

The Other Israel

WRITE ON FOR ISRAEL



NOAH BAR-SHAIN
Fuchs Mizrachi School

ESTHER BERGSON
Cleveland Heights High School

MICHELLE CAHN
Shaker Heights High School

CLAIRE COHEN
Hawken School

TEDDY EISENBERG
Brush High School

ALANA FRIEDMAN
Montessori High School

ROBYN FRUM
Fuchs Mizrachi School

JENNIE HAZEN
Orange High School

NATHAN IMMERMAN
Shaker Heights High School

LEORA JAFFE
Fuchs Mizrachi School

EVAN KOMINSKY
Mayfield High School

ILANA KARI KRAMER
Shaker Heights High School

MORIAH LIEBERMAN
Orange High School

RACHEL LIEBERMAN
Orange High School

DANIEL PEARLMAN
Solon High School

DIANA PONITZ
Shaker Heights High School

ALEX ROSENBAUM
Laurel School

ADAM ROSENBERG
Hudson High School

RACHEL SHAW
Shaker Heights High School

BENJAMIN TRANGLE
Orange High School

AVIGAYIL UNTERBERG
Fuchs Mizrachi School

JONAH WEINSTEIN
Shaker Heights High School

MAX ZIMON
Orange High School

JOSEPH ZUMMO
Fuchs Mizrachi School



CLEVELAND Jewish News

Director
Amnon Ophir

Advisers
Cynthia Dettelbach
Tina Keller
Michael Unterberg

Designer
Reuben LeVine

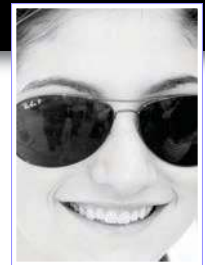
Editor
Claire Cohen

writeonforisraelcleveland.org

Write On For Israel is a joint project of The AVI CHAI Foundation and the Cleveland Jewish News, administered through @Akiva.

► Introduction

CLAIRE COHEN



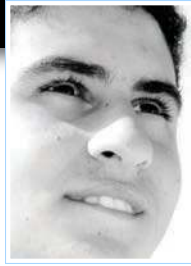
Write On For Israel (WOFI) is an intensive two-year program that trains a select group of 24 high school students each year to become advocates for Israel here in Cleveland and, later, on their college campuses. In year one, high school juniors study the history and conflicts of the Middle East with a focus on Israel's diverse population and culture and its relationship with its neighbors. This is accomplished through seminars taught by local educators and guest speakers. WOFI-ites are also taught verbal and writing skills helpful in promoting advocacy.

Between their junior and senior years, WOFI students travel to Israel on a 10-day fact finding mission. (Although it's hard to capture the excitement and bonding experience of that trip, much of what we learned about and experienced in Israel is recounted in the pages of this magazine, "The Other Israel") As seniors, students build on what they have learned and experienced by working on individual advocacy projects. They also travel to Washington, D.C., to lobby members of Congress on pro-Israel issues.

Claire Cohen, editor

► Separation and Security

BENJI TRANGLE



Four hundred and three miles of concrete, fencing, and barbed wire thread through the West Bank with the main purpose of reducing terrorist activities. Since the creation of these barriers, people have debated whether or not they impinge on Palestinian territory and the trouble caused for those who must cross checkpoints on a daily basis.

It was a hot, humid evening in June as a line of Palestinians, exhausted after a long day's work, lethargically approached a checkpoint. Watching this scene, knowing that these people just wanted to get home and see their families, I began to sympathize with those who are forced to show identification and other documents to Israeli authorities. Even though the process may only take each person a few minutes, it is tedious and wearisome.

However, by reading articles and listening to speakers, I realized the importance of the fence for Israel's security. Since the fence's construction, attacks and suicide bombers have decreased significantly. Even ambulances must be stopped and checked to prevent weapons and bombs from being smuggled into Israel. Unfortunately these highly secured checkpoints are required to ensure safety to innocent civilians.

I realized the importance of the fence for Israel's security.

Every moment was meaningful and memorable. The best group of people I have ever been a part of.

RACHEL SHAW

► Touring with the General

EVAN KOMINSKY



During our WOFI trip to Israel, I got into the habit of falling asleep on the bus almost instantaneously. Even during short, 20 minute bus rides, I would lean against the window, out cold.

One day, we were driving to the northern border. As usual, as soon as I hit the seat my eyes closed. A few hours later, I woke up to a loud voice on the microphone. Disoriented, I turned to the front of the bus to see a tall, aggressive-looking man, with hair similar to staff member Amnon Ophir—that is to say nonexistent. The man was Retired IDF General Kobe Meron, who had joined us to give his perspective on Israel's neighbors to the North.

One of the places we visited was the site of the recent Nakba and Naksa day protests. On the anniversary of Israel's independence in May, and again in June, thousands of Syrian protesters crossed the border at the Druze village of Majdal Shams. Despite his 20 years of service in the army, Meron did not hesitate to criticize the way that situation was handled. Used to more hostile situations, the soldiers didn't know how to disperse the crowd or use the kind of control that the situation demanded. As a result many people were injured.

On the bus back from the border, I was surprised when, after 45 minutes, I was still awake. I found myself contemplating Israel's precarious situation at its northern border. Israel's adversarial relationship with its neighbors has thankfully been quiet in the last few years, but anyone who has studied the Middle East conflict knows that can change on a dime. I was just thankful that there were - and are - men such as Kobe Meron who valiantly protect Israel's borders.

Meron criticized the way the situation with Syrian protesters was handled.



► Great Food and Mahmoud

DANIEL PEARLMAN



The sunset was stunning. Mediterranean waves crashing onto the rocky shoreline. Great food, great weather, great people. What more could I ask for? We were in the small coastal town of Jisr al-Zarqa, about halfway between Haifa and Tel-Aviv. As the name suggests, this is a Muslim Arab town, yet each resident is also an Israeli citizen.

In a town of 13,000 Muslims and zero Jews located in one of the most unstable regions of the world, we didn't know what to expect. How accepting would they be of a small group of American Jewish teenagers? At first, we were all a bit nervous, the Arab teens included. After a rousing ice-breaker game of "Pop the balloon attached to your neighbor's ankle" (not the actual name), we started to realize how similar these Arab teens were to us.

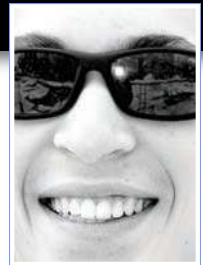
Fast-forward three hours. I was walking on the hot Mediterranean sand with Mahmoud, asking him questions.. "What is it like living here? How many siblings do you have? What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of America?" Life is fine here, he replied. It's crowded, but beautiful. I have seven siblings, but my grandparents live with us as well. America? It's freedom, of course!

Though we may be worlds apart in many ways, I found that Mahmoud and I also have many similarities: We both want to go to college, and we both have Facebook accounts. By the end of the night, any preconceptions I may have had vanished. Mahmoud's religion and culture were less important than the friendship we created. Maybe, just maybe, if everybody was able to go through the same personal experience that we did, there would be world peace.



► No Zero-Sum Game

NOAH BAR-SHAIN



As I recited the afternoon prayers on the beach while the sun was setting, I thought to myself, "How did an Orthodox Jew like me end up praying on the shore of a Palestinian fishing village?"

I went to Israel last summer with 23 American teens to learn, among other things, about the complicated conflict between Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Our program, "Write On For Israel," (WOFI) teaches that advocates for Israel must develop sympathy for the struggles of individual Palestinians. To "humanize the conflict," we distinctly avoided lumping together all of the Palestinians and considering their struggles from a purely national standpoint. WOFI took us to an Arab village in Israel, Jisr al-Zarqa, where we spent a day with Arab teens.

There are differences between their lives and ours. Some of them have ten siblings and parents who are truck drivers and garbage men. However, it surprised me how closely their interests and hobbies, such as science, music, and basketball, match mine. Many of us have the same aspirations, like earning a science degree, opening a business, or playing professional sports. We all experience similar social problems and annoying younger siblings. Socializing with them felt no different than spending time with kids in my own neighborhood.

Sharing the day with this group of Arabs forced me to develop empathy that will endure forever. Our friendships survive on Facebook, and I hope to reconnect in person someday. The Arab teens I met inspire me to work through this frustrating conflict. The Middle East does not have to be a zero-sum game: if everyone works together we will all benefit.

**If everyone
works
together we
will all
benefit.**



► Past Superficial Barriers

MORIAH LIEBERMAN



On the most fundamental level all humans are similar. This realization came to me on the Write On For Israel trip as I spent a day with Arab teens. Learning a dance together, talking, playing Frisbee and suffering through a not-so-exciting presentation, I began to bond with some of these kids. Their hospitality and friendliness really warmed me and made me view them not based on their Arab identity but on their personalities.

I realized that humans are not so different from one another. They have similar emotions, fears, and hopes. One Arab girl said something that really struck me. When we asked her what she thought of when she heard the word America, she responded, "freedom." It dawned on me then how everyone is just looking for a better life.

However, once political, religious, or ethnic identities are brought into the mix, relationships can morph into something poisonous. I saw that I could connect to Arab teenagers past superficial barriers. I left with an optimistic feeling that although there are many differences separating Jews and Arabs in Israel, they could still connect on a human level.



Arab and Jewish teens are not so different from one another.

► An 'Other Side of Israel' Party

MICHELLE CAHN



The theme of Write On For Israel's party this year was the "Other Side of Israel." The party included many aspects of Israel. Our hope was to expose people, who had never been to Israel, to Israel's many diverse sides and layers. To achieve this goal we split the party room into sections—we had an "Israeli dance club," a mock-beach, a "Bedouin tent," "Aroma" coffee, and of course food.

Around 170 teens came to the party making this event, in my opinion, a success. Some of the teens that came were not Jewish which was great because it is important to show non-Jews that Israel is not a war-zone.

I think that it is imperative that "Write On" has these parties each year. They help to teach people that Israel is a country with an amazing culture and people. This party is a type of soft advocacy that can reach people without them even knowing it. Even if we convinced just one teen that Israel is a place worth fighting for and advocating for, the party was a success in my eyes.

Teaching Cleveland teens about the country's amazing culture and people.



► Interviewing Israelis

RACHEL SHAW



"Hi, we're part of a program from America so that we can learn how to advocate for Israel on college campuses. Could we do an interview with you?"

I always gave that introduction in Hebrew, but the next question I asked, "Can we do the interview in English?" tended to earn an impressive array of negative body language. But the answer often still was yes. It seemed that the Israelis we interviewed were as eager to practice English as I was to practice my Hebrew, and I often gave in to the Israelis who, on hearing an American accent, would determinedly continue in English.

Quite a few of the interviewees asked if we were students on Birthright, and were a little confused by the idea of a program to teach Israel advocacy. The average Israeli doesn't understand why an American high school student is interested in Tel Aviv Hebrew Book Week or Israeli reactions to subjects like immigration. Israelis assume most Americans in Israel are interested mainly in tourism, with political or social advocacy a lesser priority.

Many wondered, quite simply, why we cared what American slang was popular in Israel, or why we wanted to know where they vacation or what other languages they speak. That said, non-native Israelis tend to have poignant reasons for immigrating to the Jewish state. Israel is, religiously and culturally, the Jewish homeland. A man at Tel Aviv Hebrew Book Month said quite simply that he immigrated to Israel from France because, "I wanted to be part of the majority not the minority."

Many wondered
why we cared.

I gained more than
knowledge; I gained
friends, skills, confidence,
and the tools I need to
advocate on and off
campus for the country
that I love. It was truly the
experience of a lifetime!

AVIGAYIL UNTERBERG

► Reasons Not to Hate

LEORA JAFFE



At a book fair in Tel Aviv I talked to some Israelis about their opinions of Palestinians. One young woman who had moved to Israel on her own from California said that the Israeli atmosphere definitely changed her opinions to be more radical, but she still believes that peace is both necessary and possible. Another young Russian couple said they believe that peace is a possibility, but it takes time.

In the summer of 2010 I worked with the Koby Mandel Foundation which runs a camp for children who have lost family members to terror attacks. Sheri Mandel, who lost her 13-year-old son to a terrorist attack, wrote a book titled *Blessings of a Broken Heart*. She does not hate all Palestinians. In addition, she points out, if she were to spend her life chasing her son's terrorists and never find them, it would mean they won because she had wasted her time. Instead, Mandel and her family picked themselves up from their grief and used their experiences to change other people who are suffering the same way they have.

If the Mandel family does not hate Palestinians, all the more so other people should not hate Palestinians.

They believe
peace is a
possibility,
but it takes
time.



► Reassessing South Tel Aviv

JONAH WEINSTEIN

Welcome to South Tel Aviv. Unlike the Disneyland that many American teens expect to find on their Israel trip, South Tel Aviv seemed more like Buckeye and Kinsman or Ellis Island. Both sides of the streets had people selling junk: used shoes, clothes and electronics.

Our next stop was the public park. With a playground and a lush, green playing field, this seemed like a typical residential park. However, our tour guide told us that this has become a place where homeless people sleep and defecate. This was not the Israel we knew, or thought we knew. In the middle of the park, there was a bookshelf dedicated to foreign books and open three times a week. With a bookshelf flanked by an array of Asian and Spanish individuals, I could have forgotten I was in Israel. Nearby was colorful graffiti, that read "Don't Deport Me." We were beginning to understand the struggles and sentiments of some of the inhabitants of South Tel Aviv.

The Israeli government has tried to make this park a cultural center and a place for learning. However some of these non-Jewish immigrant workers are trapped in a harsh financial situation, much like indentured servants. Having been transported to Israel to work for someone, these individuals must now pay back their benefactor in addition to making a life for themselves. As these immigrants try to settle and adjust to life in Israel, the country is faced with the challenge of integrating them into society.

**More like Buckeye and
Kinsman or Ellis Island**



► Stroll Down the Old City

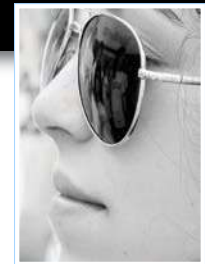
RACHEL LIEBERMAN

The holy land of Israel conjures visions of unity. Unity of communal care, loving your neighbor and protecting your fellow Jew. The sad reality is that Israel is a divided nation. As the expression goes, with five Jews and seven opinions, animosity for being a different type of Jew surges throughout Israel.

A few days after the WOFI trip ends, I walk towards the Kotel, my arms linked, with two friends from Nesiya, a pluralistic Israel program I participated in the previous summer. To my right is my friend Timna, an Orthodox Jew from Jerusalem who strictly keeps the Sabbath. To my left is my friend Shahaf, a secular Jew who never keeps the Sabbath and has little belief in G-d. The animosity between secular and religious Jews is passionately alive in Israel since many believe their way of faith is the correct path.

Now walking this path through the Old City I am confronted with the situation of two individuals whose backgrounds imply that they may reject the other. Instead, we talk about the separation, about believing in G-d, if we believe and the benefits of being a believer or not.

I am filled with hope. Even though we come from different backgrounds and have drastically different beliefs, we are able to forge a lasting friendship that is filled with respect and love between us, and I hope one day this will come to resonate throughout Israel.



**Religious and
secular able
to forge
lasting
friendships.**



► Long journey home

CLAIRE COHEN



A giant bird swooping down from the sky was the savior for a group of Jews hoping to flee the religious oppression of the Ethiopian government. Their wish was to immigrate to their ancestral homeland, where the streets were paved in gold. Little did they know that this “bird” was an airplane, and Israel’s streets would not be paved with gold.

Ethiopian Jew David Gavro, whom we met with in Israel, was six years old when he came to the Jewish state alone, and without knowing a word of Hebrew. Just a few months later, David’s parents tried to make the journey to Israel, but they were captured and imprisoned by the Ethiopian government. For seven years David lived in an Absorption Center where he learned everything from Hebrew to how to live in a modern homes.

When David was 13, his parents finally joined him in the Jewish state. Instead of being ecstatic, David found it difficult, as he had forgotten the role of parents and his were far less assimilated than he was. Due to this, David’s teenage years were far from ideal. He had problems with the police and he dropped out of high school in ninth grade. At age 18, David was working in construction when he was seriously injured.

After this experience, Gavro finally found the opportunity he was looking for. He attended a cinema school, where he discovered his love for film. Gavro filmed “Sisai,” the story of an Ethiopian man who immigrated to Israel, but goes back to find his long lost father. He also made “Green, Yellow, Red,” about Ethiopian Israelis who form a band, but struggle to be accepted. Today, Gavros is both a filmmaker and the director of a community center in Netivot.

“Ethiopian Jewry is dying,” says Gavro, because the children of those who emigrated from Ethiopia view themselves as “the second generation in Israel, not second generation Ethiopian.”



Didn't know that Israel's streets are not paved with gold.

► One Hectic City

NATHAN IMMERMAN



The streets of Jerusalem are the most hectic streets I have ever been to. Everyone in the city always has a place to be and is usually late getting there. There are too many people rushing to get to where they're going. The old streets are too narrow for the vast population because they were built for a city a fifth of the size. As I scanned this frantic city from a lookout park, I saw the densely packed apartments, the crazy streets and hilly landscape. The city's hectic nature might bother some people who like calm, peaceful openness but I am encouraged by the fact that all of the inhabitants are willing to endure the tight circumstances in order to live in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Residents willing to endure tight circumstances.

► Kotel Magic

ESTHER BERGSON



Erev Shabbat we walked through the Arab market, a never-ending tunnel that I hoped would eventually lead us to the Kotel (Western Wall). As we approached the Kotel, the roar of prayers, chants, and songs grew louder and clearer. Every member of our group was growing anxious and excited, anticipating the religious and moving experience we were about to have. It was not our first time at this holy site for most of us, but for a few, it was a new experience. Finally, a sea of black decorated with specks of army green came into sight. On the men's side, soldiers and Hasidim celebrated and sang at the top of their lungs, welcoming the Sabbath.

The women's section, however, was a totally different scene. A quiet, calm feeling came over me as I entered. A few girls from our WOFI group linked arms to do Kabbalat Shabbat. As we swayed with the sounds of the hymns, I closed my eyes and truly appreciated the magical atmosphere.

After everybody finished their prayers, the whole group congregated. I walked away from the Kotel knowing that we had all experienced something amazing, something shared by all Jewish people. I was overcome with a sense of pride for my religion and a feeling of ownership of this amazing site.

We had all experienced something amazing.

WOFI has provided me with an inside view of the Middle Eastern conflict, giving me the opportunity to not only understand it, but to truly comprehend every aspect of it.

ESTHER BERGSON

► The Power of Sderot

ALEX ROSENBAUM



I never thought I would step foot in Sderot. From what I knew, it was dangerous, a place to be avoided when visiting Israel. For almost a decade, Sderot had been bombarded with rockets from Gaza, located only one mile away. So I was a tad bit nervous as we made our way to Sderot, though my nervousness was insignificant relative to my excitement and curiosity.

We were met by Laura Bialis, our tour guide. She began our Sderot experience by inspiring and astounding us with her shocking personal stories. One particularly horrifying story that really made an impact on me was of her friend who, when the warning sirens went off early one morning, was debating whether or not to stay in bed. He ultimately decided to play it safe and run to the bomb shelter, a wise decision. The bomb fell on his house, landing where his head would have been on his bed.

That moment, when we were standing in Israel while seeing the entirety of neighboring Gaza, made me realize how close and compact everything is and how threatened Israel's borders are. A tank happened to be driving past on the Israeli side of the border, and Laura Bialis ominously muttered, "Oh no." Our hearts sank. A false alarm. But being where we were, we couldn't help reacting as we did. At the end of our trip, we were asked to reflect on what we found most powerful, and for me, the answer was Sderot.

It made me realize how threatened Israel's borders are.



► Shabbat in Israel

MICHELLE CAHN



In Cleveland my family does not celebrate Shabbat other than the occasional lighting of candles. Before going on the WOFL trip to Israel, I was a little nervous about celebrating Shabbat—would I be the only one who is not super religious? However, Shabbat turned out to be one of the most exciting and enjoyable parts of the trip.

To kick-off Shabbat we went to the Kotel on Friday night. Seeing all the people praying and hearing all the men cheering and singing made me feel closer to my Jewish heritage than I had ever felt before.

The next morning we went to synagogue. We had a few options and I chose the Italian Synagogue, but when we were not allowed in we went to The Great Synagogue. I was very disappointed because I was interested in what an Italian Synagogue would be like (and we had to walk an extra 15 minutes in the heat to get to the Great Synagogue). To make matters worse, The Great Synagogue turned out to be a great letdown. I did not understand anything that was going on in the service!

After leaving the synagogue, we went back to the hotel and relaxed for hours, the first time during the whole trip...literally!

After our chill time, we listened to two different political speakers and we went to the Gilad Shalit tent where his family and supporters gathered for the anniversary of his capturing. This was a very emotional experience and made us feel a sense of closeness to the conflict. When I heard that Gilad was finally released, I was ecstatic because I got to see firsthand what his captivity was doing to his family.

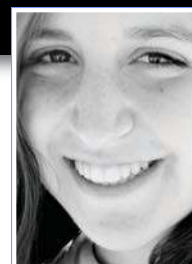
It made me feel closer to my Jewish heritage.

The biggest thing I learned in Israel is that, once you remove all the complexities of politics and religion, people are just people; people who just want to be able to raise a family, own a house, and live a normal life.

TEDDY EISENBERG

► The Matisyahu Magic

ILANA KRAMER



After Saturday night dinner in Jerusalem, a few of us toyed with the idea of singing zemirot (special Shabbat songs). Staff warned us that because we are a pluralistic group we aren't all familiar with the same tunes. But we were up for the challenge. We formed a circle and began singing, but quickly struggled to find songs and tunes in common. In small groups, friends would start a song that the rest of us didn't know, and it would quickly die out.

Suddenly someone began singing "One Day" by Matisyahu and everybody powerfully joined in. Of all of the Hebrew songs we tried, "One Day" was the only song that our entire group fully sang together.

This song is about the day when there will be no more war, violence or hate in the world. In the chorus Matisyahu sings, "All my life I've been waiting for, I've been praying for, for the people to say... That we don't want to fight no more, they'll be no more wars and our children will play." It suddenly hit me that I was sitting in the middle of Jerusalem with a pluralistic group of teenagers singing the hopeful lyrics of a Jewish pop artist about future peace. Then I realized that with Write On For Israel we were truly making a difference for our country.

All singing together the hopeful lyrics of a Jewish pop artist

Write On For Israel was an amazing experience that connects Jews from different backgrounds in a whole new way.

JOSEPH ZUMMO

► The Reminding Tent

ALANA FRIEDMAN



During Shabbat, Jerusalem is quiet. The shops are closed and the streets are almost empty of cars. Unfortunately, not everyone in the city is able to relax. Gilad Shalit's family set up a tent in downtown Jerusalem as a reminder: Their son, Gilad, a soldier in the Israeli Defense Forces, has been in captivity in Gaza for over five years. The tent was set up directly across the street from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's home and was meant to be a constant reminder to the Prime Minister.

On the day we visited the vigil, it was the fifth anniversary of Shalit's capture. Visitors spilled out onto the sidewalks and into the streets. Trees and fences were covered with fluttering yellow ribbons containing messages from the tent's visitors. However, the most striking display was inside the tent. Covering the walls were photographs and posters with Gilad Shalit's face. At the time of his capture, Shalit was not yet twenty, and we could see that he was not much older than us. For me, visiting the tent, meeting his relatives, and seeing the walls dedicated to Shalit succeeded in showing me yet another face of Israel - a compassionate one - that needs to be acknowledged.

Shalit was not much older than us.

An opportunity to become an advocate for Israel while creating friendships with Cleveland kids across the religious spectrum.

RACHEL LIEBERMAN

► All For One Soldier

AVIGAYIL UNTERBERG



June 25, 2011 was not only the date of our WOFI Shabbat, it was also the five-year anniversary of the day IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, now 25, was captured by Hamas terrorists. We visited the protest tent that sits outside the Israeli Prime Minister's house 24/7. In this tent sat Gilad's family and friends surrounded by hundreds of supporters of their cause. Their goal was clear: Free Gilad. Gilad Adayim Chai, Gilad still lives. When I approached the tent to say some words of consolation to Gilad's family I became overwhelmed with emotion. I felt both a personal obligation to do everything I could for my fellow Jews in need and a sense of helplessness. What could I possibly do? Who was I to do anything? But then I looked around.

Circling around the tent were men, women and children, religious and otherwise. Seeing the Jewish people come together like that for the sake of one Jewish soul was incredible. The unity of the Jewish people in times of crisis has always amazed me, and this time was no exception. This experience filled me with pride and hope. I saw firsthand how the Jewish people could set aside their differences and come together to accomplish a goal for the common good. None of the people around me had any more or less power than I, yet together we felt like one united force that could make a difference.

Thank God, that force did. As of October 11, 2011, a deal was made to release Shalit to his family. I believe that, among many other factors, this tent attended by people of all backgrounds helped make this happen.

We felt like one united force that could make a difference.

I was able to see and experience first hand everything we had learned about in order to make myself a better advocate.

LEORA JAFFE



► At the Yellow Submarine

JENNIE HAZEN



I wasn't sure what to expect when I first stepped onto the threshold of the Yellow Submarine, an Israeli music venue in Jerusalem's nightlife district of Talpiot. Neither I nor the few Israelis I asked had ever heard of Mika Karni, the singer whose concert we were going to see. Hopefully, a music venue that called itself the 'Yellow Submarine' would feature artists whose music would live up to the high standards set by its namesake's artists. I was not disappointed.

At first glance, Mika Karni looks like a typical "alternative/rock" singer: short, spiky blond hair, tight black pants, and adorable black jacket/white shirt combo. However, all preconceived notions I had of Mika shattered when she whipped out a violin and began playing a fast-paced western-sounding song. Over the course of the concert, Mika played music that had hints of country, classical, folk, pop, and even some classic rock 'n roll. She even offered to "sing some Brittany" for us.

However, what made Mika's concert stand out was the Karni family's involvement. As the concert progressed, Mika had her husband, young son and daughter come on stage to play in the background and sing with her. Their family dynamic really made the concert much more intimate; at one point, Mika stopped singing in order to help her daughter get something out of her eye. The concert seemed less like a 'Mika Karni' concert and more like a private jam session for the entire Karni family.

Mika's unique music and her memorable performance was one of the highlights of my Israel trip.



► What I learned

MAX ZIMON



Returning from Israel is an experience in itself. Everyone has questions: What did you do? Where did you go? Whom did you see? Is it really as good/bad/hot as everyone says?

These questions are just preludes; what everyone really wants to know is what you've learned. Anyone who's been, as compared to anyone who hasn't, is an "expert" – and the Write On For Israel trip was education-packed. The innumerable lectures, classes, discussions, interviews, and tours in our schedule covered as broad a range as possible in a ten-day trip.

But what did we really learn?

Khaled Abu-Toameh explained Israeli journalism. Neil Lazarus provided his unique interpretation of advocacy and debate. Tour guides on kibbutzim talked about the founding of the kibbutz movement and living and working in Israel. There was a lot to take away.

Yet, when I was asked what I had really learned, I had trouble answering. Did I know how Israelis live? What they care about? Is Israel doomed? Will Israel survive? How to advocate? We talked about all of these things, but I believe the trip was meant to prove something else entirely:

Israel isn't a sentence, or even a paragraph. Like the United States, Israel is an epic novel, a heterogeneous tapestry of different peoples and beliefs. Apart from the politics and religion, that's what makes it worth saving.

Israel isn't a sentence or even a paragraph; it's an epic novel.



► A Matter of Taste(s)

ROBYN FRUM and **JOSEPH ZUMMO**

Food in Israel is tied to the earth, culture and tradition which gives it its tasty and unique qualities. Hummus, falafel, schwarma, schnitzel and couscous are only some of the ethnic cuisine choices available in Israel. My favorite meals were the large Israeli breakfasts, comprised of a variety of salads, fresh fruit, yogurts, coffee, and more. The selection of fresh and organic produce was incredible.

Robyn Frum

How can you eat fruit and vegetables for breakfast? My Israeli breakfast consisted of "Milky," a rich chocolate pudding with whipped cream on top. In the Jerusalem shuk one of my favorite food places was Marzipan, a well known bakery. Robyn thought their signature fresh chocolate rugelach were the most calorically disgusting dessert ever, but I insisted on waiting in line on the already crowded sidewalk to buy some. Worth the wait!

Joseph Zummo

While Joseph was standing in line for his rugelach, I was looking at all the fresh produce. Freshly squeezed orange juice or pomegranates right from the trees were truly the tastes of Israel that I will always remember. By the time I was finished and Joseph had his Marzipan fix, I thought he'd be satisfied. But there was a candy store right next to Marzipan...

Robyn

It displayed a huge array of kosher gummies and chocolate. How could I pass up these?

Joseph

Well, at least we agreed on one thing: Israeli iced coffee - definitely the most delicious coffee-flavored way to cool off in summer. It was a great way to get our daily dose of caffeine. After all, not all of us are lucky enough to be like Amnon and function with no sleep!



At least we agreed
on one thing.

Never have I
experienced Israel
with a more
wonderful, passionate,
and diverse group of
people, all of us united
by our dedication to a
common cause.

ALEXANDRA ROSENBAUM

► "Music chooses you"

TEDDY EISENBERG



"Music chooses you." This is a perfect description of how Israelis Mika Karni and her husband, Miki Shaviv, fell into musical performance years ago. When we asked what drove them to become musicians, Mika said, "Music chooses you... It's not that you want to do it, it's that you need to do it." Playing off the musical influences of Joni Mitchell, and her husband's love of Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, and Tommy Steele, the duo began writing their own songs and performing at Attic Concerts every Friday night.

One year ago, however, their lives changed forever when they took part in a reality television show which enabled them to sign a major record deal. Before they were granted such an opportunity, Miki Shaviv said their major struggles were "convincing their parents [that they could make a living], making something of themselves, [and] raise a family." Now, the couple performs with their entire family, including their son, Yotam, and daughter, Yasmin, at various venues throughout Israel. Mika does lots of work in an attempt to bridge the gap between secular and religious Israelis. This, she believes, is Israel's true message and mission.

"It's that you
need to do it."

Mika Karni



► Teens lobby with AIPAC

ADAM ROSENBERG, ALANA FRIEDMAN and **ESTHER BERGSON**

"Hello, my name is Adam Rosenberg, and I am a senior at Hudson High School. First, I would like to thank your office for co-sponsoring HR 1905. It is crucial for Congresswomen like Marcia Fudge to support sanctions on Iran and recognize the importance of a strong Israel-U.S. relationship."

These words looped through my head as I stood in front of the Longworth Office Building across the street from the Capitol. I was surprised and nervous to have the opportunity to talk to Maheen Siddiqui, Legislative Counsel (on foreign affairs!) for Congresswoman Fudge (D-11). I was excited to make a difference, to implement my research on Israel, and most of all, excited to advocate. All that was made possible through Write On For Israel (WOFI), a two-year Israel advocacy program that monumentally changed my life for the better.

The first WOFI year was rough: lectures, notes, presentations, seminars, films, writing assignments, and a never-ending number of PowerPoint slides. Next, we travelled to Israel on a political advocacy trip. I loved every moment of it. From there, WOFI led me on a journey of Israeli advocacy that placed me on the Hill and with AIPAC.

Attending the AIPAC Schusterman Advocacy Institute High School Summit in Washington, D.C., Nov. 6-8, was extremely informative, especially when it came to learning lobbying techniques. I attended an Advanced Public Speaking class at the convention (I was very glad I had when I was in the office of Marcia Fudge). I also learned about Congress, fundraising, petitions and much, much, much more.

The U.S.-Israel relationship is not self-sustaining. We must continue to submit positive energy towards this relationship to keep it going for the safety of Israel and America.



The sixth annual conference brought 407 high school students from 28 states representing 130 different schools.

In addition to WOFI, the Northeast Ohio delegation included Alyssa Schor, Sydney Ungar, Jacob Popper, Nate Shiffman and Noah Ickowitz representing BBYO and Hallie Israel and Matt Fisher from The Temple-Tifereth Israel. Leora Hoenig of Cleveland BBYO and Ari Milgrom of The Temple-Tifereth Israel attended the trip as advisors. Noa Rabinowitz, AIPAC staffer from Beachwood, helped ensure the delegates had a good experience.

For WOFI Fellow Alana Friedman, the most memorable event was lobbying for Israel at the Capital. The ten teens from Northeast Ohio prepared short speeches on different topics Congresswoman Fudge needs to know about Israel: Iran, the peace process and the need for foreign aid. "It was an amazing opportunity to be able to talk to someone in Congress," said Alana.

Esther Bergson, another WOFI Fellow, was initially unenthusiastic about attending the AIPAC conference. That changed. "The setup of the seminars was impeccable, creating an interactive environment that encouraged every student to make a contribution to the discussion," reported Esther. "Everybody came together to create such a strong and reassuring environment that anybody - educated about the conflict in the Middle East or not - would feel completely comfortable."

"Meeting hundreds of other high school students was an interesting experience for me," said Esther. "I was shocked to find so many young adults that I could relate with and have a good time with. The AIPAC High School Summit was a life-changing experience."



► The Beauty of WOFI in Year Two

EVAN KOMINSKY



Write On For Israel is a unique two-year program. Initially, most participants view the first year and the trip to Israel as the most important components. After all, these parts constitute the majority of face-to-face time with our fearless leader Amnon Ophir, and it is when all the work is done; the second year, we thought, is just something attached to the first. Not so!

As the first year winds down, each WOFI-ite chooses a project that he or she will complete during the second year of the program. This year, the projects ranged from planning the rocking "Other Side of Israel" party, to creating this magazine. Since oversight by WOFI staff is greatly diminished in year two, it can be very easy to shirk responsibility and not give 100% effort. This portion of the program attempts to simulate what the situation will be like on college campuses; it takes control of the program from staff members and puts it into our hands.

For my project, I worked alongside Nathan Immerman to bring a little bit of Israel Advocacy to our Conservative youth group, United Synagogue Youth (USY), where we both serve on the Executive Board. In February, we held a regional weekend convention in Cleveland, drawing Jewish teenagers from around the Midwest. These events

take place in different cities four times a year and usually focus on a unique study theme. These range from relationships with each other to issues facing Judaism today.

For this convention, Nathan and I decided to shift the focus to the "other side" of Israel, the parts of Israeli society not seen by most tourists, like the internal crises Israelis deal with on a regular basis. At one point we split into small groups, and with each group, I passed around an assortment of pictures taken during our cohort's Israel trip this past summer. Using these pictures, I explained many of the problems in Israeli society not so apparent to the outside observer. I was surprised by how well I knew the information, having only been exposed to it through WOFI. It was a wonderful experience to share what I had learned with others. All in all, the weekend was a great success, and everyone I talked to said they learned so much about what truly drives Israeli society, its successes and its problems.

I am truly indebted to the WOFI program, and it was only through planning this USY weekend that I realized this. WOFI not only taught me about Israel advocacy. It taught me how to take the information that I learned and communicate it to others. It gave me the ability not only to advocate for Israel on a personal level, but to teach others how and why they should advocate for the Jewish state. That is the beauty of the second year. It let me see just how impactful one person can be in the fight for Israel's worldwide legitimacy. For that I am grateful.

Write On For Israel taught me how to take the information I learned and communicate it to others.

► Save the date

HAZAMIR CLEVELAND and @AKIVA

SAVE the DATE

2nd Annual HaZamir Concert
Benefiting the Cari L. Flox Scholarship Fund @Akiva

Sunday, May 20, 2012 at 3pm
Siegal College ~ 26500 Shaker Blvd, Beachwood 44122

Honoring
Noah Budin Singer/Songwriter
Sherry Miller HaZamir Volunteer of the Year

Special appearance by Kol Rina

For more information, contact Judy at 216-464-4050 X113 or hazamir@siegalcollege.edu



ANI ISHA (I AM A WOMAN)

A CELEBRATION OF ISRAELI WOMEN THROUGH FILM

OPENING NIGHT

FLUCHKES

Tuesday, April 17, 7:00 pm
Temple Emanu El // 4545 Brainard Road, Orange Village

THE LOST LOVE DIARIES

Thursday, April 19, 7:00 pm
The Temple - Tifereth Israel // 26000 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood

SHINING STARS

Friday, April 20, 12:30 pm
Siegal College // 26500 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood

ISRAELI TV SHOWCASE: TIMROT ASHAN & CONNECTED

Saturday, April 21, 9:00 pm
Anatolia Café // 2270 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights

FEATURE PRESENTATION

MIRALE/WITH SHORT FILM, JANICE

Film will be followed by a panel discussion on women's health in Israel
Sunday, April 22, 2:00 pm
The Cedar Lee Theatre // 2163 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights

LADY OF THE COURT

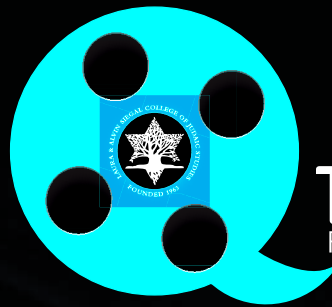
Monday, April 23, 7:00 pm
Cedar Sinai Synagogue // 23749 Cedar Road, Beachwood

WEEKEND

Tuesday, April 24, 7:00 pm
Jewish Federation of Cleveland
Mandel Building // 25701 Science Park Drive, Beachwood

HAVAT HASHOMER AT 30: ADAM'S STORY

Wednesday, April 25, evening
(during the community Yom Ha'atzmaut Celebration)
Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple
23737 Fairmount Blvd., Beachwood
for more information visit jewishcleveland.org



THE REEL ISRAEL

FILMS & CONVERSATIONS

April 17-29
2012

CITIZEN ALONI/WITH SHORT FILM BURNED NOTEBOOKS

Thursday, April 26, 7:00 pm
Siegal College
26500 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood

KTZAROT ISRAELI WOMEN IN CINEMA (3 WOMEN, 3 STORIES, 3 SHORTS)

Friday, April 27, 12:30 pm
Siegal College
26500 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood

FLUCHKES

Friday, April 27, 12:30 pm
The R.H. Myers Apartments
27200 Cedar Road, Beachwood

CLOSING EVENT

THE 5 HOUSES OF LEA GOLDBERG

Sunday, April 29, 3:30 pm
B'nai Jeshurun Congregation
27501 Fairmount Blvd., Pepper Pike

FLUCHKES

Sunday, April 29, 5:00 pm
Chagrin Documentary Film Festival
at Solon Center for the Arts
6351 SOM Center Road, Solon

Reel Israel 2012 honors the ISHA (Israel Health Advancement for Women) Project, a vital initiative of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland which brings together health professionals, volunteers, women's health advocates, academics and researchers to significantly advance women's health in Israel.

FILMS ARE
FREE & OPEN
TO THE PUBLIC

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
REELISRAEL.ORG

THIS PROJECT IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH AN ADULT EDUCATION GRANT FROM THE JEWISH EDUCATION CENTER OF CLEVELAND.

SERIES SPONSORS:



CLEVELAND
Jewish News
www.clevelandjewishnews.com

@AKIVA



write on
for Israel



SCREENING SPONSORS:

