

Salute 61 to Israel

Identities aren't black and white anymore

Janet R. Kirchheimer

NEW YORK (JTA) — I grew up in two different worlds — one that doesn't exist anymore and one in which I didn't feel quite at home. Like many children of immigrants, I struggled with the culture of America. I grew up in a time when it wasn't chic to be a hyphenated American.

I remember trying to explain to some friends that my parents were German Jews who survived the Holocaust. They couldn't understand how one could be both German and Jewish. Even though their families were Irish or Italian Catholic, they couldn't grasp the concept. To them I was Jewish and that was it. It wasn't possible for me to be defined by more than

one identity.

Many times I felt I was on the outside looking in. There were times I wanted to jump into the melting pot, blend in and be a plain old American kid eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches wearing my baseball cap, but I couldn't. Neither could most of my friends who were children of survivors.

Some of us had parents who told the neighbourhood kids that the numbers on their arms were their phone numbers; some of us had parents who told stories of the Holocaust every night over dinner; and some of us had parents who never told us anything.

Some identities choose us and some identities we choose. The Holocaust was an identity that

chose me — and I chose to keep it. I tried to run away but each time I tried, the stronger the pull was to come back. Finally I stopped running. I asked my parents to tell me their stories. I wrote a book of poetry about my family's stories and about being the daughter of survivors.

As I've gotten older, I've come to believe that my identity strug-

gle is what makes me a part of American culture. Maybe the melting pot of America is really a melding pot, and being a part of American culture means it truly is possible to have more than one identity. Our nation's president had a father who was black and a mother who was white. And that doesn't begin to do justice to the person he is

and the ways in which he identifies himself, or how we see him.

I can no longer define myself just as Jewish or just as American, or even just as a Jewish-American. I am a hyphenated American with as many hyphens as I choose. I am a Jewish-American-daughter of Holocaust survivors-daughter of immigrants-poet-opera lover-teacher-voracious reader-curious

about everything-filled with self-doubt-constant dreamer. And that is just the beginning.

*Janet R. Kirchheimer is the author of **How to Spot One of Us**, a collection of poems about the Holocaust. She is a teaching fellow at CLAL-The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.*

BBYO IS SLEEPLESS FOR ISRAEL

TORONTO — Marking the launch of a unique partnership between Beth Radom congregation and B'nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO), Beth Radom is hosting *Up All Night for Israel*, a city-wide event for Jewish teens in grades 8 through 12 to raise money for Canadian Magen David Adom.

With the mission of involving more Jewish teens in meaningful Jewish experiences, the Lake Ontario Region of BBYO, the world's leading pluralistic Jewish teen movement, is widening its reach by working with the Conservative congregation to form a new chapter.

"The BBYO/Beth Radom collaboration is a win-win situation not only for BBYO and Beth Radom, but most important, for the Toronto Jewish community," said Beth Radom Cantor David Rosen. "Our facility, along with

BBYO's experience, will allow these teens to maximize the potential of creating a community of Jewish young adults who learn together, socialize with one another and make a difference in the greater Jewish community."

The 12-hour event will take place Saturday, April 25, 2009, beginning at 10 p.m. It will feature interactive Judaic learning and Israel-themed workshops and activities as teens stay up all night in an effort to raise funds for CMDA, which donates

medical supplies and ambulances directly to the people of Israel through Magen David Adom, Israel's sole national emergency, medical, ambulance and blood services society. A midnight buffet of traditional Israeli food will be catered by Tov-Li.

"With the launch of our fifth chapter in the Greater Toronto Area, even more teens can take advantage of the fun and meaningful experiences that BBYO has been providing to Jewish high school teens for over 80

years," said Kevin Goodman regional program director. "We invite all teens to join BBYO, where they will find a network of friends and plenty of opportunities to help build their character, confidence and social calendars."

For questions concerning eligibility or for more information on BBYO in the Greater Toronto area, contact Kevin Goodman at 416-398-2004, ext. 222, or kgoodman@bbyo.org.

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Obama's seder reprises last year's on the campaign trail



PHOTO: PETE SOUZA/WHITE HOUSE
President Obama hosts a Passover seder dinner in the Old Family Dining Room of the White House on April 9, 2009, with friends and White House employees and their families joining the Obama family.



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