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First in a Series- American Jewish Life In 50 Years Is There A Demographic Time Bomb?

By Yosef I. Abramowitz

"Rabbi Yohanan said: Since The Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken away from the prophets and given to fools and children." — Talmud

For five years on Monday nights, Jewish identity issues were dramatically and amusingly played out on "Northern Exposure," the hit CBS series about a New York Jewish doctor living in small-town Alaska. Was Dr. Joel Fleischman going to live with Maggie O'Connell? If so, would their home be a Jewish one? How do you define who's part of your community and who can say Kaddish for the dead? And can importing bagels

ies at New York University and chair of the Graduate Fellowships Committee, which funds graduate training for future Jewish leaders. "To have the greatest impact, however, we must think not 5 or 10 years down the line, but 25 or 50."

A peek at the future, at Rosh Hashana 5805 (2045 C.E.) is important as the Jewish community today takes stock of 5755 and assesses its priorities. And despite the fact that "Northern Exposure" was canceled last season, the prognosis about the Jewish future may not be all bad. But that all depends upon who you ask.

"When the United States celebrates its Tricentennial in 2076, the American Jewish community is likely to number no more than 944,000 persons, and, conceivably as few as 10,420" Elihu Bergman, the assistant director of the Harvard Center for Population Studies, wrote in *Midstream* in 1977, unleashing a storm of debate and eventually widespread rebuke. While Jewish sociologists and demographers are split between optimists and pessimists, none of today's pessimists come close to sounding the death-knoll

as does Bergman. But even the optimists, like Steven Cohen, a professor at the Melton Center at Hebrew University, predict that in 50 years the 5.8 million strong American Jewish community of 1995 "will be smaller than it is today."

Here are the grim vital statistics: Half of all weddings involving a Jew are to a non-Jew and that number exceeds 2 out of 3 in many "new frontier communities" like Los Angeles, Colorado and in smaller Jewish communities, like Alaska, where there are 3,000 Jews. The Jewish population is increasingly moving out of high density Jewish cities to places where there are fewer Jews, so the interfaith marriage rate is likely to climb even higher. Of the interfaith marriages, more than two thirds of the children are being raised in another religion

or with no religion. "Almost all, over nine in ten by my calculations, of the grandchildren of today's mixed marriages will not identify as Jews" says Cohen. Intensifying this demographic time bomb is the lowest fertility rate in the country of any religious group. If there was no interfaith marriage, the community would still be shrinking.

Professor Vivian Klaff of the University of Delaware, a moderate in the demographic debates,

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projects a Jewish population that will shrink about 15 percent to a little over 4 million people in 50 years. "Lowered fertility combined with an aging population, and an increasing level of assimilation is likely to lead to a decline in the population," he writes in a forthcoming study of the Jewish family. And in their new book on Jewish life, *Jews and the New American Scene*, Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab predict that the cohesive body of Jews will not only be a smaller portion of the American population by the middle of the next century, it will be smaller in absolute numbers."

Despite the strong negative trends in Jewish life, however, there are optimistic and youthful voices who contradict the conventional wisdom.

"There will be 7-8 million Jews in 50 years," says Abby Holland, 18, the immediate past president of the Reform Movement's National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). Her optimism is echoed in different degrees by Andrew Ashkenazi, 17, head of the Hadassah-sponsored Young Judaea youth movement; Eitan Gulton, 18, head of the United Synagogue Youth (USY) of the Conservative movement and by Jeffrey Greenberg, 18, head of the National Council for Synagogue Youth.

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Blumenthal Jewish Home Kicks-Off Charlotte Annual Campaign

By Seth D. Levy - Executive Director

In August 1994 the Blumenthal Jewish Home initiated an Annual Drive in the Charlotte Jewish community to raise money for its Endowment Fund. The drive was very successful, raising over \$40,000 while securing financial commitments for future gifts. In September 1995 the Home will once again ask members of the Charlotte Jewish community to open their hearts, allowing the Home to continue the Mitzvah of providing the highest quality of care to residents in a safe, warm, home-like Jewish environment.

The goal for this year's campaign is to raise an additional \$50,000 from the Charlotte Jewish community. These funds will go into the Home's Endowment with interest from the endowment being used to underwrite the cost of medical care for some 57 indigent residents. Currently sixty (60) percent of the Home's residents are medically indigent. Since it is the policy of the Blumenthal Jewish Home to continue to provide care for our residents even after they have run out of money, this results in an annual deficit of \$500,000 in costs that is not reimbursed by Medicaid, Medicare and Special Assistance. Currently fourteen (14) Jewish communities are contributing fifty (50) percent of the deficit but we desperately need the continued financial support of individuals and families living in the Charlotte Jewish community. The Home faces many challenges as we enter a period of health care reform. Lower reimbursement rates, managed care and tougher regulations all will have an impact.

The Chairperson for the committee overseeing this campaign is Stan Greenspon. He is joined by committee members Audrey Madans, Evelyn Berger, Ruth Goldberg and Bennett Lyons. These dedicated volunteers have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of this campaign. Twenty-five (25) individuals have volunteered to become solicitors for the Home and will be contacting members of the Charlotte Jewish Community, asking for support for the Home 5 Endowment.

Thank you in advance for your generosity and mostly for your caring. I know that it is impossible to contact all members of the Charlotte Jewish Community and if you are interested in making a contribution to the Blumenthal Jewish Home's Endowment Fund, or would like to receive additional information, please contact one of the committee members listed above or Seth D. Levy, Executive Vice President at (910) 766-6401.

CAJE Announces Melamed Winners

Sheri Leonard, Linda MacDonald, and Wanda Schwartz were recently named the first annual recipients of the Carolina Agency for Jewish Education (Charlotte, NC) Melamed of the Year Award for their outstanding volunteerism on behalf of Jewish education.

Each nominee was selected by a Shalom Park religious school as a noteworthy individual who made major contributions to the cause of Jewish continuity for their respective school and the community by enriching the Jewish educational environment and setting an example of excellence.

Sheri Leonard, Charlotte Jewish Preschool's award winner was cited for her work as the founding Chairperson of the school's Par-

ent Teacher Organization (PTO) during the 1994-95 school year. Debby Block, Director of the Charlotte Jewish Preschool described Sheri in her letter of nomination as the person who "singlehandedly inspired the entire parent body to become actively involved with their children's education. Sherri's leadership of the PTO promoted positive parental attitudes toward the Preschool and toward Jewish education. Through Sherri's infectious enthusiasm and diligence, the Preschool has become a strong, happier and financially stable Jewish community organization." Linda MacDonald, selected by Temple Beth El Religious School was described by Temple Beth

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from New York maintain one's Judaism far from the centers of Jewish life? Fleischman wrestled with these issues, escaped from them and ultimately returned to New York. "Mazal tov," says O'Connell as Joel re-enters the land of his ancestral past, leaving her behind.

The tension between the Jewish doctor and his non-Jewish love interest, and their struggle to accommodate his troubled yet unyielding Jewish identity, may hold a clue in real life to what Jewish life might look like in 50 years here in the "lower forty-eight."

"The decisions we make today, where to allocate money and to what projects, will affect the American Jewish community for generations to come," says Professor Robert Chazan, chair of the department of Hebrew and Judaic Stud-

*The Editorial Board and staff of the Charlotte Jewish News
wishes everyone a happy and healthy L'Shana Tova!*

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