

# **MEMORIES**

**THE BERGEN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
OF JEWISH STUDIES**

**CLASS OF 2018/5778**



May 15, 2018

This booklet contains memories and reflections from our fourteen graduates on their learning experiences and friendships cultivated at BCHSJS over their years here.

We congratulate our graduating seniors for their commitment to Jewish study throughout their middle school and high school years. I am sure you join me in wishing them all the best in their future endeavors. We say *lehitra'ot b'karov* (see you soon) - not goodbye.

Graduates, may you continue to grow and pursue more Hebrew and Jewish learning in your college years and beyond. Mazal tov v'b'hatzlacha!

Fondly,  
Fred Nagler and the entire BCHSJS Family

*Joshua ben Perahia would say: Make for yourself a Rav (teacher),  
and acquire for yourself a colleague, and give all individuals the benefit of the doubt.  
Pirkei Avot 1:6*

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Galeet Lipke, Student Activities Coordinator  
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## *Eitan Ahdoot*

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Although I joined BCHSJS at a later time than most, I still relished and seized the opportunity to build new friendships and strengthen past relationships. In fact, I came into this year with stronger relationships that I developed when I went on a program to Israel this past summer. In just one year, I feel like I really integrated myself into this community. I would not have been able to do this without all of the great teachers and students I met and had the chance to speak to at all of the Shabbatons, Six Flags trips, and scavenger hunts. I love all of the classes I had a chance to be a part of, among them *Jewish Volunteer Corp*, *Spiritual Genetics*, and *Brains and Brawn*. At the same time, I had interesting conversations with each and every teacher I met as each one did a great job of helping me feel welcome and comfortable both in and out of the classroom at BCHSJS. Thank you everyone for all of the memories. I hope I can befriend as welcoming and as warm a group of people when I start college.



I will be attending Rutgers University in the fall.

## *Adam Alper*

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BCHSJS has been a huge part of my life for the past five years. I've dedicated nearly every Sunday morning from eighth through twelfth grade to furthering my Jewish education, and I believe that I gained a lot of knowledge and experience from this commitment. During my attendance, I have made incredible friends and memories that I know I will take with me as I go to college and beyond.



My most memorable experience from the past five years was the Young Leadership class. Through this class, I had the pleasure of meeting an amazing group of Israeli teens who came to the United States to meet us. With them they brought energy and excitement that truly made the group unforgettable. Throughout their stay, we toured New York City, learned about Jewish history and culture, and made amazing friends. When the Israeli delegation departed, I had a greater understanding of Israeli culture, which is valuable since it can only really be learned first-hand. I knew I had to go on the trip to Israel the following year to experience the Holy Land as a young adult and to see my Israeli friends again. I will never forget the time I spent as a part of the Young Leadership program as it truly was a life changing experience.

I will be attending the University of Maryland in the fall.

## Mikaela Bichler

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Throughout my five years at BCHSJS I've definitely had time to make good memories. I have had many great opportunities to go on lots of trips and to be involved in many programs and events. It was hard to choose just one good memory of BCHSJS, so I didn't; I chose a few of my favorite.

The first thing that popped into my head was the leadership program BCHSJS offered. I was in the tenth grade and eager to be a part of that class, ready to learn many skills I would use for the rest of my life. Not only did this program help me grow and taught me how to be a leader, but it gave me friends I never thought I'd have.

Along with developing my skills, I and the rest of my class, had the chance to befriend twelve Israelis around my age. I was also fortunate enough to be picked to go to Israel for a week with twelve other American teens from the class. I bonded with everyone that week, and to this day I talk to both the Israelis and Americans. I still consider everyone to be a close friend and I'm so happy that I got to share that week with most of them.

Another memory I have is the annual Shabbaton. I went to four of these in the past five years, and each one was positive in every way. The first one I went to, I was skeptical. I didn't think anything good could come from it. I'm glad to say I was very wrong. Each Shabbaton was amazing. I was able to make new friends each year, get in touch with Judaism on a deeper level, and share wonderful moments with everyone there those weekends.

Finally, the last memory I want to share may be the most simple. It's coming to BCHSJS every Sunday over these last years. When I first started, I was a shy little eighth grader, afraid I wasn't going to make any friends or that I would have a miserable time. From the first few weeks of my discovering how good BCHSJS is to now, I have created memories and friendships to last for a long time. I have my group of friends, but it's nice to know I can talk to anyone in the school. I also created amazing relationships with so many teachers. I know I can go to any teacher I've had and they will help me. I am truly grateful for the friendships and memories I created at the Bergen County High School of Jewish Studies.

I will be attending Goucher College in the fall.



## Rebecca Brandon

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As a senior, I have been spending a lot of time reflecting on the past five years. Coming from a town with a scarce Jewish population, being able to discover my Jewish identity was something I had to find through my temple and my parents' involvement in its various organizations. Coming to BCHSJS was my own decision and my own way to open myself to a larger population of Jewish teens who were open to exploring the different lens in which the courses explored Judaism and to finding new friends.



As a member of Sisterhood, my mom had been one of the people who presented the Sisterhood award that provided a scholarship for the first year attending BCHSJS. I am on the younger side, so I had my Bat Mitzvah the October I started attending BCHSJS. However, when writing my D'var Torah, I was already thinking of the opportunities presented to me to further my Jewish education through BCHSJS and I have not been disappointed.

Every year, there has been an incredibly large array of classes that have been offered, and I have loved every single class that I have taken. In particular, I loved Heather's Harry Potter class; Mike's Jewish History in a Flash and his Mass Hysteria and False Messiahs classes; Dr. Dan's Jewish History through the Ages and his Jews in Space; Deborah's art classes; Avital's Israel and International Criminal Law and her #NoFilterIsrael; Barnett's Jewish Volunteer Corp, and the Jewish Leadership class. I remember taking the Harry Potter class when I was absolutely obsessed with the entire Harry Potter universe and franchise. Discussing magic and Hogwarts from a Jewish lens really opened my eyes to aspects of the universe that I had never really thought of before (not to mention the drama of Simon spoiling some book plots to Heather).

The course that had the biggest impact on me was the Leadership class. Not only was I learning how to be a stronger leader in the Jewish and secular community, I was doing it along with an amazing group of Israelis in Nahariya. The program took me places I never thought I would go before (something big like the United Nations building and something small like trying to attend an overnight). The week the Israelis spent here and the week I got to spend in Israel has genuinely changed my life. To this day, the experience is something I constantly carry with me, and continue to talk about (probably a bit too much). I am grateful I had the opportunity to be a part of such an amazing program.

When I decided to come to BCHSJS, I knew I would be continuing my Jewish education and opening up more opportunities for myself, but I would have never imagined the extent to which it has changed me and impacted my life. I could continue on and discuss the amazing celebrations the school put together for every holiday, the new and innovative iCAN Conference, write an entire essay about my experiences with the Jewish Volunteer Corp at The Daughters of Miriam, or talk about the annual scavenger hunt (I still cringe at the videos of us in ninth grade that are still somewhere on YouTube) and the various other activities/field trips that BCHSJS offers outside the classroom every year, but I think I have gone on long enough. Our class has only grown stronger and closer as we grew older, and I cannot wait to see what amazing things each and every one of us does in the Jewish and secular community. I am forever thankful for the fact that our community has such an amazing program to offer in the first place; I don't know a better way I would have liked to spend my Sundays for the past five years. Sadly, my time at BCHSJS has come to an end, but it has only enabled me to create new beginnings for myself in college as I continue the dialogue of Israel and Judaism in my everyday life.

I will be attending Brandeis University in the fall.



## *Simon Castiel*

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Although I have many memories of my five years at BCHSJS, several specific events come to mind. My experience in Israel during the Partnership2Gether trip has had a lasting impression. Spending time with like-minded students who care about their Jewish identity and connection to Israel helped seal my commitment to my heritage and my view of Israel. I've also made lifelong Israeli friends, and we continue to stay in touch regularly. Also, the group who spent a year together in the Leadership course, followed by the trip, has bonded and we will always remember our time together. In addition, the friendships I've made over the past five years, will last a lifetime. The bagel break each Sunday is a time to reconnect with friends from other towns each week. I also enjoyed the challenging courses, and the engagement and commitment of our teachers.

I will be attending Washington University in the fall.



## *Jarod Forer*

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Lots of things have happened at BCHSJS since we started as a class in 2013. We lived through a change in administration, different teachers, and we even had school in three different buildings. In reflection, I've found that very few things were held constant. Most importantly, it was my classmates. I am graduating with the same students I met and befriended five years ago. We have shared countless overnights, trips, and experiences. A number of us went to Israel together, we learned together, and we laughed together. Even though we are all going to different places, we share the memories of the relationships we built here that will not be cut by the end of high school. Thank you to my teachers and friends for making these years worth the Sunday morning wake-up calls.

I will be attending the University of Rochester in the fall.



## *Julia Ganbarq*

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When I think back to my five years at BCHSJS, I am flooded with memories. Memories of good times with good food and good people. However, the memory of how I met some of my best friends, to this day, will always have a special place in my heart. It was a few days before the start of the school year and all the eighth graders had to come in for a special day of “bonding” and getting to know each other. Not knowing anyone, I was not afraid to say silly things or look weird in front of a big group of strangers. We had to go around and say an adjective that had the same first letter of our name and our name to introduce ourselves. Obviously, trying to be my fun and goofy self, I was “Jumpy Julia”. The first ice-breaker quickly ended and we moved on to the next. It was called “Where the Wind Blows” and it was the kind of game that made us move around in a huge circle and get to know the people standing next to us. I don’t really remember exactly how it happened, but somehow I ended up standing next to four short and awkward strangers, and I can proudly say that those four people are four people that I cannot imagine my life without.



The Bergen County High School of Jewish Studies has allowed me to meet teachers who actually treat me like a human, to go on trips across the world with my best friends, and to go to classes that actually teach me about my religion in a way in which I want to learn. From sleepy Sunday mornings to hour-long name games during classes to amazing trips to Israel, I wouldn’t have wanted to spend my Sunday mornings for the last five years any other way.

I will be attending Ithaca College in the fall.

## *Maddy Gold*

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I started coming to Hebrew high school to see my friends every week and enhance my Jewish knowledge. However, it is turned into much more than that. My BCHSJS friends have become family, my teachers are my mentors and what I have learned at BCHSJS is incredible. Being able to spend a week with the Israelis while taking the Young Leadership class was unforgettable and something that brought me closer to Israel as a whole. Seeing Broadway shows with BCHSJS has allowed me to make new friends and grow bonds with the old ones. Going on school trips with my teachers allowed me to make bonds that are incredible and wonderful. Attending BCHSJS for the past five years has been amazing, and I am so lucky to be able to make these incredible memories.



I will be attending the State University of New York, Binghamton in the fall.

## *Sarah Gordon*

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Growing up, my Jewish identity was limited to my immediate family and the select Jewish friends I had. The Jewish population in my school was close to being non-existent, so I never truly felt like I had a place. Coming to BCHSJS changed that for me. I met some amazing people, ones who I will remember for years to come. From getting up early on Sunday mornings, to visiting New York City to discover its Jewish history. In these last five years my identity as a member of the Jewish community has grown so much stronger, helping me to learn where I fit in. Lessons about the history of Judaism, its modern-day applications, and the philosophy that has stemmed from it are just the basics of what I've learned. The three hours every Sunday morning equate to lessons that will last me for a life time. They are truly invaluable. I am forever grateful for the opportunities that I was provided at BCHSJS and to be able to take them into my future.



I will be attending American University in the fall.

## *Eric Levine*

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Some of the greatest memories I have of BCHSJS are the trips. I got to do stuff that I've never done before like paintballing and seeing "Fiddler on the Roof" on Broadway. Other trips that were awesome were tubing in the snow and the visits to the UN, which were extremely interesting. Although all these trips were great, I do have a favorite, the Israel trip. The experience was absolutely amazing and I'll never forget the friends and amazing people I met. I am excited for the next chapter of my life and thankful for the five years BCHSJS gave me.

I will be attending Bergen Community College in the fall.

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## Noah Mandelman

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My most fond memory at BCHSJS was participating in the Young Leadership program. Having the opportunity to host students from another country, and then traveling to their homes to be hosted by their families is a once in a lifetime experience that I will forever cherish. When Daniel and Shalev stayed at my home for a week in March of 2015, I learned that even though they lived on the other side of the globe in a completely different country, they had a lot of the same interests that I had. For both of them, it was their first time being in the United States, so when my family took them to New York City, they were practically dreaming. Throughout the week, the most impactful experience that we had was visiting the 9/11 Memorial with them. It was also my first time going to visit it, so seeing their reactions to the finer details about what happened on 9/11 along with a view of what it was like in the Middle East and Israel at the time made it much more profound. Then, the following December of 2016, our delegation traveled to Nahariya to go and stay with them. Since we had been in contact with them throughout the year leading up to the trip, all of us had grown very close with each other, and when we saw each other at the airport, it was like meeting up with a family member whom we hadn't seen in many years. Just as our families had opened our homes and shown them what it was like to live in America, their families did the same for us in Israel. When we toured Israel, even though they had seen many of the places we went to, it was amazing for them to show us around and give a more personalized tour of the country. I know that whenever I am in Israel, I will always have a place to go and a family to welcome me in as if I am one of their own.



I will be attending the State University of New York, Binghamton in the fall.

## Jonathan Marcus

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Coming to BCHSJS in the fall of eighth grade, I was not particularly excited. My parents told me that I only had to go for one year, and that after it was my decision to go back. Five years later I am still here, and that should tell you all you need to know about my experience. I've developed a close group of friends that I keep in touch with throughout the week and will keep in touch with through college.

My best memory from BCHSJS was definitely my trip to Israel during winter break of my junior year. It was amazing to live with our Israeli friends for a week and truly become one of them. I was able to learn about the life Israeli teens lived, and compare their lives to ours in America. I also really enjoyed touring Israel and learning about Jewish and Israeli history. It was an unforgettable experience, and I was also able to connect with my other BCHSJS friends. I still talk to many of the Israelis, and I know that if I go to Israel I will always have a place to stay.



Ultimately, BCHSJS was an important part of my high school experience. I have been able to connect with other local Jews, and extend my education past my Bar Mitzvah. It has greatly prepared me for dealing with potential anti-Semitism in college and beyond. Because of my positive experience, I will definitely encourage others to try BCHSJS or any kind of post Bar Mitzvah Jewish education.

I will be attending Emory University in the fall.

## *Kayla Seigel-Laddy*

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When I look back at my five years at BCHSJS, what sticks out the most was the leadership delegation trip to Israel, and just meeting our Israeli counterparts in general when they came here. It was so cool to see how, despite living half a world apart, we had so much in common. Within that very week, I knew I had met friends who would stick with me for the rest of my life. When we went to Israel that December, my life truly was changed forever. I was so excited to go out of the terminal and see our counterparts, and when we walked out I was almost knocked over by my friend who, that week, became my sister. The host family welcomed me with open arms and treated me as if I was their own child. I learned so much about Israel and its history that week thanks to Yossi and Ravit and other various tour guides. I saw beautiful, breathtaking scenery and was able to share that experience with my friends. I've never laughed more, cried more, and been more sleep deprived, or felt so much love than I did that week. I wish I could do it over and over again. This trip made my connection to Israel and my Jewish identity stronger than it ever was before, and it has stayed that way. I know that Israel will always be my second home, and I can't wait to one day go back and be reunited with my family once again.



I will be attending Bergen Community College in the fall.

## *Jessica Stern*

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Over the past five years, BCHSJS has been an amazing experience! I have made close friends that I know I will keep in touch with for years to come. In eighth grade, I was excited to go to Hebrew high school since I already knew that three of my other friends were attending. In time, though, that group expanded, and our crew was solidified. I loved waking up Sunday morning knowing that my friends would be in class waiting for me to discuss our week and play a spirited round of Uno. We ran the gamut of classes and teachers, always staying together. It even got to the point where we would walk into class missing one of our buddies, and the teacher would ask where the other was! The senior class is bonded and incredibly close, and I have had the privilege of engaging in an interesting and fun conversation with every person standing up here today. We sat as a grade together every week during break to chat over bagels and Starbucks, and I felt so at peace talking to the people that I have grown up with. I learned and grew in every class that I took, and the teachers helped facilitate an environment to debate and share our opinions. From silly classes like Harry Potter in Judaism to more serious classes like The Ethicist (which my friends and I took five times), every course and teacher offered something unique and different. BCHSJS also thrived in the out-of-school trip department! Six Flags and Broadway were great, but nothing compares to the time I spent in Israel with my peers. I had never been to Israel before the Young Leadership program, and the chance to experience the Holy Land with my BCHSJS friends was very special for me. I am so grateful for all of the opportunities that I had at BCHSJS, and I wish my classmates the best of luck in the future!



I will be attending American University in the fall.















# BCHSJS

Bergen County High School of Jewish Studies



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