HE POLISH EMBASSY in Washington, DC, hosted a reception in December honoring Gary Schiff, an adjunct professor of history at Washington College and cantor to the Chestertown Havurah, for his book, *In Search of Polin: Chasing Jewish Ghosts in Today’s Poland.*

The event at the beautiful four-story Beaux-Arts building on Embassy Row featured a talk by Schiff, who then led a Chanukah candle-lighting ceremony, followed by a buffet featuring traditional Jewish and Polish food.

“It was an elegant and very moving evening,” said Schiff. “I spoke to about 130 guests about my book, which is both a history of Jews in Poland and the story of my family, who I’ve been able to trace there to the 1700s.”

Poland is a painful and a compelling place for Jews, and it was many years before Schiff could bring himself to visit. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was home to the largest Jewish population in Europe. Now there are very few Jews in Poland. Three million of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust were Polish Jews, and most were murdered in death camps there.

“The Poles are just beginning to deal with the whole question of the Holocaust,” says Schiff, who teaches Jewish and Middle Eastern history at Washington College and previously served as president and professor of Middle East studies at Gratz College in Philadelphia. He holds a Ph.D. and M.A. from Columbia University and a B.A. and Bachelor of Hebrew Literature from Hebrew University and is the author of *Tradition and Politics: The Religious Parties of Israel* and *The Energy Education Catalog.*

*In Search of Polin* is one of the first books to be published under a new Washington College imprint—Washington College Studies in Religion, Politics and Culture—by Peter Lang Publishing.

Gary Schiff leads a candle-lighting ceremony at the Polish Embassy.
What an amazing year it has been for Hillel at Washington College! Just over the past nine months, the atmosphere in the Hillel House has dramatically changed for the better. In January, I started working part-time in the Hillel House and I quickly witnessed an increase in student involvement and community participation within Hillel. The house, which stands at a center point for both the Washington College campus and the Chestertown community, has truly brought a different face to Hillel and Jewish life on campus today. Jewish students now have a fully functional kosher kitchen to cook in and a comfortable living room where they can study or just hang out. Since the house was open three days a week this past semester, students were able to enjoy the comforts and amenities provided by Hillel and the Hillel House.

With the Hillel House up and running, students and Chestertown community members feel a better sense of community and togetherness. Throughout the year, Hillel has hosted Shabbat dinners, religious events, baking classes and lectures within the house. By putting together these events, Hillel has begun to bridge the gap between the campus and greater community. It’s been an absolute pleasure to see so many Havurah members come join in and support all of Hillel’s endeavors this past year. The Jewish community at Washington College and in Chestertown is thriving and growing.

With my time at Washington College quickly coming to an end, I am so pleased with the progress Hillel has made over the past two years. There is no doubt in my mind that Hillel at Washington College will grow in participant support and that the Hillel House will continue to serve as an active center for Jewish life on campus.

Shalom,

Cortnee Doll ’13
Hillel Program Advisor ✡

Celebrating Passover

Clockwise: Katie Wellington ’16 and Rebecca DeSantis ’16 open the Passover service by lighting the traditional candles. Alexander Foxwell ’16 reads the Story of Passover. Samantha Mason ’15 reads from the Passover Haggadah.
People Of The Land

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST Rabbi Nina Cardin, who came to Washington College to help celebrate Earth Week, holds that environmentalism is “a sacred imperative woven into the Jewish tradition.”

The talk she delivered on April 15—“For the Love of God: Responding to the Call of the Earth”—kicked off Earth Week 2013 and was sponsored by Hillel, the Center for Environment & Society (CES) and the Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture at Washington College.

“We were all really inspired by what Rabbi Cardin had to say about the old Testament and a new way of understanding how we as people of faith can interact with the environment,” said Rachel Field ’11, the program and intern coordinator at CES who helped organize the event. “She said we need to begin with an underlying philosophy—that the earth is something to be valued of itself.”

Founder of the Baltimore Jewish Environmental Network, Cardin was named one of “Ten Women to Watch in 5771” by Jewish Woman magazine, which extolled the Baltimore native as a “trailblazer in the fields of Jewish feminism, healing and liturgy.” Cardin has co-authored or contributed to nearly a dozen books and is the author of *Tears of Sorrow, Seeds of Hope: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Infertility and Pregnancy Loss* (Jewish Lights, 1999), which was inspired by her own experience.

In her lively and popular blogs—“Nina’s Blog” (blog.bjen.org) and “Reimagining Eden” (blogs.jewishtimes.com/index.php/jewishtimes/n CARDIN)—she draws inspiration from ancient and modern texts for the “sacred imperative” to care for the planet.

“We are the People of the Book. But also the people of the land,” she wrote in a recent article for *Jewish Woman*. “We are the people of Israel and the denizens of the earth. ... It is our calling to take care of the land so that the land can always take care of us. And it is in these quotidian tasks that we can ultimately find our most sacred calling.”

A Shield Against Evil

WHY DO WE REMEMBER the Holocaust? Why, nearly three-quarters of a century after the fact, do survivors tell their pain- ful stories over and over? Perhaps the most compelling explanation is the one Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel offered when he won the Nobel Prize: They “believe that the memory of evil will serve as a shield against evil.”


A native of Vienna, Alfred Traum survived the Holocaust because his parents sent him to London. His parents were sent to Auschwitz and survived, though she lost her own parents there. Later, the family emigrated to the United States. Josiane met Alfred on a study trip to Israel; he was, by then, an officer on the ship that brought her home.

Since Alfred Traum’s retirement from Boeing, the Traums have both volunteered at the Museum, telling their stories, as they did in April to a mesmerized crowd of students and community members at Washington College, helping to build, in the process, their own “shield against evil.”
Winter In Jerusalem

WASHINGTON COLLEGE’S first winter study trip to prestigious Hebrew University of Jerusalem was a resounding success, says Joseph Prud’homme, associate professor of political science and director of Washington College’s Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture, which is sponsoring the program. “We did so much in such a short time,” he says.

For two weeks in January, ten Washington College students studied the religions of the Holy Land as well as contemporary Israeli politics and the peace process, from various perspectives, with some of the finest scholars in Israel. They also had daily in-depth tours of the country, including the four quarters of the Old City, Galilee, the Dead Sea, Tel Aviv, the Jewish settlements and Arab and Christian communities of the West Bank and the checkpoints.

“The students were able to fully experience the diversity of points of view, the reality of the security problem and the religious intensity of the place,” Prud’homme says. “One of the high points was spending the late afternoon just before the beginning of Shabbat at the Wailing Wall with the area just flooded with people celebrating their faith, men on one side, women on the other, and this intense religious reflection and devotion giving rise to incredible jubilation, exultant dancing, just as the sun was going down. The walk home was wonderful and was followed by an enlightening Shabbat dinner at the home of a renowned rabbi.”

The Knesset was holding elections, so students had an intense immersion in Israeli politics, engaging with each of the candidates and seeing firsthand how smaller parties in Israel have come to play a major part in the process. The students even had a taste of foreign affairs—at Tel Aviv University they heard a former Israeli ambassador to Jordan and Egypt give a lecture about Israel’s complex relationship with those countries.

“One of the things I am really proud of is that the program exposes students to a wide range of perspectives,” Prud’homme says. “There is considerable interest in doing this every year, so that’s what we are planning. I am very eager to go back.”

Professor Joseph Prud’homme and his students pose above the Dome of the Rock in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Immersed In The Jewish Experience

FOR ASHLEY Carol-Fingerhut ’14, spending the spring semester of her junior year at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer-Sheva, Israel, was the realization of a lifelong dream.

As a child, Carol-Fingerhut attended a Jewish day school in Illinois where she learned to speak Hebrew and spent half of each day studying Jewish subjects. “And central to all of those subjects was Israel,” she wrote in a blog post this spring. “We learned about Israel in the Torah, we watched videos about Israel, we prayed every morning and afternoon in the direction of Israel, and most of our classrooms had at least one picture of Israel in them. After spending so many years drawing pictures of Israel, I finally wanted to experience it for myself and feel what Israel is.”

Carol-Fingerhut, a political science and economics major who last year was both president of Washington College’s Hillel chapter and a delegate to the Model UN in Montreal, says she has loved the complete immersion in the Hebrew language she has experienced in Beer-Sheva as part of Washington College’s study abroad program.

“The fact that people speak more Hebrew than English here has made me appreciate the fact that I am studying at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev and that I am not in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, where I was surprised to hear so much English,” she wrote. “I like being somewhere that forces me to get out of my comfort zone and have a more Israeli college experience.”
Discovering Her Identity

IT SOUNDED almost too good to be true, but Rebecca DeSantis ‘16 jumped at the opportunity—a free 10-day Birthright trip to Israel. “My rabbi suggested it,” says the Lancaster, PA, native, “and of course I was thrilled to have the chance.”

Since 1999, Taglit-Birthright Israel, which is supported by philanthropists and the Israeli government, has sent nearly 300,000 young people, 80 percent of them North Americans, to Israel to explore their Jewish roots.

Applicants must be between the ages of 18 and 26, have graduated from high school and have at least one Jewish parent. They cannot be actively practicing another religion.

“You can choose the trip that best suits you,” says DeSantis, who served this past year as Hillel’s Judaic/Social Chair and has been elected next year’s president of the chapter. “I went in January, during winter break, with Kesher Birthright Israel, because it’s a Reformed Movement group, but if you’re Orthodox or Conservative, there are other groups you might find more compatible.”

“Taglit” means “discovery” in Hebrew, and the purpose of the trips is for young Jews living outside of Israel to discover both the country and their own identity as Jews.

“I was surprised at how safe I felt, how welcoming it was,” DeSantis says. “We saw so much of the country and we really bonded with the Israelis we met. They were so warm, and they urged us to return, to stay in their homes. I feel as if I have real friends there, now, and I can’t wait to go back.”

Challah For A Cause

BAKING AND SELLING BREAD to feed the hungry—that’s one of the ways Hillel members at Washington College are planning to use their new kosher kitchen next year.

“Everyone loves challah,” says Hillel program advisor and past president Cortnee Doll ’13. “And the charity we want to support is Mazon, which helps fight hunger in both Israel and the United States. It seems fitting to raise money to feed people here and overseas by making delicious bread for students at Washington College and the people of Chestertown. So we are planning to make this an ongoing Hillel project.”

Founded in 1985, Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger is a national nonprofit organization—that works to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the U.S. and Israel.

“Mazon” means “food” or “sustenance” in Hebrew and the nonprofit’s founders believe they can end hunger in America and Israel, both by acting to ensure that hungry people have immediate access to food, and by working to develop long-term solutions to the hunger problem. Mazon has been involved in every aspect of getting good food to people who can’t afford it, from lobbying for more nutritious food to be distributed by the nation’s food banks and in public schools, to fighting to save and even improve government food programs.
INVESTMENT ADVISOR Joseph M. Brodecki, the man who led the capital campaign to create the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, visited campus on April 23 to talk about the museum and his life in philanthropy.

Brodecki is a principal partner of Bernstein Global Wealth Management Group, a firm that provides wealth management and investment strategies. The son of Holocaust survivors, he successfully raised $200 million to build the museum and its collections and now serves on its governing council. A member of the Board of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, Brodecki lives with his wife, Shelly Brodecki, in Potomac.

“Joseph’s talk and the question-and-answer session were tremendous,” recalls Gretchen Dwyer, vice president for advancement at Washington College. “Audience members were taken behind the scenes of the fundraising, design, construction and implementation of the museum, which this year is celebrating its 20th anniversary.”

Brodecki’s talk was sponsored by the Institute of Culture, Politics and Religion at Washington College.

Accepting Applications For Ans Fellowship

The Roy Ans Fellowship in Jewish American Studies is overseen by the Rose O’Neill Literary House and is open to students of all religious backgrounds and beliefs. It offers a stipend for a student (1) to work collaboratively with a Washington College faculty member in research related to the Jewish-American experience and (2) to create a project based on or inspired by this research. Applications will be judged by the Director of the Rose O’Neill Literary House. The annual application deadline is the second Friday of December.