse geography to the deep respect and care Israelis feel toward their country. I felt the presence of God during our time in the desert. From the barrenness of the desert to the rock formations in Timna Park, it was clear that there is a Divine Presence.

Living the Mitzvah: Zarkor Trip to New Orleans (continued from cover)

On the first day, the teens visited a local synagogue for services and then jumped into their important work. Students were taken to the Lower 9th Ward and saw the devastation first-hand, allowing them to truly comprehend what occurred in the days and months following Hurricane Katrina.

"We had time in the French Quarter and fell in love with the colors and energy," participant Izzy Friesner said. "Then we went to the 9th Ward and the first thing I noticed was the lack of

color and energy. The difference was really clear."

The students were energized and started their work in the community gardens run by a woman who moved from New York City back to her hometown in New Orleans after Katrina. She began the Backyard Gardens Network and believes that forming these community gardens will enable the people of the Lower 9th Ward to join together and build community, and eventually utilize the produce that grows there.

The students helped create a rain collection device to water the garden. "It was a really worthwhile project but we spent so little time that we didn't get a sense of the finished product," said Emma Friesner.

"I definitely want to go back and see the garden when it's all done."

On Sunday, the group attended services at the Greater St. Stephens Baptist Church. They were welcomed with open arms. The Elder Pastor was very

engaging and the group was glad to be able to witness this wonderful service.

"It was moving to see hundreds of people pray together with such vigor. Everyone seemed to get into it," Izzy explained. "The spirit they showed was terrific. A lot of people had to rely on their faith to get through what they experienced."

The weekend was full of fun, work, and inspiration and the students left eager to take on their next project.

Volunteer of the Year: Phyllis Lefkowitz

On June 3, SWFS held its annual Volunteer of the Year Shabbat dinner and celebrated Phyllis Lefkowitz.

For 18 years, Phyllis has done a magnificent job ensuring that our Emergency Food Program is up and running every single Saturday morning and our synagogue honored her selfless dedication.

Our volunteers have been crucial in helping us protect the homeless and feed the hungry. We invite you to join this amazing work by volunteering.



SWFS Website New & Improved!

This past year, SWFS made substantial upgrades to our website. It is not only more user friendly, it provides a lot more options. You can click any of the images on our home page to get details of that particular event or click on "Events" to see the full schedule.

You can also find opportunities to volunteer, view Rabbi Hirsch's recent sermons, learn about the synagogue's history and even sing along with Cantor Singer and learn the Hebrew blessings for reading the Torah.

Just go to our website and explore: www.swfs.org

Memorial Plaques

Memorial plaques in our sanctuary are an appropriate way to commemorate a loved one and perpetuate the names of those who touched our lives.

To arrange for a plaque, call Donna Levine at 212-877-4050 x223.

Center for Community Learning

The SWFS Center for Community Learning continues to offer both introductory and advanced learning opportunities to provide the community with Torah lishma, learning for its own sake and satisfaction, which can empower individuals with the tools to delve deeply into Jewish spirituality and values. We are passionate about Jewish learning, and are excited to have offered classes as diversified as our month-long Sabbath World series, our 5 Scholars program, beginning Hebrew, Namshich, our adult B'nai Mitzvah alumni study group, Jewish Mysticism and the Creation of the Talmud.

SWFS offers a wide array of adult learning opportunities. Watch for our Fall Program Brochure, coming soon!



Westchester Hills Cemetery

Just outside New York City, our historic Westchester Hills Cemetery and community mausoleum provide a very beautiful resting place for your loved ones. You may wish to consider pre-need arrangements. Speak with Donna Levine at 212-877-4050 x223.

Next Step Shelter

Two of the guests of our Next Step Mens' Shelter have moved into their own apartments in the past three months. Ania and Arthur Yorinks, the dedicated coordinators of our shelter, regard this as another

example of SWFS's support of some of the less fortunate who share our community.

For the past 28 years, SWFS members volunteer five nights a week to provide warm meals and shelter to some of New York City's neediest. The guests at our shelter, whose stay with us is usually less than a year, have bonded together as a supportive community.

The mitzvah of providing food and shelter allows many of these men to move on with their lives.

Our shelter is an active member of the Emergency Shelter Network. The ESN kept numerous shelters open when the city intended to close them.

We invite you to join us. Volunteers are always needed to stay overnight. Contact Rebecca Kaplan at 212-877-4050 x 244, or rkaplan@swfs.org.



What Goes UP?

Work will begin on our brand new elevator on June 20th and continue throughout the summer.

For those who rely on the elevator to reach the rest rooms, please be advised that elevator service will be disrupted. We expect to have the new elevator in place by early September.

This capital improvement, which will cost some \$225,000, was launched with \$75,000 raised at the SWFS Winter Auction. Contributions are still being encouraged.

"Believing that the power of the Synagogue for good depends in part upon the inherent right of the pulpit to freedom of thought and speech, the founders of the Free Synagogue resolve that its pulpit shall be free to preach on behalf of truth and righteousness in the spirit, and after the pattern, of the prophets of Israel."

— 1st Annual Mtg, April 12, 1908

Spring Benefit: Shem Tov Awardees

More than 200 people came to honor our Shem Tov awardees, David & Didi Gilbert and Lori Schneider, at our spectacular Spring Benefit, celebrated in the Harold Pratt House.

We were treated to a stunning evening of food and music. Moving speeches by Rabbi Hirsch, Stanley Goos, Lance Leener, Lowell & Eileen Aptman and Deb Appelbaum made clear how much we all benefit from the commitment of these incredible achievers. Didi & David spoke movingly about their journeys, and Lori inspired everyone

with the story of how she became an educator, the satisfaction she gets working with the children and her delight in watching the children's intellectual growth over her eighteen years as director of our Early Childhood Center.

The event was a benefit for SWFS and it was wonderfully successful. Equally pleasing was the opportunity for our members to meet in a purely social environment and enjoy each other's company. SWFS President Stanley Goos said, **"The feeling of camaraderie was palpable and an atmosphere of joy surrounded the evening."**



Here When You Need Us

This past year, Caring Community initiatives have really blossomed. Stephen Wise Free Synagogue clergy and members have brought warmth and comfort to those who needed it most.

During Chanukah and Passover, SWFS held bereavement groups for congregants who lost family members, as the holidays can be particularly difficult.

These groups helped members go through the emotions of loss and created close bonds for participants.

As one participant said, **"An empty chair at the head of the Passover seder table is very painful. I am grateful to this support group for letting me express the pain that I carry every day."**

If you need a helping hand or a listening ear, or if you would like to help others, please call Rebecca Kaplan at x244.

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