

APHY: ITION



Jessica Karpay, C '11

sister's friend that they would look after me and make sure I had a good year. It wasn't necessary – my time in Grand Forks was fantastic, although cold, but having that connection made me feel even more at home from day one.

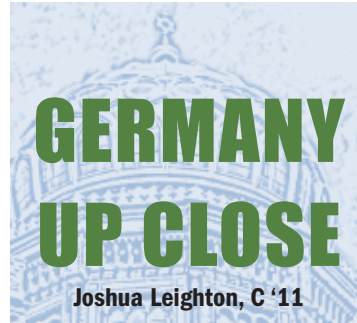
Round Two: Way Down South (at least for me)

Heading into year three of HUC-JIR, Cincinnati students get to choose our student pulpits through an event of controlled chaos known as the pulpit lottery. I chose a congregation in Joplin, MO, because after having read descriptions of all the available synagogues, it seemed to provide an interesting mix of people and activities. Of course I already knew their current student rabbi, but I had no other connection to the congregation. Or so I thought when I chose it. Later that week, my fiancé mentioned to his parents where I had chosen to serve. His father was floored. As it turns out, my fiancé's grandmother was raised in Joplin as a member of that congregation, and my fiancé's great-grandfather is buried in the Jewish cemetery in town. When preparing for the annual congregational memorial service, held in the cemetery between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, I mentioned to the congregant who oversees the Jewish cemetery that I wanted to find the grave of my fiancé's great-grandfather. He, too, showed his excitement that I had a true almost-fam-

ily connection to the congregation, and he set out trying to help me find the grave. We found it, and the plot turned out to be conveniently located under the one tree in the Jewish section of the cemetery, and therefore we held our memorial service next to his resting place. As congregants learned of my true connection, not only through choosing to serve the congregation but through family ties, it seemed that their warm welcome became even warmer. Over Thanksgiving, I met my fiancé's grandmother who grew up in Joplin, and now I have several more graves of family friends of hers to visit if I am back in that cemetery. The Jewish Geography connection with his grandmother made for an easy ice breaker and great discussions.

Jewish Geography is one reason I love Jewish life. I have discovered that wherever there's someone Jewish, there's a game of Jewish Geography waiting to be played, and perhaps won, in the most unpredictable ways that I never could have imagined. ■

Joshua Leighton, C '11,
at the entrance to
Geiger Kolleg.



Joshua Leighton, C '11

In May 2008 I was fortunate to be one of fifteen participants on the special HUC-JIR trip of Germany Close Up, an organization whose purpose is to familiarize American Jewish young adults with modern Germany, its Jewish community, and its government's support for Jews and for Israel. The itinerary of the trip was comprised of meetings, tours, social events, prayer services, and the experience of a small taste of Jewish life in modern Germany.

We had two notable political meetings. At lunch with Asaf Ichelvich, the Foreign Relations Advisor of the Israeli Embassy in Germany, the discussion centered on German-Israeli relations in particular, as well as European-Israeli relations on the whole. Ichelvich alluded to a statement made by a previous ambassador, labeling Europe as "an island surrounded by the sea of reality." On this island, however, we learned that Germany stands out as Israel's greatest ally on the European continent.

That sentiment was mirrored in a later meeting we had with Hans Ulrich Klose, a member of Parliament and Deputy Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Government. Klose provided us with a clear and concise picture of the government's positions regarding the state of Israel. As the party line goes, Germany is a friend to Israel, will support Israel and its quest for peace, and will also support and protect Germany's Jewish

AN UNPREDICTABLE JEWI

Marion Lev Cohen, N '10

citizens. It was made perfectly clear to us that this party line is not embraced by all within the government, and certainly not embraced by the German people as a whole. That these are the official stances, however, in a country that at one point so despised the Jews, created a sense of optimism within our small group.

We also toured many parts of the city of Berlin (especially the Jewish areas), talked with a group of religion students at the Humboldt University (with whom we had a screening of the Israeli film *Walk on Water*), and met with various organizations as well as with the cultural and media relations chair of the Foreign Office and representatives of the American Jewish Committee. We visited the infamous Wannsee Villa, where the Nazis solidified and launched the implementation of the “Final Solution of the Jewish Problem.” A Jewish artist took us around Dresden to picture the once great Jewish presence there.

Two of the most powerful experiences of the trip, however, came while we were interacting with the Abraham Geiger Kolleg, the progressive rabbinical (and now cantorial) school affiliated with the University of Potsdam. While the college “campus” only spans one office suite in a city building, the enthusiasm of the staff as they described their program made me very proud.

What made me even more proud was what immediately followed that meeting. We met with the Geiger students for *Shabbat* services and a potluck dinner at the Jewish Museum of Berlin. While the museum and sharing *Shabbat* with our Geiger peers were powerful experiences, what made the night even more extraordinary was what happened when the museum closed and we had to leave.

We hadn't yet recited the *Birkat HaMazon* or sung *Shabbat zemirot*. So what did we do? We sat outside on the steps of the museum, in the streets of Berlin, and together – HUC-JIR students, Geiger students, and one of the Geiger faculty rabbis – we sang our hearts out, drawing the curiosity of passersby. We sang and we prayed. We ended the evening by singing *Hatikvah*. ■



Marion Lev Cohen, N'10 (third from left), with her Talmud class study partners.

In an age of unpredictable Jewish journeys, I imagine that the winding road that led me to rabbinical school at HUC-JIR is about as unpredictable as anyone's. My life's journey begins with an Orthodox childhood, followed by years if not decades of a sort of Jewish wandering, and an epiphany (in Cuba of all places) that brings me back to intensive Jewish involvement and where I am today – a 5th-year HUC-JIR rabbinical student, with two grown children, two homes (one in New York, the other in Jerusalem), and a second (or maybe, third) career.

To start at the beginning ... I was born in 1948 into a Modern Orthodox home in Queens. My European-born parents sent me to Ramaz Yeshiva, and to a Zionist summer camp where we spoke only Hebrew. My early adult years saw something of a rebellion against my Orthodox Jewish youth (the details of which I'll leave to the imagination), and a suburban life in the Boston area quite distant from intensive Jewish involvement.

But with all these twists and turns in my Jewish journey, what has been a consistent thread and probably the underlying reason I

am at HUC-JIR today, has been a lifelong quest to live a meaningful life. My career choices have been animated by the enduring question of what it means to be in relationship to God and how I can make a difference. These questions have informed my first two career choices: to become a clinical social worker and a Jewish communal volunteer. In both capacities, I sought to help better the lives of others. As a clinical social worker – where I worked with individuals particularly around women's health issues and also ran a graduate training course for social work students at a Harvard teaching hospital – I tried to help people live happier and more productive lives. As a communal leader, I tried to help Jewish people and communities lead richer and more meaningful lives.

Both of my prior careers impelled and informed my decision to become a rabbi. In 1993 I moved back to New York City and faced some personal and professional situations that taught me the limitations of psychotherapy to help cope with crises, transitions, and loss. It was then, as an adult