

Time Bomb
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(NCSY), affiliated with the Orthodox Union. The worst case scenario, articulated by Greenberg, is that the community will stay about its current size.

"Maybe the academics and the experts are tired, old, cynical and maybe they have given up on Jewish life, but maybe the 16, 18 or 22 year olds haven't," says Dr. Gary Tobin, director of the Cohen Center of Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. "I would expect that what you hear from the 16 to 18 years olds is radically different from what you hear the 50 and 70 year olds. Why? Because they are the next generation of Jews who aren't going to die. These teens are a cadre of leaders and their idealism and energy will help mold the Jewish community of the future."

According to Peter Geffen, 1963 USY president and current director of the Israel experience program of the CRB foundation, "there is no question that we are sitting on the potential of an enormous demographic crisis that could eat up vast numbers of our people within the next 10-15 years. But the flip side is that I believe as a matter of faith that our tradition has transcendent and practical value. Given exposure, it will speak to the hearts and minds of presently disconnected Jews as long as we spend the next decade focusing our resources. By enabling non-Jewish family members to participate and join in Jewish communal activities they will ultimately come to identify with the life and culture of the Jewish people, resulting in Jewish inclusion and growth."

Applying Dr. Mayer's reasoning to Northern Exposure's Joel Fleischman and Maggie O'Connell, had they married and produced children, they could represent a net gain to the Jewish people if, as a family unit, they adopted Judaism. Mayor's idea, not accepted as realistic by most experts, may not be far off the mark.

In a forthcoming study of real Alaskan Jews, Bernard Reisman and Joel Reisman of the Cohen Center, find that despite low levels of Jewish organizational affiliation and high levels of interfaith marriage, "younger Jews observe Jewish customs and attach more importance to being Jewish than do older Jews.. This finding is especially noteworthy since the rates of intermarriage are also statistically associated but in the opposite direction."

In other words, even though intermarriage is high, it is positively correlated with Jewish pride and observance. Another surprising finding of the study is that among Alaskan Jews, there is a high frequency "with which the non-Jewish spouse acquiesces to the household being considered as Jewish and that children will be reared as Jews."

If we make these patterns the norm in the United States within the next 50 years, then we will defy the prophecies of the demographers and affirm the visions of the youth. But it's a long shot.

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Next Month: Who will be giving to what?

Commissioner's Comment

By Lloyd Scher

Shortly after the 1992 county elections, The Charlotte Observer declared the new Board of County Commissioners as one of the best and most diverse Boards in recent history. The article described the Board's make-up as 3 women (Patsy Kinsey, Ann Schrader, and Edna Chirco) an attorney (Parks Helms), a retired executive (Doug Booth), a black (Bob Walton) and a Jew (me).

I would have expected the *Observer* to describe me by my gender, race, or business. Instead, the article used my religion as its primary characterization. Even though I had spent many years on the Temple Israel Board of Trustees, had actively worked for the Federation and the JCC, I had considered myself foremost a neighborhood leader and a businessman; why did the editors choose a religious designation?

The article hit me hard! What had been a proud moment for my family, the Jewish community, and me, was transformed into a time of concern and anxiety. I felt as though the *Observer* had printed a yellow star for me to wear. I was no different than other members of the Commission and felt that religion was not a defining issue.

I then realized that my election had a greater dimension than I had imagined. I had also assumed a re-

sponsibility to the Jewish community and to myself. This was a role that was really larger than serving as a County Commissioner. I now had to prove that religion, specifically, Judaism, was not a factor for becoming an elected official. Not only did I have to prove my capabilities to my District constituency, but I also had to demonstrate them to the entire Mecklenburg community. At meetings I had to be better prepared and ask the right questions. I felt that I had to work harder. I now had to prove my competence because of my religion.

The *Observer* opened my eyes, I was a Jew, and I had the Jewish community watching me, supporting me, and helping me. As a Jew and as an elected official, I was a representative of both my district and the Jewish community. I felt that my success or failure would be reflective on the entire Jewish community. This has been the most burdensome task which my elected position has presented me.

I have enjoyed serving my District and Mecklenburg County as a neighborhood leader, a businessman and a Jew. It has been exciting. I am honored to hold my elected position, and as a Jew, I feel that my obligation is not only for my district and Mecklenburg County, but also to the Jewish community as well.

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