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The Value of Jewish Studies

As the academic year draws to a close, it is a good time to reflect on the value of Jewish Studies to an undergraduate education.

A student’s decision to earn a degree in Jewish Studies may give pause to some parents. I recall my mother’s reaction to my decision to pursue a Ph.D. in Jewish history. She had me slated for an appointment to the Supreme Court. No doubt, some degrees provide more direct routes to financial stability. And, in fact, many of our students have chosen to add Jewish Studies to a major or certificate in a subject that they see as having immediate practical applications. This year, for example, students in Jewish Studies are simultaneously pursuing degrees in such fields as Business Marketing, Economics, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Global Health, Kinesiology, Legal Studies, Psychology, and Neurobiology. When these students decide to do coursework in Jewish Studies, they voluntarily increase an already heavy course load. They do so because they find the study of Jewish civilization intrinsically meaningful, perhaps in ways they cannot yet fully articulate.

In our contemporary world, in which value is all too often quantified, monetized, and measured, the choice to study Jews makes an important statement about the value of Jewish Studies in a liberal arts education. In Jewish Studies, students explore who they are in relation to those who came before them and in relation to society today. They examine what it means to be a Jew and an American.

After graduation, some of our students will become teachers or rabbis, some will enter the arts, others will join the legal or medical professions, and the business world will attract others still. Wherever our students go in life, they will take with them the knowledge they acquired in Jewish Studies, they will impart it to others in ways large and small, and in doing so they will make some difference in the world. And CJS will have done the same.

Tony Michels, Director
Mosse/Weinstein Center or Jewish Studies
George L. Mosse Professor of American Jewish History

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From weekly Shabbat to vacations in the Catskills, Jewish leisure takes distinctive forms. At this year’s Greenfield Summer Institute, scholars from across disciplines will join us in Madison to consider the many ways that Jews have rested, relaxed, reconnected, and restored their spirits. Exploring the theme “Jews and Leisure,” this year’s Greenfield will include discussions of Algerian villas, Sephardic barbeques, European taverns and cafés, New York City dance halls, and Florida beaches. Here’s a sampling of the topics:

“The Catskills: How the ‘Jewish Alps’ Became America’s Playland”
–Stephen M. Silverman, Journalist

“Mahjong: A Chinese Game and the Making of Modern American Culture”
–Annelise Heinz (University of Oregon)

“Sephardim in the Sun: From Beaches to Backyard Barbecues”
–Rachel Smith (Columbia University)

“Israeli Folk Dance in Postwar America”
–Emily Alice Katz (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill)

“The Politics of Jewish Sports Movements in Interwar Poland”
–Jack Jacobs (City University of New York)

“Jews on the Move: The Jewish Traveler in the Modern World”
–Lauren B. Strauss (American University)

“Sites of Leisure as Sites of Resistance: The Aboulkers of Algiers and the Jewish Underground”
–Ethan Katz (University of California, Berkeley)

“Fighting Antisemitism on Vacation: Wisconsin Resorts in the Postwar Era”
–Jonathan Pollack (Madison Area Technical College & University of Wisconsin-Madison)

This year’s Greenfield will also include two hard-to-find documentaries: The Last Resort, on Jewish retirement in Miami Beach, and The Mamboniks, the surprising story of Jewish dancers who fell in love with Cuban mambo in the 1950s. After The Mamboniks, filmmaker Lex Gillespie will join us via Zoom for a Q&A.

All events will take place in the comfortable setting of Grainger Hall, home of the UW School of Business. A continental breakfast and afternoon snacks will be provided daily, with a buffet dinner on the penultimate evening. Registration information can be found at cjs.wisc.edu/greenfield.

Mendelson’s Atlantic Hotel on the shore of Lake Michigan

“Rey Mambo” (Marvin Baumel) and his wife “Lynnita” (Lynn Baumel) in rumba attire

Greenfield Summer Institute
“Jews and Leisure,” July 17-20
To register, visit cjs.wisc.edu/greenfield

The Greenfield Institute is made possible through the generosity of Larry and Roslyn Greenfield.
CURRICULAR NEWS

Recently Added Courses in Jewish Studies

CJS has been developing a variety of new courses to enhance our curriculum. Here’s a sampling of recent additions.

American Jewish Women and the Body of Tradition
Since the second half of the twentieth century, Jewish women have remade American Judaism by putting their bodies front and center. In the face of a largely male rabbinic elite, they have created new models of ritual, communal leadership, and textual interpretation both within and outside existing Jewish institutions and denominations. Taught by CJS affiliate Cara Rock-Singer (Assistant Professor, Religious Studies), this course focuses on the role of the body, gender, and sexuality in Jewish life to examine the ways that American Judaism and Jewishness are constituted and contested through everyday practices.

Modern Jewish Thought
In the late 19th century, as cultural assimilation, economic impoverishment, and rising antisemitism sowed doubts about the viability of traditionalism and emancipation alike, Jewish social and political thinkers began to propose new answers to the “Jewish question.” This course by CJS affiliate Chad Goldberg (Martindale-Bascom Professor of Sociology) introduces students to some of the major answers they debated, including revolutionary universalist utopias (socialism and Communism), various forms of Jewish nationalism, hyphenated identities, cultural pluralism, and cosmopolitanism. Students contextualize these ideas historically while also considering whether and how they remain relevant to the present.

Muslims and Jews
Designed by Adam Stern (Assistant Professor, Jewish Studies and German, Nordic, & Slavic†), this new course explores the historical relationship between Muslims and Jews in the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Ages. Students first learn about major events and figures in the history of the region, with a particular focus on the interaction between the Jewish and Muslim literary traditions. The second half of the course turns to the depiction of the region by modern writers and artists, who often invoked the flowering of intercultural productivity that once prevailed there. That memory, however, has become fraught, at times, against the background of shifting political and social conditions across the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Encountering these and other questions in both medieval and modern texts, students are prompted to consider the parallel legacies of antisemitism, Orientalism, and Islamophobia.

The Sabbath
“What is the ‘Sabbath’?” What does it mean to “rest”? Encompassing a range of textual sources from the Jewish and Christian traditions, this course offers a broad, comparative introduction to the history of the Sabbath, from the Bible to the present day. In this second course created by Adam Stern, students discuss the major theological, ritual, and cultural practices that have developed around the Sabbath, as well as contemporary political iterations of the Sabbath in modern, secular contexts.

What Is Jewish Studies?
A requirement for the Jewish Studies major, this seminar examines Jewish history, culture, and thought through the key questions that guide the field. What is Jewish practice? What is a Jewish text? What is diaspora? What is antisemitism? Exploring a variety of responses offered by scholars, writers, theologians, and artists, “What Is Jewish Studies?” develops the ability to think transhistorically, bringing together biblical, medieval, modern, and contemporary perspectives. To anchor these inquiries into the field of Jewish studies, each student produces a substantial research paper.
Exploring Jewish Humor

Q&A with Sunny Yudkoff

In a course recently developed by Sunny Yudkoff (Associate Professor of Yiddish Studies), students explore the notion of “Jewish humor” by reading a variety of texts, including jokes, short stories, films, websites, and television shows.

In the syllabus for the course you ask, “Is there such a thing as ‘Jewish humor’?” Is there such a thing?

Yes and no. “Jewish humor” isn’t just one thing. The course guides students to explore the ideas, questions, and social dynamics that have shaped conversations—especially discussions in the United States—about what makes something “Jewish humor.” Joining these conversations, students consider how questions of ethnicity, race, and religion are worked out in American popular culture through the use of humor.

What makes “Jewish humor” specifically “Jewish”?

Jewish humor is a discursive concept. That means there is no one definition but there are a series of statements, assumptions, and structures that lead people to label something as “Jewish humor.” At its most basic, as scholar Jeremy Dauber argues, Jewish humor has come to be understood as something “produced by Jews.” For many students, this is a starting point. The goal of the class is to take the discussion further, asking not simply what is Jewish humor but what does Jewish humor do. How does it empower and how does it diminish? What are its stylistic signatures?

What time frame does the course cover?

Has humor changed over those years?

The course begins by introducing students to theories of humor and emotion, ranging from turn-of-the-twentieth-century notions of laughter by Henri Bergson to twenty-first century notions of “happy objects” by Sara Ahmed. With these theories in hand, we turn to a diverse set of creative texts—folktales, short stories, television shows and more—produced from the early 1900s to 2020. While the subjects and forms of humor have changed, the stakes of the form have always remained high.

Which texts or assignments do students seem to enjoy most?

An unexpected joy of the course is a chance to teach Franz Kafka’s novella The Metamorphosis. It’s a text that many students will have read in high school. This course offers them a chance to return to it, and with some help from David Foster Wallace, ask: How might this text function as a work of Jewish humor? Or, more simply, why would anyone laugh at poor Gregor Samsa who awakes one morning to discover he had become a giant insect?

What are you hoping students will take away from this course?

While many students come into the class with an already strong love of Larry David, few are familiar with the work of humor theorists, such as psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud or philosopher Noël Carroll. The goal of the course is to give students tools to analyze humor—not simply to assert that something is funny but to explain why and how. The work of Freud, Carroll, and others empowers students to examine their own sense of humor and to analyze texts that are understood as “Jewish humor.”

Helpful in tracing the arc of Jewish humor are the comedy and legacy of Joan Rivers (left), shown here in 1968 on That Show. (Photo by John Shearer) In the course “Jewish Humor,” students analyze Rivers’s performances from the 1960s and then investigate how this icon of Jewish humor has been reimagined today in such series as The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel (bottom) and Hacks.

Exploring themes of Jewish humor in her research, Yudkoff is currently working on a new book titled, Against Jewish Humor: Toward a Theory of Yiddish Joy.
While some of the Jewish fraternities and sororities that once thrived at the UW are now gone, others are celebrating their centennials. In this issue of the CJS newsletter, we take a retrospective look at Jewish fraternities. An upcoming edition will feature Jewish sororities.

In the 1920s, when almost all Greek-letter organizations excluded Jews from membership, Jewish students at the UW formed fraternities and sororities of their own. Between 1920 and 1930, students created chapters of Phi Sigma Delta, Alpha Epsilon Phi, Zeta Beta Tau, Pi Lambda Phi, Phi Epsilon Pi, Alpha Epsilon Pi, and Phi Sigma Sigma. Some of the UW’s most distinguished alumni belonged to these organizations. Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig and Senator Herb Kohl (BA and BS ’56, respectively) met at Pi Lambda Phi, where they became good friends. Members of ZBT included Hollywood producer Walter Mirisch (BA ’42) and businessman Jerome Chazen (BA ’48), for whom the UW’s Chazen Museum is named.

For many Jewish students, a fraternity or sorority was above all a way to fit in. According to Michael Stern (BS ’65), a member of ZBT, these were places “where Jewish men and women could feel comfortable, at a time when that was not always the case.” Jeff Auslander (BS ’66) points out that at a large school like the UW, students can easily feel lost. For him, joining ZBT was “like walking into a family. It gave you an identity.”

When Richard Roberts (BS ’66) came to the UW, he didn’t know anyone. He met fellow students during rush week and ended up receiving bids from three fraternities, including one that was not Jewish. For advice, Rich called his father, who thought his son would be happier in a Jewish fraternity. Rich was indeed very happy with his choice of ZBT, where he made lifelong friendships, including Michael Stern and Ken Latimer (BS ’66). (For recent news of Latimer, see p. 11.)

In this period of the early and mid-1960s, fraternity life was not unlike its later depiction in films like National Lampoon’s Animal House. As Rich Roberts puts it, “Animal House was a documentary!” Looking back at his college experience, he does sometimes wish that he had taken academics more seriously. “The only classes I went to religiously were [George L.] Mosse’s,” Rich says. “He was unbelievable. At least once a semester we would invite him to dinner at the fraternity house.”

During these years, the civil rights movement was gaining students’ attention. Rich recalls, “I would hang out in the Rathskeller and watch the guys play gin. In the afternoon and at night the Rathskeller became kind of a beatnik hangout.” One of the regulars was civil rights activist Dion Diamond, who attended the UW for a time. “I would sit and listen to his stories from Mississippi, Alabama…” Rich says. “They were amazing.”

Ken Latimer also remembers fraternity antics against a backdrop of political change. In his freshman year, he and other ZBT pledges had to set up for house parties and clean up afterwards. “Then a senior would come in at 3:00 a.m. and pour beer on the floor so we had to re-clean!” he recalls. Meanwhile, across campus, some students began to oppose the war in Vietnam. Latimer was “focused on school and not very
political," but he objected to some of the more virulent antiwar protests, which he viewed as shutting down free speech and debate. The tactics of some protesters, he explains, "pushed me more to the conservative bent. But I respect other people’s point of view."

In the late 1960s, the atmosphere at the UW changed precipitously. Kenneth Wiseman (BA ’71) says that in the fall of 1967, when he first came to Madison, he was excited to join a fraternity, and he chose Pi Lambda Phi (‘Pi-Lam’). During that year, however, UW students’ attention shifted from their own life on campus to the developments that were then dividing the country. "Our interests were in what was going on in America," he explains.

For Ken and many other students, a pivotal moment was the October 18, 1967, demonstration against Dow Chemical Company, a maker of napalm used in the Vietnam War. During the protests, Ken stood outside Commerce Hall (now Ingraham), while inside, students blocked the Dow recruiters. "Police came with clubs and were beating students sitting peacefully in the halls," Ken recalls. Many years later, he discovered a photo in a book that showed himself among students clustered around an Army Reserve jeep, outfitted with a machine gun.

By the late 1990s, the UW-Madison was a dramatically different place. As a reflection of that change, several fraternities and sororities witnessed a revival. In 1999, freshman Jonathan H. Levin (BA ’02) restarted ZBT out of his dorm room. Jonathan had grown up hearing his father, Jess Levin (BA ’68), talk about the lifelong friendships that he built and maintained through ZBT. Jonathan wanted that experience, too.

By the time Jonathan was an undergraduate, he explains, ‘Jews belonged to organizations that would not have had them decades ago.” For a student trying to reestablish a Jewish fraternity, this also meant more competition for recruits. To drum up members, he and his small band of ZBT brothers attended Hillel events and volunteered to help move students into their dorms, with a focus on the traditionally Jewish Statesider and Towers. After introducing themselves to prospective members, they would exchange email addresses—still a new way of communicating at the time. "AOL Instant Messenger was the extent of our social media," he adds. "We had to work twice as hard as other fraternities," he explains, "because we didn’t have a house. We were looking for people that shared in the vision that we were going to be something bigger than we were in our current form." By the time he graduated, ZBT had 40 students and a small house on Langdon.

Jonathan’s experience has come full circle. For the past five years, he has served as the Vice President of Development for the national Zeta Beta Tau Foundation. In that capacity, he has worked closely with ZBT alumni and students around the country, including at his alma mater. As Jonathan points out, ZBT became a non-sectarian organization nationally in 1954. At the UW, however, its Jewish membership has always been in the 90 percent range.

Last year, ZBT celebrated its hundredth year at the UW-Madison. Announcing the occasion, Joe Goldberg (BA ’67) reminded members about the courage of the students who had created the chapter in a period of deep discrimination. As Goldberg observed, “Their efforts changed the course of not only their lives, but many generations to follow.”

Were you a member of a Jewish sorority?

If you belonged to a historically Jewish sorority at the UW-Madison, we would love to hear from you for an article in a future issue of this newsletter. To share your experiences, please contact us at jewishtudies@cjs.wisc.edu.
As a student at the UW–Madison in the early 2000s, Ari Lorge (BA ’07) was already drawn to the rabbinate. Now a rabbi at New York City’s Central Synagogue, he recalls the path that led him in that direction. While he came to the UW thinking he wanted to be a rabbi, Lorge explains, he left campus knowing he wanted to be one. During his years in Madison, he says, “I found new passions in my courses of study, but everything continued to affirm my love of Judaism, Jewish learning, and Jewish living.”

Growing up in Skokie, Illinois, Lorge was familiar with UW–Madison since childhood. Several members of his family were Badgers, as were many of his counsellors at the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute, the Jewish overnight camp he regularly attended in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. Later, when choosing a college, he considered OSRUI’s proximity to Madison a plus. While studying at the UW, he could continue working with synagogue groups who were on retreat at the camp during the year.

At the UW Lorge found himself drawn to courses on human rights, humanitarian intervention, and comparative genocide. “The questions raised by those subjects,” he explains, “stood at the intersection of Jewish history, ethics, morality, and the real world. For whom are we responsible? How ought our values and ethics to play out in the world? What causes regular people to perform unspeakable evil? What limits, if any, should there be on acting to save innocent life somewhere? How can one stop a regime from performing crimes against humanity within their own borders?” These questions led him to major in Political Science.

His most formative experiences, however, occurred at Hillel. “I am deeply indebted to Rabbi Andrea Steinberger,” Lorge says. “She helped nudge me into taking leadership roles within the UW Jewish community. My sister Sari and I organized Hillel’s response to the Darfur Genocide and worked in collaboration with other campus organizations to raise awareness, rally, and support the survivors. Rabbi Steinberger also encouraged me to lead the Reform minyan. My friend Brian Avner and I began to lead a monthly service that was musical, joyous, and participatory.”

Rabbi Steinberger and several of Lorge’s UW professors wrote letters of recommendation for his application to the rabbinical program at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati, Ohio. He loved his studies there and in Jerusalem.

Although Lorge had always pictured himself living in the Midwest, at the time of his ordination in 2013, most of the positions were on the East Coast. In visiting Central Synagogue for an interview, he was impressed by the clergy and lay leaders he met there. “The questions they were asking were different in scope,” Lorge recalls. “The way they were thinking about Jewish life and the place of the synagogue was exciting and galvanizing. Ten years later it still feels that way.” As a Midwesterner, he felt nervous about moving to New York City, but, he explains, “so many people went out of their way to make sure I felt at home here.”

Reflecting on his work, Lorge explains, “One of the incredible things about synagogues is the way they have changed over thousands of years to meet the needs of the Jewish community of their moment.” Most recently, he has found it both challenging and rewarding to participate in Central Synagogue’s efforts to make Jewish life “as vibrant and present as possible” during the global pandemic. “I feel so lucky to be a part of the Central community. I continue to draw tremendous strength from this passionate, dedicated, and inspiring community. The relationships with them are the reward.”

“I found new passions in my courses of study, but everything continued to affirm my love of Judaism, Jewish learning, and Jewish living.”

—Rabbi Ari Lorge
For her dissertation in the Department of History, graduate student Erin Faigin decided to set her sights on the area of California where she grew up. With crucial support from the Julie A. and Peter M. Weil Distinguished Graduate Fellowship, Erin has the resources she needs to conduct her research on Jewish suburbanization in the San Fernando Valley.

What prompted you to focus on the San Fernando Valley?

It really is a homecoming. This wasn’t my original topic; I was planning to write on regional networks in interwar Yiddish arts and letters. But returning to Los Angeles after spending several years in Wisconsin, I realized that was where my attention needed to be. The Valley is home to half of Los Angeles Jewry. Jews in the Valley are often older, poorer, and more politically conservative than Jews in the city. These differences are real, but not entirely understood. And the scholarship on American Jewish suburbanization largely concludes that suburbanization and upward mobility were closely linked, but this isn’t entirely true. Part of my work is trying to uncover the economic and cultural complexities that accompany suburbanization.

How has the Weil Fellowship supported your research?

Most significantly, it gave me the opportunity to go back to Los Angeles. While I was in Los Angeles, I had the opportunity to work with scholars at the University of Southern California and Hebrew Union College, and I also had the chance to talk with my family. My parents have been actively involved in Jewish life in the San Fernando Valley for over 40 years, so I really benefit from their knowledge.

In one chapter, you look closely at the image of the “Valley Girl” and compare it to another stereotype, the “Jewish American Princess.” What’s the difference between them? Did the two merge in the “Coastie” stereotype that arose here on the UW campus in the 1990s?

The main difference is that the Jewish American Princess is labeled as Jewish, whereas the Valley Girl is ambiguously (and not always) so—though you didn’t have to be Jewish to be a Jewish American Princess, and often she is Jewish in name only. Otherwise, they are similar in a number of ways: young women who are entitled, spoiled, demanding. And the relationship to the “Coastie” stereotype is also undeniable. What links them all is misogyny and economically motivated antisemitism.

Back in the early 1980s, some girls and young women seemed to embrace the “Valley Girl” and “J.A.P.” identities, despite the often-derogatory connotations. Were there some positive aspects of the stereotypes, too?

Absolutely. I think there is something inherently powerful about these stereotypes. In part, they represented empowered, opinionated, and demanding young women. These were women who had benefitted from feminism, from upward mobility, from access to education. They represented some of the gains Jewish women had made in the postwar period, while echoing older stereotypes.

Much of the Valley’s history is relatively recent. What types of sources will you be using in your research? Are you planning to conduct any interviews?

There is an abundance of source material that I get to work with. My chapter on Valley Girls uses music, film, television, and trade paperbacks, as well as more traditional archival and periodical sources. I especially love the Jewish American Princess and Valley joke books and instructional manuals that were popular in the early 1980s. And yes, I have done some interviews and am planning on conducting more. That is one of the benefits of studying the not-so-distant past.

Made possible by Julie A. and Peter M. Weil (BA ‘70, JD ‘74), the Weil Distinguished Graduate Fellowship is intended to attract and support outstanding Ph.D. candidates who wish to study American Jewish history. The fellowship package includes five years of guaranteed support.
Teryl Dobbs (Music) spent part of her sabbatical in Vienna and Prague, engaging in extensive fieldwork on the forced removal and geospatial trauma of Jewish musicians and music educators during the Shoah. In addition, Professor Dobbs presented the inaugural Arnold Nemirow Lecture in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, “Music in the Shoah: Savagery and Survival,” at the College of Charleston, South Carolina and attended the Harvard-Radcliffe Institute to discuss her research on the role of the children’s opera Brundibar in the Shoah and post-Shoah periods.

Chad Goldberg (Martindale-Bascom Professor of Sociology) was interviewed by PBS Wisconsin reporter Aditi Debnath for a segment on contemporary antisemitism on the news show Here & Now. The segment is available online at https://pbswisconsin.org/news-item/the-chronic-scourge-of-casual-antisemitism-in-a-divisive-era/. In addition, he participated in a meeting of the Academic Committee of the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, and he presented a paper entitled "From Multiculturalism to Antisemitism? Revisiting the Jewish Question in America" at the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Goldberg has also recently reviewed two books in the field of Jewish studies: David Barak-Gorodetsky’s Judah Magnes: The Prophetic Politics of a Religious Binationalist (for the journal American Jewish History) and Tal Elmaliach’s Hakibbutz Ha’artzi, Mapam, and the Demise of the Israeli Labor Movement (for Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research). Elmaliach was formerly a postdoctoral fellow at the Mosse Program in History and is now a faculty member at the University of Haifa.

Steve Nadler (Philosophy) recently published The Portraitist: Frans Hals and His World (University of Chicago Press). His article “The Curse on Spinoza” appeared in the November issue of the Jewish Quarterly.

Sunny Yudkoff received tenure last summer. This past fall, she presented research on the art of Mel Bochner at the University of Toronto, where she also led a graduate seminar in Yiddish on Avrom Sutzkever’s epic poem Sibir (Siberia). Her article “The Joy of Joys: A Reception History of Leo Rosten’s Yiddish Lexicon” appeared in the Association for Jewish Studies Review. In addition, Professor Yudkoff was the recipient of the 2022 Phillip R. Certain-Gary D. Sandefur Letters & Science Distinguished Faculty Award.

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Introducing the Darren M. Latimer Series on Jews and Sports

A second-generation professional basketball player, Dan Grunfeld is also the grandson of Holocaust survivors. In October, he recounted his family’s remarkable story in the inaugural lecture of the Center’s new Darren M. Latimer Series on Jews and Sports. Co-sponsored by the UW Hillel Foundation, Grunfeld’s talk was based on his recently published book, *By the Grace of the Game: The World’s Only Journey from Auschwitz to the NBA* (Triumph Books, 2021).

During the Holocaust, Grunfeld’s paternal grandparents lost nearly every member of their immediate families. With the help of the Israeli government, the Grunfelds eventually emigrated to the United States and settled in New York City, where they opened a fabric store. At the playground where their nine-year-old son Ernie went to make friends and try to fit in, he fell in love with the game of basketball. Ernie Grunfeld—Dan’s father—went on to become an Olympic champion and a leading star of the New York Knicks. Inspired by his father’s success on the court, Dan himself was an Academic All-American and All-Conference basketball selection at Stanford University, and later played for eight seasons in top leagues in Germany, Spain, and Israel.

In the Q&A with Grunfeld, CJS Director Tony Michels noted that the family’s outstanding performance in basketball presents an obvious challenge to stereotypes about Jews as non-athletes. Grunfeld agreed, adding that the Grunfeld athletic tradition extends back at least as far as his grandfather, Alex, a world-ranked ping-pong player in Romania and captain of his soccer team. For all the Grunfelds’ success in sports, however, it is Dan’s 97-year-old grandmother, Livia, that he considers “the star of our family.” Her account of survival during the Holocaust is preserved in an oral history on the site of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Museum (collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn509557).

Grunfeld also revealed his many ties to the University of Wisconsin. UW alumni in his family include his mother, Nancy Kahn Grunfeld (BA ’78), and her parents, Gerald Kahn (BBA ’48 and LLB ’50) and Rosalie Eisenberg Kahn (BA ’51), who met at the UW. Gerald Kahn later served on the CJS Board of Visitors from 1994 to 2011.

Special guests at Grunfeld’s talk included CJS Board of Visitors member Kenneth Latimer (BS ’66), together with many of the friends and family who made the new series possible. The Latimer Series was created in the memory of Kenneth’s son, Darren M. Latimer (BBA ’96). An avid sports fan, Darren passed away in 2019 after a fourteen-year battle with brain cancer.

A recording of Grunfeld’s talk is available on the CJS website: cjs.wisc.edu/lecture-archive/.

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Joshua Shanes (College of Charleston) at the 2022 Greenfield Institute