The Challenge: JBI celebrated its 70th anniversary last May, honoring its President, Barbara B. Friedman, with a gala at the Metropolitan Club. Recognizing the growing needs of the blind and visually impaired, particularly the many thousands of seniors suffering from age-related vision loss, Mrs. Friedman, who has served on the JBI Board for 18 years, and her husband, Stephen Friedman, made a $600,000 challenge grant toward the establishment of a $1.2 million endowment for JBI’s Talking Books Library. Thanks to the generosity of those attending the gala, JBI has come very close to completing that challenge.

The Need: The need to ensure the future of the Talking Books Library has never been greater. Today, as people live longer, increasing numbers suffer from age-related vision problems such as macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

The JBI Library is the largest library of Jewish interest in the world for the blind and visually impaired; more than 10,000 Talking Books are available—free—to visually impaired seniors and people of all ages in the United

Barbara B. Friedman, JBI President and honoree, with her husband, Stephen Friedman.
States, Israel, countries of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa. JBI's Talking Books are available in English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Hungarian and Romanian. Spanish will soon be added in response to requests from Jewish communities in Latin America and Jewish immigrants from Latin America in the United States.

**The Celebration:** Larry King, host of Larry King Live, served as master of ceremonies at the gala. Mr. King has won several awards for his radio and television shows, including nine Cable Ace Awards, the cable industry’s highest honor. Mr. King is the brother-in-law of Ellen David, an actress who has served for many years as a volunteer narrator of JBI's Talking Books and is a member of the JBI Board.

Marvin Hamlisch, celebrated composer and award winner for his work on Broadway and in more than 40 motion pictures, is a lifelong friend of JBI Vice President, William Gross. Mr. Hamlisch entertained us with his virtuosity and then accompanied a performance by Laurie Rubin, a rising opera star and recipient of JBI’s Braille services.

Miss Rubin, 24, was born blind. She began to study music when she was a child and always enjoyed classical music. When she was 13, her keen ear – together with the necessary texts transcribed into Braille by JBI - made it possible for her to become a Bat Mitzvah. This, she says, “made me feel like I could do anything.” She studied music at Oberlin College in Ohio, and has just completed a master's degree at Yale University's School of Music. A mezzo soprano, Miss Rubin has perfect pitch.

A South African subscriber recently thanked JBI in words that sum up what many feel: “I have been unable to read for the past 10 years and have relied on your audiotapes as a substitute for the tremendous amount of reading I enjoyed when I was sighted.... I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the quality and content of your Talking Books....They have made a significant difference to the quality of my life.”
and sings in eight languages, including Hebrew and Yiddish. She has performed solo at the White House and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Miss Rubin says that if she has a successful career, her reward will be the opportunity to be “an activist for people with disabilities, especially blindness. I want people to realize how much you can do as a blind person.”

**The Finishing Touch:** Barbara and Stephen Friedman’s leadership in establishing the Talking Books Endowment, as well as the extraordinary talent on display in JBI’s behalf, inspired everyone at the gala. We need just $100,000 more to complete the full one-to-one match and reach our $1.2 million goal.

**We need your help:** You, our supporters, have a special opportunity to participate in this historic achievement for JBI. Every dollar you contribute becomes two. Your participation will enable JBI to further improve the quality of life for thousands suffering from loss of vision in every part of the world.

Please use the enclosed envelope to add “The Finishing Touch.”

We thank you very much for your generous participation.

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Mr. B is confined to a wheelchair (like the one Christopher Reeves uses) after a broken back and neck robbed him of his ability to perform the simplest tasks. His wife writes, “I merely wanted to share with you the difference that your organization makes....When one is confined to a special 170-degree-recline wheelchair (more like a cosmos on wheels), something as simple as an audio tape, a ‘plastic band with a bit of iron oxide on it,’ can make all the difference in the world.

In fact, it can allow one to cross the line between ‘vegetating’ and living...[My husband’s] favorite books are those by Shalom Aleichem, and he listens to them whenever possible. He just loves the feeling and emotion that JBI’s narrators put into their recordings.... JBI tapes literally keep him going.”
All the books you’ve always wanted to hear.

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