



Bergen County High School
of Jewish Studies
Class of 2021/5781
June 6, 2021



Ceremony

Star-Spangled Banner & HaTikva

Welcome

Jessica Spiegel, Principal-Director

Greetings

Rabbi David J. Fine
Temple Israel & Jewish Community Center

D'var Torah

Rabbi Rachel Salston
Fair Lawn Jewish Center

Board of Directors Address

Sy Blechman, President

Senior Reflections

Laurence Fine
Victoria (Tori) Gluck
Spencer Seigel-Laddy

Faculty Address

Dr. Daniel Rynhold

Awards

Barnett Goldman

Presentation of Diplomas

Rabbis, Principals, and Sy Blechman

Closing Remarks

Jessica Spiegel

In my four years at BCHSJS, I have made many lasting friendships and enjoyed several thoughtful discussions.

I loved all of our trips and events, such as our time at the ice-skating rink, field days and bingo nights with USY, and of course, our Shabbatonim and our one and only Sundayton. Even in a time of social distancing, BCHSJS's and USY's creative staff hosted social events that my peers and I treasured. I will always miss the late nights, talent shows, and unending games of the Shabbaton.

I cherished The Ethicist and all the other discussion-based classes that Dr. Daniel Rynhold instructed. Dr. Dan creatively approaches complicated situations with insight from Jewish teachings and texts, ultimately reminding my peers and me that life is a complex and nuanced reality with some questions that will never be answered.

Another class that stood out was Jewish-Infused Improv with Ilana Schimmel. The class encouraged me to be creative and spontaneous, and I loved all the games we played. I became notorious for being the only student to attend the class virtually for most of the semester. In fact, I was so notorious that after I returned to in-person instruction, one of my classmates' improvised actions was waving to me through Ilana's computer screen! Even though my circumstances limited my ability to glide around the room with the other students, Ilana and my classmates were very patient and supportive. Thanks to them, improv class was a special and enjoyable experience.

I was also fascinated by many of Tova Sklar's classes, such as Jewish Medical Ethics and Permission to Believe. Ms. Tova presents difficult questions and situations in a balanced way. She values and respects students' opinions, and she encourages honest discussion about difficult topics.

The resilient students and staff of BCHSJS continued our special Sunday experience even after the pandemic struck and complicated all the details. I commend principal Jessica Spiegel, the instructors, and everyone who worked extra hard to make sure that my peers and I enjoyed our time here.

BCHSJS was a very important aspect of my high school experience, and I look forward to joining Jewish community organizations, such as Hillel, in college. I value my religious identity, and I will continue to honor my traditions with my Jewish peers at Cornell University.

Ori Ben Yossef
Cornell University



The most significant memory I have from BCHSJS is the first day of classes. The moment I walked into the 8th grade core class with Barnett Goldman in Englewood, New Jersey I didn't realize it would impact my life so greatly. My first day of classes was quite scary (of course) but the energy and the environment was so overwhelmingly welcoming and positive. It was well worth waking up every Sunday morning bright and early to learn about Israel, socialize, and discover more about Judaism. It feels so nice to be surrounded by so many Jews in such a packed community. I have gained a lot of knowledge, advice, valuable lessons, and interesting anecdotes from peers and teachers here.

I will miss BCHSJS so much. There is so much to look back on yet so much to look forward to as a Jewish student. I am prepared to enter the "real world" and deal with difficult scenarios. From experiences ranging from the "murder hotel" to New Orleans and Charleston I learned about Jewish culture from all around the nation. BCHSJS will always hold a special place in my heart and I can't wait to see what the future holds.

Daley Brown
Purdue University



I can remember when I pulled up to this huge school not knowing anyone except my sisters, freaking out of my mind. There were people getting schedules, teachers directing students where to go, it was pretty chaotic. I had heard of this school from an older friend who came to my Jewish Center. She also gave me a pen and I thought, hey I love free stuff. So I looked through her flyer, showed it to my parents, and two weeks later, Michelle 'The Front Desk Lady' called my name.

Most students would mention a special Shabbaton in 2018 at the "Murder Hotel" as their favorite memory. It was rumored to have ghosts wandering with doors shutting and items suddenly moved. Since we were there for 3 days (Friday-Sunday), it was, to say the least, an experience. My favorite memory of that experience was either the walk with Barnett to an old lake and shed, or the lip-sync karaoke night. At the karaoke night, the students could take their own leap of faith and sing whatever song they wanted with whatever choreography they so chose. I just enjoyed watching people's expressions and costumes, it was entertaining. I don't remember if I ever took that leap, I was pretty shy, but that night made me feel centered and also involved, just by clapping along to the rhythms and cheering on my peers. The teachers even made their own song and dance number, which was definitely my favorite part of the entire night.

In my first few years of joining, I looked up and down the roster of classes and electives, and I saw one "Mosaics and the Messiah" (or something like that I don't remember) with Deborah Stack. I didn't want to take anything too intensive with Judaism, as I was a beginner to this new school and new people, it was quite overwhelming. So I walked into her class and Deborah was the most bubbly teacher I had ever met. Especially since it was so early on a Sunday morning, I was surprised to see her with coffee and talking about the newest trends. But right as class started she got right down to business. She explained things so well and thoroughly and even gave modern references, so we'd understand easier. She was very hands-on and really inclusive to everyone.

- Olivia Brown

York College of Pennsylvania



BCHSJS has been a wonderful place for me when it comes to embracing my Jewish heritage in the modern world. I have never had classes as entertaining and up to date about the Jewish experience as at this school, and it's been a true pleasure! I have the fondest memories of laughing until tears rolled down my face melded with a deep satisfaction when learning about a subject discussed in depth. BCHSJS was the perfect place for me as a knowledge-hungry teen with a knack for connecting with others.

One of my favorite memories at BCHSJS was ironically NOT at BCHSJS. Rather, it was at the Spring Shabbaton of my freshman year, at a hotel located in the innermost heart of the Catskill Mountains. After a fun, chaotic bus ride through the Catskill's gorgeous forests, we had made our way to our destination, which we playfully called the haunted hotel due to its guestless lobby and dark corridors. Yet it was perfect.

The two nights spent there were filled with such absolute joy for me. Everyone dropped their walls and would strike up a conversation with the nearest friendly face, and it was awesome! On that trip I discovered my passion for Jenga and engaged in a nuanced, group dialogue with NCSY leader Shouf about the nature of religion. By far though, the best part of that Shabbaton was the lip-synching competition. I cannot even begin to describe how much fun it was to see the teachers and students gesticulating wildly along to famous songs in pop culture, and even to have a giant dance party with two T-Rexes singing along to "Shake it Off" by Taylor Swift. Special shout out to Barnett's special rendition of "Single Ladies;" his sashaying was top notch.

The Spring Shabbaton was representative of the welcoming and lighthearted atmosphere that BCHSJS embodies in their teachings. They take this attitude and apply it to Judaism, making it more palatable to a tired, teenage class on a Sunday. It works and I commend the teachers and staff for their effort. BCHSJS will forever be imprinted on my heart as a place filled with compassionate, quirky, funny people that I am proud to call *my people*. I hope that future students will be able to share the same enjoyable experiences I was lucky to have.

-Sabrina Burns

Rutgers University - New Brunswick, the School of Arts & Science Honors Program.

BCHSJS has helped shape my Jewish thinking. I had met so many great people that forced me to think critically as we discussed Judaism, Israel, politics, and Jewish politics. I've been challenged to think deeply and question how we see Judaism.

It is important for American Jews to maintain their Jewish identity by regularly being a part of a community like BCHSJS. Growing up around other Jewish kids has been so valuable to me. Whether we're celebrating holidays or gathering at Shabbatons, there is something unique to what it means to be Jewish.

I am very excited to be attending Wesleyan University next fall. AS we all transition towards the next stages in our lives, it is important that some things stay constant. And one of those things is our Judaism.

Judaism grounds us.

No matter where we are in life, Judaism is a sense of familiarity and community.

- Lawrence Fine
Wesleyan University



I first joined the BCHSJS family back in Fall 2016, several months after I had my Bar Mitzvah service and celebration with my family and friends. Originally, it was a recommendation from a friend's parent, as I then went to the open house. I showed a moderate amount of interest in wanting to join this 'new' Hebrew school, as my friends would be doing the same as well. Though I went to Bris Avroham of Fair Lawn as a kid, my friends went to Fair Lawn Jewish Center, but we would now finally all be able to attend school together every Sunday. Our class was definitely huge when we first started, but has obviously decreased in size over the years, as some had busier schedules, lived too far from the current location, or lost interest in it altogether. I've learned so much over the years from amazing people like Avital, Barnett, Yarden, Rabbi Hoffman, Mr. Prince, Tova, and of course the now retired Mr. Nagler and Jessica. My Jewish identity is something I'm very proud of and I'm not afraid to share it, as I'm glad that the past five years have been able to help me with finding that.

Some of my favorite memories from BCHSJS definitely have to do with the activities that happen both in and out of school, especially the Shabbatons. That actually marked the first time that I would be away from home for a certain period of time, as I never went to a sleepaway camp or overnight trips without my parents when I was a kid. The term that goes around for our first two Spring Shabbatons was 'murder hotel,' as that's what the place felt like at least. Otherwise, I had great times in all three that I went to, as we haven't had anymore since 2019, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Broadway shows have also been another major staple that I went to every single year, since school began in 2016. Through BCHSJS, I was able to see *Fiddler on the Roof*, *School of Rock*, *Come From Away*, and *Beetlejuice* all live on stage before my own eyes. Our school has also been to trampoline parks, such as Urban Air and Sky Zone. I'll never forget the time I played the *Spider-Man 2* Pizza Theme while eating actual pizza, right next to my friend Ori. Though this year hasn't had as many activities due to several constraints, there were tons of activities that occurred before school began, such as we tie dyed face masks, had an ice cream social, and even got to watch *Bee Movie* under the stars. More recently, we had our first SundayTon, where we got to spend the afternoon doing tons of fun activities, including sports & games, arts & crafts, a cake decorating contest, and a drum circle, which all ended with ice cream for everyone. Activities like these have given me so many memories that I would like to keep and share with others in the future.

After 5 years, I can't believe I'm finally graduating from both BCHSJS and my own school district, as all of this was definitely an adventure I'll never forget. As I will be attending Bergen Community College for the next 2 years to then transfer out, I will hopefully find a Hillel group to continue sharing my own Jewish identity safely. Thank you to everyone who made this possible, you are the best.

- Gregory Fishbeyn
Bergen Community College

I think we've all heard the classic story of how people come to Hebrew of their parents forcing them to. I myself was one of those people but I quickly learned that it is a pretty cool way to spend a Sunday. I originally came in with my group of friends from Fair Lawn Jewish Center. To most we were known as the FLJC clique. I guess it was because we were like family to each other. But, slowly when we were in 8th grade core curriculum, I started branching out towards other people and all I can say it has been a whirlwind of crazy since that class. It is crazy to say that we are graduating but it's the truth. I mean I always knew graduation was coming I just never imagined how fast it crept up on me. Now, let's jump into some of my favorite memories. The first one that comes to mind is me lip syncing Beauty and The Beast at the first spring shabbaton. I really enjoyed lip syncing and dancing. I thought it was just doing something fun. Honestly that was the highlight of the weekend. Second would have to be the fall shabbaton where me and two of my friends squished together on my air mattress in a children's classroom. It was a crazy night of gossiping and having a great time with new and old friends. Another one would have to be me and my friends from FLJC hiding in the library at Moriah and us getting caught. We never really cared about getting caught, we mostly cared about exploring and having fun. Whether it be exploring Moriah or a hotel I always had a great time. I would like to say out of my classes I loved taking classes taught by Avital because we have the same sense of humor and sarcasm. I even remember one year I took a class on Israeli law or something of the justice system nature. I found it very interesting to take. She was always there to support us or have a witty response to our dumb actions. She was the older sister/mother figure to a lot of us. Enough of me talking about Avital. I sometimes think how my Jewish education experience would have been different had I not gone to BCHSJS. For example, had I never gone to BCHSJS I would have gone on TJJ and met more of my really close friends. It was also an amazing experience getting to see Israel for the first time. I always imagined seeing Israel for the first time on Birthright or through a gap year. I also never imagined how much fun it could be learning about certain topics but in the context of real life events or even movies. In one of the classes I took "Disney and Judaism" we looked at the symbolism between moments from movies and the Talmud. I guess you get my drift. I'm guessing you could say I enjoyed going to BCHSJS more than I would.

Victoria Gluck
Montclair State University



The past five years have been incredibly important in shaping my Jewish identity. Unlike a lot of people, I had the choice of going, and I figured since my sister enjoyed going, I may as well try it out. And I didn't regret it. I was able to connect with more people my age that were also Jewish, something incredibly important considering I come from a not-so-Jewish town. I was able to make so many meaningful memories with my friends. One of my favorite memories was back in 9th grade, when we went to Crown Heights in Brooklyn for a scavenger hunt. It was in a more orthodox community, so there were things there that I'm not used to seeing. It was also the first time I got to explore part of the city with friends. We got to run around, trying to find different places, such as a mikvah or different temples. I got to learn so much about the different communities, while still having fun.

I also got to take so many fun and interesting classes, with amazing teachers. One of my favorite teachers, Deborah Stack, taught some of my favorite classes such as Manis and Midrash, along with other, fun creative classes. We always had good discussions in class, as well as did tons of creative projects. I still have the travel menorah, and mosaic tile that I made in one of her classes. Another one of my favorite teachers was Dr. Dan, in the last 3 years, I took his class The Ethicist every semester. This class helped me understand moral dilemmas from several different lenses. There was always a good discussion, and I learned a lot from both my peers, and Dr. Dan. Last but not least, probably the most important class I've taken in these past 5 years was the volunteer corps. Although it didn't always go according to plan, that class taught me a lot about helping the community, and learning the importance of talking to everyone in the community. About once a month, we would visit Daughters of Miriam, a nursing home, to hold discussions with some of the community members there to discuss how they grew up, and to see how much it has changed. Those conversations were incredibly meaningful to myself, and I'm sure to the community members. There are so many other incredible memories from the past 5 years, and coming to BCHSJS helped me to create and maintain a stronger connection to my Judaism.

Molli Gordon

Westchester University



I started coming to BCHSJS 5 years ago, and when I first started going I hated it. I thought I was finally done with being Jewish after my bar mitzvah, and now I had to wake up early every Sunday to learn about judaism. Once I got there however I realized that simply learning about judaism didn't do it justice. The biggest way BCHSJS stood out from simply being "jew school" was the teachers. People like Yardena, Barnett, and Dr. Silk made the classes truly engaging and turned BCHSJS from a chore to something I look forward to every Sunday (also the start time switching to 2 hours later this year didn't hurt at all).

In terms of specific memories, one that almost every BCHSJS student has is the murder hotel. The murder hotel was my first shabaton, and it was where my long standing friendships with people like Alex and Lewis (also Jacob may he rest in peace) first began. This had to have been the best shabaton simply because the atmosphere of the hotel was so intoxicating, it literally felt like you were in the shining and that was hype.

Another one of my favorite memories about BCHSJS would be the entirety of Dr. Silk's improv class. I would always look forward to flexing my creative and comedic chops with some of the most creative and funny people I know. Things like taxi and switch were some of the funnest things I've done and even though I kinda got the impression that Dr. Silk was not a fan of how much fun we were having, he was a really good improv teacher and leader in the activities.

Max Katzman
Case Western Reserve University

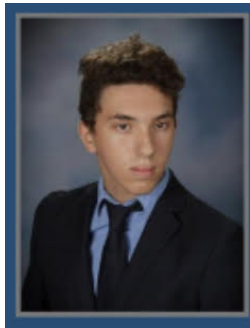


When I originally started BCHSJS I wasn't very sure I made the right choice. I had to choose between the hebrew high school at the temple that I went to at that time Temple Avodat Shalom with the friends I had known for almost 8 years at that point or BCHSJS where I originally was only friends with 3 people who were going here. Now, I know I made the right choice. All my friends at the other temple ended up leaving that hebrew high school and I lost contact with all of them. Here I've made more friends than just those 3 I originally knew and I've made wonderful memories over the years.

One of the memories I ofcourse have to mention is the murder hotel shabbatones. There was this old hotel that was up on the top of a mountain in the Catskills in New York that we used to go to for the shabbatone. My most fondest memory of this place is going down this abandoned hallway in the hotel. In the hotel there was this hallway where all the lights were turned off and technically I wasn't allowed there but I went down there anyways.

Alan Rosenberg

Ramapo College



I have made so many fond memories at BCHSJS, it's honestly hard to choose between my favorites and most profound. I could and would gush for hours on end about the friends I met, the people I connected with, the things I've experienced, and on and on. I'll try to condense it down, not wanting things to get too crazy.

The first memories that come to my mind when someone asks me about BCHSJS is the Shabaton at the murder hotel. It wasn't **actually** a murder hotel, mind you, but dear lord was it probably haunted. My first 2 shabatons were spent at this murder hotel and it was something. To explore the hotel with a group of friends trying to find some haunted stuff, or just trying to scare them, was fun. Not to mention the lip sync battles that went down there. I will never forget Barnett doing single ladies. Mainly because I still have it on video. I will not let him live that down. Not to mention the absolutely amazing lip sync performances I did with my friends. My third shabaton may not have been at the murder hotel (it closed down, typical for haunted hotels to do) but the fun still remained. Learning card tricks from Mr. Nagler, playing TTRPGs with friends, and more lip sync battles followed in that year. While my last 2 shabatons were cut off by COVID, I still will value the memories of those 3.

The second memory was probably one of my favorite classes: The Jewish Volunteer Corps. While the leadership program was shut down by the time I was in school, I still enjoyed this class. Barnett especially being a part of it. Visiting the residents of Sisters of Miriam every week was always fun. The residents were always fun to talk with and learn from. Watching Tuesdays with Morrie in class but never quite finishing it was also something I clearly remember. But going to speak with them every week was.. Always nice. Being there for them and giving company always made me feel really happy about myself.

The final thing I'll touch on is the teachers. The teachers really made BCHSJS what it is for me. Dr. Silk taught me all about the Talmud and the laws of the Torah, along with some serious Jewish Improv skills. Barnett for the Jewish Volunteer Corps and both my freshman and senior seminars, helping me connect with this new strange place... and then helping me be better off when I leave it. Yardena for really just being such a fun teacher to be around, and I honestly took all her classes whenever I could. Totally wasn't because of the candy that she gave out, as that was only a factor adding to the reason. Dr. Dan for providing several ethical dilemmas to the class that I always tried to find a way to solve in the absolutely worst way possible. Tova is enthusiastic and always teaching with a smile, always ready to help a student with learning about the Torah. Avital for relating modern things to Judaism, mostly with Netflix and Jews, but also teaching about international law and how it relates to Judaism. That and being a really fun, interesting teacher. Those were.. Really all the teachers I had the honor of having. The teachers really made BCHSJS what it is, and I'll be sad to not see them every Sunday.

Spencer Seigel - Laddy
Ramapo College



Some of my greatest memories and highlights from BCHSJS were:

Meeting new friends

Learning from great teachers

SHABBATONS! (So much fun!)

Drama class



Mimi Steinberg



Sidney Ansonoff
Rochester Institute of Technology



Max Ansonoff
Brandeis University

Lewis Milun