

5007 Providence Road
Charlotte, NC 28226
Address Correction Requested

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Charlotte, NC
Permit No. 1208

The Charlotte JEWISH news

Vol. 17 No.10

Tishrei 5756 November 1995

9th Annual Book & Author Evening: A Modern-Day Exodus From Egypt

By Suzanne Cannon

"In each generation every man must regard himself as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt." - from The Haggadah

It is not hard for Andre Aciman to regard himself as having personally gone forth from Egypt. The author of the critically acclaimed memoir *Out of Egypt* was born in Alexandria and left there when the rising tide of Arab nationalism finally swept his family out of the country in the mid-1960's. Aciman is this year's special guest for the Ninth Annual Book and Author Evening, co-sponsored by the Charlotte chapter of Hadassah, the Speizman Jewish Library and the

living room during one of the frequent air raids of the Suez War, Aciman recalls musing, "I would miss these nights, not the war itself but the blackout, not my uncles or aunts but the velvety hush of their voices when we turned off the lights and drew closer to the radio, almost whispering our thoughts in the dark."

Nearly a decade later, most of Aciman's extended family had fled Egypt in the face of the roiling currents of pan-Arab nationalism and the concomitant rise of anti-Semitism. Aciman, his parents, grandmother, and an aunt and uncle were all that remained in Alexandria

Interfaith Couples Find a Home at Temple Beth El

By Resa Goldberg

Like many interfaith couples that choose to raise their children Jewish, Andrea and Howard Seidler needed a connection to the Jewish community.

They had that at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where they were active at the Hillel House and enjoyed the proximity of cities heavily populated by Jews. There was no need, they said, to join area synagogues that didn't really welcome the interfaith anyway.

Then they moved to Charlotte.

"We realized when we arrived last year that if we wanted that sense of community here, we would have to search for it," says Howard.

The Seidlers found their community at Temple Beth El, where interfaith couples represent one of the fastest growing segments of membership. While the numbers aren't tracked on a monthly basis, Beth El officials estimate that up to 80% of new members in recent months are interfaith couples — a group that now makes up approximately 30% percent of the 750 families who belong to the temple.

A recent survey of Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the official organization of Reform synagogues, found that the majority — 41% — reported between 6% and 150% of membership units are interfaith families. Like Temple Beth El, 16% of Reform temples said that more than 25% of their membership consists of interfaith families.

"The numbers of interfaith couples joining Reform synagogues is rising across the country," says Dru Greenwood, director of UAHC's Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach. "One measure of growth is the higher numbers of kindergarten-aged children of interfaith marriages in religious schools than children in the 5th or 6th grade."

Greenwood says much of the increase can be attributed to the rising numbers of UAHC temples that provide Outreach programming. While Temple Beth El has had some form of such programming for many years, it has been stepping up its efforts to meet the growing demand. One of its more successful pro-



This interfaith group discussion at Temple Beth El focused on self-identity, criteria that define a good person and the differences between Judaism and Christianity.

grams - now in its third season - is called Second Mondays, a drop-in discussion group that meets monthly to talk about issues of interest to interfaith couples. Other Outreach activities, such as the Teaching Shabbat, are designed, in part, to help educate the non-Jewish partner and help that person feel more comfortable.

Shirley Fytelson, Temple Beth El member for 12 years, says

the recent influx of interfaith couples and increased interest in Outreach programming coincides with Rabbi James Bennett's arrival in Charlotte just over two years ago. "I think Rabbi Bennett is more liberal than our former rabbi on issues such as officiating at interfaith marriages," she says.

See Interfaith page 3



Andre Aciman

Photo Credit Sigrid Estrada

Jewish Community Center. The tale he tells of living as a Jew in an Arab land is a skillful blend of the lyrical, the farcical and the frightening.

Barely a generation ago, 800,000 Jews lived in the Arab world, nearly a quarter of them in Egypt alone. Among them was Aciman's family, who settled in Alexandria in 1905 after his great uncle Isaac befriended Fouad, the future king of Egypt, while both were students at the University of Turin. This marked the beginning of the family's sixty-year sojourn in Egypt, a period often punctuated with the anxiety and fear brought on by turbulent world events. Recaptured in Adman's silvery prose, however, even the worst times seem to be bathed in the honeyed glow of nostalgia. While the entire family huddled in his great-grandmother's darkened

reluctant to sacrifice their high bourgeois Mediterranean lifestyle to what they hoped were only transient fears. In the meantime Aciman, a student at an English public school that "had essentially become an Arab school wearing the tattered relics of British garb," endured the sting of incessant insults heaped on him by Miss Sharif, his Arabic teacher, and

See ACIMAN, Page 7

Next Month in the CJN
Joel Goldman writes about
Rabbis from Charlotte
Who Are They?
Where Are They?

Federation Community Campaign Begins

For Ourselves, For Our Children For Israel, Forever

The 1996 Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte campaign kicks off this month with the theme "For Ourselves, For Our Children, For Israel, Forever." Under the enthusiastic leadership of campaign chair Bill Gorelick and vice-chair, Jill Newman, a team of dedicated workers has been assembled to solicit funds for needs both locally and abroad. At a recent solicitor training event, Bill said, "I am confident that with support and participation from the community, we will be able to achieve our goal and continue to meet the growing needs of the Jewish community at home and around the world. The Federation annual campaign is the best way to ensure that we will keep alive a legacy that makes a difference in thousands of Jewish lives."

Contributions to the campaign underwrite a wide range of local Jewish educational, cultural and social service programs and agencies in addition to supporting Israel and the needs of fellow Jews worldwide.

The Charlotte Jewish community can be proud of the dynamic leadership that has volunteered to

spearhead the annual campaign. The following individuals have assumed key leadership positions for the 1996 fundraising drive:

Men's Division

Major Gifts

(\$10,000+) - Bob Speizman

Chazak

(\$3,600 - \$9,999) - Todd Gorelick and David Swimmer

Pacesetter

(\$1,250 - \$3,599) - Jack Levinson and Alan Goldberg

\$365 - \$1,249 - Jon Goldberg and Craig Katzman

Women's Division

Women's Division President - Phyllis Schiffman

Lion of Judah

(\$5,000+) - Bobbi Bernstein and Lee Blumenthal

Pacesetter

(\$1,250 - \$4,999) - Ruth Goldberg and Nancy Kipnis

\$365 - \$1,249 - Alison Lerner and Donna Lerner

Telepledge

Alison Levinson

Super Sunday

Dan & Stacy Levinson and George & Andrea Cronson