

List College Newsletter

SUMMER 2011

Henrietta Szold and JTS

By Dean Shuly Rubin Schwartz



As a college dean, I'm often asked whether my administrative responsibilities still allow time for academic research. Thankfully, I have often found that my scholarly interests inform my work with List College. One of my recent projects, on the life and impact of Henrietta Szold, illustrates this in a particularly meaningful way.

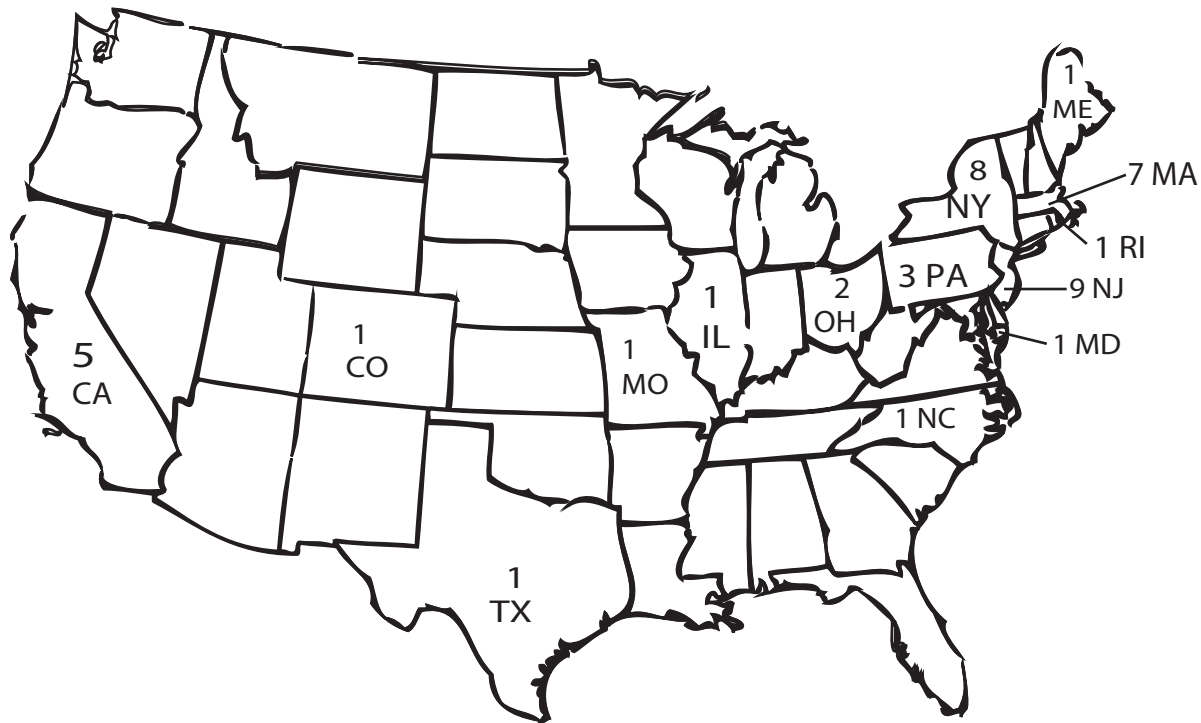
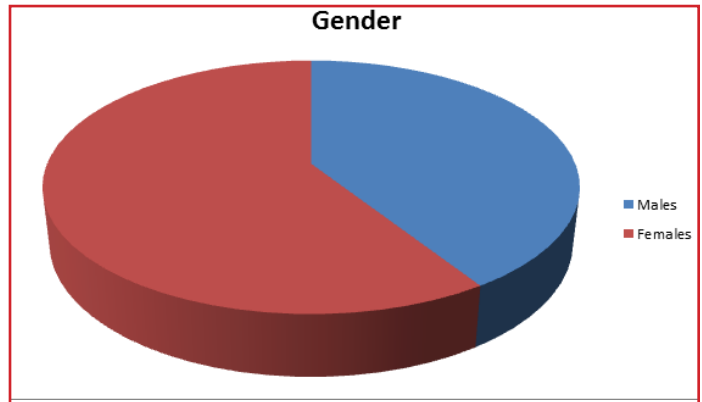
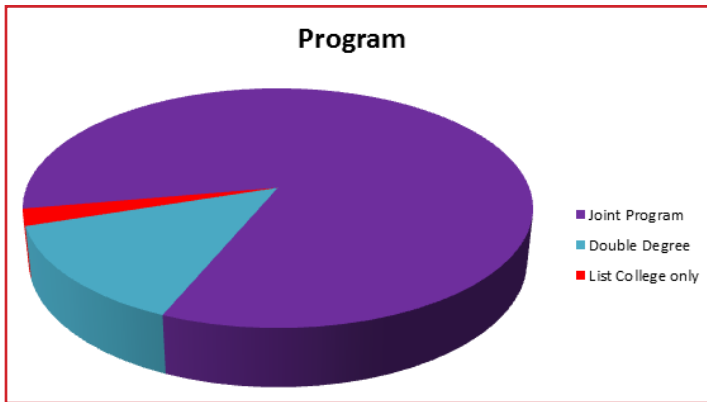
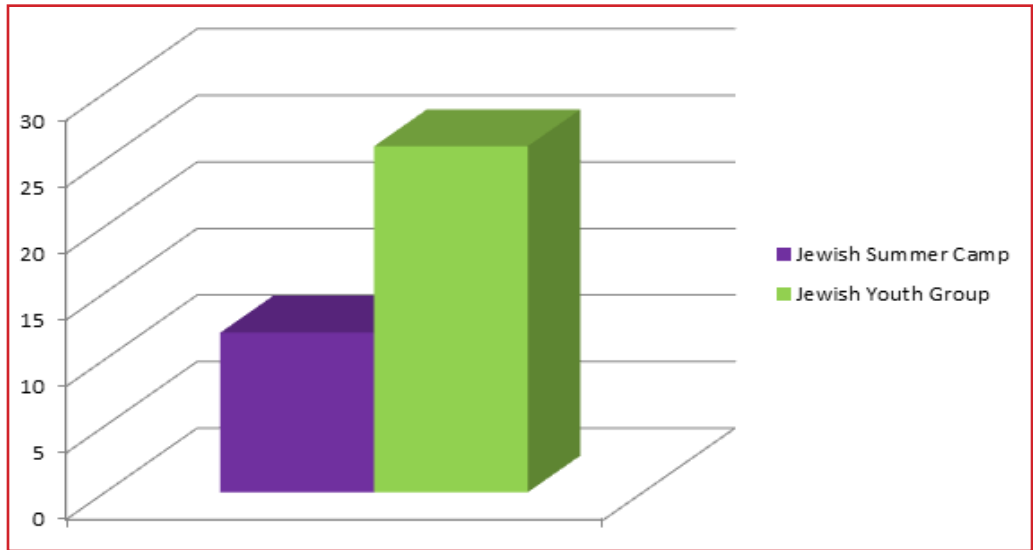
One of Henrietta Szold's earliest memories was being lifted on her father's shoulders to glimpse the funeral cortege of Abraham Lincoln. Now, 150 years after her birth, we stand on her shoulders and admire the great American Jewish icon she became. As the first woman to request permission to study at JTS to advance her own knowledge—not for the goal of ordination—Henrietta Szold has always served as a special role model for List College students, especially for its women.

At a time when independent, Jewishly learned women were a rarity, Szold stood in a class by herself by virtue of her erudition, vision, and leadership. She modeled a life that integrated her passionate commitments to Jewish learning, the Jewish people, American society, and universal values of justice and equality — the kinds of commitments that define the List College mission today. One of her earliest achievements was the establishment of a night school to help new Russian Jewish immigrants learn English and citizenship. By 1898, more than 5,000 Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants had attended, and it became a model for schools around country. Devoted to Jewish learning throughout her life, Szold studied at JTS during the first decade of the 20th century. She quickly impressed both faculty and students with her intellect. One student described her as “the earliest Jewish woman in America to be known as a savant.”

Szold is best known as the founder of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization, which grew to become the largest Zionist organization in the United States and one of the largest women's volunteer organizations in the world. *Continued on page 8*

List College Class of 2015!

Here are four graphs and maps representing some of what we know about the newest List College class. Welcome!



Tribute to Dean Dorothy Denburg, BC '70

By Lauren Carel, DD '11 and Jennifer Levinson, DD '11



All Barnard students in recent history will remember Dean Denburg for one reason or another. Few, however, will have the same memories of “Dean D” (as she is affectionately known) as the Double Degree students of Barnard and JTS. Dean D will always have a cherished place in the hearts of the Double Degrees for the role she played in each of our lives. She is the perfect blend of Jewish mother and confidant, and a warm, all-knowing resource about Barnard and the Double Degree program.

Year after year, she graciously chose to advise a large portion of the Double Degree students, and her affection and fondness extended to all the Double Degrees. Never missing a Double Degree Reception, she always looked forward to seeing and hearing from each and every student. Whether discussing issues regarding the Barnard, Columbia, or JTS communities, joining games like “Pretty, Pretty Princess,” or organizing community service projects like knitting or decorating pillowcases to be donated, Dean D served as the ultimate strong, beautiful Barnard woman (class of 1970). The conversations we had and the anecdotes she shared with us during these events will not soon fade from our memories.

Dean Denburg truly loves Barnard. She always provided encouragement as she served us breakfast at midnight as we prepared for our final exams, one of the more popular Barnard traditions called, appropriately enough, Midnight Breakfast. She knew our names, always made sure we had enough to eat, and smiled just a little bit more brightly when a Double Degree student stepped in front of her at this favorite event. Dean Denburg welcomed us at Convocation and said the first of many goodbyes at the Barnard Senior Toast. She is truly a heat-warming staple in the Double Degree experience.

We wish her all the best as she transitions to her new role within Barnard as the Vice President for College Relations, a position in which she will oversee the Offices of Alumnae Affairs and Career Development. We know that she will continue to do wonderful things for Barnard. We will always be reminded of her in our hearts and minds long after we receive our diplomas. Our lives and experiences at Barnard would not have been the same without her.

Thank you so very much Dean Denburg, from the bottom of our Double Degree hearts, for all that you have done for Barnard and the Double Degrees. We could not have done it without you!

Two LC Students Honored by Jewish Week

Eric Schorr, JP 11, and Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster, DD '01, GS '06, and RS '08, have been named to the Jewish Week's prestigious “36 Under 36” list of young innovators.

Rabbi Kahn-Troster is the lead organizer for Rabbis for Human Rights—North America's campaign against slavery and human trafficking and U.S.-sponsored torture, and serves on the board of the Jewish environmental group Hazon.

Mr. Schorr is a student activist and was recently elected president of LionPac, a pro-Israel public affairs student group at Columbia University. Mr. Schorr's group works to educate the campus community about the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship.



Judaism in Prague

Rachel Spencer, JP '11

In the spring of 2010, I studied in Prague, Czech Republic. Planning to go abroad is no small task for a List College student, and trying to go somewhere other than Israel can pose an extra challenge. Armed with Czech food vocabulary (meat, bread, etc.) and a handful of verbs after a semester of Czech at Columbia, I found myself at Charles University in Prague. My school, housed in an old palace with red carpet-



lined stairways, was located next to the Communist Party headquarters, a constant reminder of the country's recent transition from a communist past.

Prior to leaving, everyone asked me, "Why Prague?" and I did not have specific ties to the city to point to. As an anthropology major, the pull of the unfamiliar was exciting for me. There is so much value in getting away from the familiar bubble of Jewish life, school, and New York City. I did not, by any means, abandon Judaism when there. Rather, I had to seek out Jewish life for myself.

Academically, I took a course on "Czechs, Germans, and Jews in Bohemian Lands," which explored the historical relationships between the groups. The old Jewish quarter of Prague, preserved as a series of museums, spoke to the strong historical presence of Jews in the country. The cemetery, with its jagged collection of old graves, and the Holocaust memorial with children's drawings from Terezin all echoed a community of a not so distant past. On a program trip to Poland, we visited Auschwitz. The excursion was treated as a visit to a museum, reinforcing the stagnant view of Jewish life in the area.

My school, housed in an old palace with red carpet-lined stairways, was located next to the Communist Party headquarters.

However, not all Jewish life was of the past. On Passover, I spent the first Seder with members of the Conservative community, led by the Conservative Rabbi of Prague and had a lively and delicious second Seder at Chabad the next night. The night before going to Auschwitz, I went with a friend to synagogue for Kabbalat Shabbat in Krakow, expecting to find a meager crowd. Instead, we encountered a large group of Jewish teens from the U.S. Such moments reaffirmed that although these areas of Eastern Europe are seeped with historical destruction, they are not simply Jewish communities that once were.

Judaism in Japan

David Weltman JP '12

There is no question that study abroad can be difficult from the perspective of acculturation. Even for an American, study in the U.K. or Australia, is still an entirely new world. But for an observant Jew in Japan, the stakes are higher. The culture is pretty much ambivalent when it comes to religion. There is a saying that you are born Shinto (Shinto is the native Japanese folk religion, and the priest performs a birth ceremony), marry Christian (far cheaper than a traditional Shinto wedding), and die Buddhist. Which leads to the joke: “What sect of Buddhism does your family belong to?” “I don’t know; no one in my family has died recently.” This is the same society that was strictly vegetarian 100 years ago, and now uses pork basically as a seasoning. Needless to say, it was not easy.

The program that I attended was Antioch University’s Buddhist studies in Japan program, which was an approved Columbia program. It required us to rise before dawn in order to perform meditation and Buddhist rituals; it fell under the categories of experiential learning and extreme discomfort, depending on whom you ask. And while the meditation was powerful, the prostrations to the Buddha were a bit unnerving. Here was idol worship, being practiced before my eyes! And before every meal, our food was first placed before the Buddha. Talk about all of those laws on *avoda zara* (idol worship) suddenly gaining *halacha lema’ase* (practical) meaning in my life.



I was an active participant in a synagogue about an hour west by train from Kyoto, in the international city of Kobe. It is a Sephardi synagogue, filled with mostly Israelis on business and some American expatriates. They offered food and lodging every Shabbat and were very hospitable. I also really enjoyed the few times I sported a yarmulke instead of a baseball cap when I went to the convenience store or walked around. Sometimes, I was met with really confused glares, while other times I was complimented with “cute hat.” It literally felt like I had landed on another planet,

one without preconceived notions or knowledge of Jews. In a really strange sense, my unease came with a sense of peace. And despite the difficulties of keeping Judaism in Japan, through the religious tolerance of the people on the program, I was able to follow Jewish law to the best of my ability and teach others about Judaism. I also did a cool independent project, comparing and contrasting Shingon esoteric Buddhism with Kabbalah.

A real moment of joy and satisfaction from the hard work of staying observant came when I was asked by other members of my program if they could come with me to synagogue. Due to lodging difficulties, we instead decided that I would stay for a Shabbat and do kiddush and motzi with them over dinner, using grape juice and breadsticks I brought from the States. Afterwards, one of the other students remarked, “That reminded me of home, when I used to do that on Friday nights with my family. It was really nice.” That meant a lot to me, and was one of many points in which we were able to learn from one another’s experiences and practices.

It was a trip of a lifetime, and I highly recommend everyone to visit Japan if the opportunity arises. It is a beautiful country with a culture so different—and yet so similar—from our own.

Teaching Trombone

Sam Alexander, JP '13

“Goats Build Doors For Animals.”

When I asked my class of fifth-graders, who were learning to play the trombone, to create a mnemonic device to encourage a rapid retrieval of note names in bass clef, Curtis replied “Goats Build Doors For Animals.” This imaginative, humorous, and fun response to learning music and performance inspired me to fix myself in a tie and walk the two blocks over to P.S. 125 to teach these kids each week. Their constant creativity challenged me to develop new strategies to help them to understand the relationships between notes and to continually make practicing a worthwhile experience.

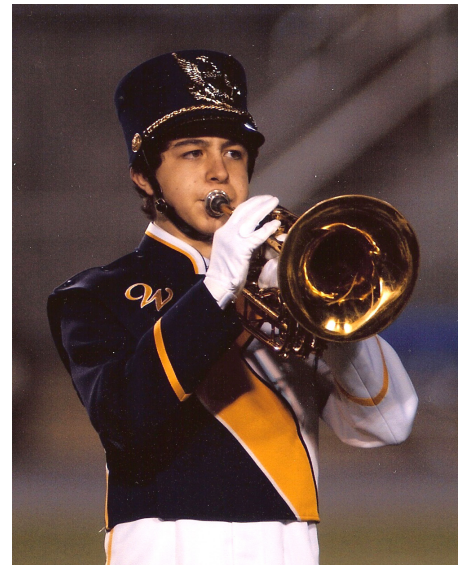
The students in the program enjoy the experience of playing music, and I get the invaluable opportunity to work with these students.

As I wandered the club fair on the steps of Low Library during my first week in the Joint Program, I was initially turned on to the Columbia University Wind Ensemble (CUWE) because I did not want my high school persona of “band geek” to fall by the wayside as I took on the challenges of my new college life. In high school, I was drawn to both the seemingly insurmountable goals that accompany music performance, and the community of peer mentors that play a central role in a performance group. I hoped that I would be able to find a similar musical atmosphere at Columbia

through the wind ensemble. Lucky for me, I found this and much more.

In the past three years, CUWE has worked to develop and professionalize two fantastic programs. Every year, on a Sunday in March, CUWE hosts the Columbia Festival of Winds. On that day, Lerner Hall, Columbia’s student activities center is filled with hundreds of musicians that play all kinds of instruments from piccolo to euphonium and tuba. CUWE shares its stage in Lerner Hall with bands from New York City high schools, community wind ensembles like the Manhattan Wind Ensemble, and fellow universities like Princeton University’s wind ensemble. Most importantly the students, like Curtis, that CUWE members mentor at P.S. 125 join us on stage. The Festival of Winds raises money for those students to have a free music program the following year. These students are involved in CUWE’s second fabulous program, Making Music Matter.

Through the generosity of university benefactors and The Morningside Area Alliance, a local nonprofit that assists in funding a variety of causes in the Harlem community, CUWE is able to bring a group of students at P.S. 125 free group music lessons in trumpet, trombone, flute, or clarinet. Not only do the students get the invaluable opportunity to learn how to play a musical instrument, but they also get the to learn in a new way and with all people. They are free to express their creativity through this outlet, as Curtis showed me weekly. The students in the program enjoy the experience of playing music, rather than just listening to it, and I get to work with these amazing young people. Participation in this program is a part of my own development, as I plan to begin teaching following my completion of the Barnard Education Certification Program. My work with these students makes each week both extremely exciting and practically worthwhile. I am infinitely grateful that CUWE worked to develop this program and that I became involved with CUWE.



List College Pride at Columbia Dance Marathon

By David Offit, JP '13

On January 29th and 30th, 2011, I joined over 150 Columbia University students to dance for 18 hours straight to raise money for the Elizabeth Glazer Pediatric AIDS Fund, a charity that helps to eliminate pediatric Aids by providing necessary medications to mothers and children. The experience was incredibly powerful; I was constantly reminded that I was making a difference in the lives of children everywhere. But, in my mind, one of the most poignant aspects of the event was the way that List College students contributed to the efforts.

During the marathon, I noticed two spectacular qualities about the List College student body: first, List College students are disproportionately involved in campus activities. But this wasn't surprising, or even unique to Dance Marathon. LC students go out into the greater community, whether on campus or in New York City, and they take part in whatever the community has to offer. We're always looking for a way to contribute to the world around them, and get involved in the next campus activity. So it's no wonder that so many List students decided to get involved in such an exciting event for such a worthy cause.

List students always support one another. During almost every hour of the Dance Marathon, even at 4 and 5 a.m., there were fellow List College students to cheer us on, bring us food, and make sure that we were okay. At some of the most fun parts of the Dance Marathon (such as Columbia/Barnard Hillel sponsored "Bar Mitzvah Hour"), there were close to 40 List College *continued on next page*



students filling the room with encouraging energy. Other dancers had visitors too, but no group of people came out in such infectiously energetic hordes as the List College community. Throughout the Marathon, as I looked around the room, I could see the other dancers wondering how it was that so many dancers and supporters knew each other. I could sense their envy of the great mass of people that seemed like a family, constantly hugging and supporting one another through a difficult (though fun!) endeavor.

The support from List students came even before the event started. In fact, many of the participants in Dance Marathon signed up partially in an effort to support a fellow JTS student. Hannah Goodman (DD '12) was on the Steering Committee for the event, and urged her classmates to sign up to support her cause and join the event that she and her committee had worked so tirelessly to plan. List College students, such as myself, jumped at the opportunity to help Hannah. A List College team raised the most money of the entire event, and two of the top five individual fundraisers were List College students.

Dance Marathon reminded me why I love being part of the List College family: We are an incredibly important part of the Columbia and JTS communities, while acting as a supportive, cohesive family in everything that we do. Whether it be in theater, community service, Jewish life on campus, Greek life, Student Council, and even athletics, List College students are involved. And, when there's a chance to show support, List College students come out in droves to show that we care.



Henrietta Szold continued



Through Hadassah, Szold worked to provide medical care in the Yishuv for both Jewish and Arab patients and later played a key leadership role in Youth Aliyah, the program that rescued thousands of children from Nazism and integrated them into new lives in Palestine. Equally committed to deepening Hadassah women's knowledge of both Zionism and Judaism, Szold encouraged the proliferation of study groups, lectures and other such gatherings. Wildly successful, Hadassah grew to become the largest Zionist organization in the United States and one of the largest women's volunteer organizations in the world.

Nowhere is Szold's dedication to women's empowerment more deeply illustrated than in her response to a dear male friend's offer to recite Kaddish on Szold's behalf when her mother died. "The elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom. Women were freed from positive duties when they could not perform them but not when they could..." Szold replied. "The Kaddish means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community, which his parent had.... You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family."

Though she moved to Palestine in 1920, Szold continued to exert a profound influence on American Jewish women, exemplifying how much an educated, motivated and determined person — much less a woman — could accomplish. Even today, Szold serves to as an inspiring model of how one can make a difference in Jewish life.

In many ways, Szold reminds me of List College students, for, like Szold, our students recognize how critical it is for Jews to cultivate the knowledge, commitment and community that will enable them to contribute substantively to the Jewish community. We honor her memory best when we each strive to leave our own enriching mark on Jewish life today and in the future.

A Unified Response

By Abby Shuster; JP '14

Editors' note: This April, the Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine, a student group at Columbia University, created a "mock checkpoint" on campus. Group members dressed as Israeli soldiers, apprehended and questioned students on their way to class, "in what the group described as an effort to "protest human rights violations." What follows is one student leader's account of Columbia Hillel's response.*

**<http://www.columbiaspectator.com/2010/11/19/israel-palestine-groups-clash-college-walk>*



Crafting a Hillel-wide response to Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine's mock checkpoint was no easy task, but one that was well worth it. Students who came to Hillel's open meeting brought a wide range of political agendas and beliefs, each with his or her own ideas about how to respond to the Mock Checkpoint. Quickly, though, we realized that issuing multiple responses and demonstrations would only undermine our chance at presenting a nuanced argument. We decided to come together as a Jewish community and to formulate a clear statement that best represented us all, even as it pushed everyone out of our respective comfort zones. It was only through this struggle and cooperation that we were able to respond to CSJP with information that complicated its oversimplified message, rather than try to refute it with equally antagonistic rhetoric.

Finally settling on a slogan of "It's Complicated: Let's Talk About It" to describe the complexities of the checkpoints, we realized that we too, as a community, are complicated. Matters of Israeli politics often divide the Jewish world, and the fact that Hillel was able to issue a unified response is a remarkable success story on its own.

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Alumni News

Leigh Abrams (JP '05) recently became engaged to David Waterman. Leigh earned her JD from Loyola University in May 2010, and is currently working as an attorney in Chicago at DLA Piper.

Mara Berde (JP '07, DS '09) will be returning to New York after this summer to be the Director of Volunteer Services for the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village -- the village where she spent a year working in Rwanda.

Erin Beser (JP '05) and Ethan Witkovsky recently became engaged. Erin is completing her master's degree in education at the Hartman Melamdim Institute. The couple will reside in White Plains, NY.

Michael Bohnen (JP '10) was accepted to Columbia University School of Medicine. He will begin his studies in September 2011.

Mollie (Gilbert) Brody (DD '01) and Aaron Brody, along with big sister Livnat, announced the birth of their son and little brother, Ziv Eitan.

Elly Cohen (JP '06) graduated from Teachers College in May with a master's degree in Peace Education. Elly relocated to Oregon to become the Outreach Coordinator for the Middle East Studies Center at Portland State University.

Ricky Gratz (JP '02) and Sarah Gratz welcomed a new baby girl.

Eitan Kensky (JP '06) recently published an article for the *Jewish Review of Books* on a biography of Hank Greenberg.

Rachel Grundfast Lappen (DD '00) welcomed a new baby Elliot Chaim.

Tova Leibovic (JP '08) recently became engaged to Austin Douglas. They live in Santa Barbara, CA.

Leah Penkava (JP '08) recently left Disney and is now an Executive Assistant in the Domestic Network Distribution department of HBO.

Odette Rajwan (JP '05) earned a MBA from Zicklin School of Business in May 2011 and then traveled throughout India. Odette is a Vice President at BlackRock.

Richie Reaven (JP '03) and Dr. Laura Babkes Reaven, announced the birth of their first daughter, Isabella Rose Reaven on March 24, 2011. Richie recently completed a year as chief resident in Radiology at University of Maryland.

Eliana (Katz) Seltzer (DD '03) and Joel Seltzer announced the birth of their daughter, Talia Zelda Seltzer, in May 2011.

Jacob Taber (JP '09) will be starting New York University School of Law in fall 2011.

Shira Wallach (DD '08) and Adam Roffman recently became engaged.

Ilan Schwartz (JP '07) and Rebecca Schwartz announced the arrival of their son, Gevah Benjamin, on February 15, 2011. Ilan began his rabbinic studies at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in September 2010.

Hilary (Yohlin) Waller (JP '04) and Matthew Waller announced the birth of their daughter, Molly Arielle, on March 9, 2011.

Interview with Dr. Burton Visotsky, 2011 List College Professor of the Year



Q: What's your favorite thing about teaching List College students?

A: Eager, earnest, inquiring minds -- willing to learn through challenging conventional wisdom -- coupled with an enormous capacity for study and hard work.

Q: What do you think is most valuable about interreligious dialogue?

A: It reminds me of the common humanity we all share. Serious interreligious dialogue helps me define my own Judaism and its borders, as well.

Q: You've been a visiting professor at many universities and seminaries. Of all these places, where did you most enjoy teaching?

A: JTS, far and away. Where would I like to teach? There's no place like home. This will be my 40th year at JTS, and as they used to say on "Saturday Night Live", "JTS be very, very good to me."

Q: What brought you to JTS?

A: The desire for a first-rate Jewish education. JTS was *the* place to do that, and back when I started (1972), Rabbinical School was the best way to get the broadest Jewish education post-BA.

Q: What's your favorite food from the JTS cafeteria?

A: I particularly enjoy Chef's Welsh Rarebit

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