

## Why I Participated in the March

By Shira N. Melenson

If you lived in the '60s, you'd know what it means to protest. I went to a protest but it was slightly different from the protests of the hippies. I went to Washington, D.C. on December 6 to support our fellow brothers and sisters, not the causes of the flower children, but our fellow Jews.

Going to this event was different from attending services or going to a Kadima meeting. This meeting, with over 200,000 Jews, gave me a great feeling of unity and belonging, not just to the Charlotte Jewish community but to the Jews of the world.

For the brief period of time that I was in Washington, in fact only a day, I felt like I really belonged to the Jewish people. It's hard to feel like you are part of the Jewish people when your gentile friends can't understand why you are the only Jew they know who keeps kosher or stays out of school on Jewish holidays. But this experience made me more confident about my Jewish identity because I know I am part of a large Jewish population.

A multitude of Jews are trapped in the USSR — unable to leave. No — they are not allowed to read Hebrew. No — they are not allowed to pray in synagogues and at home. Just like me, you probably take for granted your freedoms of speech and religion. Russian Jews don't have the choice as to whether they do or do not want to go to synagogue this Saturday. They just can't.



Shira Melenson

This trip to Washington and the subsequent summit meeting of Mikhail Gorbachev and President Reagan, represented to me a chance to make up for what we didn't do during World War II, when we could have saved some Jews. Well, this is the same situation. Yes, we are losing Jews — no, not to the gas chambers, but to atheism. Russian Jews are dying in a different way.

According to statistics, four out of ten Jews are intermarrying. This means that we are losing many, many of our Jewish population. A small minority is slowly but surely becoming smaller. We made our effort, but it is not enough. It is unlikely that this one rally will succeed in freeing all Soviet Jews who wish to leave Russia. We must all keep trying through letters and rallies. We must not stop until every Soviet Jew who wants to leave is allowed to do so.

*(Editor's note: Shira, 12, daughter of Cynthia and Richard Melenson, is a 7th grader at Piedmont Middle School. She is a member of Temple Israel and attends The Consolidated Jewish High School.)*

# Pro-Soviet Jewry March

## Personal Reflections of December 6

By Phil Joffe

We used to call it a "happening," a major event involving many and forgotten by few. December 6, 1987 Washington D.C. was a "happening" which I'll never forget and hopefully, neither will my two boys.

The impact of this day was first sensed when we rounded a corner and the grassy ellipse became visible. It was between us and the Washington Monument. There were a lot of people and a lot of signs, banners and posters. A lot of color and a lot of movement. By the time the March was to begin, the ellipse would be filled to overflowing but when we stepped onto the grass people were in loose groups across its expanse. Jewish music was performed live on a portable stage. An announcer was broadcasting lists of states and assigned staging areas. States. It just dawned on me that the announcer said states. It was as if it never occurred to me that this event was going to be so large as to coordinate people by states. Not by temples, not by communities, but by whole states.

We ate lunch while standing around the 8-foot tall North Carolina sign in staging area 4. Everytime I looked up there were more people. Well before the March began, the compression was such that you couldn't hold your arms out and turn completely around without touching several people. The magnitude of this "happening" was sinking in a little more.

It was awesome. So many people from so many places, all there at one time, all speaking with one voice in support of human rights. For many it was the first protest demonstration since the late 1960s. These people were of all ages. They were as old as my dad and as young as my children. They were my age. Most were Jewish. Some were not. They had come together from all corners of the world: Canada, South Africa, Hawaii, Israel, and they were here in Washington on this rectangular, grassy park all around me. Everybody was here to make the same statement by his physical presence. The time and effort and expense of each person underlined his intense

belief in the rights of people, of all people, but focusing, on this day, on the Soviet Jews who have been unable to leave the Soviet Union to pursue lives of their choosing...to be free Jewish men and women... just like us...just like me. It was a very emotionally moving experience realizing that so many people share a belief with an intensity similar to our own.

Strength in numbers? I guess so. But it was the personification of the numbers which really struck home.

Then the March began and several dozen people wearing the same light blue baseball caps merged onto the street alongside of us. They were from Cumberland County, New Jersey and their hats had printed on the front "Free Joffe!" Something about seeing my name struck a deep chord. I don't think that there's any family relationship; only my dad and his brother escaped Europe. There is no one else on his side of the family. But there was a specific person. A Soviet Jew. And we shared the same name. A light blue baseball cap on a sunny but cold day in Washington reduced the enormity of the meaning of the day's events down to a number I could comprehend: one, me.

They played the "Star Spangled Banner" before the speeches began. Over 200,000 voices sang. Then a shofar was blown. I shivered down to my marrow. I think a lot of others did too.

We heard much of what we had expected to hear. The words and phrases were not unfamiliar, and I don't think anyone expected them to be. What was said seemed less important than the fact that there were 200,000 people standing together and listening.

I'm glad my boys were there. The day brought us closer together and tightened the bonds between ourselves, the millions of Jews who came before us and the millions yet to come.

In our lives, Sunday, December 6, 1987 in Washington, D.C. will be remembered as a true "happening," involving many and to be forgotten by few and most certainly not by me.



Charlotte youths carry



Charlotte delegation enroute



(Front L to R) Meg Goldstein, Amelia and Bill R) Matt Luftglass, Emily Zimmern and Barry



Mike Minkin, executive director CJF, being interviewed



More of our delegation — not



Phil Joffe, Todd Joffe, Roz Cooper photo/Mike Minkin



"Marching along together." photo/Mike Minkin



Jews and non-Jews, the old, the not-so-old, and the youth all gathered together for the March. Pictured are Laura Grifenhagen (L), Rachel Klein (R), girl in center is 'Jennifer,' Rachel's friend.

photo/Walter Klein

"Let Our People Go" —