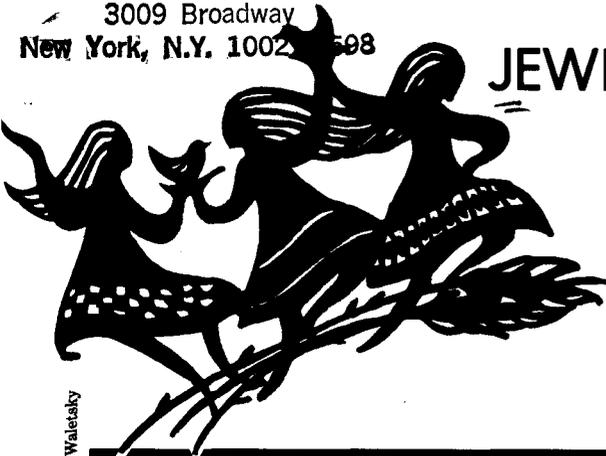


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Tairi Walelsky

JEWISH WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER

ARTS + CULTURE/religion - Jewish
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NEWSLETTER

Published by the JWRC, a project of the National Council of Jewish Women

Spring 1986

To Our Readers . . .

THIS PREMIERE ISSUE OF THE JEWISH Women's Resource Center Newsletter includes reports of activities pursued here in our own offices, within New York City, out in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and from Haifa, Israel. It reflects our purpose, which is to collect news and to disseminate it. It's essential, we believe, that we in New York are apprised of the political activities of women in Haifa and that women in Haifa learn of rituals being created in Albuquerque. Ignorance of each other keeps us isolated, that is to say, stranded. Because of the efforts of Jewish women in the late 1960s and through the 1970s there exist small circles of influence world wide. At JWRC, we think there needs to be a network through which these circles can interlock.

Connections are easily made. Last February, for example, a letter arrived at our offices from Dee Eimer, of The Jewish Religious Women's Working Party, part of the Social Issues Committee of the Reform Social Synagogues of Great Britain. A study group has formed, she writes, and its first topic of inquiry is the use of *tallit* among women. How do American women feel about wearing *tallit*? she asks. Her letter was forwarded to scholars and writers, but certainly individual response is appropriate. You can write to Dee Eimer: 65 Derwent Rd., Palmer's Green, London N13 4QA. In an upcoming issue, I hope to print a report on the London group's activities.

Please note that the theme of each item in this newsletter is identification: as Jewish women in opposition to Jewish men, to tradition, to their society; as Jewish women who insist on participation in defining their tradition, their place in history, their place in the contemporary world; as Jews among non-Jews. The writers were not obeying an editorial decree. Rather, we think they are responding to an imperative within modern Jewish life: letting women in. The writers and the women they are writing about have anticipated what is to come. They have let themselves in, and they are already engaged.

We depend on you within your small circles of influence to write and to tell us what's happening. Be in touch.

—Fran Snyder, Editor

ISRAEL REPORT

OPENED IN OCTOBER 1984, *ISHA* [*Woman to Woman*] provides a space where women can meet, share information, network and be a part of Israel's small but active feminist community. We run consciousness-raising groups, lectures and seminars. In addition we work with the Haifa Rape Crisis Center and Battered Women's Shelter on public awareness campaigns, distributing information about subjects such as violence against women and discrimination in the workplace.

Isha L'Isha is run by a women's collective that decided to fill a gap left by the closing of *Kol Ha-Isha* [*Woman's Voice*], Haifa's first women's bookstore and center. Our center includes a large roof terrace, which is set up as a coffee-house in summer, meeting rooms and a library/reading room. Israel's only feminist Hebrew-language magazine, *Noga*, is for sale, as well as feminist books and pamphlets. T-shirts, posters and buttons, produced by the collective, are also sold. One of the rooms serves as the office for the Haifa Rape Crisis Center.

The center's on-going activities are geared to an Israeli public that sees "women's issues" as something of minor importance, relegated to the back pages and human interest spots of newspapers. Feminist is almost a dirty word, conjuring up images of screaming bra-burners. Feminists, it is said in veiled tones, are "ruining the family," and family is a very important feature of this Jewish, child-oriented society. The paradox of being considered both a serious threat and a marginal issue does not make it easy for Israeli women to stand up and say, "I am a feminist." More often, you will hear, "I am not a feminist, but . . ." The Hebrew word for "racism" is in common usage; the Hebrew equivalent for "sexism" is practically unknown.

Our most important work is finding names for the various problems women face in Israeli society—from the difficulties of being self-supporting (on the average women earn 60% of men's salaries) to the rarity of being able to sit alone and unharassed in a cafe.

Consciousness-raising is one of our highest priorities. We sponsor three C-R groups each week. In these groups, women may realize,

some for the first time, that what they'd thought were their own "faults" and problems are common to many women.

In addition, we hold a weekly class in home repair, and we schedule lectures by guest speakers on a variety of issues: among them,

In Israel, you will often hear, "I am not a feminist, but..."

women's status in the rabbinical courts, employment, Israeli stereotypes versus women's psychological development.

Our public awareness campaigns consist of setting up street booths in four main areas of the city and distributing information and resource materials to passers-by. For International Women's Day, street booths were situated throughout the city and activities were focused on women at work: women working for absurdly low salaries; women as the first employees to be laid off during Israel's present economic difficulties; the financial strains that force mothers to quit their jobs when day care centers close.

Isha L'Isha's most recent seminar discussed the sexist and pornographic portrayal of women in the Israeli mass media. It included a lecture by a media researcher, group discussions on protest methods, and a panel discussion about the repercussions of such images on women and men.

Ishal L'Isha-Haifa Women's Center is a non-profit organization, supported by membership dues, private donations, and the New Israel Fund. You can reach us at: P.O. Box 3610, 34730 Haifa, Israel. Telephone: (04)664949.

—Lani Raven,
Director

JWRC Round-Up

THE JEWISH WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER rapidly approaches the end of its first decade. Those of us who mothered this project have reason to be proud. Thousands of Jewish women have been aided in their quests for equal opportunity and religious fulfillment by the JWRC. Today, in the United States there are more than 100 women rabbis. One can find *sid-durim* using non-genderized God-language. Orthodox women have their own *davening* groups, and their Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform sisters read from the *Torah* and conduct services with increasing frequency. Our library preserves the invaluable documents that record these individual and shared victories. Those who follow us will understand our struggles and know our successes.

The JWRC is flourishing. Its growth reflects the massive "going public" of Jewish women's energies that has occurred throughout the past 15 years. Requests for research materials and baby-naming ceremonies for infant daughters stream into the office with fierce regularity. Our Jewish Women's Poetry Project gathers on the first Tuesday evening of each month, and frequently sponsors public readings. Our women rabbinic and cantorial students support group continues to serve as a vehicle for empowerment. Rosh Chodesh celebrations are held monthly. The Center's most recent, "Jewish and Lesbian: Sharing Experiences," was a tremendous success, and led to the scheduling of a follow-up session on May 29th. This year's conference, "Jewish Women and Jewish Men: Our Changing Relationships," to be held on Sunday, May 18th, marks our third consecutive major conference.

In 1982 the fledgling JWRC was given a gracious home by the National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section. With NCJW's generous support, the JWRC has been able to grow. We're grateful for their sponsorship, and we're delighted to be counted among the organization's many worthy endeavors.

We still need a lot of help. The library is crying out to be catalogued. Our 1986-1987 schedule needs your suggestions and your visions. This newsletter, we hope, will serve as a tool to further develop an exchange between the JWRC and you. Certainly, the revival of the newsletter is cause for celebration. JWRC friends who knew the old newsletter have been nudging us to get this project flying again. We're fortunate to have Fran Snyder at the helm for her talents in writing, editing and publishing.

Please let us hear from you.

—Celia Y. Weisman,
Director

In our next issue:

Jewish-American and Israeli women writers.

THE JWRC'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT creates a kind of living history from a unique moment in Jewish life. Last year, when Conservative women were accepted as rabbinical students, we decided to record their stories and the hopes of these rabbis-in-training in their own words.

This project enhances by a thousandfold our archives on women in the rabbinate and in Jewish life in general. Have you ever wondered how Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, became a prophetess? There is one small clue in Numbers 12:2, but beyond that, no facts, not even hints. However, you could write a well-documented report on the role of women in Reform Judaism and trace the road that led in 1973 to their ordination at the Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion. All this material is found at the JWRC. Added to this, we now have the Oral History Project.

This is the current status of the project: Volunteers have interviewed 14 students enrolled in the Jewish Theological Seminary; among those are several men. Tapes of the interviews have been transcribed, and they form the first part of our first Oral History Library Collection. The completed collection requires two more interviews with the same students.

A new project for the Oral History Library is planned. We will collect memoirs of past and present leaders of the National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section. This continues our commitment to documenting the whys and hows, the lives and events of our community in order to preserve an intimate and living history.

Our committee has expanded. We continue our training in the techniques of interviewing, as well as in the use of our primary piece of equipment: the tape recorder. We're very excited about our project.

—Emita Levy,
Project Chairperson

THE DRIVE TO CONNECT," ADRIENNE Rich has said, is the true nature of poetry. Jewish women write poetry that connects them as human beings, as women, and as Jews.

The idea of the Jewish Women's Resource Center Poetry Project began in Spring 1985 with a letter from Marcia Cohn Spiegel, in Los Angeles, to a group of poets in New York. Marty was sorry to write that her anthology of Jewish women poets still had no publisher, but she also had good news: the National Council of Jewish Women, New York Section, had invited her to organize an evening of readings.

On June 4th an astonishingly large group of people filled Council House. Each participating poet rose for her "*aliyah*," as one poet in the audience later wrote, and each read marvelous poems. All the poems were different, but all were very relevant to Jewish women. Everyone present spoke of the relief and sense of connection that is felt when there is no need to "explain."

A second evening of readings followed in the fall of 1985. At a meeting afterward, the poets organized a workshop to meet at Council House on the first Tuesday of every month and to open it to any Jewish woman who wanted to read her work and work on a poem. This is how our workshops are conducted: Each poet brings copies of her work. Two others read her work aloud, then a very gentle, supportive critique is given in order to help her imagine her poem as a perfect and finished work.

Sadly, Marty Spiegel, who had inspired all this, missed all of it. Her husband fell ill before the first reading, and he has since died. But Marty made it to New York in March to conduct a special workshop. She read beautifully from her new book *Women Speak to God: The Poems and Prayers of Jewish Women*, (edited by Marty and Deborah Lipton Kremsdorf).

—Henny Wenkart,
Project Chairperson

With Our Compliments . . .

to our readers of the first JWRC newsletter and to readers of this brand new publication. In the future, we'll distribute by subscription only. The introductory fee is \$5.00 for three issues per year. You can send checks to the JWRC, 9 E. 69th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10012.

Jewish Women's Resource Center NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, No. 1 Spring 1986

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Fran Snyder

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NEW YORK NEWS

The Women's Tefillah Network, the umbrella organization of *halachic* women's prayer groups, has been meeting regularly since its founding in December 1984. In that short time the network has published a quarterly newsletter, and in September 1985 it sponsored a conference on women and prayer. Its most recent activity is an essay contest for religious girls in junior and senior high school. The subjects, "A Jewish woman I admire" and "What prayer means to me," are intended to encourage girls to think about and research topics relating to women and religion.

The network's primary goal, in general, is to aid the formation of new groups. Women's prayer groups are a relatively recent innovation. The first group started in Baltimore, Maryland, fifteen years ago. Since then, the growth and development of groups has been rapid and exciting. There are six groups in the New York metropolitan area alone, and more are forming. Our newest member-group started in Staten Island, in December 1985. There are groups across the United States and in Israel. Altogether, the network numbers 700 individuals.

Women's prayer groups generally meet once a month and usually on a Shabbat morning in order to pray together. Only women are permitted to attend, and *Halacha* is strictly adhered to. The entire prayer service is recited, including a complete *Torah* and *Haftorah* reading, with the exception of prayers for which a *minyan* of ten men is necessary. Though some groups are *minyanim*, most omit prayers such as *Kaddish* and *Kedusha*, which are traditionally recited only with a *minyan*.

The prayer groups enable women to actively participate in and to lead services, and to function as *Torah* readers. This is permitted in women-only groups, as women cannot perform these functions for men. Women give *divrei Torah* [talks]. They celebrate important events in their lives: Bat Mitzvot, engagements, baby namings are regular events. In short, a women's prayer group is a women's *shul*.

With the exception of a few brave Orthodox rabbis, rabbinic response to the groups has not been positive. Hostility continues to be expressed in articles written in rabbinic journals, as well as from the pulpits of many Orthodox synagogues. Many groups lack adequate space in which to conduct services as most Orthodox synagogues have closed their doors. An exception is the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and its rabbi, Avi Weiss, who has been most supportive. He serves as the *halachic* advisor for three of the New York area groups.

Despite rabbinic disapproval, membership in the network is increasing. Dues are \$10 a year, which entitles members to receive the newsletter, as well as information about other activities. The network has a speakers bureau.

It is the task of Jewish women to strengthen our youngsters' feelings of Jewish identity and to raise the level of religious education and participation in ritual for our children and for ourselves. This is a difficult struggle. We welcome your interest and help.

For information: Women's Tefillah Network, Inc., P.O. Box 236, Brooklyn, NY 11230.

—Rivka Haut, Flatbush Davening Group

LETTER FROM ALBUQUERQUE . . .

"Shalom from the southwest!" writes Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb. "The Jewish community in Albuquerque is growing, as it is in Santa Fe and in New Mexico, in general. My congregation, Nahalat Shalom, is in its third year. We're about fifty households, families and single people, and we're all ages.

"The women in our community have been celebrating the new moon, month after month, and our ceremony has grown and deepened. Rosh Chodesh is a place for women's religious expression and exploration of our spiritual roots as women. We read text, dance, heal, empower, sing, bellydance, meditate, poke fun . . . generally whoop it up around a fire, in a hot tub, by the river, in each other's houses. Rosh Chodesh is spreading to Santa Fe.

"Other news . . . artist Michele Zachein has created a beautiful environment called "The Tent Meeting," which is installed in the Santa Fe Museum of Fine Arts and is to tour the country soon. It has three walls, each one dedicated through the use of images to the three major branches of the Clan of Abraham: Judaism,

Christianity, Islam. I participated in the opening with Jassar Al Rabia, a Bedouin man and archeologist working with the University of New Mexico, and Mother Tess of the Carmelite Order in Colorado.

"Last Sunday was Hanukah. The Jewish Federation hosted its third annual Hanukah Celebration, drawing more than 1000 people to dance to the *klezmir* music of Albuquerque's New Shtetl Band. They're fantastic! All the organizations had booths. Nahalat Shalom had a latke concession . . . Oh, the lines! What a blast.

"Many events are shared by people of different ethnic origins. Last June, Jewish, black, anglo, Hispanic, and native American women gathered in story and celebration. Last year, I held an interfaith seder, which drew more than 250 people, mostly by word of mouth! It was a veggie potluck meal. People of different religious and ethnic traditions shared their views of freedom."

At press time, Rabbi Gottlieb reported that she and her congregation are planning another multi-ethnic seder. In recounting the Exodus tale this year, a speaker from Peru is expected, and the rabbi says, Sarah Sorenson, a Jewish woman in her early 90s, will recall struggles in the American labor movement, including the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE CHANGELINGS

by Jo Sinclair (Ruth Seid)
The Feminist Press (1955, 1983), 322 pp., \$8.95.

The time is the 1950s, the place a town in Ohio where Jews have lived for several generations. When the first blacks come in search of a better place to live, they are met with hatred and fear. Two 11-year-old girls, one Jewish and the other black, become friends. They are the changelings of Jo Sinclair's novel, originally published in 1955 and reissued in 1983.

The story is told from the point of view of Judy Vincent, a Jewish gang leader, who refers to herself as Vincent throughout the book. Clara Jackson, too, once led a gang, and their friendship is formed when Clara watches Vincent being beaten by members of her own gang and she expresses anger, which at that moment the humiliated Vincent cannot. The onset of adolescence secures their bond. They understand that the adult world expects them to develop into women who will participate in the prejudices that characterize their families and friends. Vincent and Clara will not share this adult world view, and together they manage to transcend it.

It is surprising that this book was out of print

for some 30 years. When compared to other children's books available in Jewish libraries, like the *All of a Kind Family* series, *The Changelings* is infinitely deeper, richer, and more subtle. It delves into real issues, particularly that of trying to fuse the often disparate identities of Jew, female, second or third generation American, and of the individual.

Sinclair captures the nuances of adolescence, but the book is not just for kids. She gives us a taste of the social turmoil of this period. She writes of a time with which we are not yet finished.

—reviewed by Melanie Hahn

THE JEWISH MOTHERS' HALL OF FAME

by Fred Bernstein
Doubleday (1986), 174 pp., \$6.95

Steven Spielberg's mother cooked 30 cans of cherries until they exploded all over her kitchen because young Steven wanted to film gore; Abbie Hoffman's mother sent dental floss to her fugitive son; Eddie Fisher's mother hates Liz Taylor. "Behind every successful man or woman is a mother who has sacrificed, supported, and protected," writes Fred Bernstein. Haven't we heard this before? Fortunately, *People* staffer Bernstein writes in those chatty magazine sentences that need only be scanned, not read. One glance and you get the message: behind every cliched sentence is a cliched thought.

—F.S.

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EVENTS

At The JWRC

All events take place at Council House, 9 E. 69th St., and begin at 7 p.m.

- May 29:** Jewish Lesbian Support Group follow-up
- June 19:** Rosh Chodesh observance
- June 26:**
Celebrating Miriam Today: Jewish Women & Ritual Innovation, featuring "Miriam's Daughters Now," a video by Lilly Rivlin, and discussion of *Miriam's Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*, by Penina V. Adelman.
- September 18:** Debate on Matrilineal vs. Patrilineal Descent
- October 15:** Women's Sukkah Celebration

Here & There

May 23-June 1:

"YeshiVacation '86" is a yeshiva-intensive, women-only residency program in the Lubavitch community of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, sponsored by Machon Chana Women's In-

stitute for the Study of Judaism. The program includes Torah study classes, symposia on such subjects as "Women in the Forefront of Torah," and "Civil Rights and Jewish Law," a mikvah tour and a challah-baking demonstration. Fees are \$75 including room and board; \$25 for the May 23-24 Shabbaton. For information: 718/735-0217,8; or 718/493-8581.

March 1986-Dec. 1986:

"Changing Tradition: The Position of Women in Judaism," Joods Historisch Museum (Jewish Historical Museum), Waaggebouw, Nieumarkt 4, 1012 CR, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; curated by Judith Frishman. The exhibit features "Miriam's Daughters Now," a 27-minute videotape about Jewish women's rituals, by New York writer and filmmaker Lilly Rivlin (see "At the JWRC").

June 11-15:

The National Women's Studies Association Conference, University of Champaign/Urbana. This year's conference includes "Jewish Women's Voices: Diversity and Community," a plenary session sponsored by the Jewish Women's Caucus, with panelists Irena Klepfisz, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Francie Saposnik; also, session on Jewish feminist issues, a pre-conference meeting for Jewish women, a women's minyan for Shabbat and Shavuot. For information: NWSA '86, 304 Stiven House, 708 S. Matthews, Urbana, IL 61801.