A familiar name from the past touched off a memory, and then a happy reunion, at JBI. It all began last December during a JBI Russian language outreach presentation at a senior residence in Irvington, New Jersey, where 20 seniors listened as Inna Suholutsky, our Russian Liaison and Outreach Assistant, spoke about JBI Library’s wealth of Russian Talking Books available free of charge to the visually impaired.

When Inna mentioned volunteer Victor Persik, resident Irina Gusso excitedly exclaimed that she remembered Victor as a talented young fellow actor from Moscow years ago. Irina went on to become a well-respected actor in the Moscow Theater, but never saw her classmate again.

Irina hurried upstairs to her apartment and returned with a photo album with a picture of their graduating acting class. Sure enough, it was Victor!

Until that presentation, Irina did not realize how valuable her acting skills would be for recording materials for JBI’s Russian Collection. She jumped at the opportunity to “do some acting again,” and we arranged for her to visit the JBI studios. Little did Victor anticipate the wonderful surprise we had arranged for him when he arrived for his recording session. There stood Irina, waiting to greet her old friend with arms wide open!

JBI offers a wide variety of materials and programs for the Russian community worldwide, from the JBI Voice magazine and Russian Talking Books to the JBI Senior Summer Camp and Book Clubs in the Soviet Union.

For further information on Russian language materials, please contact JBI at 1-800-433-1531.

Large Print Books Fill Void for Partial Vision Loss

Many of us need and use reading glasses. In an instant, everything becomes bigger and more legible. But what kind of solution is there for a person with more serious vision impairment?

There are no easy fixes, but JBI helps by producing materials that enable such people to continue reading. For individuals with complete vision loss, JBI Audio Books offer a wonderful alternative. For people with partial vision, JBI’s Large Print Books, produced within guidelines developed by vision experts, often are the answer. While public libraries offer a selection of large print books, the type in those books is only slightly larger than regular type. JBI’s Large Print Books, made for those with more serious vision loss, have the following features:

- text prints with intense contrast, black type on a white or light beige background;
- type size is 19 points or larger;
- space between the lines is at least 25% of the point size;
- fonts are straight, with no curved lines;
- word letters are not too close together;
- margins are extra wide with room for binding so the book can be opened flat;
- paper is matte, not glossy, and more legible.
Seniors and Students Meet for Book Discussion

In an unusual meeting of minds, sighted high school students and seniors from a JBI Low Vision Book Group in Plantation, Florida, exchanged ideas about the book, Sara and Eleanor: The Story of Sara Delano Roosevelt and Her Daughter-in-Law, Eleanor Roosevelt.

It was a lively afternoon; students learned about the Roosevelt era in their history lessons, and the group of 30 people representing many different decades had much to talk about and many stories to tell. One senior who had met Eleanor Roosevelt shared personal impressions. Several students commented later that it never occurred to them that people with limited sight could “read” in other ways like Talking Books.

This intergenerational dialog was arranged by Goldie Witrock, JBI Library’s Outreach Coordinator for Broward County, Florida, who led the discussion. The event was such a success that Book Group members look forward to future student/senior discussions.

JBI Subscriber is “A Big Hit!” Talking to Kids about Blindness

Recently, Bill Gross, a longtime subscriber and JBI Board Member, together with his wife Cheryl, captured the attention of a classroom full of fourth graders in Livingston, New Jersey when they talked with them about blindness.

“The presentation couldn’t have gone better, they were full of questions and seemed very enamored of Bill,” said Cheryl.

With this success behind them, Bill and Cheryl plan to speak with other classes interested in learning more about the blind and visually impaired.

Here are a few of the many thank you notes Bill and Cheryl received following their presentation:

Dear Bill and Cheryl,

You taught me so much. I am so glad that you were able to come and I hope you come again. I learned so much and want to share it with other people.

Yael

Thank you for telling all of us about blind people and Braille. You just taught me a lot. My grandpa and my uncle are blind, too.

Max

JBI Volunteers Honored

JBI volunteer honorees (left to right): Audrey Flamb erg (Dubov Award), Jessia Leonard Levine, Arlene Simon and Thom Carroll (Spirit Awards).

At JBI’s recent annual volunteer party, JBI Spirit Awards were presented to narrators and directors who had completed more than 200 hours of service. Honorees included Thom Carroll, Roselyn Dlutman, Brian Lang, Jessia Leonard Levine and Arlene Simon.

Audrey Flamb erg, one of our most prolific volunteers, received the Leopold Dubov Distinguished Volunteer Service Award at the party. A life-long New Yorker, artist Audrey Flamb erg spent her early career as art director for several leading fashion magazines, including Harpers Bazaar and Vogue.

After her mother died more than 11 years ago, Audrey started reading for JBI to help others have access to the larger world around them. Although not visually impaired, her mother suffered from debilitating arthritis which left her housebound for many years. Narrating books is one way that Audrey felt she could help expand people’s lives beyond their own realities.

Arlene Simon sums up her volunteer experience, “Each time I leave the studio, I know that vision-impaired individuals will have access to additional reading material because of the work my colleagues and I did.”

If you’re interested in volunteering, please call JBI’s volunteer hotline at 1-800-433-1531, Ext. 300 and leave a message for Lisa Kirsch.

Authors Contribute to ‘Writers Who Read’

Through its exciting Writers Who Read program, JBI is fortunate to have distinguished authors read portions of their newest books for The JBI Library. Most recently, Anne Roiphe read from her newest book, Water from the Well: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah; Marion Cuba read from Shanghai Legacy; and Rabbi David Ellenson read from After Emancipation: Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity. Their enthusiastic participation adds a unique dimension to our subscribers’ experience in reading Talking Books.
Update: The Complete Artscroll Siddur Braille Translation

We are pleased to announce that Dr. Abraham Nemeth has completed a Braille translation of The Complete Artscroll Siddur, the most popular Orthodox Siddur in use today. This labor of love took him well over six years and comprises 14 volumes of Braille.

Following his work on JBI’s Hebrew Braille Bible, the first of its kind, combining the oldest language, Hebrew, with the newest one, Braille, JBI enlisted Dr. Nemeth to work on several Braille projects. “What Dr. Nemeth does requires a lot of textual knowledge as well as a perfect knowledge of Hebrew Braille,” Dr. Isler said. “There aren’t many people who have the combined knowledge needed to do this editing and compilation. He is a unique resource and a motivating force for sighted and blind alike.

(Reprinted, in part, from The Detroit Jewish News Online)

JBI’s Low Vision Clinic Expands to Help More Children

Thanks to the recently expanded Children’s Clinic, JBI’s Low Vision Clinic in Tel Aviv now offer hundreds of visually impaired young people access to unique vision services.

The Clinic’s newly refurbished space offers a child-friendly waiting room and specialized pediatric examination stations.

One child currently under the Clinic’s treatment is David L. (see picture below) who suffers from craniosynostosis. This condition does not allow proper brain growth and required extensive surgery to prevent serious neurological damage.

Through low vision aids designed by the Clinic, the best corrected vision in his right eye is 20/200 and in his left eye is a best corrected vision of 20/60. David is now doing well at school, though he still has trouble with distance vision. A detailed letter was written by the Children’s Clinic to the school outlining for David’s teachers his special seating and other requirements.

JBI Prepares for Building Renovations

JBI is getting ready to begin construction on its Manhattan headquarters which is in desperate need of repair and modernization.

It is hard to believe that this aging double brownstone serves so many thousands of people around the world! As the number of visually impaired individuals whom we serve continues to rise, it becomes more apparent each day just how crucial the redesign and reorganization of our headquarters is to our ability to serve those who need us now and will need us in the future.

Our Building Renovation Campaign is still underway. Become a part of it! We’ve come this far in our planning thanks to our wonderful donors, including the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, who awarded a challenge grant that will match every dollar you donate up to $500,000. Just think — your matched gift can accomplish twice as much for the blind and visually impaired! A $100 gift becomes $200 and $1,000 gift becomes $2,000!

Naming opportunities are still available and are a great way to show your dedication to JBI or honor someone special in your life. A gift of $1,000 will be recognized with a Building Block on JBI’s new wall of honor and in a JBI Talking Book.

For more information, please call Beth Rudich at 1-800-433-1531. With heartfelt thanks for your ongoing generosity — the cornerstone of our future.

JBI Building Naming Opportunities Available

Physical Spaces

International Recording Center (7th Floor) $300,000
Community Conference and Seminar Room (6th Floor) $250,000
Volunteer Training and Quality Control Center (7th Floor) $60,000
Outreach and Public Education Resource Center (2nd Floor) $40,000
Management Information Systems $25,000
Archival Center Elevator $25,000
Sukkah $20,000

Library Collections, $50,000 each

Children’s Library, Poetry, Jewish Humor, Non-Fiction, Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Holocaust, Jewish Lifecycle and Holidays (includes cookbooks), Torah, Prophets and Writings
A Talk with Dora Issacharoff, JBI Spanish Coordinator

JBI’s growing Spanish Collection is in good hands with Dora Issacharoff, who will lead the way in bringing our unique free Audio Book Collection to blind and visually impaired people in the U.S., Latin America, Spain and Israel.

Dora is highly qualified to organize the selection, distribution and recording of Spanish language books: Born and raised in Argentina, she holds degrees in literature, philosophy and art history from the University of Buenos Aires. After coming to the U.S., she earned master’s degrees in Spanish literature and philosophy.

In Argentina, Dora worked for several Jewish/Spanish magazines. In the U.S., she has taught at Hunter College and Yeshiva University, and has presented papers at international literature conferences.

“JBI is poised to begin more intense outreach efforts to the Spanish-speaking community,” says Dora. “Obviously, in order to engage our new subscribers, the selection of materials we offer is critically important. It is my job to make sure that JBI’s collection of Spanish language Talking Books and magazines meets the needs of a diverse population with broad tastes in literature and commentary. I feel confident that, with access to JBI’s free library, many, many visually impaired Spanish speakers will once again experience the joy of reading.”

“Moreover, it is truly exciting to report that JBI just received our first request for Braille materials in Spanish from Karin, a blind woman who lives in Israel and speaks only Spanish. A man in Argentina actually learned of our services and made the request on her behalf, demonstrating the value of JBI’s extensive outreach programs, which create a network that reaches people all over the world.”

“JBI is a very exciting organization. By recording books and magazines in many different languages, The JBI Library helps people in need interact with the world around them.”

For more information on JBI’s Spanish language materials, please contact Dora Issacharoff at 1-800-433-1531.

JBI’s new Spanish Community Coordinator, Dora Issacharoff.
In this, the 76th year of JBI’s existence, this small agency has never been busier or more vibrant. Remember that while we expand our services to include Spanish language materials, increase the number of Russian language Talking Books in our collection, and enlist subscriber participation in Talking Books Clubs, we are still maintaining our focus on helping the individual. You will note on page 3 that JBI just produced its first Siddur in Spanish Braille for a JBI user in Israel! It might interest you to know that JBI also just produced a Reconstructionist Siddur in Braille for use right here in the United States.

I am sure you will enjoy the profile of Elaine Wolbrom on page 6, who is an exceptionally gifted volunteer narrator. Another one of our very talented volunteers, Ellen David, recently won a New York Innovative Theater Award for Outstanding Actress in a Lead Role for her performance in To Nineveh: A Modern Miracle.

The little boy whose photo appears on page 3 is one of over 500 patients under the age of 15 at our newly expanded and refurbished Children’s Clinic, part of the JBI Low Vision Clinic at Sourasky Medical Center in Tel Aviv. Children come to the Clinic from all parts of Israel and sometimes from farther afield. So many of these children are very bright and eager to learn. With the devoted and creative help of the staff of the Clinic, almost all of them are able to be mainstreamed in regular classrooms and even to excel academically. All of us at JBI are grateful to the Israel Charitable Foundation for their generous support of the physical expansion of the Children’s Clinic.

Our President and CEO, Dr. Ellen Isler, likes to say that our work at JBI is “costly but priceless”—costly to produce but priceless to those who need us. The stories we report here — and the many which we have no room to report — prove the truth of her assertion over and over again.

Judy E. Tenney
Chairman
Volunteer in the Spotlight: Elaine Wolbrom

When Elaine Wolbrom’s husband, Irving, began having great difficulty reading as a result of glaucoma, she realized what it meant for avid readers to be deprived of that simple pleasure. In her search to help him and be part of the process, she was guided to JBI Audio Books. Elaine now volunteers as both Director and Narrator.

As an adult, Elaine worked as a geriatric social worker, but throughout high school and college, Elaine was a performing artist, even creating a two-woman comedy act that toured New York City. As Elaine explains, JBI has offered her a natural connection between the art world and the world of visual limitation. “By creating characters in the books I narrate, JBI has given me back a very special part of myself, a part I had thought was lost.”

Elaine enjoys narrating novels — especially ones that explore family dynamics. Currently, she is reading A Day of Small Beginnings by Lisa Pearl Rosenbaum. The book speaks to Elaine and her husband because it is about a Polish-American Jewish family’s search for roots. Elaine took Irving and their children to visit Poland 55 years to the day after Irving and his family had escaped the Nazis.

Become A Member of JBI’s Tikvah Society

Membership in The Tikvah Society is open to anyone who makes a gift through a will or enters into a life income arrangement (insurance policy, trust, IRA or gift annuity) with JBI. Through their thoughtfulness and planning, these individuals help ensure a bright future for the vision impaired and blind worldwide.

For more information or to become a member of The Tikvah Society, please visit our web site at www.jbilibrary.org or contact Beth Rudich at 1-800-433-1531.