

rael. Iranian Jews are Zionists, I thought, they just cannot publicly proclaim their support. Yet the enthusiastic speech given by Shiraz Jewish officials of their participation in annual anti-Israel parades shattered that opinion.

What about Iran's support for Hamas and Hezbollah? Given the reality of Iranian rockets reaching Beersheva through the hands of Hamas, this issue is more pressing than ever. Many Iranians believe that their government's focus on Israel is part of the national vision to emerge as a regional power. Support of Hamas and Hezbollah allows Iran to wield greater influence with its Arab neighbors. From what I could gather, the average Muslim citizen seems frustrated that tax dollars are fleeing the country to support organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah when the economy at home desperately needs revitalizing.

Bottom line: I walked away with more hope than fear. Over 60% of the country is under the age of 30. That 60% statistically looks quite favorably towards the United States. I spotted more than one young man donning U.S. army gear... in public. Young women compelled by teachers to spend their lunch break in the mosque quietly rebelled by gathering in the back around a pile of L'Oréal and Lancome eyeshadow. Potential for reform exists. Certainly, the government's structure does not invite it with a religious Supreme Council able to veto any progressive legislation. Nevertheless, the country continues to evolve. The devastating effects of the Iran/Iraq War marked a turning point in Iranian politics and a general shift toward pragmatism.

The American Jewish community possesses a unique opportunity. We have 20,000 brothers and sisters living in Iran whose collective story remains largely untold. Their existence hints that someday, a different relationship with Iran may be possible. In learning and sharing their narrative, we begin to put cracks in the wall of fear constructed around Iran. Their narrative *will* contradict our own on everything from Israel to intermarriage. That may not be easy to hear. But as Jews, as people deeply committed to remembering stories, we cannot refuse to listen out of fear that acknowledging another's truth will negate our own. If there is any hope of conflict resolution, we first have to be able to acknowledge two conflicting narratives simultaneously. ■



FACING EVIL, FINDING GOD

Jean Bloch Rosensaft and Elizabeth McNamara Mueller

It was a personal tragedy that propelled Rabbi Stephanie Bernstein, N '09, toward the rabbinate. Her husband Michael Bernstein, a lawyer for the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigation (OSI), was killed in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988. He was returning from Vienna, where he had persuaded the Austrian government to accept Auschwitz SS guard Josef Eckert upon his deportation from the U.S. Of the twenty-four former Nazis who had been deported from the United States during OSI's first 10 years, Michael Bernstein was responsible for seven.

made with us as a community," she explains.

She applied to HUC-JIR after a decade of consultation with her rabbi, Fred Reiner, C '73. Being in her late 40s, and wanting to explore what it would be like to study with students the age of her own children, she trained for the Hebrew admissions exam with classes at George Washington University. This experience, along with "studying Torah with Methodists" at Wesley Theological Seminary, which has a high percentage of second-career students, helped prepare her for her years at HUC-JIR.



Stephanie Bernstein, N '09, (center) surrounded by classmates.

At the time of his death, Stephanie Bernstein was a clinical social worker with two young children. A lifelong Reform Jew who had grown up within a vibrant community in Duluth, MN, she sought out the comfort of her community at Temple Sinai in Washington, D.C., and became increasingly involved as a lay leader and ultimately served as the synagogue's President. "Community is at the heart of who we are as Jews. Judaism rests on the covenant that God

Married to Henry Winokur since 1990, Bernstein went off alone to Israel and at 50 was the oldest rabbinical student of her Year-In-Israel Program cohort. She nonetheless bonded with the much younger students of her *mabazor* (class), who became among her closest friends at HUC-JIR. She vividly recalls their hike through the Negev, which was supposed to be six hours, but lasted much longer, and required her to climb down a metal ladder built into the side of a

cliff. She says, “It was quite a drop, and I thought, you know, this is scary, but it’s not as scary as what I did to get here. So I turned around and I went down that ladder.”

Bernstein continues, “Before I began my studies at HUC-JIR many people told me what a good thing it was that someone like me – with gray hair and lots of life experience – was going to become a rabbi. It gave me hope – as I closed my psychotherapy practice and prepared to begin my studies – that taking on a new professional identity would not be all that difficult. After classes started, it quickly became apparent to me that I would face the same academic challenges as my younger classmates, and that they had something to teach me. Many of my fellow students – Jewish studies majors in college – had far more Jewish knowledge than I did. Many had spent considerable time in Israel, which I was seeing for the first time.”

Bernstein commuted to New York for the duration of her stateside years of study, during which time she served as student rabbi at Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation in Reston, VA, taught Introduction to Judaism at the Union for Reform Judaism, and received chaplaincy training at Sibley Memorial Hospital. A paper on “God and Evil” for Dr. Eugene Borowitz’s class grew out of her personal life experience. Wanting to pursue further study on the “breadth of our history and experience and how *Halakhah* has helped us to survive and adapt in situations that the rabbis never could have envisioned,” she wrote her rabbinical thesis on responsa from the Holocaust era, under the guidance of Dr. Alyssa Gray.

“Being a second career student has been a tremendous amount of fun, very rewarding, and very intellectually stimulating. No one has ever said to me, ‘Oh, what are you doing here?’” ■

Bernstein was among the demonstrators protesting Scotland’s release of one of the bombers of Pan Am Flight 103 when Libyan leader Qaddafi addressed the U.N.

Feeling that something was missing from her life, **Rachael Bregman**, N ’10, decided to hike the Appalachian Trail. Traveling alone for six months, from Georgia to Maine, she was “surrounded by other people with profound faith,” She reminisced, “It was an incredible experience. I cried probably every day. And I hated it often. And I love it more looking back on it. Sometimes I think I would give anything to do it again. And sometimes I think I’d have to be crazy.”

Bregman’s journey first began in a deeply committed, Reform Jewish home in the suburbs of Boston. While she loved her Jewish roots, she went to Boston College, a Catholic university. Ironically, this choice was what pushed her toward Jewish professional work. “I missed being around Jews,” she explained. So she became a vice president

and divorced in quick succession, however, hit her hard. She took a year off from HUC-JIR to recover while studying at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies and developed a strong support network of other transplanted Americans and Israeli friends.

A presentation about chaplaincy in the American military services inspired her to return to the U.S. and go into the Navy before she started her second year of rabbinical school. “All I wanted to do,” she affirmed, “was volunteer.” She is now a U.S. Naval Chaplain Candidate and Ensign.

Back at HUC-JIR, she looked to broaden her horizons beyond classroom learning and started working with, and eventually joined the leadership team of the New York School’s Soup Kitchen – a cause in which she is still actively involved. Every Monday evening, Bregman



FINDING A JEWISH PAT

Sarah Goldberg

of BC’s Jewish student union and began working as a youth group advisor and Hebrew School teacher at a local Conservative synagogue. Her search for deeper meaning in her life propelled her to take that life-changing hike.

With her newfound experiences in tow, Bregman resumed being a youth educator and advisor, serving as a “de-facto rabbi” for the youth community of a synagogue. “I loved mattering to people” she says, but ultimately she felt she needed “more training to really be able to help people” and applied to HUC-JIR. However, she explains, “the personal interactions that first prompted me to become a rabbi are no longer the reasons I will become a rabbi.” Bregman’s experiences along the way have helped shift her thinking.

Her first stop was HUC-JIR’s Year-In-Israel Program in Jerusalem, where her vision for her life began to reshape itself. The personal turmoil of getting married

interacted with people from diverse walks of life, levels of education, and religious faiths. She offered weekly teachings that integrated Jewish heritage and secular beliefs, discussing “issues of justice, poverty, hunger, and homelessness with reference to Talmudic sources.”

One act of *hesed* led to another and in December 2008, Bregman and a group of twenty young Jews, including HUC-JIR classmates, went on the URJ mission to volunteer in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Bregman was dismayed by the continued devastation four years after the storm and touched by the gratitude of the Louisiana families.

On New Year’s Eve, Bregman spent the night at a shelter in a Brooklyn Heights Synagogue, where she spread hope for the New Year and made pancakes. She then went to Hazon’s Food Conference in Monterey, CA, to learn about Jews, food, and justice. Back in

