

A College Student's Experience at the Yiddish Institute

By Sarah Mann

It is hard to put my experience at the Yiddish Institute into words on a page. The friends I made, the activities I participated in, and the knowledge I gained are truly unique to the program. Never have I felt more comfortable and at home with a group of people I just met than at the Yiddish Institute. I was welcomed with open arms into what I'd call a community or rather a *mishpocheh* of friends and family near and far all sharing a love and passion for the Yiddish language and culture.

Having taken up Yiddish at the University of Pennsylvania my sophomore year, partly prompted by hearing my Zeydah speak bits and pieces of "Kitchen Yiddish" and my enthusiasm for studying the Holocaust, I became very interested in attending the Yiddish Institute. I must admit that I was anxious to attend given the fact that I had just taken up the language, and was far from being fluent, though I was pleasantly

surprised at how relaxed the atmosphere was and how much others were willing to help. While I expected the program to run much like a school, it rather felt more like a summer camp to me – an environment that fosters learning in new and exciting ways, offering different activities to meet everyone's interests.

I attended the Yiddish Institute with only two semesters of Yiddish under my belt, hardly any compared to those who have spoken for a lifetime. However, despite my rather limited knowledge, I was still able to understand a great deal while others spoke, and was always urged to practice my skills with others in simple conversation. The program offers a very unique way to practice Yiddish. Meals were served in a big dining hall, and people at every table could be heard kibbutzing. The relaxed social setting made me more willing to step out of my comfort zone and push aside English to speak in Yiddish.

The Yiddish Institute gave me an opportunity to not only hone my skills as a beginner Yiddish speaker, but also provided me with experiences in which to learn firsthand about Yiddish culture. My fondest memories of the trip were the musical performances and late night bonding whereby singing, dancing, storytelling, and schmoozing would take place. In Yiddish class, I had watched videos of Klezmer bands, and heard famous Yiddish singers, but to sit in the audience for a live Klezmer band and singing performance by those with whom I had become friends, was truly an amazing experience. I felt as though I was beginning to understand the importance of music and song not only in Yiddish culture, but in the greater Jewish culture as well. As the tunes shot through my veins, I felt the urge to dance, and along with those I just met, I made my way around the audience, dancing and singing, urging others to participate.

The late night gatherings were memories I'll cherish for a lifetime. While I read short stories, songs, and simple poetry in my Yiddish text books in school, during these gatherings I got to hear great Yiddish literature, riddles, and jokes. I surprised myself by how much I could understand. Listening to the stories and personal poetry gave me a much greater appreciation for the Yiddish language, perhaps because I was enjoying them with a group of people whose love for Yiddish was so immense and whose determination to pass on the Yiddish language to those younger and less knowledgeable was so great.

The Yiddish Institute provided me with an opportunity that I could not find elsewhere. It enabled me to refine my language skills, provided me with a greater appreciation and love for Yiddish culture, but most importantly introduced me to a loving, welcoming, and inspiring group of Yiddish speakers whom I'm most

proud and happy to say I've met. I was expecting to spend my time at the program with a few college students, however to my surprise I found myself surrounded by a group of people of my parent's and grandparent's generation. I was delighted by their interest and willingness to help me improve my skills, their inclination to share life their life experiences, and their energy and passion for what many consider a dying language.

Before attending the Institute, I was even questioning whether Yiddish was actually a dying language – a statement many would make upon learning that I had chosen to study Yiddish. However, after attending the Yiddish Institute, I can surely say with great certainty that Yiddish is most definitely very alive, and it will take this generation and the next to ensure and safeguard its future. I am proud to say that I will continue learning and pursuing my passion for Yiddish and hope to help keep such a beautiful language and its accompanying culture alive. ☆

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Scott is a long time community volunteer, leader, and sponsor in the Jewish community since 1985. Both he and Tricia, along with their dental team, volunteer their time and expertise to make a positive impact in our community.

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J Force at the Levine JCC

By Lauren Abeles

"Rock On!" You might hear these words coming from Missy when you walk by the glass windows that enclose the J Force room at the Levine JCC. If you look into the room, you will see that the participants are working hard and having fun while getting in shape. If you have ever wondered exactly what J Force is or how it might benefit you, read on!

The J Force program is designed for exercise at all fitness levels and provides a holistic approach to a healthier lifestyle. Each day is a new workout, to keep the program fresh and your body challenged. The focus is on strength, aerobic and anaerobic conditioning, muscular endurance, power, agility, balance, and speed.

Missy Schomaker is the J Force Coordinator and its leader. This popular program has grown over the last few years and has added more hours and trainers during the week. Josh Ferguson is the new Assistant for the J Force Program. Both Missy and Josh are Certified Personal Trainers and they embrace a full body approach when it comes to fitness, developing the body from the inside out.

Along with having amazing trainers, one of the most compelling features of J Force is its Wave System, which really differentiates it from other fitness programs. Basically, you are able to work out in "waves," set time frames for a 30 minute high intensity workout, which are scheduled every 45 minutes, and focus on different body parts each day. Monday and Thursday the focus is on lower body, Tuesday and Friday the



Missy Schomaker (far right) supervises her client at JForce.

focus is on upper body, and Wednesday and Sunday core strength. The trainers consistently vary the routines ensuring a diversified and fresh program. Often people feel that they are in better condition within weeks.

Karen Ransenberg, a longtime Levine JCC member, has recently become a member of the J-Force team and has had a very positive experience. "I have done several exercise classes at the J that I like very much, but I found myself not going consistently. I would walk by the JForce room, and it just seemed beyond my physical reach. However, I tried one class and realized that I could actually do the workout. I thought I would

it gives me the flexibility of going to the class at my own convenience. Missy has pushed me beyond what I thought was my peak of fitness. She is a 'superwoman' and she praises you for whatever level you can accomplish. She is welcoming to anyone who walks through that door and her enthusiasm for reaching and going beyond your personal best is infectious. Most days I end my workout out of breath or lying on my back, but at the end I have a great sense of accomplishment."

There are two ways you can try JForce. You are invited to come by or call Missy to set up a time to give it a try. The first session is free. You can also schedule an Intro to JForce session, which is a great segue into JForce. This small group option gives you extra instruction and guidance on the basic exercises, before you try a regular JForce workout.

Fitness Trainers Patty Torcellini and Cathy Bennett run a similar program for youths from 5th-10th grade called JForce Youth. JForce Youth is a unique program. Teens will experience a similar structured circuit workout that is a lot of fun for them. The kids love working out together and they especially like using the Expresso Bikes. They can drop in anytime Monday-Thursday from 3-5 PM for a 40 minute workout. We presently have over 20 teens enrolled and most come twice a week. Teens of all fitness levels are welcome and their workout fits their individual goals. This is great for teens who are in between team sports seasons or are in need of some strength training that they are not getting at school. ☆



Trainer Patty Torcellini, far left, leads a JForce Youth group.

start out slowly but found that I wanted to go more often. I try to go at least 4 to 5 times a week. Also, I like that J Force has different wave times during the day, so



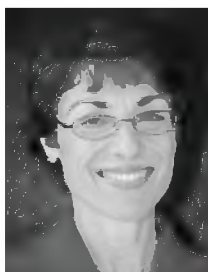
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