

The 27th Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute

By Marvin Bienstock

It was Sunday morning and the 80-plus people gathered in the lecture hall at Wildacres Retreat Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina were talking about the preceding two and a half days and nights. Whether the speaker was a participant in the 27th Annual Charlotte Yiddish Institute, a guest lecturer or a musician who had performed, the same words were heard over and over and over – family, emotion, memories, new friendships, friendships renewed and, “till we are together again next year.” For the participants who spoke it did not matter if this had been their first institute or their 27th. They spoke about a sense of bonding, a sense of acceptance, a respect and love for each other, and, of course, of their love for what Yiddish had meant or now meant to them. For some it was the language: for some it was the community or neighborhood in which they had lived. For others it was the culture, the music or the memories of family life with their parents, grandparents and extended family.

What had happened in the preceding hours to evoke this emotionality? It had begun at the point of arrival. For newcomers, it was the outreach of other newcomers and long time participants. There was a feeling that there was so much they shared with each other highlighted by their choice to be together in a Yiddish atmosphere. There was a desire to ask about each other and to listen to the responses. And, as they listened, they discovered that, no matter how far apart they had lived in their individual lives, there were points of connection, points where lives had crossed, people they knew in common, shared occupations and so much more. Add it all up and what was created was a strong fabric which covered everyone with a sense of warmth and belonging.

The program for the first evening was designed to create even more opportunities for meeting each other. First there were

words of welcome from Abe Luski, a founder of the Institute. He was followed by Mike House, Wildacres Manager, who shared the incredible history of this focal point for bringing together countless diverse groups. Then Baila Pransky, also a founding member and the Institute's Coordinator/Advisor, introduced the other members of the hard-working Committee who make the Institute what it is.

Next to speak was the Guest Lecturer, Dr. Sheva Zucker, author, teacher of Yiddish at Duke University and the newly appointed Executive Director of the League for Yiddish and editor of its magazine. She was followed by Robert Abelson, Cantor of Temple Israel, New York City, and a performer for 40 years in film, on television and on the Broadway. Then Joyce Rosenszweig, pianist and conductor in concerts throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe and Israel, and Music Director of Cong. Beth Simchat Torah in Manhattan, spoke. Ali and Gene Kavadlo, members of the Charlotte Symphony and Viva Klezmer, talked about their planned concert for Saturday afternoon.

They were followed by those who were to lead workshops in Beginner's Yiddish, Advanced Yiddish, Jewish Cooking, the Sharing of Personal Jewish Memories, and the touring of Penland School of the Arts and artists' studios/workshops.

Finally, there came a very special time when each person present was asked to stand and share their Yiddish name, where they now live and where their parents/grandparents were born. Over and over again there was an underlying buzz as people said, “That's where my family was from” or “That's my Yiddish name” or “I need to talk to him/her about that.” And, talk to each



Marvin Bienstock, Marisa Rosenfeld, Joyce Rosenszweig, Lisa Faulds, and Gene Kavadlo.

other they did as they gathered in the canteen for the first of many sessions of noshing on traditional treats, baked goods, candy, fruit and so much more brought to be shared with everyone by the Hospitality Committee and by participants. With great reluctance, the day, which had started so early and, for many, so far away, was brought to a close as people headed off to their rooms thinking about the joys to come in the days ahead.



Robert Abelson, Joyce Rosenszweig, Ali Kavadlo, Gene Kavadlo, Adele Abramowitz, and Joel Abramowitz

They were not disappointed. Their expectations were met. Dr. Zucker, in her three presentations shared insights into Jewish lives, lives very few of those present had ever known about. These included the Russian Jews who in, WWII, escaped first to Japan and then went on to establish a Jewish community in Shanghai. She shed light on the first women to write

their biographies in Yiddish, and she spoke about the movements to create Jewish homelands in Kimberly, Australia and Tasmania. As was true for the entire Institute, oral and/or written translations were provided so that it was not necessary to understand or to speak Yiddish fluently to be a full participant.

Cantor Abelson and Joyce Rosenszweig repeatedly brought the audience to standing ovations and cries of “bravo” as they performed the works of Sholom Secunda, Songs of the Sabbath, and a Yiddish Song Festival Concert. On Friday evening, going on into the late hours, people joined Joyce Rosenszweig as she played for them to sing from the Wildacres Book of Yiddish Songs which drew melodies from their memories and turned them into a joyful chorus.

On Shabbat morning the services incorporated and increased the

feeling of community. Cantor Sheldon Feinberg, a participant from Beaufort, SC, began the morning services. Cantor Martha Novick, also a participant, led part of the services and went on to perform with Cantor Abelson and Joyce Rosenszweig. Dr. Howard Winokuer of Charlotte chanted the Torah portion which was then read in Yiddish by Rabbi Leo Hoffman.

John Pransky chanted the Haftarah.

On Saturday evening, the concert performance and the consuming of edible goodies was followed by a talent show featuring participants from age twelve on up whose talents included singing, humor and instrumental performance. A particularly moving moment happened when April Rosenbaum, a recent college graduate spoke about what Yiddish has come to mean in her life. At midnight, a group asked for the traditional “kumsitz” – the singing of folk songs from many different nations. The response to the request lasted over another hour, and, at its conclusion, another group made the request that, in future years, time be set aside, as in the past, for Israeli folk dancing and other dancing. They were thanked for their reminder and assured that dancing would be back in all future years.

The final discussion on Sunday morning focused on how to preserve Yiddish and all those things people had seen and felt over the weekend not only at future Institutes but in personal and communal life. Don't be surprised, dear reader, if you are approached about coming to next year's Institute. The participants pledged to reach out and contact their friends and their family from grade schoolers to grandparents.

Can the love of Yiddish be passed on to the younger generations? Two days after the Institute I received an email from Marisa Rosenfeld, a member of the Institute Committee and the mother of the twelve-year-old who had attended. She wrote, “As soon as Lisa returned home, she began searching the internet for Yiddish expressions. She has asked me to teach her Yiddish because it seems, ‘very cool and fun.’ She also wants to use Yiddish when she talks with her grandmother.”

Yiddish does more than live on the peak of a mountain in North Carolina. It can live, prosper and grow in the hearts, minds and beings of anyone and everyone. ☆

WOMEN'S NEWS

In Celebration of Learning

By Janice Bernstein, President, Charlotte Chapter of Hadassah

November is Jewish Book Month and it reminds us, yet again, that we are truly the People of the Book. Learning and education mark the cornerstone of our heritage, help connect us as a people and provide the continuity for generations to come. Certainly as Jewish women, we have always been the keepers of our stories and transmitters of our oral histories; we are a catalyst for learning, sharing and teaching the next generation.

Always in the forefront of providing women with educational opportunities, Hadassah has encouraged learning and empowered women since our founding as a study group in 1912. Women have found sacred space in

Hadassah's book groups and programs, as members connect with each other through discussions and exchange of ideas. Maintaining this tradition today, we are proud of the thousands of members who continue to learn through our women's symposia, education days, scholar weekends, Hebrew programs, meetings, events, book clubs and study groups. Opening a world of ideas and innovative concepts through creative and skillful peer-led study sessions and seminars, Hadassah women are energized by contemporary as well as historical concepts. These programs offer an inviting environment to share



ideas and life's experiences and enrich our lives through learning. In Charlotte, we have monthly Lunch 'n' Learn meetings which are very popular. Won't you join the group? Call Debby Block at 704-246-2910 for information. We are also planning an education event on December 8. Please watch for details in the mail, or call Roz Cooper for more information 704-846-8315.

We enrich our communities as well, as we tutor children and open a world of letters and words to help them learn to read and become productive citizens; we collect books for children in our local shelters and community hospitals to ease their way in difficult times; we purchase books to

brighten a child's day at Hadassah Hospital with the *sefer l'refuah* program; and we support our remarkable Hadassah College Jerusalem. If you are interested in beginning any of these programs in Charlotte, please call Janice Bernstein at 704-846-9290 to volunteer.

All of these Hadassah programs provide community support as well as lifelong learning for our members at every age and at every stage of life. Our efforts serve to reinforce our belief that the pursuit of education is an enduring legacy. ☆

HADASSAH CIRCLE AT THE LAKE

New Membership Meeting
November 6, 6-7 PM

at the home of Robbie Damesch
211 Quaker Rd., The Point, Mooresville
RSVP to Robbie, 704-799-0666

COME LEARN ABOUT HADASSAH!