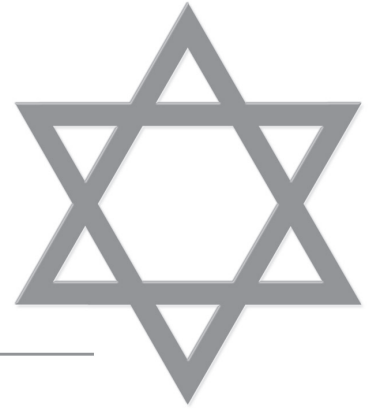




HILLEL

# The Star



WASHINGTON AND LEE HILLEL NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 2005

## Birthright Israel Trip *by Artur Mkhitarian, 3rd Classman, VMI*

The words I write in this article will never do justice to what Israel really is and what I experienced during the birthright trip. Everyone took something different from this trip. Some became emotional due to a personal spiritual feeling. Some viewed this as a free vacation and others as a religious and cultural trip. As for me, I am probably in the middle of those extremes. Honestly I was not prepared for this trip; in fact I was very ignorant about Israel and Judaism. Yes, I am Jewish, and in fact I attended a private Jewish school as a young child. But as I grew older, I started to drift away from my Jewish identity. I have traveled quite a bit, but Israel has been the most important and impressive experience for me. The whole trip still sometimes seems like a dream.

In a sense, I have rediscovered my Jewish identity and now more than ever, I am very proud to be Jewish. I definitely owe this to the amazing people I met in Israel. I went by myself, knowing I would meet others, but I had no idea what to expect, and that was exciting. Even at the airport I befriended fellow Jews, and more on the plane. I even ran into old friends I had not seen in years. My group consisted of about thirty students, mostly from Virginia. The main guide was Ornit, a very passionate Israeli woman. She was very insightful and a great mentor for all of us during the trip. The bus was pretty comfortable and we spent the majority of

the trip in it. If you could stay awake, you could see some of the most beautiful and breathtaking landscapes through the large bus windows and watch the whole country



*Art and friends enjoy dinner in a Bedouin tent*

go by. We traveled as much as we could in the ten days through most of Israel. The most memorable places for me are Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. On the third day, we were joined by five wonderful and lively Israeli soldiers. I was lucky to become very close with one of them. We visited many historic and holy sites. Holocaust education was an important yet heartbreaking part of this trip. We were even privileged to hear a testimony from a woman who spent over two years in Auschwitz. I experienced many mixed emotions there.

The Israeli culture seemed foreign at first. Hebrew was everywhere, even the graffiti. I had no idea what it all meant, but for a change, I was part of the majority. I came to

Israel expecting some huge internal change, some revelation. At first, I was shocked and disappointed by how little I felt. The only time I became emotional and cried was not at The Wall or Yad Vashem but at the Children's Holocaust museum. Reading the names and where and when they died really got to me.

I do appreciate the history and the holiness of the country; after all that is what binds us Jews all together, eating falafel, joking exchanging stories and praying together with soldiers and new friends really stands out for me. It was the Jewish social life that I enjoyed and learned so much from.

Before the trip I viewed Israel as a place torn by war and in a seemingly hopeless situation; now I view it completely differently. Even though I may never return, I will never lose sight of what Israel really is. It is a place of united hope and happiness. I will never forget Israel or the people I met. It was depressing to say the final goodbyes; I even parted with Israel by a farewell kiss to a pillar in the airport at Tel Aviv. Even though I am Jewish and identify myself now more closely with Jews, I am not Israeli, so it was time to go home. Due to this cultural, educational and spiritual trip, I now greatly appreciate my heritage and religion. I am very proud to be Jewish. Shalom!

*Birthright Israel is a free 10-day trip sponsored by Jewish philanthropists and the State of Israel.*

## Director's Corner

*By Joan Robins*

In this season's newsletter we are pleased to bring you reports of some remarkable student community service, outstanding attendance at Hillel events, and Hillel's presentation to the W&L Board of Trustees. Thoughts about Israel are featured as well—please don't miss the articles about Birthright Israel and Hila Yashar's heartfelt remarks about her experience as an Israeli student at W&L.

Our newsletter reflects a very active, ambitious program, led by a committed group of students. I was happy to share the High Holidays with many of them again this year, and to welcome them into my home for Erev Rosh Hashanah dinner. For many freshmen, it is the first time that they are away from home at this time of the year. It's exciting to see them exploring their new independence as well as their Judaism.

I'm so pleased to announce that Jon Phillipson '06, co-president, has been named finalist for Rhodes and semi-finalist for Mitchel scholarships. It's a pleasure for me to work with such talented students.

Through the efforts of the W&L Hillel Board, Administration, and Admissions Office, we have grown tremendously. Thanks to Hillel's very generous donors, (please don't miss the article about Charlie Thalheimer '41) we are able to offer the support students need to make Jewish growth and pride a highlight of their college years.



*Alex Flaster '09 and his mom relax during the Sunday Bagel Brunch during Parents' Weekend. The event was well attended by students, parents, faculty and staff, who enjoyed lox, bagels, and more!*

## Jew Crew '05-'06

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## Community Service

*By Taylor Lawch '09*

The Hillel Community Services committee has been very busy this fall.

Guided by our tradition of *tikkun olam*, our officers decided to offer financial support to those devastated by Hurricane Katrina and Rita. W&L Hillel sent a check to the New Orleans JCC, which provides child care to children of all faiths. We also sent a check to Tulane Hillel and W&L's relief effort, to support college students who were affected. The New Orleans community is special to us, as two members of our Hillel grew up in the area—Jon Phillipson '06 and Michael Kern '06. This money was partially raised by local members of our community as tzedakah collection, and also by Hillel students.

We hope to make a connection to individuals associated with the JCC and Tulane Hillel so that we can continue to support them. In addition to sending future tzedakah collections to these organizations, we plan to volunteer our time and energy to future hurricane relief efforts.

Hillel also decided to continue our Thanksgiving tradition, started last year by Leah Greenberg '05, of donating 20 Thanksgiving baskets to the Glasgow Head Start program. Head Start is a pre-school program designed for families living in poverty. These families, often comprised of two working parents or a single parent working two jobs, do not have the time or resources to splurge on Thanksgiving treats.

Hillel donated \$200 and Hillel members raised the additional \$360 by asking students for small contributions. These baskets were filled with a turkey and an assortment of yams, green beans, mashed potatoes, and stuffing, generously discounted by the local Kroger. They gave underprivileged families the luxuries that are easily taken for granted during the Thanksgiving holiday. The W&L and Hillel community is proud to share this great American holiday with those who may not have been able to take part in it otherwise.



*Delivering Thanksgiving Baskets: Taylor Lawch '09 and Justine Dargahi '07 pack boxes at Glasgow Head Start. After packing, they met the children and wished them a Happy Thanksgiving.*

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**Mr. John Zamoiski '74:** Reunion Weekend

## Very Interesting Professors

Once a month, a professor joins Hillel for lunch at a local restaurant. Our first lunch in September featured the new Dean of the College, Hank Dobin, who came to W&L from an administrative position at Princeton. Dean Dobin offered comments about his own academic interest (Shakespeare) and talked with us about W&L. He said that both he and his wife, Bonnie Bernstein, have received warm welcomes from everyone at W&L including the Jewish community.

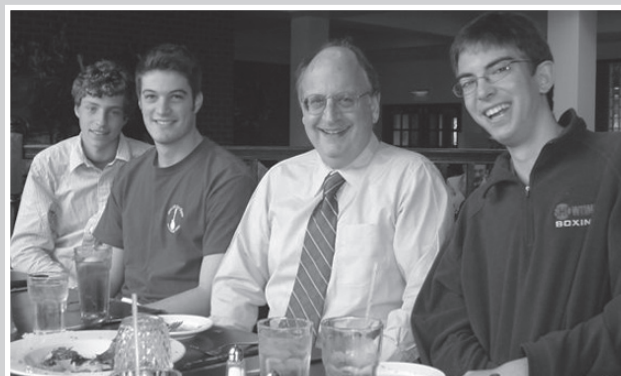
In October, Acting President Harlan Beckley joined us for lunch with his wife, Debby, and talked to us about the Shepherd Poverty Program, an interdisciplinary program which integrates academic study with learning through service. Beckley founded the program, and except for this year's leave to serve as W&L's President, is also Program Director. President Beckley told us about the "Shepherd Consortium," a proposal for a demonstration grant in higher education to support a ten-school, five year project for the study of poverty. This program would be the first of its kind in undergraduate education. Beckley has been on the faculty of the Religion Department at W&L for over 30 years.

In November, *Newsweek's* Business Editor, Allan Sloan, joined us for lunch. He has had a 30 year career in business journalism, and has won numerous awards. Sloan has been featured on National Public Radio on "Marketplace," and he frequently appears as a commentator on PBS's "Nightly Business Report." His *Newsweek* columns

## By Alex Burpee '08

also appear in the the Journalism Department as a Reynolds Distinguished Visiting Fellow. He said that when he requested a meeting with Jewish students, he was pleasantly surprised to find an active Hillel at W&L.

These lunches offer great opportunities for students to get to know professors (and other educators) on a more personal basis. They were sponsored by Shep Buckman '99, James Freund '62, and Howard and Janet Rubel '78.



Hillel students welcomed Allan Sloan as November's featured guest (L to R: Dmitry Slavin '09, Alex Burpee '08, Allan Sloan, Arie George '08)

## Being Jewish at W&L—an Israeli's Perspective

*By Hila Yashar '09*

Being a Jewish student who just came from the Jewish state, Israel, feels strange at times. Although I feel that I have become used to living in this beautiful place, I am still shocked every time I see people eating pizza with pepperoni or watching TV on Yom Kippur. I am used to seeing the roads completely empty of cars on Yom Kippur, seeing Chanukias in every window on Chanukah and not

encountering even the smallest crumb of bread in the house during Pesach. Even though all these changes make me feel like a stranger sometimes, when I go to "First Fridays" Shabbat services at W&L, I shake from excitement because of the familiar prayers that my father sings when we gather around the Shabbat table at home, the amazing taste of the Challa, and the sweet flavor of the wine that normally my brothers and I try to avoid. Hillel feels to me like a big supportive family whose members share a lot in common with me and make me feel that I am an important part of it.

## First Fridays at Five *By Justine Dargahi '07*

This year's season of "First Fridays at Five" (Shabbat services and dinner) has gotten off to a great start. At our first service of the year we welcomed Acting President Harlan Beckley and his wife Debby, and also the new Dean of the College Hank Dobin and his wife Bonnie Bernstein. As the new service leader I have been very

excited about the great attendance, which has usually been standing room only. At our second service we welcomed the wonderful guitar playing of Ben Goldsmith, son of Jan Kaufman and Professor Art Goldsmith. Ben's guitar accompaniment adds a very nice element to the service.

In November we began a new tradition during the service: either a student or a member of the community will provide the D'var Torah. Our first volunteer was Professor Richard Marks, who offered an interesting and inspirational commentary to the week's Torah portion. It is my hope that this tradition will continue.

I would like to thank the members of the Lexington Jewish community who attend our services and create such a wonderful family feeling. On behalf of Hillel students, I would also like to thank the community for taking time to prepare all the delicious home cooked dishes for the potluck dinners!

*Hila Yashar '09 lights the Shabbat candles at "First Fridays at Five." Standing close by is Justine Dargahi '07, this year's service leader.*



## *By Tata Rubenstein '08*

On November 4th, Washington and Lee Hillel conducted its semi-annual advisory board meeting. Present were the Hillel student executive committee, Hillel Board members, and several guests from the Washington and Lee community. The Board consists of alumni, parents, faculty, and members of the Lexington community. We began the meeting by introducing the Board's two newest members: Betty Taylor and Mitch Wapner. I know I speak for the entire Hillel when I say how happy we are about our two new additions.

On the agenda for the meeting were three guest speakers, each discussing an aspect of Jewish life at W&L. The first to present was Burr Datz, the Director of Religious Life. Burr discussed his plans to unite and encourage contact with all religious leaders and groups in Lexington. Next, Charlie Boisky from the admissions office came to update us on the status of Jewish applicants for the 2006-07 academic year. We are confident that through the many strategies that Hillel and the admissions office have made, the number of applicants will rise again this year.

Our third guest was Jim Farrar, the assistant to the President of the University. Mr. Farrar spoke about the recent Washington and

Lee Board of Trustees meeting, during which Joan Robins and Jon Philipson '06 presented an update to the entire Board. The Board has taken a sincere interest in helping W&L attract more Jewish students which is extremely exciting and promising. We are beyond ecstatic for the rest of the school year and are confident that Hillel will continue to make great strides.



*Trustee Rector Phil Norwood '69 meets with Joan Robins and Tara Rubenstein '08 after the Hillel presentation at the October 21st meeting.*



# Five Star Generals—Charles Thalhimer '41

*By Joan Robins*

*This is the second in the series highlighting alumni on or after their 50th reunion.*

In the early 1800s, William Thalhimer, great grandfather of Charlie Thalhimer '41, arrived in New Orleans from Germany. Soon after arriving, he moved to Richmond, Virginia where he opened a store in 1842. Thalhimer's Department Store was expanded by Charlie and his brother when they returned from the service in 1950. The chain grew to 26 units in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee, and was sold in 1978.

Charlie has been very active in the greater Richmond community. He served on the boards of the United Way, the Richmond Jewish Federation, the Medical College of Virginia, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, ADL, Boys and Girls Club, Sovran Bank, and Boy Scouts. Over the years, Charlie has led the fundraising campaigns of Virginia Commonwealth University, United Jewish Appeal of Richmond, United Way of Greater Richmond, Boys and Girls Clubs, and others.

Strengthening the Jewish community as part of the larger community has always been a focus for Charlie, and now he has established a charitable trust for Washington and

Lee Hillel in honor of his classmate Alvin T. Fleishman '41. This very generous gift will sustain the Hillel program and Jewish student life for many years to come.

In August, sophomore Seth Feibelman '08 and I met with Charlie for lunch in Richmond to thank him for his support, goodwill, and future provision.

Charlie arrived at lunch with his W&L yearbook in hand so that we could see pictures of his classmates and the ZBT fraternity house, one of two Jewish fraternities which no longer exist on campus. Looking through the yearbook, Charlie told us that he came to W&L at the age of 16, against the advice of Dean Gilliam. It impressed Charlie that Gilliam remembered his name, however, and greeted him on campus shortly after he arrived. Charlie remembered that he wrote many papers for Gilliam, who taught English, but he always received poor grades. Charlie's chosen topic was usually about fishing, a great love of his. "My father started me fishing at a very young age, and I once held the world record for bonefish at 15 lbs." Charlie recalled that later in the semester, a classmate from

Louisville who wrote all his themes about horses and horseracing and who received better grades on each paper, told Charlie that Dean Gilliam was not a fisherman but was fond of horses.

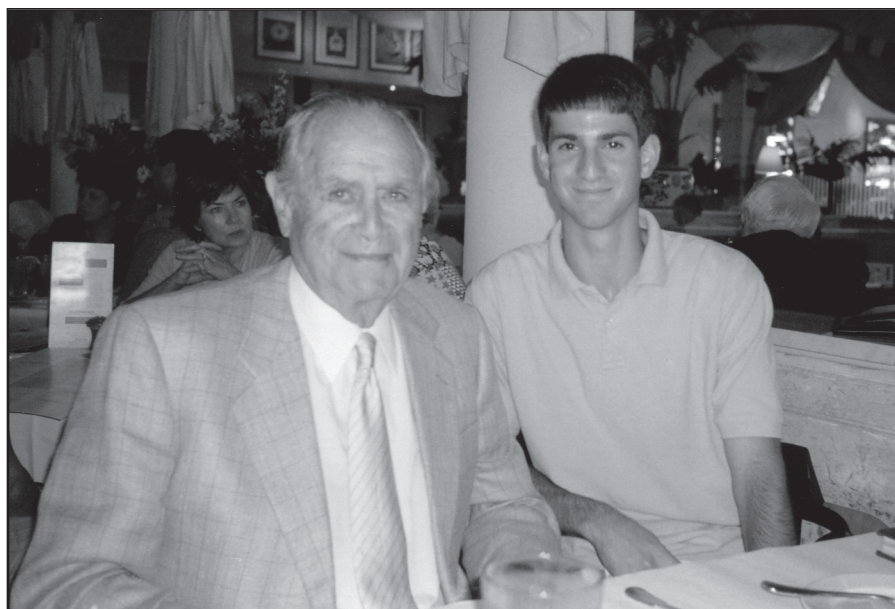
Other memories of college included a social life that revolved around the fraternities, visiting the surrounding girls' schools, and big dance weekends on campus. He fondly remembered his classmates, especially his roommate and valedictorian, Al Fleishman. "Al was the smartest, and continued to work for W&L throughout his life."

Charlie is supporting Hillel because he feels it has given Jewish students a sense of belonging, especially now that the two Jewish fraternities are gone. He says that he is hopeful that W&L will strive to attract more qualified Jewish students from all over the country.

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*Seth Feibelman '08 thanks Charlie Thalhimer '41 for his generous bequest to W&L Hillel.*



# The Star



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*Jews on Safari: Victoria Kesselman '07 feeds a llama at Safari Park. Hillel enjoyed the trip to the park in Natural Bridge, followed by dinner at the Natural Bridge Hotel.*



*Freshman Bagel Brunch, sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lawch (Taylor '09): Upperclassmen, faculty and staff get together to greet freshmen on Sept 4th. Left - right: Alex Flaster '09, Jenny Sutton '09, Professor David Novack, Director Joan Robins, Arie George '08, Kyle Harvey '08)*