

# Jewish Traveler

By Maxine Silverstein

## EGYPT: WINGS OVER THE NILE

In April, we traveled to an incredible destination – Egypt. The trip was something we will never forget and Egypt is a “once in a lifetime destination.” We were fortunate to travel by boat down the Nile and have private jet

flights for our group. In ten days, we saw almost the entire country. Cairo, Egypt’s capital, with a population of approximately 20 million, is the largest city in Africa and the key city of the Arab world. This ancient city has evoked won-

drous images for more than a millennium. Today, Cairo is a magnificent, modern city built along both sides of the Nile, where the past is forever echoed in the present, and the old harmoniously coexists with the new.

philosopher and authority on religious law, worshipped at this synagogue while living in Cairo. As a result, it was popularly called the Maimonides Synagogue. The massive project of rebuilding this incredible building, which took fifteen years of expert labor, dates from the signing of the Israel-Egypt Accords of 1979. This dramatic project has restored the dilapidated Ben Ezra Synagogue building to its original splendor. Though its congregation is only a remnant, the building now stands as a beautiful landmark, with its stones reflecting over 1,000 years of Egyptian-Jewish history. It’s a must-see when visiting Cairo, and we felt very safe throughout our visit here.

ing waters of Lake Nasser. It now stands high above the water in much the same fashion as before, facing Lake Nasser in magnificent splendor.

**Planning a Wedding or Social Event?**  
 Carolina Bride™ Magazine is MUST Reading!

Planning Articles ~ Area Businesses  
 Stories Featuring Local Weddings

Available at area  
 bridal salons, department stores,  
 and newsstands.

704.358.5910 ♦ carolinabride.com

Carolina Bride Magazine is published quarterly by The Jewish Association, Inc.



Maxine and Gary at Abu Simbel.

The Jewish community of Egypt is the second oldest in the world. Most of us first had our consciousness raised about life for Jews in Egypt when we recited, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt” at our Passover Seder. Some of the biblical accounts we recall of Egypt – the sojourns of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph and the bondage of the Children of Israel – are indelibly imprinted on our collective memory.

Cairo became a must-see for serious Jewish travelers after 1977, when President Anwar Sadat made his historic visit to Jerusalem. Following the normalization of relations between Egypt and Israel in 1979, tens of thousand of Israelis have traveled to the capital of the Arab world’s largest and most influential country. Cairo has had a Jewish population since the city was founded more than a dozen centuries ago. Their presence and their contributions to both the city and to Judaism have linked Cairo inextricably to Jewish history. Today, the Jewish community, numbering fewer than 100, is approaching extinction as most all of them are elderly; the last wedding was held in 1980.

We were able to visit The Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. This famous synagogue in Old Cairo was originally called The Synagogue of the Men of Israel. It was built in 1882 on the remains of a Coptic basilica that was sold to Jews. Large-scale festivities were held here after the festivals of Passover and Sukkot, when the synagogue was the goal of pilgrimages made from various parts of northern Africa. During a restoration in the 1890s, a great discovery took place: a storeroom for worn out holy books and documents containing the Divine name was found. It was fortunate that the arid climate had partially preserved many handwritten pages dating from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. The documents contained a number of rare manuscripts of Old Testament interpretations.

This beautiful synagogue is also known for its twelfth-century wooden doors and its Moorish interior design, featuring many arches, hanging lamps and a central stone bimah. One of the most famous Jews of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides, physician,



The Great Pyramid of Giza and the Sphinx.

After leaving Cairo, we flew to Abu Simbel to visit the temple of Ramses II. This magnificent place has stood the test of time for more than 3,000 years and is one of the best preserved temples in the country. It took 25 years and 25,000 workers to carve this structure into the mountainside. The four statues on the famous outer façade each stand 67 feet high. In what is considered to be a major engineering feat, the entire Abu Simbel complex was moved in order to save it from the encroach-



Maxine and Gary at Ben Ezra Synagogue.

Our next stop was Aswan, where we boarded our ship to cruise down the Nile for four magical nights. We got to visit Luxor to see the Valley of the Kings and the Temple of Karnak. After Luxor, we flew back to Cairo to see the Ancient Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx. The great pyramids of Giza are the only remaining examples of the original Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The pyramid of Cheops is the largest – more than 400 feet high and covering 13 acres. Nearby, in stony silence, sits the great Sphinx at whose feet Alexander the Great, Caesar, Cleopatra and Napoleon all paused. The Sphinx, with its head of a man and body of a lion, represents wisdom and might. Carved from solid rock, it is 240 feet long and 66 feet wide.

We ended this fabulous trip at the Mena House Oberoi, a wonderful historic hotel and formerly a royal hunting lodge. Our elegant room had a beautiful balcony overlooking the Giza Pyramids. We have traveled near and far, but we will never forget this incredible journey into the past. Five thousand years of history have been fashioned from this country. ☆

Celebrate **Folk Art** at **Maddi's!**

The Folk Art Month at Maddi's and we're celebrating by offering you a **save 15% on all folk art in June.**

Best New Gallery 2006  
 The art of ooohs and ahhs.

*Personally Yours* Stationery  
 Invitations • Papers • Design

**ENVELOPMENTS**

*Envelopments to create Bar/Bat Mitzvah Invitations as unique as you are!*

120 cardstock colors and patterns, 60 typesyles, 30 ink colors, 6 base formats...  
 Endless possibilities! Fully stocked only at Personally Yours Stationery.  
 Also featuring Checkerboard, Encore and 10 fine catalog printers.

~Hebrew Translation Services Available~

McMullen Creek Market • 8326-402 Pineville-Matthews Rd.  
 Phone: 704-541-7344 www.mycustominvite.com

# Youth Visions

## Op-Ed: The Voice of Our Youth To Vote or Not to Vote: That is the Question

By Julie Epstein

To vote: a formal expression of opinion or choice, either positive or negative, made by an individual or body of individuals. It's your choice, it's your opinion, and it's your expression. We could sit around and let our peers decide for us or we could get involved and make a difference. You may be asking yourself, why would I want to waste my precious time when I know the Electoral College decides for me? Well it's time to look deeper into the matter and stop thinking about just you. Voting is a privilege to citizens, an opportunity to make a mark on our country by choosing our leaders. Voting is a choice in matter; why not get your voice heard? Your actions determine how we

live our lives; spend our tax money, and how we are lead as a country. In our last election 111 million voiced their opinion. One person against 111 million may seem small, but matters none the less. Your vote may make the difference in an election, and even if you don't think it will let yourself be amazed. Our country itself is amazing and we should feel inspired and compelled to voice our vote and understand where our country stands in leadership. Rise above the voices telling you, you do not matter. Rise above your feelings of apathy and disinterest. Take a stand and make a difference. ☆

Julie Epstein is a sophomore from Temple Beth El.