



LEADERS
THEN AND NOW:
Profiles of
NCSY
ALUMNI



The heart and soul of NCSY has always been the NCSYers themselves, the brave and idealistic young boys and girls from places like Vancouver, British Columbia, or Charleston, West Virginia, who embrace Torah and *mitzvot* despite the prevailing climate of indifference, apathy and even antagonism. In the pages ahead, we present portraits of some of the NCSY alumni who have made the arduous journey to Torah observance. We trace these individuals' lives—over 20 and 30 years—demonstrating how NCSY changed not only their future, but oftentimes, the future of families, synagogues and even entire communities. But what marks these individuals as special is not only their genuine commitment to living a Torah lifestyle, rather it is their unfailing devotion to the Jewish people and Jewish communal service. Leaders back in their NCSY days, these individuals were imbued with a love of Torah at NCSY but also with a profound sense of responsibility and purpose. Thus, today these alumni—whether they are rabbis or Jewish educators, high-powered investors or dentists—are motivated by a singular ambition: to serve *Klal Yisrael*. We salute these outstanding individuals for the extraordinary contributions they have made and are continuing to make to Jewish life.

Captions for these photos appear on last page of this section .

Jeanne Abrams

UTICA CHAPTER, UPSTATE NY REGION
1963-1968

By *Nechama Carmel*



More than 30 years later, most members of the Upstate New York (Har Sinai) Region still remember the 1966 regional convention that was snowed in. Fifty-four inches of snow blanketed upper New York, causing the New York Thruway to shut down. “It was actually a wonderful experience,” recalls Jeanne Abrams (née Lichtman). “Our bus was stranded on the Thruway for nearly 10 hours.... There was a great deal of *ruach*. We spent the time singing and eating the food the Albany contingent packed for us.” True, Abrams was sick with bronchitis for two weeks afterwards and one convention delegate needed 10 full days to get home, but that Albany *Shabbaton* remains permanently etched in Har Sinai history.

Nechama Carmel is the editor of Jewish Action.

In fact, among Har Sinai members, Utica became known for two things: One, for hosting the stranded convention delegates for three days (Utica was as far west as the buses could go) and two, Jeanne Abrams.

The president of the Utica Chapter of NCSY who later became president of the entire region, Abrams was an only child of Holocaust survivors who had moved to Upstate New York to find a better life. Like so many Jewish immigrants who came to the United States in the early and mid-twentieth century, Abrams’ parents gave up being observant amidst the overwhelming pressures to Americanize. And yet, despite the pulls to assimilate, they insisted on being members of an Orthodox *shul*. “Although my very Americanized and very successful relatives belonged to the Conservative temple in the area, my parents were members of Congregation House of Jacob, where Rabbi Louis Ginsburg was the rabbi,” recalls Abrams who attended the rabbi’s Talmud Torah classes for several years, and absorbed many of his ideals. “Rabbi Ginsburg had a profound effect on me,” remembers Abrams. Indeed, he did. At the age of 12, Abrams became *shomer Shabbat*.

Who was this man who so effectively conveyed the meaning and beauty of Shabbat to a young girl, and in doing so, ultimately turned her entire family around? A beloved figure in the community, Rabbi Ginsburg spent 18 years struggling to uphold Jewish life in Utica amidst a frightening trend of assimilation. His congregation was mostly comprised of Eastern European immigrants who were largely consumed with acclimating to a new culture and attaining some level of financial success. Among the *shul* constituency, however, there was

one group that was particularly receptive to his message: the children.

During the time Rabbi Ginsburg served as rabbi of Congregation House of Jacob, he was also the chaplain to the city and state police departments as well as the city fire department. Additionally, he served as president of the American chapter of the Religious Zionists of America and was an officer of the local region of the Rabbinical Council of America. But by far, his most outstanding accomplishment was bringing NCSY to Utica and fostering the fledgling movement’s phenomenal growth.

Officially founded in Schenectady in 1960, the Har Sinai Region really took off when Rabbi Ginsburg became the volunteer regional director in 1963, leading his region to excel in virtually every area and to claim award after award at every national convention. Since the communities in Upstate New York were too small to support a regional director, finding Rabbi Ginsburg was, in the words of former NCSY National Director Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, “an extraordinary piece of *mazzal*.” Enthusiastic, warm and extremely gifted in youth work, Rabbi Ginsburg, known as “the father of the Har Sinai Region,” was eventually recruited to join the NCSY national staff. Yet, even while serving as director of national projects for the OU and NCSY, he maintained his responsibilities as regional director, refusing to abandon his first love: the Har Sinai Region.

When Abrams was growing up in the ’60s, Utica had about 3,000 Jews but only a handful was *shomer Shabbat*. Those who kept Shabbat clung to each other for support. “I had these four or five friends—including the rabbi’s children—who were *shomer Shabbat* and we used to

“We used to live from convention to convention.”

walk to the *shul* for *oneg Shabbat*,” says Abrams. Indeed, there was one hard and fast rule that the Utica Chapter adhered to: only those within walking distance could participate in the *oneg Shabbat*. These Shabbat gatherings were not insignificant; in fact, they constituted a major part of the teenagers’ social lives. In the days before the emergence of the day school movement, NCSY was a social lifeline for many. “There was very little socializing among Orthodox synagogues before NCSY,” explained a former member of the Har Sinai Region. “We kids were very lonely.” Most of the teenagers like Abrams who became observant while attending public high schools limited their social lives to attending NCSY events, regional *Shabbatonim* (which cost about \$11 in those days) and of course, the annual NCSY National Convention. “If you didn’t have a supportive peer group in high school, you couldn’t make it through,” recalls Raina Berger, who was a member of the Schenectady Chapter. “We used to live from convention to convention.”

Thoughtful, mature and exceptionally refined, Abrams was just one of the reasons that the Har Sinai Region consistently shined. “We had an extraordinary collection of young people back then,” says Larry Ziffer, who was a member of the Schenectady Chapter and is today the vice president for community development in the Baltimore Jewish Federation.

In 1968, NCSY reported to the OU’s Youth Commission that the Har Sinai Region—which encompassed 14 chapters from Albany to Buffalo and from Saratoga Springs to the Catskill Mountains—boasted an extraordinary record of accomplishment: while less than 10 percent of that region’s members came from observant homes, some 60 percent had begun keeping Shabbat. Furthermore, out of the 45 members who served on the regional board between 1963 and 1968, 82 percent continued their Jewish educa-

tion at yeshivot or other Torah institutions. So many students, in fact, went on to attend Stern (as did Abrams) or Yeshiva University (as did her husband) that often, after winter break, as the Amtrak to New York City would snake across the region, stopping at Buffalo, Syracuse and then Albany, more and more NCSY alumni would board. A veritable NCSY reunion would take place on the train.

What made Har Sinai so wildly successful? Simply put, it was the Ginsburg philosophy of self-leadership. One of the fundamental tenets of NCSY is to empower youth and give them meaningful roles, and the Har Sinai Region excelled at this under Rabbi Ginsburg’s leadership. “The kids literally ran the region,” recalled a former NCSY professional. “They felt a real sense of ownership.” Since the chapter advisors in those days were mostly parents whose primary role was to chauffeur their charges to and from events, the kids would decide by themselves what to do. “It was kid-driven and kid-organized,” recalls Flo Ziffer (née Simon), a former member of the Utica Chapter (who is married to Larry Ziffer and yes, they met in NCSY). Having real authority and responsibility gave kids like Abrams the skills to become future leaders.

Har Sinai’s success triggered a range of responses among many of the parents. “Some parents were terribly intimidated by the notion of their kids becoming Orthodox, even though they were affiliated with the Orthodox *shul*,” recalls Larry Ziffer. When a parent would express alarm that his child was becoming “too *frum*,” a mischievous smile spread across Rabbi Ginsburg’s face as he would quote the well-known Yiddish expression: “*A chisaron az di kallah iz tzu sheym?* Is it a

problem that the bride is too pretty?”

In 1967, Abrams became regional president, taking over the position from her future husband, Lewis. As president, Abrams organized events and *Shabbatonim*, all the while honing her innate organizational and administrative skills that are fundamental to the work she does today. “Jeanne was the quiet, solid type,” recalls Larry Ziffer. “She engendered enormous respect. She brought almost a regal kind of demeanor to the presidency; she was not a cheerleader type but elegant and intellectual always.”

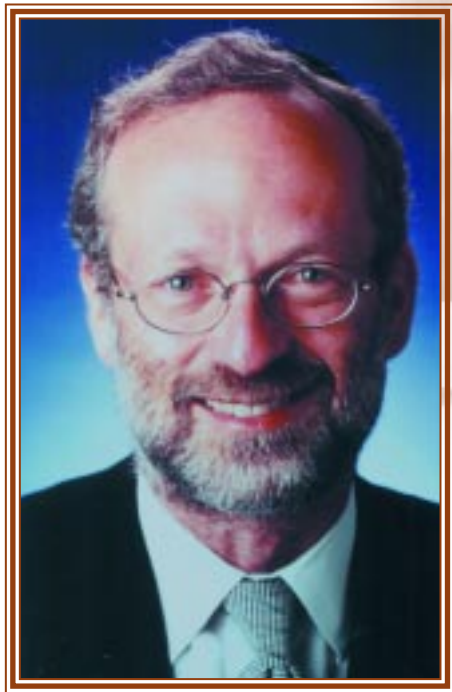
Dignified, brainy, with her head always in a book, Abrams didn’t surprise too many of her old friends when she went on to get a Ph.D. in American History. Nor did it surprise them when she became an associate professor at the University of Denver or took on the prestigious positions of director of the Ira M. Beck Memorial Archive and the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society at the University of Denver, dedicating herself to preserving the history of Jewish life in Denver. They know of her competence, her intellect, her impatience with mediocrity, and above all, her passion for Jewish life. So Abrams’ decision to devote her life to serving the Jewish community was almost inevitable. True, as one of Abrams’ colleagues noted, most Jewish cities the size of Denver don’t have a historical society—nor do they have such an extensive archive with more than 5,000 photos—but since her NCSY days Abrams has never been content just to have fun. She wanted to accomplish.

These days, the Abrams live in Denver, where they are widely respected in the community. Lewis is a highly regarded educator (in 29 years, he has never taught the same lesson twice) who teaches at Denver’s Hillel Academy. And aside from her professional accomplishments, Jeanne supports the local mikvah and sits on numerous boards. Together, they have raised four children, all of whom have beautiful families of their own that are steeped in Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. Of course, all of this is due, in no small part, to a determined 12-year-old girl from Utica who began keeping Shabbat. **JA**

Marc Belzberg

VANCOUVER CHAPTER, WEST COAST REGION
1970-1972

By Toby Klein Greenwald



He definitely gets around a lot.

You can find investor/entrepreneur Marc Belzberg, in his large *kippah* and sandy-colored beard, hosting 300 people at a Haifa hotel. They are all men, women and children whose families have been struck by terror, and Belzberg and his Belgian-born wife, Chantal, are there as the founders of the One Family Fund, a fund that provides help to these suffering families.

On another day you'll find him

*Mrs. Greenwald is a journalist, photographer, educator and the editor-in-chief of **WholeFamily.com**, an award-winning web site that provides information on improving family relationships. She and her husband live in Efrat with their six children.*

working behind the scenes with major Israeli politicians or with the movers and shakers behind them. Or you'll find him with a couple of brilliant young post-army guys, as he advises an Israeli start-up.

None of this has caused Belzberg to forget his family priorities. This interview was squeezed in between eating Friday morning breakfast with his wife and picking up one of his six kids from a Jerusalem pre-school. Could any of this have been predicted by those who tried to tame a wild Canadian teenager 30 years ago?

Born in 1954 in Edmonton, Alberta, home at that time to a Jewish community of only 5,000, Belzberg was one of four children whose strongly Zionist, well-to-do parents belonged to the Conservative and Orthodox synagogues. They actually attended synagogue only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but, he says, "They worked on behalf of the UJA, the Federation and Israel. My grandparents came over from Poland in the early 1900s. My grandmother kept kosher but my grandfather went to work on Shabbat. My parents were raised with very little Jewish education."

Belzberg attended a secular Jewish day school—"very Israeli and non-religious"—through the sixth grade and then moved to another non-Orthodox afternoon school for two evenings a week "until I got kicked out for fooling around," he says. "I even got the strap a couple of times."

His first move into Jewish "activism"—in a manner of speaking—came when the Belzbergs moved to Vancouver as Marc was about to enter high school. He spent grade 9 as the

social director of USY, organizing parties. For grade 10, he says, "My parents decided to send me to Rocky Mountain Boarding School, a rough and tough school for boys in Alberta," thinking perhaps that would straighten him out. But he had other plans.

Belzberg had heard about a youth village in Israel called Hadassim. It was far away from the scrutiny of his parents or *Survivor*-mentality educators. Together with some friends from Edmonton and Calgary, he joined a group of 25 kids across Canada who were going there for their sophomore year.

The other students in Hadassim were a far cry from the Canadian bunch. "They were mostly Russians or kids from broken homes," he recalls. "That was a crazy year. The principal was an older man, German and not religious. They taught us nothing about Shabbat. We used to hitchhike to the beach in Netanya on Shabbat. We were a wild bunch. One girl got pregnant. One guy tried to commit suicide. The principal sent all of us to group therapy once a week.

"By the end of the year they were happy to see us go home. They thought we [the Canadians] were ruining the Israelis." On Christmas Eve in Hadassim, the Canadian teenagers got homesick. "There were no songs, no snow, no Macy's windows. So we put a Christmas tree in my room and we went out on the lawn and sang Christmas carols."

While Belzberg and his friends

were wreaking havoc in Hadassim, a young rabbi had come to Vancouver. Rabbi Marvin Hier had brought Baltimore-born Rabbi Pinchas (“Pinky”) Bak out West to be the principal of the day school. He succeeded in changing the nature of the school and its curriculum; perhaps even more important, he started a local NCSY chapter.

While Belzberg’s friends went straight home after their year in Israel, he spent a month in Europe with his parents. “I came back to Vancouver in August. On Saturday, I called my old friends who had led a crazy life with me in Israel that year but their mothers—one after the other—answered the phone and said my friends wouldn’t talk on the phone on ‘Shabbat.’ I didn’t know what was happening. I had never even heard of such a thing!

“Then they told me about Pinky Bak. I resisted for a couple of weeks. They said he was running a *minyan* every morning for high school kids next to the public school. Finally I decided to go along. One of my friends had to come over the night before to teach me how to put on the *tefillin* I received for my Bar Mitzvah but had never worn.

“The *minyan* was fantastic. It was lively, there was singing....I went back on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and on Shabbat told my mother that I wanted to go to the Orthodox *shul*. She drove me there. When the services were over and I was about to

leave, one of my friends came to get me and said, ‘Come to Pinky Bak’s house for Shabbat lunch.’ But I wasn’t ready for that yet and started home.

“I was two long blocks away already when Pinky came running up to me, panting. ‘Come for lunch,’ he said, and he was a guy you couldn’t say ‘No’ to. I ended up staying there the whole day—lunch, back to *shul* for *Minchah*, back to his place for *Seudah Shelishit*, back to *shul* for *Ma’ariv*, back to Pinky’s for *Havdalah*.

“I came home that night and announced to my parents, ‘I’m becoming religious.’”

Belzberg became active in NCSY. “I became the ‘social director’ again, but unlike USY, this time it meant social action, and the parties we planned looked different than they did before.” He eventually became chapter president and social action director of the entire region. At the end of the 12th grade he was named NCSY “Kid of the Year”; under his term as president, their chapter was “Chapter of the Year.”

More and more teens in Vancouver were becoming religious. Belzberg relates, “Previously, the only religious guy had been the son of the *chazzan* of the Conservative synagogue. He kept kosher and he was chapter president of USY. Once we got into religion, however, he became the class ‘goy.’ Today he is my attorney and lives in Israel.”

How did Belzberg’s parents react to his becoming religious? “They went nuts. They said, ‘It’s a phase. It will pass.’”

“The first thing my father said was, ‘Okay, then you can give me the keys to the car. You won’t need it. People back in those days only used

camels.’ They also said no to the idea of my keeping kosher, insisting, ‘When in our house, you’ll do as we do.’”

So he found himself, in a bizarre reversal of the norm, eating kosher outside and *treif* at home.

“Then my father saw me eating a cheeseburger at home one day and told me, ‘You’re a hypocrite. Not keeping kosher at home doesn’t mean you have to eat cheeseburgers.’” Belzberg still had a way to go.

At the end of 11th grade he went to Israel with 50 other Vancouver kids on a Yeshiva University (YU)-organized trip with Rabbi Hier. “On my last day in Israel, I bought one *milchig* bowl, one *fleyshik* bowl, and a fork for each, and came home with the intention of really keeping kosher.” He got through 12th grade on cereal.

Then two of his sisters became religious. (His sister, Lisa, is today married to Matthew Bronfman, the son of Edgar Bronfman.) It was now three kids against the two parents, and the parents finally capitulated. “We had our own food at the table and our dishes in a section of the kitchen.”

Belzberg recalls one of his fondest memories of NCSY. “We heard that the Russian Premier Kosygin was coming to town. One of the kids who worked in a car wash borrowed 100 chains and gave them out to us. We wore them like belts and went down to the beautiful hotel in Vancouver where a state dinner was being held for Kosygin on a Saturday night. We dispersed ourselves throughout the lobby and by the storefronts and nobody noticed anything unusual.

“A few of us passed out menus to the dinner guests, itemizing the dinner of a Russian Jewish prisoner. All the ‘tuxes’ who were walking back and forth saw it and you can imagine it was quite different than the eight-course meal they were being served. Then, at exactly 9 PM, one kid blew a shofar and

**“I came home that night
and announced to my parents,
‘I’m becoming religious.’”**

we all formed a large circle in the middle of the lobby and raised the chains above our heads. Pinky made *Havdalah* and we sang *Am Yisrael Chai* and chanted, 'Let my people go!' It was great!!"

Rabbi Hier and the mothers of the newly religious teenagers were interviewed on a radio show about the turn to religion. But there were still problems in town. By the time Belzberg reached 12th grade, lots of teens—including religious teens—were into drugs. Belzberg describes the battle plan that had been cooked up by Rabbis Bak and Hier.

"They called an emergency meeting of all the kids in *shul* and once everyone was there, they played a taped phone call from Rabbi Jakobovits, the chief rabbi of England, and they read anti-drug responsa written by Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Then they asked all the kids to sign a document stating that they would stop taking drugs. The document was to be publicized as a full-page ad in the local Jewish paper."

Not everyone signed, and their reasons illustrated the directness of the teen mentality. "One of them was the sweetest girl who didn't touch drugs—she just didn't believe people should do things because of peer pressure," says Belzberg. "The other was a guy with long hair and thick glasses who was into hard drugs. He claimed that not everyone who was signing really meant it and he refused to be a hypocrite. Today he's a prominent physician."

Belzberg and seven of his friends were accepted to YU, their school of choice, under Rabbi Bak's influence. Belzberg began to serve as an NCSY advisor, speaking before groups and spending almost every Shabbat in a different city during his years in college. Later, when Belzberg went into business, he became the lay president of NCSY.

During Belzberg's second year in YU, there were seven Vancouver boys learning in Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's James Striar School of Jewish Studies class, which was geared for promising students with minimal Torah backgrounds. Rabbi Riskin asked how there happened to be so many students from Vancouver. They told him about Rabbi Bak. "Rabbi Riskin flew out to Vancouver and convinced Pinky to come back to become the principal of the first Ohr Torah high school in New York. I worked as a dorm counselor in the same school."

The next part of his story doesn't end happily. "Pinky took the 12th grade students to Israel. He had each of them placed at an appropriate school and went to visit each one of them. On his return home, he told me how he had looked out over Jerusalem from his room in the Plaza Hotel. 'I've fallen in love with Israel all over again,' he said. 'I've worked in *chinuch* all my life. Now I want to return to live in Israel.'

"He came home the day before Purim. We planned on taking the high school kids to dance and sing in the neighborhood. But Pinky wanted to visit his parents the very day he returned and asked me to drive him to the train station. He came back the next day and joined us all at Lincoln Square Synagogue for the Megillah reading and Purim *seudah*.

"I was standing next to him when, in the middle of the festivities, he dropped dead of a brain aneurysm."

Hundreds of loving students and former NCSYers turned up for the funeral. At the time, Rabbi Bak's wife was pregnant with twins.

Years later, Belzberg's parents have a different take on their son's turn to Orthodoxy. "Today they're thrilled. They see the lives my sisters and I lead as a result. They also see friends we had while growing up who today lead differ-

ent kinds of lives and they see there is no comparison.

"Had I not discovered NCSY and Pinky Bak, I might be dead—from OD-ing, drunk driving, AIDS, who knows? Instead, my life has meaning. Every day is significant; being Jewish is significant. I wake up in the morning and ask, 'What do the Jewish people need? What should I do for the Jewish people today?'"

"Among the major moments in my life were my involvement with social action and *kiruv*. I worked for Soviet Jewry and was active in demonstrating and teaching Judaism.

"We should constantly be asking ourselves, 'What can I contribute to this world that I am passing through?'"

Belzberg, who lives in Jerusalem, is President of E-Sim Software. He is also involved in the Israeli political scene and in outreach. An executive of one of the hi-tech companies in which Belzberg invested says, "Marc's attitude is supportive and caring when he asks what he can do to help." Belzberg is actively involved with NCSY in Israel and sits on its board, thus having an influence on young people in Israel today.

Upon reaching Bat Mitzvah age, the Belzbergs' daughter, Michal, agreed with her parents that instead of a large party, the money should be used to found a fund that would help families who had been struck by terror. The Belzbergs added to that amount and gave \$100,000 to begin the project. That is how the One Family Fund was born. [See sidebar.]

The NCSY boy from Vancouver has, indeed, passed on his sense of *tzedakah* and involvement in Israel and *Am Yisrael* to the next generation of Jewish teen activists, both within his family and beyond it.

And these kids aren't singing Christmas carols. **JA**

Two Days of Miracles for Terror Victims

By Toby Klein Greenwald

A curly-haired toddler, barely more than a year and a half old, pushes a *sufganiyah* (jelly donut) into her tiny mouth. Her father takes her by the hand and coaxes her over for a photograph. She doesn't understand the eagerness of the hotel staff, the emotional welcome by the organizers or the tears in the reporter's eyes. And she may no longer remember her mother, Nirit Sakuri, who was murdered in a terrorist attack some months ago, while driving her car home to Kedumim in the Shomron. All Tehila knows is that she's with her father, Yossi, and her two siblings—five and three years old—in a warm beautiful place and people are pampering her.

Across the lobby, Michal Rosenberg Ziat of Givat Shmuel is relaxing with her husband and five children after a day of touring. Her son, 14-year-old Eliran, was killed last March when a suicide bomber blew himself up at a bus stop. Michal was notified of her son's death five hours after the attack, "But I knew," she says, "when I called all of his friends who were waiting with him to find out if they knew anything and none of them called back."

Yossi and Michal have joined 300 other fathers, mothers and children for a two-day event planned and paid for by the One Family Fund, founded by the Belzbergs for the victims of terror. Held this past Chanukah at the luxurious Dan Carmel hotel in Haifa, the event drew 170 children; Chantal Belzberg handpicked

individual gifts, based on age and gender, for every one of them. When she told the management at Toys "R" Us what the gifts were for, they sold them to the One Family Fund at cost. The gifts are only one small part of the perks and necessities that the fund provides to help the victims of terror.

Later that night, Tehila receives a large box containing a baby doll with pink clothing and creamy skin. After dinner she sits on the carpet of the hotel dining room, shoves the bottle into the baby's mouth and is content.

Other projects of the One Family Fund include providing funds in hospitals for the immediate needs of wounded victims of terror and

their families; buying computers for the wounded; aiding in the cost of memorial projects and tuition; providing urgent needs for the home; arranging volunteer activities in hospitals; helping with housing and more.

The Belzbergs began the One Family Fund last August, after a suicide bombing in Jerusalem's Sbarro pizzeria killed 15 people and wounded many others. Their daughter, Michal, was scheduled to have a Bat Mitzvah one week later. Michal's parents told her that it wasn't appropriate to have the kind of party they had planned in light of the number of people in mourning and the many who were wounded over the last year, and suggested they put the money to better use. She agreed and the extended Belzberg family donated \$100,000 to start the fund. Since then they joined forces with the Israel Emergency Solidarity Fund of New York and together have raised more than a million dollars that will be used to help ease both the pain and the financial difficulties of victims of terror.

One Family Fund can not bring back Yossi's wife or Michal's son, but it can let them know that they are not alone.



Photos: Toby Klein Greenwald



Top: Chantal Belzberg giving Chanukah gift to victim of terror. Bottom: Michal Rosenberg Ziat and family. Her 14-year-old son, Eliran, was killed by a suicide bomber.

Nina S. Butler

SOUTHFIELD (KOCHAV AND LAPEED) CHAPTERS, CENTRAL EAST REGION

1970-1974

By *Reuvain Dor*



In the early seventies, Southfield Michigan's now defunct B'nai David Congregation was an active congregation poised precariously between Orthodoxy and the "Traditional Conservadoxy" that would spell its eventual oblivion.

The synagogue itself was built with a *mechitzah* in its main sanctuary, but the practice of the congregation was not to use it. In those days the *shul* supported two NCSY chapters on the high school level, divided by age. In 1973, more than 100 NCSYers—primarily public school kids—considered B'nai David *their* congregation. Most of the local day school kids joined the NCSY chapter across town at the Young Israel of Oakwoods.

There were three Novetsky siblings who were part of B'nai David's NCSY. The oldest, Jay, now an ophthalmologist in Detroit, was a regional vice president. The youngest, Terry, now an attorney in New York, was national president of NCSY. And there was Nina....

Reuvain Dor is a writer living in Pittsburgh.

In February 1973, NCSY held a major *Shabbaton* at B'nai David, with over 300 teenage participants. The Central East NCSY regional director serving at that time remembers it well:

"The *mechitzah* that was part of B'nai David's structure had only been used once since the building was dedicated in 1964—the week of the rabbi's son's Bar Mitzvah. When the *shul's* administration agreed to host an NCSY *Shabbaton*, part of the deal was that the congregation would enforce the use of the *mechitzah* for that Shabbat. B'nai David also allowed NCSY—as was the practice—to bring the food for the *Shabbaton* from the region's caterer in Cleveland, despite the *shul's* exclusive contract with its caterer."

In 1970, a group of Soviet Jewish refuseniks had been arrested for allegedly conspiring to hijack a plane to Israel. Central East NCSY's regional board chose one of them, Sylva Zalmanson, as the subject of a prisoner of conscience bracelet campaign modeled after the Vietnam War POW bracelets then in vogue, and ordered thousands of bracelets that were to be distributed to NCSYers at the B'nai David *Shabbaton*. There the cause of Russian Jewry would be explored, accompanied by exhortations to sell bracelets for the NCSY Torah Fund *tzedakah*. The person chosen to spearhead the effort was Nina Novetsky. She had the enthusiasm. She had the organizational ability. She had the social standing. She could make it happen. By Saturday night, when the chapters had placed their orders and the bracelets were being counted out, it looked like a success. But, on Sunday morning, a horrible thing happened. A rumor began to spread...Sylva

Zalmanson had been freed! The region had just invested thousands of dollars in a project intended to show solidarity with a prisoner of conscience who was no longer a prisoner! According to the regional director at the time, "Nobody was more outraged than Nina. 'It's not fair!' she said. 'We should write letters! We should protest!'" Before it dawned on the regional director that she wasn't serious, he looked at this girl and thought, "My goodness, she is really dangerous...."

Almost five years later that "dangerous" NCSYer and her regional director, Danny Butler (now Judge Butler), were married.

After the *Shabbaton*, the two NCSY chapters at B'nai David—including the Novetsky kids—began to conduct Shabbat services in the *shul's* youth lounge with a *mechitzah*. The synagogue administration finally decided that things had gotten out of hand, and one Shabbat the president of the *shul* broke up the teen *minyan* by dragging the *mechitzah* out into the parking lot.

The NCSYers responded by holding services *in* the parking lot, which lasted only until the weather changed. In what is still a heavily Jewish neighborhood, that beautiful synagogue building is now an art center. But many mark the day that the *mechitzah* was dragged out of the teen *minyan* as the beginning of the end.

Neither the Sylva Zalmanson episode nor the *mechitzah* controversy did anything to diminish Nina's involvement or enthusiasm. In fact she attended so many *Shabbatonim* and programs in her senior year in Southfield High School that she was in danger of not graduating because she

had not met the Friday afternoon gym requirement. In order for her to be exempt from gym, her regional director had to write a letter attesting to her involvement in NCSY's programs throughout the region, which conflicted with school on so many early winter Fridays.

Despite her NCSY advisors' best efforts, Nina chose not to attend Stern College—in those pre-“Year in Israel” days—but opted instead for the University of Michigan. It only took a couple of months for her to realize that NCSY had affected her too deeply for her to be comfortable at U of M. So, she transferred to Stern College. With a couple of years at Stern under her belt, she began to attend NCSY *Shabbatonim* as an advisor. There she encountered her former regional director, still working for NCSY while attending law school. Five weeks later, Nina Novetsky and Danny Butler were engaged.

Now, after 24 years of marriage, Nina Butler's array of academic, communal and educational accomplishments is stunning. Armed with a Master's in the Art of Teaching, she began her teaching career at Pittsburgh's two day schools, then did a four-year stint as the first Judaic program director at the local JCC.

As a kindergarten teacher—back at Pittsburgh's Hillel Academy—Butler first heard of the very competitive Wexner Graduate Fellowship Program over Shabbat lunch. Within days, just beating the deadline, she had applied for the fellowship, taken the GRE and been accepted to graduate school. After an intensive screening and interview process, Butler was among only 17 worldwide awarded a Wexner Graduate Fellowship. That made it possible for her to return to school and earn an M.A. in Special Education and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and Policy Studies, along with all the licenses and certifications which quali-

...one Shabbat, the president of the shul broke up the teen minyan by dragging the mechitzah out into the parking lot.

fied her to return to Hillel Academy as its principal.

But it is not her charmed career path which has made Butler the object of respect and admiration in her community and beyond. What has marked her as unique has been her unfailingly positive approach to dealing with the adversity that she and her family have encountered. Although the Butlers' oldest son, Mikey, has cystic fibrosis, necessitating endlessly recurring hospitalizations, and two of their sons have fragile X, which ordinarily presents itself as autism, Butler is quick to reject any inclination towards pity by others or herself. “We have been incredibly fortunate,” she says, “as beneficiaries of a world of *chesed* and opportunities provided by a range of organizations. Had we never needed them, it's quite possible that we might never have been aware of the wide array of institutions and organizations that help people in need.” She readily singles out several organizations that have had a profound effect on her family:

• **Camp HASC (Hebrew Academy for Special Children)**, where Butler has

served as the educational coordinator. According to Butler, the camp turned her son, Uri, into the world's happiest, most contented person, with an effectiveness that lasts year-round. She points out that despite what HASC does for its special needs campers and their families, its most important accomplishment over the years may be sensitizing the thousands of HASC counselors to the plight of those less fortunate.

• **Pittsburgh's Jewish Federation**, which is continually refining its approach to the special needs population, and has made a range of services available, from special Jewish educational options to synagogue accessibility.

• **Yeshiva University (YU)**, which made it possible for the Butlers' son, Mikey, to graduate college, although it was necessary for him to commute from YU to the hospital in Pittsburgh on a regular basis. YU assured Mikey from the beginning that appropriate accommodations could be made, and they were. This past December, Rabbi Norman Lamm himself flew to Pittsburgh to award Mikey his diploma in a surprise ceremony.

• **Yachad**, an OU project whose summer program at Camp Morasha not only transformed the summer for the Butlers' youngest son, JJ, and several dozen of his friends, but injected an element of *chesed* into Morasha's programming that affected the summer of the 1,000 typical kids at camp as well.

• **And NCSY.** Each child in the Butler family has been affected by some facet of NCSY. At one time, NCSY was purely an outreach organization, but now its constellation of services benefits Jewish kids from all backgrounds. So her son, Gavri, attended **NCSY Summer Kollel**—for three years running—which supplemented his Torah skills and enabled him to make the grade at Yeshivat Har Etzion, Israel's “*hesder* Harvard.”

Her daughter, Shoshi, benefited similarly from the **NCSY Summer Experience for Girls' (SEG)** summertime educational program in

NY's Catskill Mountains as well as **Michlelet** NCSY in Israel. "Shoshi's Jewish high school class had only six girls. NCSY has expanded her peer group to hundreds."

Despite his health problems, Mikey has served as an advisor and drummer in several NCSY regions. When he is in the hospital, the NCSYers use his hospital room as a Shabbat meeting place.

Central East NCSY, which integrates Yachad into every Shabbaton, has comfortably assimilated Butler's other two sons. Butler points out that the NCSY/Yachad partnership remains the only circumstance in all of American society where the elite, the cream of the crop among teenagers, regularly interact—as peers—with teenagers who are physically and mentally challenged.

Notwithstanding the pressures of her private and professional life, Butler attributes her personal equilibrium to Shabbat, the touchstone of Jewish existence, which is also the basic element of NCSY's programming. The Butler family Shabbat is social and family and entertainment and *chesed* all rolled into one. They begin preparations on Wednesday, and are not done cleaning up until Monday. It is the focus of their lives, and it provides a level of interaction with their children and their friends that they believe is the key to their family's stability and overall happiness.

"I still remember the NCSY National Convention at the Pioneer Country Club back in the early '70s where the Friday night meal would start with Rabbi [Pinchas] Stolper gathering his children around him and giving them each a *berachah* in turn. That remarkable image, which I saw for the first time in NCSY, gave me a thrill which I gratefully relive every Shabbat at our own table."

The Butlers' enthusiasm for NCSY expresses itself each summer at their annual Garden Sizzler, a fundraiser for NCSY that raises thousands of dollars. Judge Butler describes the event, going on its 11th year, as, "Pittsburgh's hottest summer-

time kosher ticket." It's an all-you-can-eat barbeque that sells out almost immediately after its date is announced.

And their enthusiasm for NCSY has not been diminished by the passage of time or the fact that two of their children have run unsuccessfully for national president. Butler adds, "Just as we did for his predecessor some 15 years ago, we gave Rabbi Tzali Freedman a key to our house when he took on the position of regional director. We are endlessly grateful to NCSY, which is bigger than any single individual, for all that it has done for us, our children and the communities around us. I still consider myself an NCSYer."

Thus motivated, Butler has been the recipient of a great many commendations and awards for her personal and professional achievements. The United Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh

has chosen her for their Community Relations Award and their Special Needs Service Award, while Stern College has honored her with the Belkin Memorial Award for Jewish Education. Butler's involvements also extend to the local *chevrah kadisha* and the hospitality services of Friends of Jewish Patients, a Pittsburgh organization assisting patients awaiting transplants, and their families. She serves on the boards of the Jewish Family and Children's Services and the Jewish Federation, and is on the editorial board of a national magazine for Jewish kids, spearheaded by the Avi Chai Foundation published in partnership with Jewish Family & Life, called *Babaganewz*.

As a principal, educator and mother, Butler is mindful of her responsibility to her students and to her own children. "These kids are so far ahead of where I was at their age. My most important goal is to enable them to appreciate the opportunities they have and to take full enthusiastic advantage of them." **JA**

Dennis M. Eisenberg

**DETROIT (YOUNG ISRAEL TEENS) CHAPTER,
CENTRAL EAST REGION
1968-1971**

By Diane Chabbott



The Yeshivah of Flatbush in Brooklyn, New York, stands today as a proud and influential force in the Modern Orthodox day school movement in America. The school has a student body exceeding 2,100 (nursery through 12th grade) and an annual budget of \$22 million. Each year, it allocates \$3.8 million in tuition assistance. Such an immense operation clearly requires substantial and talented leadership to operate effectively. Some 18 years ago, the

Eisenberg lived in a home where community service was an obligation and never just an option.

Yeshivah captured one of the Midwest's rising stars, Dennis Eisenberg, to serve as its executive director. Under his guidance, the Yeshivah has flourished.

One wonders from where did Eisenberg get the acumen, the drive, the leadership abilities and the extraordinary dedication to Jewish life? Simply put, Eisenberg lived in a home where community service was an obligation and never just an option. His father, Meyer, ז"ל, was a founding member of the Young Israel synagogue in Detroit as well as a supporter of numerous institutions and organizations, including the Jewish National Fund, Israel Bonds and Shaare Zedek Hospital. A contractor by profession, he often donated his services for free to assist local organizations. Acting on his instincts for charity, for service and for community, Meyer Eisenberg paved a path which his son wisely traveled.

In 1968, when Eisenberg was 15 years old, his parents and synagogue rabbi encouraged him to attend a Yeshiva University winter seminar in Brantford, Ontario. At the seminar, Eisenberg met NCSY kids and was impressed with the youth group. He subsequently returned to Detroit with a mission: to bring NCSY to the Young Israel of Oakwoods, the *shul* that his

family attended. "I was 15 years old, telling the Young Israel rabbi and *shul* board members that the youth programs they had were not good enough," recalls Eisenberg. Ultimately, the NCSY chapter known as the Young Israel Teens—which is one of NCSY's most dynamic chapters today—was born.

"Dennis was always a community person," stated Terry, his wife, herself a former NCSY junior leader and president in Detroit. The Detroit community was certainly in need of an effective youth group. The day school movement was quite new at that time, and many *frum* kids such as Eisenberg attended public schools and were looking for more. "NCSY gave us Talmud Torah kids a strong Jewish identity and a sense of belonging," recalls Eisenberg. Terry tells of a night when a group of NCSY kids went to the roller skating rink. "The owner insisted the boys take off their yarmulkes to skate. It was a rough night...but the yarmulkes stayed on and we skated." Incidents such as these made the teens' Jewish identification even stronger.

NCSY also did a tremendous amount for the synagogue itself, and awakened many *shul* members to the jewels in their own congregations: the youth. Ultimately, adults began to enjoy the NCSY programs. "In the beginning the adults would just watch us teens, but by *Seudah Shelishit* they'd be in the circle singing along," recalls Eisenberg.

Along with his NCSY friends, Eisenberg attended *Shabbatonim* in Cincinnati, Dayton, Louisville and Keyport. "It was a novelty to see teens from other places with whom I could identify," remembers Eisenberg. He and his friends would play guitar and sing along at every *kumsitz*. "The emotionalism got to me—the *davening*, the discussions, the singing. Regional *Shabbatonim* were experiences that reached deep inside," says Eisenberg.

Eisenberg rose through the NCSY ranks to become a chapter president and eventually a regional and national officer. The Central East regional director at the time, Ivan Lerner, guided and mentored Eisenberg through the years. "Ivan was non-stop

and mesmerizing," remembers Eisenberg.

After graduation from high school, Eisenberg remained singularly devoted to the Young Israel Movement and NCSY. Appointed youth director of a few of the Young Israel *shuls* in the community, he guided and improved the youth programs emphasizing Jewish identity, continuity, outreach and community. In 1977, Eisenberg married Terry (née Leiderman), and together they created a Jewish home steeped in devotion to Torah and communal service.

At first, Eisenberg entered the family contracting business. But it didn't take him too long to realize that his true calling was in *chinuch* and *kiruv*. In 1979, Eisenberg accepted the post of executive director of Akiva Hebrew Day School, the Modern Orthodox day school in Detroit, where he stabilized the school's fiscal program and relocated it to its own facility.

Clearly Eisenberg's NCSY background made him uniquely qualified to serve as a Jewish communal professional. Although he had many opportunities to go into business, he stayed focused on what he felt was his purpose in life—"working for Jewish continuity with a special emphasis on Jewish education."

During a transitional period at the

**"I was 15 years old,
telling the Young
Israel rabbi
and shul board
members that the
youth programs
they had were not
good enough."**

Diane Chabbott is assistant editor of Jewish Action. She thanks OU Vice President Gary Torgow for his help with this article.

Yeshivah of Flatbush, Eisenberg was recruited to assume the executive directorship of the institution. The first few years were difficult for him—transplanted to a new community and in charge of a school with an exalted reputation. But Eisenberg did an outstanding job, as Matthew J. Maryles, honorary president and current member of the Yeshivah's board of trustees said, "When Dennis came to New York, he brought with him the out-of-towner's touch of hospitality, combined with great savvy. He understood what the Yeshivah was historically, and that it couldn't rest on its laurels. He designed and built for the future, recognizing the need for changes in areas running the gamut—financial, educational and organizational. His vision of the place was both professional and passionate and somehow he succeeded without offending anyone." The skills Eisenberg honed while working with various NCSY communities enabled him to unite the greater Yeshivah family as well—students, parents, educators, alumni and the general public. "He

doesn't only juggle distinct communities, he appreciates them for their distinctness," says one of his colleagues.

Although Eisenberg is a consummate financial manager and a talented executive, his aspirations remain what they always were—to inspire Jewish youth with the vibrancy of Torah. Thus, Eisenberg is a regular at the Yeshivah seminars—*Shabbatonim* where students, faculty and older student advisors get to know each other as "people" while enjoying the learning and incredible *ruach*. "It's in his blood," says Rabbi Naftali Besser, dean of students at the Yeshivah's high school. "He can't stay away."

For the last 18 years, Eisenberg has masterfully guided the Yeshivah through two major capital campaigns, a reorganization of the school's fiscal structure and the development of a

strong and vibrant partnership between the lay and professional leadership.

In September of 2000, the Yeshivah took the unusual step of naming an employee an officer of the school (a lay leadership position). In recognition of his extraordinary accomplishments, Eisenberg was named executive vice president of the Yeshivah with the responsibility for creating a long-term strategic vision for the school.

Eisenberg and his wife, a first grade teacher at the Yeshivah, have instilled their values in their children, Renana, Aviva, Mayer and Daniel.

The Eisenbergs have continued to stay involved with NCSY, serving in numerous capacities on the national NCSY Youth Commission, and the board of the Orthodox Union. Additionally, Eisenberg is a national vice chair of the NCSY Ben Zakkai Honor Society.

Dennis Eisenberg is truly one of NCSY's many success stories. He continues to be a wonderful and worthy example of what NCSY has accomplished and continues to accomplish in our generation. **JA**

Marla Frohlinger

SKOKIE CHAPTER, GREATER MIDWEST REGION
1969-1973

By Erica M. Rauzin



NCSY made a big impact on Marla Frohlinger (née Corush), and it continues to affect her children and her students, from one generation to the next. In high school, NCSY shaped her Jewish awareness and taught her leadership skills. It led her to Yeshiva University's Stern College, introduced her to her future husband and helped her select education as a career. As she traces her personal history, Frohlinger finds NCSY at every turn in the road. "I came from a traditional background," she says. "I went to my first NCSY

meeting when I was 14. I enjoyed the program and decided to continue. Over the years, I became more involved. First I was chapter vice president, then I was

Ms. Rauzin's self-syndicated Jewish family humor column runs in Jewish community newspapers across the US, and appears weekly in The Miami Herald's Jewish Star Times section and in Denver's Intermountain Jewish News. A former newspaper reporter and magazine editor, she is also a freelance book and web editor (rauзин@aol.com).

a regional officer and then I became the first national vice president of education.

“NCSY helped me realize the importance of Judaism and the importance of education. I did not have a strong Jewish educational background, and every time I went to an NCSY event I learned something new. NCSY gave me a sense of perspective...taught me what was important.

“At 16, I decided to go with my region [Greater Midwest] to the national convention in New York. I was very touched by the spirit at the convention and the camaraderie of all the participants. That gave me the inspiration to learn and...to maintain an Orthodox lifestyle. It helped me make a decision as to which college I should attend. Before NCSY, I never thought of going to a religious college,” Frohlinger recalls, “but, in 1973, I enrolled in Stern College because many of my advisors and role models were alumna.

“As an educator today, I think mentoring people is very important. In NCSY, I met people who had the values that I sought. They taught me some of the skills a good leader needs.”

Being deeply aware of how vulnerable young people are to peer influence, she also notes, “NCSY was a good pathway. When I was growing up I saw people around me doing things that did not appeal to me. NCSY was a wonderful way to channel my energies.

“Instead of participating in protests, which is what was going on in the 1970s, NCSY gave me the opportunity to do something more constructive,” Frohlinger says. “At that time, Russian Jewry was very much in the news. NCSY taught me how to deal with political issues and how to be an effective advocate.”

She found something else very important at NCSY: her husband, dentist Dr. Stan Frohlinger. “We met when I was still in high school because Stan, who was then national president, chaired a board meeting in Chicago.” After dating in New York during their

college years, the couple married in 1978. Today, they have four children: Aliza, 19, a Stern sophomore, who was NCSY Southern Region’s vice president; Daniella, 18, a student at Michlelet Esther in Jerusalem, who was the Miami Beach chapter president and Jordan, 17, a junior at Toras Chaim Academy of Miami Beach, who was the chapter’s vice president of communications. Raqi, 8, is too

As she traces her personal history, Frohlinger finds NCSY at every turn in the road.

young to join NCSY, but it doesn’t take a crystal ball to predict membership in her future.

The Frohlingers both credit NCSY for adding to their skills as parents. Stan explains, “The most important thing that I walked away with and use now in my adult life is a better ability to look at things from a child’s or teenager’s perspective.”

Marla adds, “I translate the experiences I had as a teenager into being a better listener as an adult. I want to listen to my children, and to my students. I feel I am a better college administrator for being able to understand their perspectives.”

As vice chancellor for student services and professional coordination


at Nova Southeastern University, Florida’s largest private university, Frohlinger calls upon her listening skills every day. As the administration’s student advocate and the one in charge of admissions and student services, Frohlinger develops educational affiliations with other institutions that contribute to student training.

“I meet with the leaders of student government twice a month,” she explains. “We discuss university issues and other topics that are on their minds. This keeps the lines of communication wide open. In NCSY, that’s what it’s all about. There were always discussions back and forth; there was always somebody to talk to.”

As her career unfolded, Frohlinger’s NCSY-inspired ability to listen to young people was a continuous theme. She began as an elementary school teacher at Ramaz in New York and then became assistant director of admissions at Stern College, where she worked with Dean Karen Bacon.

“I saw Dr. Bacon juggle being the dean, professor and mom. She became a mentor and role model to me,” Frohlinger remembers. When the family moved to Florida, Frohlinger became director of admissions at the Southeastern College of Osteopathic Medicine. As the institution added colleges of pharmacy, optometry, allied health, medical science and dental medicine, it became Southeastern University of the Health Sciences, and Frohlinger’s responsibilities grew.

Like her mentor, Dean Bacon, Frohlinger skillfully juggles motherhood and her professional life with a history of community volunteerism. She has been active with the *chevrah kadisha*, with synagogues in various neighborhoods where the family lived and with her children’s schools. “We wanted our children to see how important it is to be involved in the community,” she says, “so we became active, and they learned from that.”

And that is how leadership works, *l’dor v’dor*, from generation to generation, in the tradition of NCSY. 

Lisa Kermaier

INDIANAPOLIS CHAPTER, CENTRAL EAST REGION
1970-1976

By Sara Bedein

When Rabbi Ronald Gray, the dynamic young rabbi of Bnai Torah Congregation in Indianapolis, brought NCSY to town in 1970, many Jewish lives were affected—including Lisa (née Goldstein) Kermaier's.

"I was 11 years old when Rabbi Gray brought NCSY to our congregation," recalled Kermaier. "Though our shul was called Orthodox, fewer than 20 families from the *shul* were actually so. There were various degrees of *kashrut* observance among the families, but the vast majority were not *shomer Shabbat*."

Soon after Rabbi Gray started the local NCSY chapter, he helped establish Indianapolis' first Jewish day school. The day school also set up an afternoon learning program for teenagers, many of whom were active in NCSY and attended its activities, learning sessions and *Shabbatonim*. As a result of the Jewish framework, many of the Jewish kids in Indianapolis went on to become *shomer Shabbat*, and succeeded in influencing their families to become more religious as well.

"I come from a warm, loving close-knit family," said Kermaier. "With my becoming *shomer Shabbat*, the overall level of observance increased in our home. This continues to be the case to this day....Nowadays my father goes to a

Sara Bedein is a writer and translator whose articles have appeared in the Jewish Spectator, Intermountain Jewish News, The Canadian Jewish News as well as various other publications. She lives with her husband and six children in Efrat.

daily *minyan* and both my parents attend weekly *shiurim*."

"When Lisa first became *shomer Shabbat*," recalled Kermaier's mother, "she was hired as a babysitter for a couple going on a luxury cruise. Lisa, who was about 12 at the time, was so excited by this golden opportunity that she skipped around the house singing how 'all good things happen to Lisa Goldstein.' All of sudden, she realized that part of the cruise would be taking place on Shabbat. Without hesitation, she called to cancel her services."

Mona Blumberg, a childhood friend of Kermaier's, now living in Kiryat Arba, remembered: "A group of about 25 of us became *shomer Shabbat*

over a four year period. Shabbat mornings we would pick each other up on the way to *shul*. For some, like Lisa, it was a very long walk—four miles. The sweltering Indianapolis heat made walking long distances in high heel shoes and dress suits a difficult task. Since I lived only four blocks from the *shul*, on Fridays, the boys would leave their suits and ties and the girls would leave their Shabbat shoes at my house and change into them when they reached my house. From there we would continue together to *shul*. Since some of the families of the newly *shomer Shabbat* kids were giving them a hard time about *kashrut*, we would often hold communal lunches together with Rabbi Gray and his family at the *shul*."

Among those who were part of this close-knit group were Rabbi Tzvi Blaubstein, who is today the assistant dean at Nishmat—the Jerusalem Center for Advanced Jewish Study for Women, and Rabbi Yerachmiel Fried, currently a *rosh kollel* in Houston, Texas.

NCSY became an integral part of Kermaier's life. She became president of her chapter and went on to become president of the entire region. She struck up friendships with Jewish youth throughout the Midwest. "The kids from NCSY were like one extended family, and many of us maintain close contact with one another to this day," said Kermaier. "After college, many of us went on to yeshivot and seminaries and have become Jewish leaders in Israel and the Diaspora."

When Kermaier was 16, she attended a six-week NCSY summer

**"The kids from
NCSY were like one
extended family,
and many of us
maintain close
contact with
one another
to this day..."**

program in Israel along with two other members of the Indianapolis clan. The program had long-lasting effects: today, all three of them reside with their families in Israel.

“The summer I was in Israel, Rabbi Pinchas Stolper [the director of national NCSY at the time] and his family joined the summer program,” said Kermaier. “Their daughter, Michal, was the same age as me, and though we came from very different backgrounds—Michal was a Bais Yaakov girl while I went to public school—we became fast friends. Through this friendship, a new world opened up to me and I became a *bat bayit* in the Stolpers’ home. The Stolpers became family to me and participated at my wedding, *Sheva Berachot*, first son’s *brit* and even at one of my son’s Bar Mitzvahs.”

Kermaier studied at Michlala in Jerusalem for a year, after which she returned to Touro College to complete her degree in English Literature. She met her husband, Ben Zion, while she was in New York and the couple married in 1980. Following the birth of the Kermaiers’ first baby, the young family moved to Jerusalem, where Lisa taught at Michlelet Bruria, a school for women who are returning to Judaism, and Ben Zion learned at a *kollel* and did some freelance computer work.

Today, at the age of 43, Kermaier credits her involvement with NCSY for the direction her life has taken. Currently, she and her husband are the proud parents of ten children ranging in ages two months to 20 years. A highly successful educator and role model, she is the academic administrator at Darchei Binah, a seminary for women. She also teaches a three-part lecture series on marriage, where according to many of her students, “it’s the most popular class at the seminary.” Additionally, Kermaier is the wife of a *rosh kollel*: seven years ago, Rabbi Kermaier opened up Beit Midrash Neir Gedalya, a *kollel* for local men from Neve Yaakov who have limited backgrounds in learning Torah.

With both of the Kermaiers so heavily involved in education, they often welcome their students into their home,

where many of them find not only a good home-cooked meal but also a ready ear to listen. Indeed, the Kermaiers have become famous for their open home.

“Lisa’s house is always filled with guests, especially on Shabbat,” said one of Kermaier’s relatives. “It is not uncommon for her to host up to 20 guests, making each of them feel welcome.”

Some years ago, Leah Garfinkel, one of Kermaier’s students at Michlelet Bruria, mentioned that her mother and brother, both of whom were not religious, would be visiting Israel.

Despite the fact that the Kermaiers had only recently arrived in Israel themselves and were living at the Beit Canada Absorption Center, that didn’t stop them from inviting the Garfinkels to their

home for Shabbat. “The Shabbat I spent with the Kermaiers changed my life,” recalled Leah’s brother, Andy.

Andy, who was 16 years old and had never had a Bar Mitzvah celebration, really wanted to mark his passage into adulthood in the Jewish way. Eager to help Andy fulfill his wish, Ben Zion taught him how to recite the *berachot* for his *aliyah* as well as some basic *halachot*. The Kermaiers then rounded up as many relatives and friends as they could and held a Bar Mitzvah celebration for Andy at the Kotel. Today Andy sports a *kippah* and *tzitzit* and lives with his family in Beit Shemesh.

As the Kermaiers approach the 20th anniversary of their move to Israel, they have much to be proud of. They have built a beautiful home based on *ahavat Yisrael* and *chesed*. The ripple effect set into motion so many years ago in Indianapolis continues to spread. **JA**

Rabbi Zev Leff

MIAMI CHAPTER, SOUTHERN REGION
1961-1965

By Yaakov Kornreich



In today’s highly politicized world, Rabbi Zev Leff’s apolitical approach is rare. One of Israel’s most popular English-speaking Torah educators, Rabbi Leff enjoys a unique acceptance across a broad spectrum of audiences, from unaffiliated Israelis to Zionist *hesder yeshivah* students to graduates of the *Chareidi* Mirrer Yeshivah. “I believe that as long as one is involved in practicing genuine *Yiddishkeit*, the particular flavor doesn’t really matter,” says Rabbi Leff.

A much sought-after speaker, Rabbi Leff is often called to England, South Africa, the United States and

other countries to inspire people with his words of Torah. “His *talmidim* will tell you that he has the rare ability to bring across a subtle point of Torah learning with wit and humor as well as analytical brilliance,” remarked one of his longtime friends. Rabbi Leff attributes much of his success in “inreach” as well as outreach to the fundamental lessons he learned at NCSY. “NCSY gave me an opportunity to experience Jews all along the ladder of spiritual growth,” says Rabbi Leff. “It enabled me to work with people from different backgrounds, and prepared me for my role as a rabbi in an out-of-town community.”

Born in the Bronx, New York, into a traditional but not very observant family, Rabbi Leff became interested in *Yiddishkeit* while attending a local Hebrew school. His family then moved to the Greater Miami Area, and placed him in the Talmud Torah of a local Conservative temple, where the teachers and lay leaders quickly recognized the young boy’s enormous potential.

It was not unusual in those days for Conservative temples to be led by rabbis who had been ordained at Orthodox yeshivot and who remained personally Orthodox. This was the case in the temple that Rabbi Leff attended. As a child of 10, Rabbi Leff had already told the rabbi and some of the more prominent members of the temple that he wanted to be a rabbi when he grew up; impressed with the youth, they were determined to provide him with the best educational opportunities available.

With their help, and no little financial sacrifice by Rabbi Leff’s parents, Rabbi Leff entered the Hebrew

Mr. Kornreich, a member of the Ben Zakkai Honor Society of NCSY, was the editor of numerous NCSY publications in the early 1970s. He has served as the Orthodox Union’s director of publications and public relations, managing editor of Jewish Life and Jewish Action and editor of Young Israel’s Viewpoint. Currently a freelance Jewish journalist, he is a regular contributor to the American edition of Yated Ne’eman.

Academy of Greater Miami, led by Rabbi Alexander S. Gross, *zt”l*. While he should have been placed in the fifth grade, he was placed in a third grade class in order to help him catch up. In two years’ time, Rabbi Leff had not only caught up but was rapidly developing into one of the school’s best *talmidim*. During this time, Rabbi Leff also made the decision to become *shomer Shabbat*.

Eventually, Rabbi Leff went on to the Mesivta of Greater Miami where he

**In two years’ time,
Rabbi Leff
had not only
caught up
but was rapidly
developing into
one of the school’s
best talmidim.**

was regularly assigned to the most advanced *shiurim* in the yeshivah. A sparkplug of enthusiasm, he reveled in the give and take of Talmudic discussions. It was not uncommon for him to come up with *she’eilot* (questions) that his *rebbeim* couldn’t answer, as well as *teshuvot* (answers) to questions they had never even thought of. “Everyone likes to stump the *rebbe* with a really good question,” says one of his former classmates, “but Zev used to do that on a regular basis.”

At the same time, Rabbi Leff became active in NCSY. With the permission of the *rebbeim* at the Mesivta,

Rabbi Leff and his fellow students, including the renowned educator Rabbi Sholom Strajcher and Orthodox Union Vice President Dr. David Luchins, traveled to NCSY conventions throughout the South. With their strong Jewish backgrounds, the Mesivta boys became role models for Jewish youth in Savannah, Memphis and Atlanta.

After serving as president of the Miami NCSY chapter, Rabbi Leff left to study at the Telshe Yeshivah in Cleveland, Ohio, where he became a close *talmid* of Rav Mordechai Gifter, *zt”l*. Aware of Rabbi Leff’s background, Rav Gifter encouraged him to maintain contact with his NCSY friends. Often, when there was a yeshivah break, Rabbi Leff would visit with his Mesivta friends, many of whom were attending schools in New York City and would spend their free time at the NCSY national office. Therefore, Rabbi Leff did not think it strange when, during a visit to New York in Sukkot of 1968, his Mesivta pal, David Luchins, wanted to meet at the NCSY national office. Luchins intended to introduce Rabbi Leff to Rivkah Minkoff, an NCSY leader from Ellenville, New York, who was then working at the NCSY office. Things moved quickly. By Chanukah, Rabbi Chaim Wasserman, the assistant national director of NCSY, hosted a *vort* (engagement party) for the young couple at his Brooklyn home, and one of the couple’s *Sheva Berachot* was held in the NCSY national office. The Leffs settled in Cleveland, where Rabbi Leff learned in *kollel* and supervised the Telshe dormitory. The couple also got involved in the NCSY Central East Region.

In 1974, while Rabbi Leff and his family were spending Pesach in Miami, the Young Israel of Greater Miami in North Miami Beach was between rabbis, and the rabbi whom they had hired just for Yom Tov backed out at the last minute. The *shul* board pleaded with Rabbi Leff—would he fill in? Rabbi Leff reluctantly agreed to deliver the *derashot* for the first days of Yom Tov. His sermons were received so well, he was asked to speak again during the last

two days; after Yom Tov, he was invited to apply for the position of rabbi.

This was the last thing that Rabbi Leff wanted to do, but he politely promised to consider the invitation. After returning to Cleveland, he mentioned the experience, in passing, to Rav Gifter. To Rabbi Leff's surprise, Rav Gifter told him to apply, adding that 20 years earlier, the *roshei yeshivah* in the United States had made a major mistake by failing to encourage their best *talmidim* to enter *rabbanut*. Were more capable *talmidim* leading American synagogues, Rav Gifter said, America would look much different. He also reminded Rabbi Leff that he had a personal responsibility to serve the community that had helped him develop into a *ben Torah*.

Rabbi Leff returned to Miami for an interview. The board offered him a one-year contract. He took it, but asked Rav Gifter to hold his old job open in case things didn't work out.

That turned out to be unnecessary. Rabbi Leff served as the *rav* of the Young Israel of Greater Miami for nine

years. The transition from dormitory counselor at Telshe to *rav* of an out-of-town community was not terribly difficult for the young rabbi: he had been moving in two worlds his entire life. He had gone from growing up in a non-observant home to becoming the best *talmid* at the Mesivta. While he never compromised his religious principles, he always maintained ties with his former world. Indeed, his ability to incorporate all of his experiences so well enables him to relate to a broad spectrum of Jews. It is what gives him a perspective and a depth of experience that few other leaders in the Torah world have.

While Rabbi Leff served as a rabbi in Miami, he enjoyed working with the NCSY chapter based in his *shul*, and even returned to teach at the Mesivta where he had been a *talmid* more than a decade earlier.

By 1983, the Leffs decided to make *aliyah*. Upon moving to Israel,

Rabbi Leff became the *rav* of Moshav Matityahu, a community located just outside Kiryat Sefer. "Rabbi Leff is a true *morah d'asra* [leader of the community] and provides guidance and direction in all areas in the *moshav*," says Meir Migdal, a longtime resident of Moshav Matityahu.

Today, in addition to his communal duties, Rabbi Leff is also *rosh yeshivah* of Yeshiva Gedolah Matityahu, which is geared to students who don't necessarily fit the mold. Additionally, he teaches a group of unaffiliated Israelis who live near Moshav Matityahu and lectures at several leading Israeli yeshivot, seminaries and institutions, including the Orthodox Union's Israel Center. He is a featured speaker at the conventions of the Orthodox Union, Agudath Israel and Torah Umesorah.

"The lesson I learned more than 30 years ago at NCSY conventions is that Judaism is not monolithic and that there are many legitimate approaches to *Yiddishkeit*," says Rabbi Leff. "This has been the guiding philosophy of my life."

Louis J. Malcmacher

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS (AISHEL) CHAPTER,
CENTRAL EAST REGION
1972-1974

By Danny Butler



It has always been something of a puzzle by what measure NCSY can claim success.

Thirty years ago, NCSY's Central East Region extended from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania to Mishawaka, Indiana, from Fort Knox, Kentucky to Sarnia, Ontario. It included Charleston, West Virginia, known as the "*Yerushalayim* of West Virginia," where for many years the rabbi maintained an accurate census of every birth, death and most importantly, marriage, chronicling the inter-

marriage that dissipated the community's Jewish character.

How effective was NCSY? One night in 1974, NCSY held a function in Charleston that drew more than *half* of the Jewish teenagers in the community. The regional president at the time, Louis Malcmacher from Cleveland Heights, used to insist that the same thing could be done in Brooklyn if only they could find a *shul* big enough.

The Central East Regional Convention in 1974, which used nearby

One night in 1974, NCSY held a function in Charleston that drew more than half of the Jewish teenagers in the community.

Capital University's dormitories for housing, attracted more than 500 teens to Congregation Beth Jacob in Columbus, Ohio. Perhaps less than 10 percent of the kids who attended that convention were day school kids. Most were like the Regional President Louis Malcmacher from Cleveland Heights High.

The goal of every *Shabbaton* held then or since is to communicate within a very limited time the magical quality of our Torah heritage...to make it exciting, interesting, fun, meaningful and desirable. The challenge of each *Shabbaton* was—and still is—to make sure that

Judge Butler is a former regional director of NCSY. He is a judge on Pittsburgh's Municipal Court with jurisdiction over Pittsburgh's four police forces. He and his wife Nina—whom he met in NCSY—live in the house his grandparents lived in when his grandfather was the first mashgiach for the first OU product, Heinz ketchup. Judge Butler is still a featured speaker at NCSY conventions around the country.

enough new kids come in order to maintain the interest of the old kids. At the same time, it's important to ensure that the new kids attend the next *Shabbaton*, preferably with a friend. As the region's exponential growth in the early years demonstrates, the *Shabbatonim* were successful. And hundreds of kids whose immigrant parents had intended to leave *Yiddishkeit* behind, or whose third-generation American parents saw Judaism as a defunct vestige of a bygone era, encountered the Shabbat experience and were exposed to their heritage. Sometimes with amazing results....

In most cases, there could be little expectation that these public school kids, whose parents went to work on Shabbat, would change their lives forever as a result of this minimal contact. The best we could realistically hope for was that someday the parents who had been NCSYers in the '60s and '70s would summon up the happy, warm memories of an NCSY experience and would therefore encourage their children to participate in NCSY—to experience it and to see for themselves.

In a geographical area where the intermarriage and assimilation was overwhelming, NCSY had its effect and an untold number of Jewish marriages resulted. And then, as now, the Central East Region had a greater hand in influencing high school graduates to pursue some form of post-high school Torah education than all the day schools in the region *put together*. Consequently, today, in every community in the Central East, NCSY alumni, sometimes unrecognizable under their black hats and *sheitels*, are at the forefront of just about every substantive Jewish organization/institution in the region. Oh, and every once in a while, there is a star like Louis Malcmacher.

When Malcmacher was the chapter president of Taylor Road Synagogue's Aishel Chapter in Cleveland Heights, his parents did not share his enthusiasm for NCSY and the Torah lifestyle it represented. Holocaust survivors, tortured by memories of past losses and ever fearful that the sanctuary of America might be temporary,

they nevertheless allowed their son to pursue the lifestyle he discovered in NCSY.

For Malcmacher, the seeds of his later professional accomplishments and communal involvement were planted long ago in a supportive home that reflected those values. And, although Malcmacher claims otherwise, they cannot honestly be attributed to NCSY. But NCSY *was* responsible for the Shabbat experience that first caught Malcmacher's attention all those years ago and inspired him to embrace *Yiddishkeit*; since then, Shabbat has become a badge of honor that he wears proudly *everywhere*. Malcmacher is known not only as a lecturer on dental education in demand around the world, but also as the only one on the dental education circuit who is *shomer Shabbat*. He is a spokesman for Cleveland's Jewish community and the first head of community relations for a big city federation who is Sabbath observant. And there is not a charity, or a cause, or a school or a poor person who needs dental work who does not benefit from

He is a spokesman for Cleveland's Jewish community and the first head of community relations for a big city federation who is Sabbath observant.

Malcacher's enthusiasm, commitment, and *menschlichkeit*.

There is no real difference between the NCSY regional president who motivated 40 kids to wear yarmulkes in Heights High School in 1974, and the world-class dentist who chaired the National Agudah Convention 25 years later. As he acknowledges a debt to NCSY for the leadership opportunities that it gave him and for the world that it introduced him to, Malcacher continues to have the same uninterrupted, close relationship that he had with his mentor at NCSY, Rabbi Baruch Taub, who was national director of NCSY then, and later, the *shadchan* who connected him with Chanie Posner. During the '70s, Chanie, in her position as Rabbi Taub's administrative assistant, was the one who made NCSY's national office work.

Do you want to really know Louis Malcacher?

You could talk to the thousands of dentists to whom he has taught advanced techniques.

You could talk to the people at the Jewish Federation of Cleveland who would tell you of the wonders he has done to enhance Jewish unity in their community.

You could talk to people at dozens of Torah institutions who have benefited from his largesse, his enthusiasm and his time.

You could talk to people in the Cleveland area who can smile or chew after world-class dental care that they could not afford, but received at no cost from a consummate professional who is a *mensch*.

You could talk to the friends and neighbors who witnessed the hands-on care he gave his father-in-law in the final years of his life, with love and respect that undoubtedly his own children will never forget...especially after they saw him do it again for his own father in his last years.

You could talk to the friend who insists that he was rescued last summer from a near-fatal disease by the ever-present dentist who made him laugh. ("...Racked with pain, I said desperately,

'Louie, I don't want to die on Tisha B'Av.' He whipped out his Palm and said, 'What about Monday?')

You could talk to the mother who could not understand his enthusiasm for old-world Judaism, and has had her mind changed by the continuing respect of a doting son, and a third generation that is satisfied and happy and secure.

You could talk to his daughter, Shaina, who would tell you she has "the best father," and that he is the father "everybody wants to be with."

You could talk to his wife, Chanie, who will tell you—without a breath of sarcasm—that after 25 years with Louie, "I wouldn't change a thing."

Like many NCSYers over the years who "bought the whole package," Malcacher chose not to have his children participate in NCSY "because they don't need it." But if you're concerned that they might have been too sheltered, then you've never been to the Malcacher Shabbat table, which attracts a range of Jews from the entire community and beyond, who discover each week the warmth and the magic that Louis J. Malcacher first experienced when in NCSY, and which he has never stopped sharing. So that now, his sons will tell you that their career goal is *kiruv*—Jewish outreach—which I guess is where it all started. **JA**

Rabbi Sholom Strajcher

MIAMI CHAPTER, SOUTHERN REGION

1960-1964

By *Yaakov Kornreich*



and the Mesivta of Greater Miami, a yeshivah high school for boys. In those days, the notion of a high school level yeshivah was not widely accepted in the Miami Jewish community and the Mesivta was viewed as an educational experiment whose success was very much in doubt. Thus, in Sholom Strajcher's Mesivta class, there were only eight students, all of whom rightfully looked upon themselves as pioneers.

Rabbi Strajcher became part of a

Mr. Kornreich, a member of the Ben Zakkai Honor Society of NCSY, was the editor of numerous NCSY publications in the early 1970s. He has served as the Orthodox Union's director of publications and public relations, managing editor of Jewish Life and Jewish Action and editor of Young Israel's Viewpoint. Currently a freelance Jewish journalist, he is a regular contributor to the American edition of Yated Ne'eman.

In the early '60s, the Greater Miami Jewish community, which was centered in Miami Beach, had two Jewish schools: the Hebrew Academy of Greater Miami, which was a day school,

close-knit group of students who shared a common vision of serving Torah and the Jewish people. For three years, this group, which included Zev Leff (the current rabbi of Moshav Matityahu) and David Luchins (currently a senior advisor to the NY state comptroller and a vice president of the OU), lived, studied and played together as brothers, creating strong bonds that would endure for years to come.

Despite their youth, the boys understood that they comprised virtually the entire local population of *shomer Shabbat* Jews their age, and that many in the community judged *Yiddishkeit*, as well as the school, by their actions. The Mesivta boys also belonged to the Miami chapter of NCSY. In fact, NCSY was such a part of their lives that the Southern Regional Convention (the region had only one convention a year back then) was the equivalent of an annual class trip.

Today, Rabbi Strajcher, who as a congregational rabbi and Jewish educator has helped transform Jewish communities in Savannah, Memphis and New Orleans among other cities, attributes his love of teaching Torah to his formative experiences at NCSY. “I gained so much from Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, whose vision created NCSY, as well as its other early leaders—Rabbis Chaim Wasserman, Alexander Rosenberg, Nachman Bulman and Baruch Taub. They taught me that every encounter is an opportunity to make a difference in someone’s life. I watched them do it, and learned to emulate their approach. They imprinted upon me the idea that teaching Torah with patience, honesty and love can overcome even the greatest obstacles, and that even though we may not always see success, we often leave an impression that can make a crucial difference in a Jew’s life years later.”

Indeed, NCSY offered the Mesivta boys a chance to spread what they were

Despite their youth, the boys understood that they comprised virtually the entire local population of shomer Shabbat Jews their age...

learning to their less-learned peers throughout the South. In those years, most Jewish communities in the South did not have day schools, and the Mesivta boys were usually among the few present at conventions with strong Jewish backgrounds. They were encouraged by the convention staff to serve as unofficial advisors and to share their Torah knowledge with their fellow NCSYers.

Opening a fellow Jew’s eyes to the wisdom and beauty of Torah was a heady experience for the young boys. “I learned back then that *kiruv* is nothing more than bringing someone to an understanding of how Torah talks to them in their lives,” says Rabbi Strajcher.

Conventions were always experiences, but one convention stands out in Rabbi Strajchter’s memory—the year it was held in Memphis, a 36-hour bus trip each way from Miami. Since all eight of the students in the Mesivta class were members of the Miami chapter, sending the entire chapter would have entailed canceling classes for at least three days. Reluctantly, the students

decided that only three chapter members would go that year: Eddie Zemel, David Luchins and Sholom Strajcher.

Usually chapters would charter a bus to go to a convention, but this time the three boys simply bought bus tickets to Memphis. Rabbi Strajcher recalls spending the trip mystified by the glares of white people seated in the front of the bus. “We were unaware of the significance—in the segregated deep South of the early 1960s—of choosing seats in the back of the bus.” Bone-tired and disoriented, they arrived in Memphis Friday afternoon and were picked up at the station by a teenager who was to bring them to the Baron Hirsch Synagogue. During the ride, the teenager boasted that he had been the valedictorian of his afternoon Hebrew school, but that now he was attending a Jesuit high school because his parents wanted him to have a “broader” education.

Upon arriving at the *shul*, where they were to be assigned to the homes within walking distance of the *shul*, the boys were directed to a pretty Southern belle. After checking her list, she informed them that their names were not there, and they would have to wait until she could find somewhere to put them up. That was too much for the exhausted group. But in his characteristically soothing manner, Rabbi Strajchter calmed the group and assured the young woman that whatever she found would be fine.

Eventually, Rabbi Strajcher was assigned to the home of the boy who had picked him up at the station. “The house was more than a mile from the *shul*,” he recalls. “And yes, it rained that Shabbat.”

Once at his host’s home, Rabbi Strajcher learned that the boy’s mother was deeply suspicious of Orthodox Jews. “She lifted up my yarmulke, expecting to find horns underneath,” says Rabbi Strajcher. “She was genuinely surprised when she didn’t find any.”

The story has a happy ending. Largely due to the influence of NCSY, the teenager left the Jesuit high school, went to a yeshiva and now has a fine Orthodox family of his own. His parents also became *shomer Shabbat* and are now major supporters of Torah institutions.

By the way, Elaine Goldstein, the young lady who found Rabbi Strajcher home hospitality, later married him, and in the 30 years since has been happily providing Shabbat hospitality for countless guests at the Strajcher family table.

Rabbi Strajcher served two terms as national president of NCSY. Later, when he came to New York City to attend Chaim Berlin and become a *talmid* of Rav Yitzchak Hutner, *zt"l*, his connection with NCSY continued. Even today, the powerful bonds he formed in the Mesivta and NCSY continue to sustain him as he moves from community to community, from coast to coast.

Considered one of the best educators in the country, Rabbi Strajcher has been the recipient of numerous awards from Torah Umesorah and other national organizations. Dr. Ed Beiser, an associate dean of humanities at Brown University's medical school, recalls how Rabbi Strajcher got the position of dean of the Providence Hebrew Day School/New England Academy of Torah. "Providence had only one Jewish day school, which was supported by the entire community—Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. A

search committee—representing all three streams—was set up to find an appropriate dean. The committee was initially reluctant to consider Rabbi Strajcher's application because he was the rabbi of the large Orthodox *shul* in Savannah. They were interested in an educator. When they asked Rabbi Strajcher why he wanted to leave his current position, he replied that he had been spending too much of his time conducting funerals for the members of his *shul*, and that he had no further interest in a career in *rabbanut* if it meant that he would wind up burying *Klal Yisrael*."

Rabbi Strajcher was offered the job. "The Strajcher family hit Providence like a whirlwind," says Dr. Beiser. "They charmed everyone with their warmth and hospitality...and Rabbi Strajcher wound up influencing as many adults as he did children."

During the nine years that he was in Providence, Rabbi Strajcher, who is today known as a "principal's principal," succeeded in building up the school. "While he was dean, the school was widely known to be one of the best yeshiva high schools in the country," says one of his former colleagues. But his influence was felt way beyond the school. With his personal warmth and genuine *ahavat Yisrael*, Rabbi Strajcher made friends with everyone, and even rabbis from other denominations held him in great esteem. Because of his ability to build bridges, he was able to con-

vince the local federation to help finance the Orthodox mikvah.

Rabbi Strajcher's career led him to Cleveland, where he served as the educational director of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, and to Los Angeles, where he is today the educational director of the Yeshiva University High School of Los Angeles/Girls' Division.

In reflecting over the years since his days at Mesivta, Rabbi Strajcher is struck about how much the Orthodox community has changed.

"When I went to yeshiva, we never bothered to look at the color of one's *kippah*. However, today, with so many distinctive groups within our community, the intensity of our love and concern for those outside our specific group has somehow been weakened. We have to ensure that we are exhibiting love and sensitivity to the needs of every individual."

Indeed, *ahavat Yisrael* and *kiruv* are at the core of Rabbi Strajcher's life. But it was those early *kiruv* experiences—in the days that predated the *Teshuvah* Movement—that inspires Rabbi Strajcher in his work today. "I still get a thrill every once in a while," he says, "as I'm waiting to change planes at some airport, or when I am walking down the street in almost any Jewish community in America, and people I met in NCSY decades ago come over to thank me and give me an update on their level of Jewish commitment." **JA**

Captions for photos on page 25: Clockwise starting from left-hand corner: •Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, former national director of NCSY, addressing a group at a 1974 NCSY convention at the Pine View Hotel. •Rabbi Stolper, National President Joel Ziff, and Rabbi Chaim Wasserman, former associate national director of NCSY, present Sholom Strajcher with a token of recognition at a convention in the early 60s. Photo: courtesy of Sholom Strajcher •Sholom Strajcher delivering an address at Southern Regional Convention at the Bnai Brith Jacob synagogue in Savannah, Georgia in the early 60s. He eventually served as the rabbi of the synagogue. Photo: courtesy of Sholom Strajcher •Rabbi Stolper making Havdalah at a 1964 convention with David Hurwitz looking on. Photo: courtesy of Rabbi Stolper •Left to Right: David Hurwitz; Vivian Luchins; Rabbi Stolper; Lawrence Kobrin, former Youth Commission chairman; Rabbi Wasserman and Rabbi Louis Ginsberg, former NCSY director of national projects, at a 1967 convention. Photo: courtesy of David Hurwitz •Left to Right: Sholom Strajcher; unknown; Harold Boxer, former chairman of the Youth Commission; Rabbi Wasserman and Rabbi Stolper at a 1964 convention. Photo: Marc Stann, courtesy of Rabbi Stolper.