

A look back at the BJE's 2015 - 2016 BJE Adult Ed Courses and Classes



UB/BJE Lecture Series on Love - Ethel Melzer with Dr. Richard Cohen



Professor Ted Steinberg taught a class in the fall



Asher Lev Book Club with artist Harvey Breverman



Prayer Book Hebrew Reading Classes with Michal Shmuel-Lewis



Introduction to Judaism Course - Spring 2016 with Rabbi Alex Lazarus-Klein



Buffalo Mikvah Field Trip for Intro to Judaism classes with Brocha Leah Greenberg



UB/BJE Lecture Series on Love - Dr. Alex Green



Asher Lev Book Club with Saul Elkin and Adam Yellen from the Jewish Repertory Theatre

Advocacy in Action

By Chana Kotzin, Ph.D.,
Director, Jewish Buffalo Archives Project



Elinor Weiss, 3rd from left, 4th from left, Lois Gibbs

A commitment to activism characterizes the papers of Elinor Weiss, recently lodged within the University Archives at the University at Buffalo (ms200.45). Elinor was born in the Bronx and grew up in Yonkers. She graduated from the University of Buffalo in 1968, met her future husband, Joel Weiss, while she was a UB student and stayed, teaching in the Buffalo public school system for many years. Alongside her teaching career and beyond it, Elinor was also very active in a range of communal causes that she continues today, most recently, with Israel Advocacy through organizations including Hadassah of Buffalo.

Connecting to a network of advocacy organizations through Jewish women's groups is a leitmotif that runs through these personal papers. Elinor Weiss was an active member of the National Council

of Jewish Women (NCJW) during the 1980s and 1990s. The NCJW had been originally founded in Chicago in 1893, as a local grassroots community organization of Jewish women volunteers, committed to progressive ideals and social justice. With local sections around the country, including Buffalo, members worked to improve the quality of life for the entire community. During the 1980's the Buffalo Section of NCJW, and its national center lobbied for various issues relating to education, health, women's rights and the environment.

Developing testimonies on various issues that ranged from the links between poverty and gender, to protecting the entire community's health by ensuring environmental safeguards, Weiss served at various times as Buffalo Legislative Affairs Chair for NCJW, and as the Environmental

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Legislative Liaison for New York State Public Affairs of the NCJW. In this capacity, Elinor wrote articles and delivered testimony on low-level radioactive waste management, and hazardous waste disposable site remediation programs, among many others, all of which can be read within her papers. In 1991, she received the Hannah G. Solomon Award of the National Council of Jewish Women, Buffalo Section, for her work, as well as her efforts as part of the Pfohl Brothers Landfill Cleanup Committee, a local chemical landfill in Cheektowaga whose contaminants drained into local waterways. Lois Gibbs, former Love Canal activist and campaigner, spoke at Mrs. Weiss' award ceremony.

Alongside her interest in environmental safeguards, which have continued throughout the 2000s, Mrs. Weiss has a strong commitment to Israel. Following a trip to Israel in 2002, she worked with a range of local Jewish organizations to organize Israel Advocacy programs. Several programs looked at a number of topics including how mainline churches understand Israel, and separately, how Jewish student campus life is affected by views about Israel. Letters and articles written, legislative advocacy and activism all have led to a 2016 award by the national Israel advocacy group CAMERA. The papers of Elinor Weiss illustrate grassroots activism in a range of spheres, and how action builds from research and writing, to networking, programming and advocacy. The collection guide is located on the BJE's website, under the Jewish Buffalo Archives Project tab.

For more information you can email Chana Revell Kotzin, Ph.D. at archivesproject@bjebuffalo.org or call 716-204-5388.

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