ON A CLASS TRIP TO ISRAEL in January 2013, Jackelyn Gitlin ’15 was surprised to discover a British cemetery just a few miles from the Hebrew University campus in Jerusalem. Interred in the Jerusalem War Cemetery are more than 2,500 fallen servicemen of the British Commonwealth—the imperial power that gained control of the contested territory during World War I. Gitlin, a history major, was inspired to investigate how the British Mandate influenced the emergence of the State of Israel.

That question would develop into Gitlin’s Senior Capstone Experience project, “Abandoning Jerusalem,” which won departmental honors in May. With a grant from the Guy F. Goodfellow Scholars program, Gitlin explored the ramifications of the British Mandate, “including Britain’s failures as imperial wardens,” she says.

Over winter break, Gitlin spent two weeks in the Archives of the Imperial War Museum in London, examining documents like the Transjordan Police Force’s official reports while also looking for “a more candid British perspective” that would shed light on what transpired in Palestine under British occupation. Among the most enlightening personal journals and memoirs she found was a diary kept by the military assistant to Sir Alan Cunningham, the High Commissioner of Palestine who served between 1945 and 1948.

“Cunningham’s aide had some interesting responses to what was happening. He added a lot of color to the story.”

It’s a story well worth the telling, says history professor Clayton Black, Gitlin’s thesis advisor. “Jackie has written an insightful analysis of a largely forgotten chapter of Middle East history. Using an array of first-hand accounts and reports by British officials, she shows that the British effort to make good on promises to Zionists for a homeland in Palestine collided with a growing sympathy for the local Arabs, who repeatedly clashed with Jewish immigrants over land, rights, and questions of governance. As a result, she points out, many Mandate officials, who often spoke neither Hebrew nor Arabic, retreated into the isolation of an illusory English home away from home. In the end, she finds, the British were ill-prepared for the frustrations that Palestine presented and were eager to rid themselves of the problem they had themselves created.”

Gitlin, who returns to campus in the fall to complete the education block, hopes to teach high school AP history.
Greetings From Hillel

WE HAVE JUST CONCLUDED another exciting semester for Washington College Hillel. In everything we do, we strive to make the Hillel House a comfortable and welcoming space for students to come and express their Jewish identity and learn about our heritage.

After winter break, we held a welcome-back Shabbat dinner and service for the returning College community.

In celebration of Purim, we held a Purim party for the children of the local Havurah community. We welcomed six children to the Hillel House, where we baked hamantaschen and made Purim art projects. It was a fun afternoon for both the kids and the college students! In April, we held a Havdalah dinner and service where we hosted visiting prospective students. For Passover, we held our annual Havurah-Hillel Seder in the Hynson Lounge. With more than 60 members of the Hillel and Havurah communities in attendance, we celebrated Passover with a lively seder and wonderful food! To conclude the year, a few Hillel members attended a Holocaust Remembrance Day service at Temple B’nai Israel in Easton, MD.

With the addition of a new television, we held our first movie night in the house! We hope this amenity will bring more students to the house to relax after busy days of classes.

An important part of this semester for me was my trip to Israel during spring break with the Jewish National Fund. After spending the winter raising funds for JNF’s Blueprint Negev development project, I had the opportunity to travel to Southern Israel with 20 other Jewish college students to participate in projects designed to build up the desert. I spent a week living on a kibbutz, traveling daily to volunteer at development projects throughout the Negev, including working at an Ethiopian Absorption Center, farming at an independent olive grove, gardening at an urban renewal project, and creating a soccer field for children of a village near the Egyptian border. I learned so much during my trip about the hard work that has been done toward David Ben Gurion’s dream of a beautiful and green desert, and I strengthened my connection to the Land of Israel.

Next semester, I travel back to Israel to study abroad at Ben Gurion University of the Negev for the fall semester. I have enjoyed my year as Hillel President, and I look forward to returning as a member next spring. I hope to see the club continue to grow with new members and new events to further build the community we have enjoyed this year.

Shalom.

Rebecca DeSantis ’16
Hillel President 2013-2014
We recently observed Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, honoring the memory of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis and their collaborators. Some attention, however, should also be paid to the “The Righteous among the Nations” (Hassidei Umot ha-Olam), those non-Jews who risked their own lives to help save Jews.

With the establishment of Israel in 1948, that phrase became an official designation conferred by the State and its Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Authority upon those individuals whose heroic actions were documented. To date, some 25,000 such awards have been presented. Of course, several times that number likely performed similar acts, but many did not survive the war. While a few of the Righteous, like Oskar Schindler or Raoul Wallenberg, have become widely known, most remain anonymous.

So who were these people and what motivated them? While Righteous Gentiles were found in every country, some nations distinguished themselves by their efforts to rescue Jews—notably Denmark, Italy, and Bulgaria—while others, like the Baltic States and Ukraine, had large numbers of perpetrators. This has led to speculation as to the role cultural and historical factors, especially democracy, may have played. Yet, democratic, moderate Holland, where Jews had been welcomed for centuries, had one of the worst records of collaboration and deportation of Jews to their deaths (110,000 out of 140,000). I plan to explore this question on my trip there this summer.

Other factors, such as economic class or social status, have been adduced as well. Yet, rescuers ranged the gamut from royalty and industrialists to peasants and factory workers. Perhaps the most controversial question is the role of religion. Some rescuers attributed their actions to their faith. People of all religions—Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, even some Balkan Muslims—and of all ranks, from senior prelates to humble priests and nuns to laypeople, were involved. But it is also true that many leading Christian clerics were at best indifferent, at worst complicit. It has been argued that centuries of hostile Christian teaching about Jews as “Christ killers” helped lay the groundwork for the Shoah.

The non-religious realms of society that are supposed to uphold our best civic traditions fared no better. In academe, the law, medicine, science, the arts, and business, many were only too willing to capitalize on the misfortunes of their former Jewish colleagues. Greed was often a motivation behind some rescuers as well. Yet, the personal characteristics of integrity, courage, decency, and of what we Jews call “menschlichkeit,” doing the right thing, seem to be the most common, if not universal, threads that bound these brave souls together. May their memory be a blessing.

Dr. Schiff is adjunct professor of history at Washington College.
ALL MOTHERS WANT to protect their children, but Jewish mothers are particularly fierce when it comes to protecting their family’s heritage. Susan Stoppart Shapiro ’91, whose future mother-in-law persuaded her to convert to Judaism but repeatedly failed to get the married couple to temple, knows all too well the Jewish mother’s lament. As Susan Shapiro’s son Max approached the Jewish coming-of-age and she and her husband began making plans for a ski vacation/destination ceremony, Shapiro’s mother-in-law had some ideas of her own about Max’s bar mitzvah.

In a marked departure from the contracts and complaints she writes as an attorney specializing in employment law and business law, Shapiro has turned to humor to examine the complicated Shapiro family dynamics. Her mother-in-law, who soothes her disappointment during winters in Florida, and who keeps cash, credit cards, and important papers close to the chest, as it were, plays the starring role.

It’s a love letter to my mother-in-law,” Shapiro insists. “Still, I’m waiting in terror to hear whether she likes it.”

“Boca, Boobs, and the Bar Mitzvah” appears in a new collection of funny stories, published in time for Mother’s Day, called Moms Are Nuts. Edited by Shapiro’s friend Amy Vansant, the book includes essays by noted humorists Wendi Aarons (an award-winning mommy blogger) and Gloria Fallon (yes, Jimmy’s sister).

“The other writers are very experienced with book publications, so it’s fascinating for me to hear them talk about how they approach marketing,” Shapiro says. “Many of them have huge followings on social media among the mommy crowd. So in the parenting/family humor section, sales have been good! In Kindle’s humor division, the book has ranked as high as #9.”

Meanwhile, plans for Max’s bar mitzvah are moving apace. He had his first Skype lesson with the Adventure Rabbi in April, and the ceremony will take place during a ski vacation on Heavenly Mountain in Lake Tahoe next February.

The skiing should be great, but a Jewish mother’s hopes for a family trip to Israel are dashed, once again.

I give to Hillel and am in support of the endowment that is being created because I believe it will help add to the wonderful experience that Washington College offers its students, especially those who follow the Jewish faith. Jewish students can feel a great sense of belonging and being supported.

—Peter D. Maller ’90, Founder and CEO
Maller Wealth Advisors, Inc.
Hunt Valley, Maryland
SINCE FIRST LEARNING about the Shoah in high school, Katie Wellington ’16 has developed a fascination with Jewish culture and a passion for human rights. She came to Washington College intent on a major in international studies and a career in which she might help avert future genocidal atrocities.

Wellington, who is not Jewish, became friends with Rebecca DeSantis ’16, the president of Hillel, in their freshman year, and joined the Hillel membership. In January of 2013, Wellington traveled to Hebrew University in Israel with political science professor Joseph Prud’homme, and then decided to spend her junior year abroad on academic exchange at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. During her year in Israel, she will undertake an independent research project funded by the Roy Ans Fellowship in Jewish-American Studies.

Wellington intends to conduct interviews with local leaders and voters affiliated with the three political parties in Israel—Kadima (Centralist Alternative), Shas (Ultra-Orthodox), and Hatnua (Liberal Democratic). She hopes to learn to what extent each of the Israeli political parties use the Holocaust to mobilize the youngest generation of voters, and then consider how Jewish-American interest groups might adopt similar messaging.

“The Holocaust shaped the world, but especially the state of Israel,” she says. “We were in Israel while the Knesset, or Israeli Parliament, was holding elections, so I was able to see how past historical events, especially the Holocaust, influence how the Israeli government is managed in contemporary times. The history and the land of Israel are so closely interconnected, and the pain of the Holocaust is still very palpable, even for those of us who didn’t live through it.”

CHESTERTOWN HAVURAH

Hillel and Havurah share a mutually beneficial relationship, worshipping together, cooking together, collaborating on charitable projects, and celebrating High Holidays. Here, members of the Chestertown Havurah are pictured in Hynson Lounge, when they visited campus to celebrate Passover Seder with the Washington College Hillel.

Pictured are (clockwise from top left): Lee Rosenson, Ilene Lipstein, Helene Silverman, Sheldon Singer, Faith Altman, and Faith’s grandson, Jake Altman.
Fundraising Report

To date, we have raised $256,893 in gifts and pledges for Hillel House. Of this, $169,000 has been used for building renovations and the remainder, $37,000 in cash and an anticipated $51,000 in pledges, will initiate an endowed fund to support the ongoing operations of the Hillel House in perpetuity.

For all who contributed to this effort, you have my deepest appreciation. Hillel House is a vibrant part of the life of the College. Through regular activities, services, and events here, Jewish students become active and engaged in their faith, and students of other faiths can interact and learn about Judaism and Jewish culture. Hillel House ensures a vibrant and lively place for our College community to share important and valuable experiences.

Hillel is also a quiet place where students can go to read and meditate or to engage in unhurried conversations. It is a retreat that offers a place of reflection. Thank you to all who have donated the books that fill our shelves.

I encourage you to continue to support Hillel. Our goal is to grow the endowment to over $100,000 in the next year. This will provide annual support for Hillel programs. In the coming fall we will bring in speakers, take students on field trips, and sponsor events. None of this would be possible without your contributions.

I see the Hillel House as a young effort that will grow over time. As we nurture it, we will see more students who are Jewish or interested in exploring and understanding Jewish traditions on campus. Thank you for making such a tremendous difference for Washington College, and please do keep engaged and supportive of Hillel. Enclosed is an envelope for your convenience.

I hope to see you there soon! ✡

Gary Grant
Vice President of Advancement