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2:00 P.M. - 5:45P.M.
Wednesday
7:00 P.M. 9:00 P.M.
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Closed
Monday Friday Saturday

Library hours change when the Religious Schools are not in session

Speizman Jewish Library

Andre Aciman

On Sunday, December 10, 1995, the Charlotte chapter of Hadassah, the Speizman Jewish Library, and the Jewish Community Center will host Professor Andre Aciman as guest speaker at the annual Book & Author Evening.

We are pleased to introduce the author of *Out of Egypt* to the Charlotte Jewish community. Professor Aciman will provide us with a unique and colorful glimpse into the now vanished world of Jews in Arab lands. His book will be available for purchase at the JCC front desk.

The following excerpted article appeared in the February 3, 1995 issue of the *Forward*.

**Amalia Warshenbrot, Librarian,
Speizman Jewish Library**

**Suzanne Cannon, Publicity Chair
Book & Author Evening**

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Aciman's Exodus

By Douglas Century

Out of Egypt is at once an elegy lost Jewish culture and a satire of one singularly cosmopolitan Sephardic family. "People have said that there's something 'magical' about the Alexandria I write about," says author Andre Aciman. "But it's really not Alexandria that's magical — it's the act of remembering Alexandria that becomes magical. That's why every chapter in the book ends with the notion that memory is, after all, the most important thing."

"Judaism is founded on the idea of remembering, and re-remembering, and remembering that you should not forget — that's what makes us Jewish, I think."

"The model you cannot ignore, of course, is Marcel Proust," Aciman continues. "He not only shows you how memory works, but he also talks about memory quite a lot. It becomes impossible to separate the two."

Mr. Aciman writes with remarkable acuity and honesty about his family foibles, from his father's extramarital affairs to the roguish adventures of his Uncle Vili (at various times, a soldier in Kaiser Wilhelm's army, an ardent admirer of Mussolini and a British agent who spied on the Israelis and was rewarded for his efforts with a country estate in Surrey, on which he spent the rest of his life under the assumed name of Dr. H.M. Spingarn.

Asked how he managed to write so candidly about his living relatives, Mr. Aciman says: "You can't always be totally honest, but you have to give enough of the truth to let people know that this is real. My way of operating is to expose them with their pants down and then to give them back something so that they can be human."

"I had to fight against the stream," Mr. Aciman says. "I wanted to produce a very lyrical Alexandria, because I think about Alexandria with a great deal of elygy. On the other hand, I had to

keep in mind the farcical aspects of what goes on in our family."

"In Egypt you had a very large Jewish community," Mr. Aciman relates. "Since the Sephardic community was so huge, within themselves they had many rivalries." Such petty distinctions mattered little to the Arab authorities, who began a campaign of anti-Semitic persecution under Nasser until, by 1971, there were only 400 Jews left in Egypt. Still, despite their years of exile, the plight of Egyptian Jews has gone largely unchronicled.

One of the most poignant moments *Out of Egypt* depicts a final Passover before the family's departure from Alexandria, when 14-year-old Andre flees the seder table and goes down to the seafront to envision the life he will forge for himself in the West.

"Exile is the one thing that is fundamentally Jewish," Mr. Aciman says now, some 30 years after that last Alexandrian night. "However, it's no fun being in exile. I wouldn't wish it on my own sons; on the other hand, I wish they had some of it, because it would give them a sense of depth, to know that you won't always have this permanent address. It's this sense of insecurity that gives you what I call the irony of God: a God who's not ironic is of no use to Jews."

Of his former life in Alexandria Aciman says, "I don't really miss it. It was an awful time to live really." But even as he praises his new-found home, the ambivalence of exile creeps into Mr. Aciman's language. "You know, there's a wonderful moment in the Bible in which the people say, 'I miss the garlic of Egypt,' because they didn't have garlic in the wilderness. I'm grateful and happy to be in America — but clearly some sense of life stopped for me when I left Alexandria."

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