

Jews for Judaism

2005 Creative Writing Contest

Winners

Winners Grades 1-5

First Place

Channa Schachet-Briskin
My Happiest Jewish Memories
A.J. Heschel Day School
Grade 1

Second Place

Ariel Rafie
L'dor V'dor
Yavneh Hebrew Academy
Grade 5

Third Place

Shoshana Arunasalam
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Rio Vista
Grade 5

Winners Grades 6-8

First Place

Rebecca Heikaly
The Blessing
Hillel Hebrew Academy
Grade: 7

Second Place

Brianna Miller
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched
Studies
Grade: 8

Third Place

Danielle Magady
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Yeshiva Ohr Eliyahu
Grade: 8

Winners Grades 9-12

First Place

Jacey Stamler
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Chadwick
Grade: 12

Second Place

Yossi Rodal
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon Chabad
Grade: 10

Third Place

Mojdeh Shokri
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Ohr Haemet Institute
Grade: 9

Finalist

Chaya Abramson
Yeshiva Ohr Eliyahu.
Grade 5

Talia Arya
Temple Sollel Day School
Grade 3

Daniella Deutsch
Westwood Charter Elementary
Grade 4

Stephanie Heimler
Tarbut V'Torah
Grade 4

Rina Schiller
Yeshiva Ohr Eliyahu
Grade 5

Alex Weil
Stephen S. Wise
Grade 3

Daniella Wohlfarth
Yavneh Hebrew Academy
Grade 5

Stephen Apfel
Yavneh Hebrew Academy
Grade 7

Sammy Brunelle
Maimonides Academy
Grade 8

Roe Raviv
Maimonides Academy
Grade 8

Elana Sassover
Maimonides Academy
Grade 8

Ariel Schnitzer
Harkam Hillel Academy
Grade 6

Jonathan Swartz
Yavneh Hebrew Academy
Grade 7

Zisi Wolf
Yeshiva Rav Iassacson
Grade 6

Jennifer Beckerman
Santa Barbara Middle
Grade 9

Chaim Gamzo
Yeshiva University High School of LA
Grade 9

Hershel Gilbert-McNabb
Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon Chabad
Grade 9

Alice Ollstein
Santa Monica High School
Grade 11

Elyse Perlmutter-Gumbiner
*Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched
Studies* Grade 9

Michael Shaolian
University High School
Grade 9

Julia Trakhtenberg
Shalhevet High School
Grade 9

Entries Were Received From Students Who Attend The Following Schools

A.J Heshel West Day School	Ohr Haemet Institue
Acacia Elementary	Orange County High School of Arts
Adat Ariel	Pressman Academy
Adat Elohim	Prospect Park Yeshiva
A.J. Heschel Day School	Rio Vista
Bais Chana High School	San Diego Hebrew Day School
Bais Rebbe	Santa Barbara Middle
Beverly Vista	Santa Monica High School
Chabad Hebrew Academy	Shalhevet High School
Chabad Hebrew Academy	Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies
Chabad of South Bay	Sinai Akiba
Chadwick	Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School
Cheder of Los Angeles	Stephen S. Wise
City of Angnells Middle Scholl	Stephen Wise Temple Elementary School
Colina Middle School	Tarbut V'Torah community Day School
Emek Hebrew Academy	Temple Beth Tikvah
Francis Parker	Temple Beth Tikvah Religious School
Congregation Beth Shalom	Temple Israel
Hawthorne Elementary	The Oak School
Hearst Elementary	University High School
Hebrew Academy of Long Beach	University Synagogue
Hebrew School CTJ	Valley Beth Shalom Day School
Hillel Hebrew Academy	Valley Beth Shalom
Kadima Hebrew Academy	Westwood Charter Elm
Maimonides Academy	Westwood Elementary
McAuliffe Middle School	Willow Elementary
Michael Diller High School	Woodsboro Elementary
Milken High School	Yavneh Hebrew Academy
Natan Eli High School	Yeshiva Ahron Yaakov Ohr Eliyahu.
Nefesh	Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon Chabad
Newcomb Academy	Yeshivah Rav Iassacson
Oakwood School	Yeshiva University High School of LA

Celebrity Judges

Miriam Grossman, M.D., is a UCLA Student Psychologist and best selling author of *“The Wonder of Becoming You.”*

David Sacks, is an Emmy Award winning writer and producer (*Malcolm in the Middle, The Simpsons*), Golden Globe Award winner (*Third Rock from the Sun*).

Arthur Allan Seidelman, is an Emmy and Peabody award winning director of film, theatre and television including, *Hill Street Blues*. Two of his films, *Puerto Vallarta Squeeze* and *The Sisters* will be opening in theatres this year.

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Ufarasta Jewish Books Store

First Place - Grades 1-5

“My Happiest Jewish Memories”

by Channa Schachet-Briskin

1st Grade at Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School- Age 7

(Please listen to enclosed CD for song's tune.)

My favorite things about being Jewish
Things I like to do
I like to do them with my family
I hope that you do too.

Lighting the Menorah
Holding the Torah
Spinning the Dreidel
Setting the Shabbat Table.

Eating the Challah
Being named Channa
Going to the Synagogue
Praying to One G-d.

Getting a Magen Dah-vid
Tu B'shvat planting a seed
Four questions Seder night
Purim costumes that fit just right.

Eating apples and honey (oh, so sweet)
On Shavuot we eat blintzes (such a treat)
Being a Mensch and doing my part
Giving Tzedakah from the heart.

My happiest Jewish memories
I make them all year long
They make me feel like singing
That's why I wrote this song.

Second Place - Grades 1-5

L'Dor V'Dor

Ariel Shalom Rephael (ASHeR) Rafie
Yavneh Hebrew Academy
Grade 5

A few years ago, during the time that Kohanim were going to Duchan, I realized the true meaning of the verse “L'Dor V'Dor, (from generation to generation)” in practice:

On a *Shabbat*, we were in a *Sefaradic shul*, as I found myself under my father's *talit*, with his hands on my head (this is to transfer the *bracha* from father to son), I noticed that my grandfather A”H, had my father under his *talit* with his hands on my father's head! This was truly a very happy moment.

The thought of me having my son under my *talit* with my hands on his head in the future, gave me a chill. It dawned on me that I am a ring of the long chain of Jewish continuity. Although my grandfather has passed away now, I was rethinking that moment and talked to my father about it, he told me that his grandfather, and his father, and so on did the same thing during *Birkat Kohanim*. Then he sat me down and asked me if I remembered others doing the same thing in the *Shul*. I did remember that there were a few of my friends in the same position.

He then told me: probably the *Ben Ish Chai*, *Rambam*, *Rashi*, *Rabbi Akiva*, and even *David Hamelech* did the same thing. How proud I felt to identify myself with this unbreakable chain! Now we are members of Beth Jacob of Beverly Hills, although it is an *Ashkenazic shul*, during *shalosh regalim* (*Pesach*, *Sukkoth* and *Shavuot*,) we happily keep our tradition!

Third Place - Grades 1-5

My Happiest Jewish Memory

By Shoshana Arunasalam

Rio Vista

Fifth Grade

Had I been asked last year what my favorite Jewish experience was I might have responded that it was tearing open Chanukah presents on the first night of Chanukah. Or I might have replied sharing a wonderful Shabbos dinner with friends, family and my favorite delicacies. But now I must answer differently, describing to you as best as I can the most vivid experience of a lifetime.

I had waited so long for this spectacular moment. Kingston Ave. was lined from beginning to end with hordes of people. I fought my way through the masses. The men were joyous and the women were electrified. I had never expected even on the most festive nights of Succos to see so much simcha. Delight pervaded the air. I wished I had wings so that I could fly over the swarm of people to get a better look at the prancing and lively Chassidim rather than have to struggle to break through the mob for a glimpse of them. Everywhere I looked there were spectators; on roofs of buildings, clinging to street lamps, on the top of traffic light poles, even on a little ledge of a walk don't walk sign. . . wherever there was a place to balance. The lights were spectacular. The range of music was so vast; some blasted in a way that kept people singing and dancing all night while other music swayed you to sleep.

Everyone I knew in Crown Heights was there. Everyone yearned to be part of the simcha that happens only once a year. I felt like I could go swimming in the sea of black hats and coats. Suddenly my Ima tapped me on the shoulder. She said, "Go with this nice girl to get a light up toy." The girl appeared to be 12 years old. She took my sister's and my hand and led us off. She talked to us as we walked. I could see something in this girl that I had seen in this town before. It was, a kindness, a type of caring that was genuine. It was one of the things I missed the most about leaving this community and the many Chabad events I was fortunate enough to attend. We reached the store, but they were out of toys. Somehow, it didn't really matter. The real treat was already mine.

I had never imagined the numerous Chassidim who had gathered here tonight to celebrate the holiday which was a special Jewish privilege. My one wish at this moment was to never leave this street. I didn't want to fly back to a rural community void of all Yiddishkeit. I didn't want to leave a place where I fit in so well and where my neshoma sang like it was home. I felt so special, so privileged to be a 10 year old Jewish girl experiencing this chance of a lifetime opportunity.

First Place - Grades 6-8

The Blessing

Rebecca Heikaly

Hillel Hebrew Academy

Grade 7

It began as an ordinary Sunday morning, I slowly got up and gazed out the window. I washed my face, brushed my teeth, and ran downstairs to say good morning to my parent, and I noticed my mother wasn't home. I said good morning to my Dad and asked where Mom was. He hesitated to talk, paused, and looked at me with a terrified face saying "there was a terrible accident last night."

At that moment my heart started pounding, thoughts ran through my head. What could have happened? Is mommy okay?

My father continued, "Your grandfather is in the hospital." When I heard those words, my heart shattered as if it was a piece of glass. My father continued, "He was walking to Shul last night and a car hit him and drove away; we didn't find out until 8:00 in the morning, but everything is okay."

Of course I knew that he was just telling me everything is okay because I'm young and he doesn't want to worry me. That night my family and I went to visit my grandfather in a special room called the ICU, which is for people who are critically ill. We were finally allowed to go inside, but then the nurse said, "No children allowed!" My siblings and I were so disappointed to hear this so we sat outside in tears and waited for our parents to come back. They came back saying everything is okay and he would be better soon. Yet, we all knew it wasn't true when we saw the tears on my mothers' face. My grandfather has fractured his ribs, broken his spinal cord, and was diagnosed with pneumonia weeks later.

At night I wondered, why bad things happen to such good people; this thought kept running through my head. How could such a good hearted religious man be hurt so badly?

We begged the nurses to let us see our grandfather. After much begging, the nurse agreed. We went inside the room and saw my grandfather sleeping. His whole face was bruised up, and I just couldn't bare the pain of seeing my grandfather in this condition. The doctors didn't know how long he would live and told us he may be paralyzed forever. My grandfather woke up; he hadn't spoken for two weeks. He looked at my sister and I in the eyes and slowly his frown turned into a smile. He pointed to the two of us and told us to come closer. He told my sister to stand on one side and me on the other. He slowly put his hand on our heads, and my sister and I barely heard him. After closely listening, to the words, we heard Hebrew and realized he was blessing us. My sisters' face piled up with tears, and as I saw her cry, I couldn't control my self and began to cry, too. It was as if he was Yaakov, and we were his children. The moment was so special, that even the nurses in the room began to tear.

I have never experienced such a spiritual moment. The closeness that I felt between my grandfather and me had never been so strong.

Second Place - Grades 6-8

Brianna Miller

My Happiest Jewish Memory

Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies
8th Grade

The letter ש (shin). It's only a simple Hebrew letter unless you write it in the Torah. My happiest Jewish memory is writing this letter along with the other letters in the word "Shema" in my temple's Torah.

In March of 2002, my temple, Temple Judea in Tarzana, California, decided to have a new Torah written by the congregation. A scribe was chosen who came to our temple. He was very professional and brought along a special quill and ink. He would stay for approximately one week. My family, along with many others, wanted to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime experience. When our time came to write our word, it was almost nerve-racking. I was worried that I would mess up the Torah. Then the scribe would have to start all over with the writing of the Torah. So, of course, the first thing I asked the scribe was "Will I mess up?" He told me that I wouldn't mess up because he would be guiding my hand in order to write the letter.

One by one, my family wrote their letter, each smiling a big toothy grin when they had finished. When it was my turn, I was excited and scared. I mean, the ink we were writing with was permanent! Though before I knew it, the scribe had gotten his quill fully dipped in the black ink and was resting it on the Torah's parchment paper, waiting for me to begin. I reached for the quill and drew the letter, with a sigh of relief, along with the scribe's hand guiding me. I looked back at the word shema written in the Torah by my family. I couldn't believe that a hundred years from now, some Bar/Bat Mitzvah would read the very word that I had written as part of their Torah portion. It was great to think that I had contributed to a wonderful part of my Jewish history.

Two years later, I had my Bat Mitzvah, another joyous event in my Jewish life. Coincidentally, I read my Torah portion from that exact Torah that I had written in two years beforehand. That surely added to the spectacular holiness of having my Bat Mitzvah.

Two amazing experiences in only a couple of years have really strengthened my Jewish religion. Now I can say that I've been through my Bat Mitzvah and also have achieved one of the Torah's hardest mitzvahs to accomplish, writing a Torah. Though I didn't write the whole Torah, writing that one letter was just as good.

Third Place - Grades 6-8

Danielle Magady
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Yeshiva Ohr Eliyahu
Grade 8

My happiest Jewish memory is of my Bat Mitzvah, which took place on June 19, 2002. I will never forget it.

It took a lot of work to prepare for my Bat Mitzvah. I have Down Syndrome so many things take me longer to learn. In honor of my becoming a Bat Mitzvah, my mom and I learned about the laws of *bikur cholim* together. I learned that Jews have an obligation to visit people who are sick. I learned that the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* is part of the mitzvah of *v'ahavtah I'reachah kamochah* - to love your neighbor as you love yourself. We must visit people who are sick, just like we would want people to visit us if we were the sick ones.

After my mom and I finished learning about *bikur cholim*, she helped me write my *d'var torah*. Then I practiced for many, many hours and for many, many weeks and months. Even though it was a lot of hard work, in the end it was worth it because I was able to share my words of Torah with everyone. I learned a very important lesson through this experience. Sometimes we have to put A LOT of effort into something we want, but then it feels SO great when we succeed!

The night of the party was one of the happiest of my life because I was with all of the people who are important to me - my friends, my family, and my teachers, aides and counselors. We danced and danced. I gave my *d'var torah* and everyone loved it. My family and many of my friends got up and spoke or made up songs about me. I felt special and loved.

I was sad when my Bat Mitzvah party was over. But then two weeks later my family and I went to Israel. Instead of getting presents, I had asked many of the grown up guests to give money for victims of terror in Israel in honor of my Bat Mitzvah. I raised over \$8000 to give to these families and while we were there I got to do the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* by meeting with some of them. They told us about how they got hurt and then my brothers and I passed out get well cards and checks. I hugged many of them.

They were so happy because they know that Jews in the United States care about them. I still love to watch the video of my Bat Mitzvah celebration. Sometimes I wish that I could jump into the television screen and be at my Bat Mitzvah again! But at least I have a wonderful memory that I can carry around always in my heart.

First Place - Grades 9-12

Jacey Stamler
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Chadwick
12th Grade

The icy wind ripped through my bundled body as I shivered and my toes buried themselves in the sand in desperate search of warmth. All of the counselors at the Jewish summer camp I was working at had gathered on the beach for a special after-hours program that the administration had planned for us that night. I chatted with friends in a hushed tone while the flames of bagged candles flickered around us. I noticed my Israeli friend Yakir gently pick up a candle and walk to the front. In just seconds every counselor had ceased whispering and a reverent silence fell over us. We all knew Yakir had been a soldier in the Israeli army, but the only evidence of it was a dog tag that hung around his neck. Everybody loved Yakir because of his animated personality, his boundless enthusiasm, and his constant happiness. As he stood facing the group though, the candle's flickering light unearthed a solemnity on his face that was scarily unfamiliar to us all and revealed creases in his brow and bags under his eyes that had never been apparent before. Yakir quietly began to speak and although the crash of the waves on the rocks was almost deafening, we had no trouble understanding his words.

He began with nostalgic anecdotes about his "brothers" in the army. Whether he had formed an intense relationship with another soldier or whether he had just met him, Yakir considered every soldier his brother. They were a band of brothers bound by an honor in fighting for their beloved Israel and by a fear that they would not live to see their twenty-first birthdays. Yakir told us of bulldozing houses on the Gaza Strip and rescuing injured civilians. In the middle of his story, he paused, looked at his shoes, and breathed in deeply. "I would do anything for all of you," he whispered. "You are people that I love. And although my inside grows weary, my spirit will never extinguish because living without spirit is wasting life that could in any seconds be taken away." I didn't smile this time when he mispronounced and butchered words with his thick Israeli accent. I froze, shuddering, stuck in the obviousness yet profundity of his words. Would it take a year in the army for me to realize the life of privilege and safety I have always enjoyed yet never acknowledged? I rested my head on my knees and quivering tears began to inundate my eyes. I stared at the sand with an overwhelming feeling of shame. As Yakir and I walked back toward the camp together, I silently vowed to start living out the Jewish values that supposedly defined me, and to recognize with utter gratitude every blessing and privilege that I had in my life. As I reflect on the emotion and insight I endured in that moment, I know that it was the happiest and most gratifying Jewish moment in my life.

Second Place – Grades 9-12

Memories of Life

Yossi Rodal
Yeshiva Orh Elchanan Chabad
Grade 10

Life can be compared to a fire
People striving higher and higher

Continuously boggling the mind
Life can be so refined

A person comes, a person goes
Reality of the way life flows

For human growth life is a vital source
When being guided by a supernatural force

Is it by chance the world did occur
Or as time passes by, is all a blur?

No! I believe there is a hidden power
That creates life, down to the growth of a flower

We believe there is an entity behind all lives
How else do we explain how man thrives?

There is a G-d, I believe it's true
He will help me, see me through

There's a point to life, it's not all about fun
What have you accomplished when your time is done?

Now I have a mission to fulfill
I must do it, for it is G-d's will

So take advantage while you are able
Do a good deed, make your life stable

Pray for a world full of peace
Then hatred and animosity will immediately cease

Do a good deed, your life you'll enhance
Don't procrastinate, this is your chance

Everyone united, the way to succeed
Toward Moshiach we will then proceed

These lessons in life keep me secure
These happy memories will forever endure

Third Place - Grades 9-12

Mojdeh Shokri
My Happiest Jewish Memory
Ohr Haemet Institute
Grade 9

Oh, how much I wished we wouldn't go. It was almost Shabbat and my parents were getting ready to go to my cousin's house." Do we have to go?" I said in a sad way. "Yes we do" my mother had answered almost annoyed. I said "ok", but in my heart I felt hatred and rage. I didn't know if it was for what G-d was doing to me or because my parents were forcing me to go to my cousin's house on Shabbat.

I knew that I could not talk to my parents words it just would not work. I was only eight and we had just came to America. My parents had not found any job yet and with two kids I knew it was for my dad to support us so I didn't want to pressure my parents. I had to listen to my parent's words, but what about G-d's words. If G-d loved me why couldn't my parents understand that I didn't want to go? "If G-d wants all of us to be good Jews then why doesn't he help us?"

Like always when we got to my cousins house the T.V. was on and all of the family was sitting around it. I remember how I had seen myself different from all of the people that were sitting there as if I was so different from them. Not that I hated my family members but why wouldn't they understand the way I did that Hashem has given us the Torah and we have to keep it. No matter what I thought or wished to happen I still had to face reality and reality was that I was eight year old girl that nobody would understand. I dropped my head and not wanting to show my sad face to anyone I ran to one of the rooms of the house that was empty. I knew that no matter how long I would stand there no miracle would happen.

I sat in the room and cried waiting for a miracle to happen. As I was standing up to get a tissue I noticed the fearing that it was someone that I knew I tried to hide my face. To my surprise it was an old women that I had never seen. I tried to clean the little tear drops on my face and pretended as if I was playing around I said hello when I saw that she was looking at me and with all my heart I wished that she would go out because the last thing wanted then was someone staring at me as if I had done something wrong. I saw that the old woman stepped out her shoes and sat on the bed right next to me. She asked me how old I was and what school I went to then little my little these questions turned into heart warming conversation. I told her that I waned to become religious just like my teachers were and sing songs on Shabbat just like I had done in my teachers house the week before. The women had looked at me with such understanding that I felt like she was going through the same pain as I was .She told me that she couldn't believe how an eight year old could say such things. She told me that I had a very special soul and that if I would continue my path like this I will be very successful in life. She told me that I was different from all the girls that are my age and that I was going to reach my goal if kept on trying I could see the tears falling from the sky for me. Her tears looked like diamonds to me and her words had touched me deeply like a bullet. That night when we went home I went to sleep so easily because someone had comforted me and told me that the way I was taking the right step in choosing to be religious.

When I told my parents that I wanted to keep Shabbat they told me that they were going to help me do it if I really wanted to and they would try stay home most of the Shabbats. After a year later not only I kept Shabbat but my parents were also keeping Shabbat. They had enjoyed seeing me do it so they tried to it to. As I became older not only was I keeping Shabbat but I was also convincing my friends and people that I knew to do it to. As years passed I found out that the old woman had passed away. I had only met that woman once but she had changed my life forever. I would never forget because she was one of the people who had helped me to not give up in being religious. Even though my parents had a very important in helping me reach my goal that woman was like an angel sent from G-d to help me and may she rest in peace.