

Education

Veteran teachers discuss problems and

Irwin Keinon



"How many people during a day's work can remind youngsters that even though our generation continues to war and to hate, that even though man is capable of holocaust there still remains the sublimity of man: there still remain the Rembrandts, the Beethovens, the Shakespeares? and the teacher by introducing and keeping their works alive can make decency hopefully prevail."

Such is English teacher Irwin Keinon's philosophy of his profession, and the reason why he still finds teaching rewarding after 26 years.

Keinon, who was born in Denver and received his bachelors and masters degrees from DU, taught elementary school for seven years before going to East High School where he just completed 19 years of teaching, and

where his areas of emphasis are Shakespeare, English Literature and Composition.

This month he is going on a year sabbatical to Israel. He and his wife, Margot, feel this trip will provide them an opportunity for "professional and personal growth."

Keinon has seen several changes occur since he began teaching at East in the early 60s.

"Students were less materialistic then," he stated. "Many were more interested in helping to make the world a better place; it was a time for marching and civil rights."

"I think there's less concern today for helping humanity and more concern for helping oneself and for immediate gratification."

He points to absenteeism as a major problem in education and as a partial cause of declining S.A.T. scores.

He sees "no hostility among races," stating that, "The parents of Park Hill students should be commended for staying in the public school system."

Keinon fears that the public schools are in trouble as more parents send their children to private and parochial schools.

"There's a danger in turning the public schools into situations where the minorities and poor will wallow in ignorance," he stated.

He agrees that East has changed with this phenomenon.

"Many of the motivated students who went to East 20 years ago are now motivating their children in private schools."

"If the public schools are in trouble, it is because public education has become a right instead of a privilege. Consequently authority, discipline and standards often mean very little."

Keinon sees a basic change at East that is "reflective of society as a whole."

"Kids are more sophisticated," he said. "In a sense they've lost their innocence. They're living faster. The things that brought us satisfactions, such as pep rallies and dances, are no longer appealing to urban students."

"Students are not doing much reading and writing," he said. "They're not being creative in their thinking. He added, however, that "there is still every opportunity for the student who wants to succeed in education. There are more accelerated classes today than when I started."

How, then, does Keinon motivate his students?

A recipient of the 1978 Denver Award for Excellence for teachers, Keinon attempts to "bring in relevant life situations to make Shakespeare come alive."

He uses young love in **Romeo and Juliet**, for instance, "for students to see they aren't the first

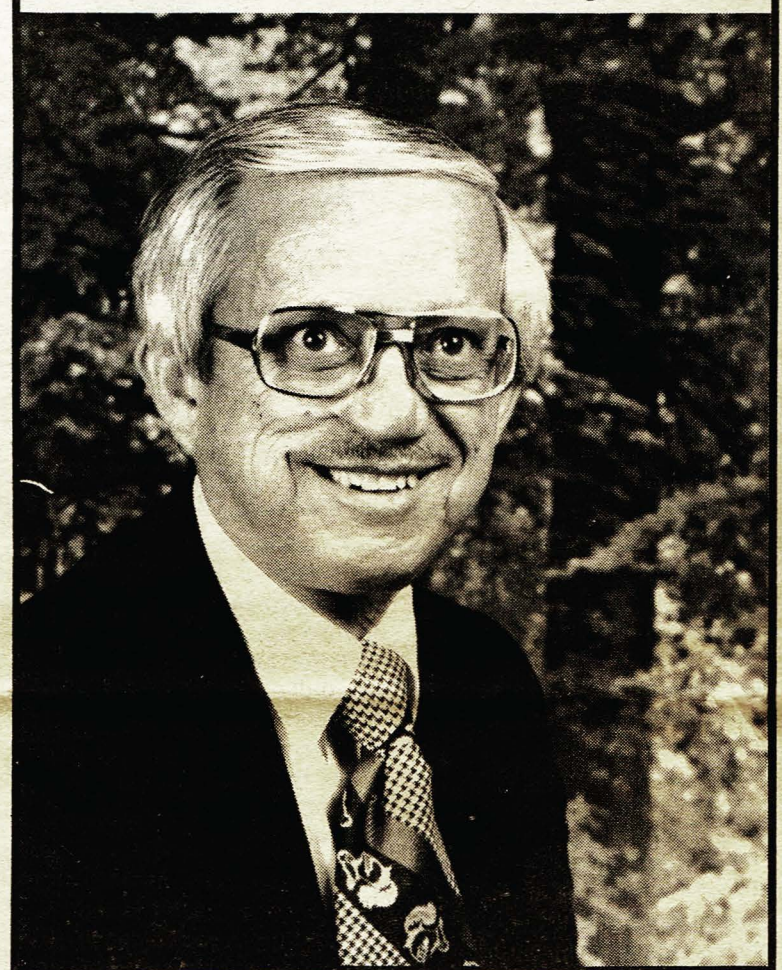
ones who have these traumas — that people have been talking about them for years."

Keinon, who views teaching as a way of achieving immortality "by influencing and by perpetuating the values of the past and the present," feels that his enthusiasm is constantly renewed by students' first discovery of new works.

As he concludes: "It's a unique

experience, really, to be a teacher. No matter what's going on elsewhere, a certain time-stopping magical experience is going on in your classroom when you shut the door and become a king. What other job gives one an opportunity to touch so influentially upwards of 150 lives a day? In what other job, also, is one given the opportunity of being touched by 150 lives daily?"

Nate Levey



On the weekends he is Nate Levey, orchestra leader of the local bar mitzvah and wedding circuit, but during the week he is Nathan Levey, principal of Fallis Elementary School.

As a teacher for 17 years and an administrator for 13, Levey has seen a variety of changes in education.

"Because public schools cannot be 'selective,' they are traditionally a major arena for political ideas. Because of that, we're constantly changing with political trends."

The two general problems in this arena are "conflicting curriculum and curriculum content."

"Going into the year 2000, no one really understands what the term 'basics' is," he stated. "No two people agree."

"People might say, teach children to read and write, but we don't read reading or write writing. You need to read and write an 'idea.' The question is, what do you read and write about?"

Levey referred to a 1982 Gallup Poll which listed five main problems that the public is concerned about in education: lack of discipline, improper financial support; substance and drug abuse; poor curriculum and standards; and teacher lack of interest.

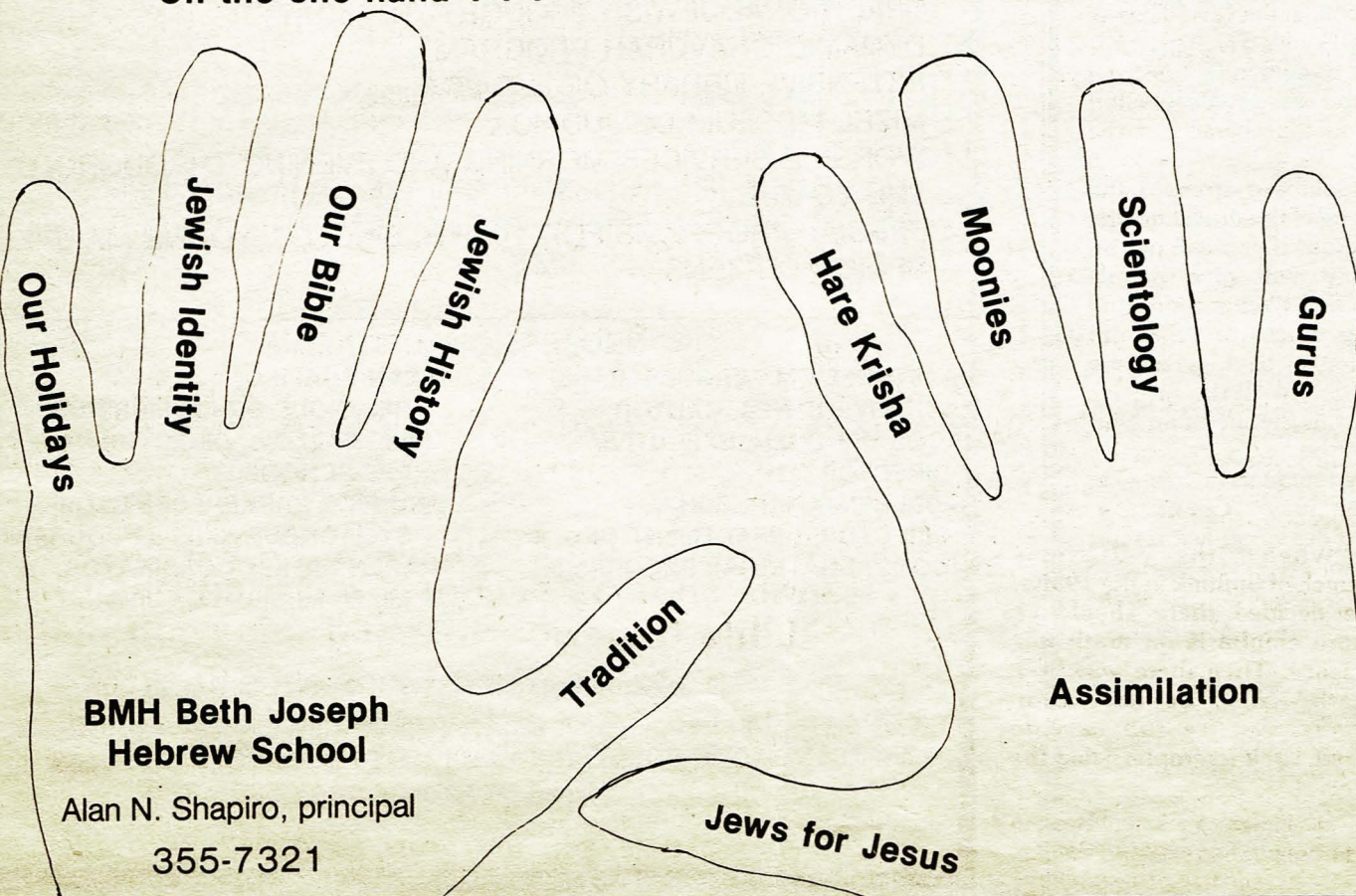
While he feels that Fallis itself has few problems with drug abuse or with lack of teacher interest, he agrees that poor curriculum and standards are a nationwide problem.

"The trend now is toward poor performance in all levels of education," he said. "A lot of it is due to lack of standards. I personally prefer to have standards that are too high than too low."

Levey feels that the primary emphasis in education is "to give

On the one hand . . .

On the other hand . . .



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strongpoints of public and private schools

children skills which will enable them to cope in a highly technological society."

He points to four key areas: "First, a child should know how to read critically, literally and esthetically. Second, we need to teach children how to study and take tests, starting from the first grade. Third, a child should have a good facility in math and arithmetic. Finally, we should expose children to careers without telling them specifically what they should do."

Levey also stressed the high technology phenomenon.

"New skills needed now will be obsolete by the time the student gets a job, and new jobs aren't created quickly enough," he said. "For example, satellites are making the field of meteorology obsolete."

"We can't keep up with the technology," he stated. "We have to decide the difference between training and education."

To illustrate this point, Levey likes to use a favorite quotation by Albert Einstein: "Education is what is left after you've forgotten everything else."

In dealing with discipline, Levey sets forth a code which has helped behavior problems "go down 90%."

The code emphasizes "consistency and fairness in dealing with all children."

He adds that parents have to be involved in establishing similar rules at home and that "children must be taught to realize the consequences to themselves of rule violations."

Is teacher burn-out a problem? "It's a phenomenon, but many of the teachers I've seen burn out, weren't on fire to begin with."

"Every year I throw away my lesson plans, and start over with new fresh ideas," he said, adding that if each year is a new experience, burn out isn't as likely to occur.

education will be a very important issue in the 1984 election year."

She commented that while merit pay for teachers is a good "ideal," enforcement would be a problem.

"Who will judge who deserves merit pay? You're bound to have personal prejudices creep in."

According to Mrs. Tockman, teacher training is a problem as well. "They should learn more classroom management and methods of teaching, and receive more concentration in basic subjects."

Speculating on the weakness of writing and spelling skills among students, she stated, "The tendency of schools was to be all-embracing. They worked on socialization skills and offered classes far from the basic necessities."

"At Hillel, we have always tried to emphasize the basic skills. Half of the day is spent on Hebrew subjects, while the other half is spent on secular studies; thus we must compound them into a highly concentrated program, covering in half a day what the public schools cover in a full day."

Mrs. Tockman also praises US education because it is offered to all children. "At Hillel we have many Russian children. We try to help them adjust, learn the language, and become good citizens."

How does she motivate her students?

"It's a difficult concept. Sometimes it's the home atmosphere, sometimes it's teacher/pupil rapport. You have to be very creative and inspiring. I knew a teacher who said she taught as if her very life depended on it. You have to teach as if it is the most important thing in your life."

"The thanks a teacher gets from parents and students is a very rewarding experience. Gratification and results preclude teacher burn-out. I still love the students and feel I have something to give them. Teaching Jewish children, guiding and inspiring them to learn, has been very fulfilling."

Students keep in touch, and I go to their bar mitzvahs and weddings and then teach their children."

Mrs. Tockman also noted that parental involvement is greater than in public school. "They have chosen the school and made a financial outlay. They become members of the board and are more active in making decisions." Changes are always occurring in education, she feels.

"When the Russians launched Sputnik in the 1950's, we decided there should be more emphasis on math and science. Then there was 'new math.' Now, we have computers. But we still have to come back to emphasizing the 'basics.'"

"I think with President Reagan addressing the NEA and the National Association of Teachers —

Irwin Hoffman

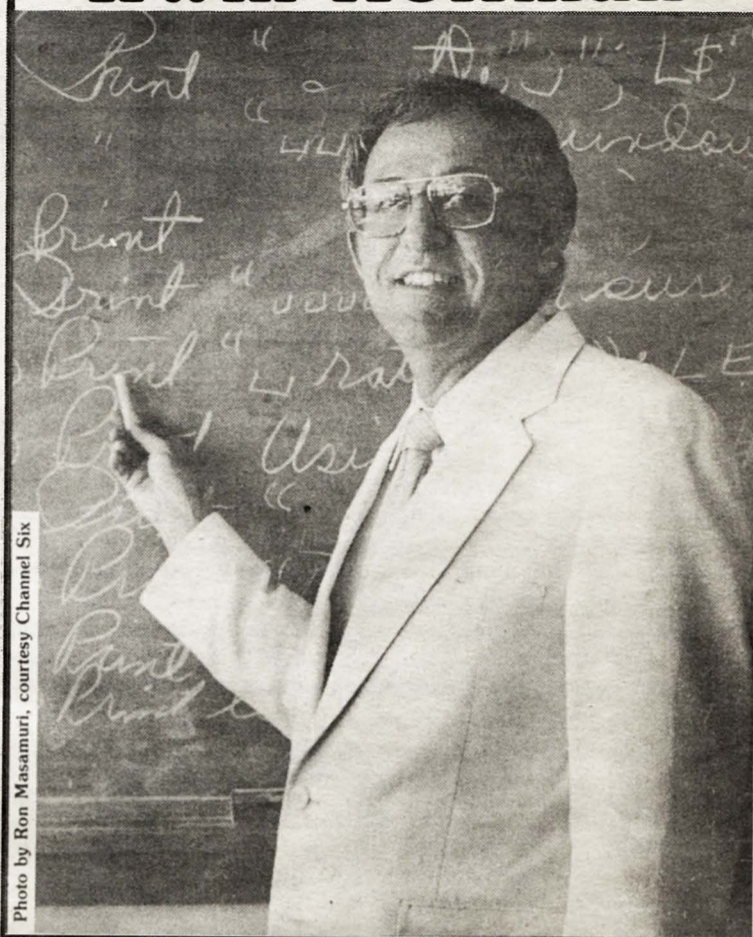


Photo by Ron Masamuri, courtesy Channel Six

Irwin Hoffman chose teaching as a profession so he could teach tennis in the summers. Now, the situation is reversed; he teaches tennis in order to allow him to continue teaching school.

"I love teaching," he said. "With great successes as a teacher, you see that you are effective, that you can have a positive impact on someone's life. You feel appreciated."

Dr. Hoffman, head of George Washington High School's nationally recognized computer science lab, has many successes to his credit.

His advanced students are currently employed with national and local companies as consultants for research projects. They write their own instruction manuals, and as Hoffman states:

"I'm trying to apply computers to all disciplines," he said. "We have business students, math students, and special education students working with these computers. In addition, artists are programming them to print pictures,

and musicians are conducting symphonies."

George Washington was the first high school in the country to have a computer program, as the result of Dr. Hoffman's persistent efforts.

In 1963, when computers were relatively new and used primarily at the higher academic levels, Hoffman convinced DU to give GW students free time on their computer.

Since then, the lab has grown to include 36 computers, the majority of which Hoffman acquired through grants.

He attributes the program's popularity to "the excitement in the environment."

"They see students working for numerous companies, translating software into other languages, and corresponding with the Atari Board of Directors. They also see teaching from a different point of view — they see us researching and not bored," he stated.

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Terry Tockman



"We try to motivate each child so that they can achieve well in both secular and Hebraic studies," says Terry Tockman of the philosophy of Hillel Academy, where she has taught for 23 years.

Mrs. Tockman, who teaches grades 4-8 and is the coordinator of secular studies, received her BS in education from Brooklyn College. She did graduate work at New York Univ., City College and Hunter College, as well as studying in Denver at DU, CU and UNC.

She is a veteran of both New York Public Schools and Denver Public Schools.

"The advantage of a private school like Hillel Academy is that the students have more personal contact with the teachers," she stated. "I taught five children from the same family — you can see the continuation and effect.



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