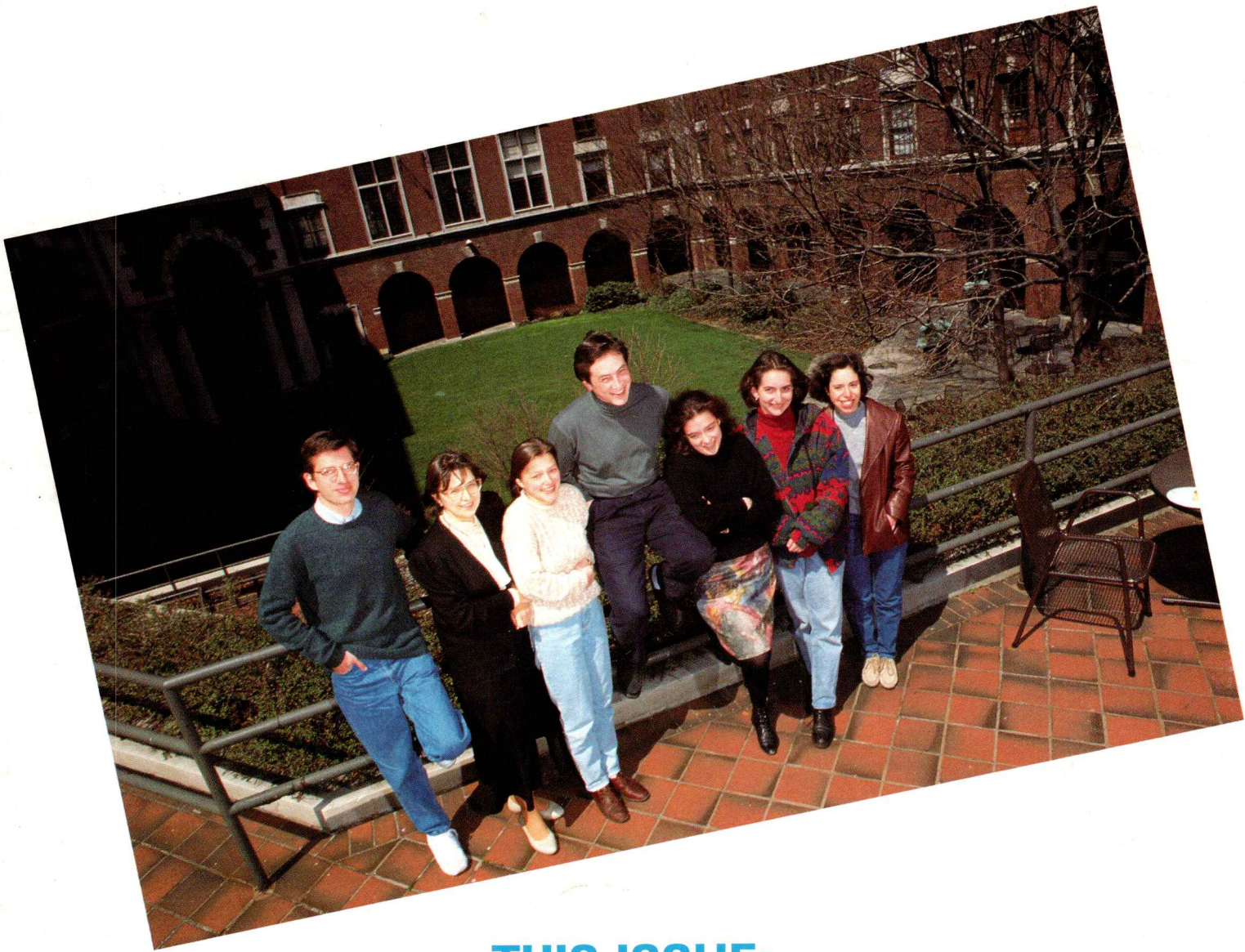


MASORET

THE MAGAZINE OF THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Volume 4 Number 1 Summer 1995

מסורת



THIS ISSUE:

THE INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE OF JTS

MOSCOW ✧ **ISRAEL** ✧ **MEXICO** ✧ **CANADA** ✧ **ARGENTINA**

BRAZIL ✧ **UKRAINE** ✧ **BUDAPEST** ✧ **NEW YORK**

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Volume 4 Number 1 Summer 1995

Founded in 1886, the Jewish Theological Seminary is the premier center for the academic study of Judaism in North America and the spiritual center of Conservative Judaism.

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Chancellor

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Chairman of the Board

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Vice President

The word "masoret" [ma·sō·rèt] has many meanings including Jewish tradition, legacy and heritage.

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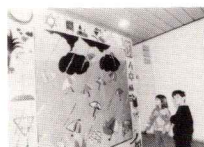
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Curator of Jewish Art

On the Cover

Student participants in Project Judaica, the Seminary's Jewish studies program in Russia, enjoy spring on the Seminary's campus in New York.

Cover photo: Barry Korbman

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From the editor:

We hope you enjoy *Masoret's* new design, which we feel better reflects the vibrant atmosphere of the Seminary. We would like to hear what you think, please send us your comments.

The Jewish Theological Seminary acknowledges with profound gratitude the late Sidney Weisner for his generous support of this publication.

FROM RUSSIA

My Spring at the Seminary

By Irina Ashtashkevich

After two and a half months in the United States studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, it is still very hard to comprehend that I am here. Many Russian students study all over the world today, and a group of Russian students coming to New York is nothing extraordinary. But *we* are very special. We are Project Judaica students, and we are likely the first students since 1917 to come from Russia to study Judaica.

Project Judaica began in September 1991 at the Russian State University for the Humanities (formerly Historical-Archival Institute). Project Judaica is a joint educational program of the RSUH, the Jewish Theological Seminary of

America and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. The aim of the project is to prepare Russian specialists in Jewish studies, who know Jewish languages, Jewish history and how to work with Jewish archives.

For three and a half years we have studied Yiddish and Hebrew, Jewish history from the biblical

period through modernity, and Jewish philosophy and religion; and we worked with the Jewish archives in Moscow, Kiev and Vilna.

Although study in Israel or in the United States was structured into our course of study from the outset, until very late autumn 1994, I could not imagine that I would actually be at the Seminary for the spring 1995 semester. Though we already had our tickets and visas, I kept asking myself, "Is it really possible?"

My academic life here is very different from my life in Russia. I can concentrate completely on Jewish studies, without having to complete the simultaneous course of work we were responsible for at the Russian State University for the Humanities. I can spend all day long sitting in the wonderful library, which I could only dream of in Russia. While Project Judaica has its own library in RSUH (about

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A WITH LOVE

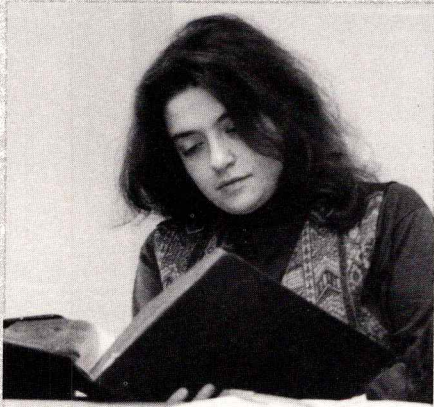


PHOTO CREDIT: MARJORIE GERSTEN

five thousand volumes), it cannot compare to the JTS library, one of the greatest Judaica libraries in the world. I also have the opportunity to learn a new way to learn. Not only can I choose some of the courses I take, which we cannot do in Russia, but further, here I have to work by myself and read a lot for each class. I cannot just go to lectures and take notes, as we do in Russia. At the Seminary, I have learned how to learn.

The variety of schools and Jewish activities to choose from at the Seminary creates a special atmosphere of common studies and common life and has affected my personal outlook. I never followed rules of kashrut or celebrated Jewish holidays. Now I have gotten a chance to experience real Jewish life in the Seminary dorm. For the first days it was very hard to remember all the tiny details of

the kosher kitchen, although I knew them very well in theory. I was surprised to discover how easy it is to be Jewish here. I do not think any salesperson in any Moscow grocery store knows what kosher food is. Here, products we buy are marked with kashrut signs.

I can also talk with other students about what we are studying and be understood. Because there are very few Jewish studies specialists in the whole former Soviet Union, people in Russia are surprised and even shocked to hear that I study Judaica. At the beginning, people just called us "Jews" because we were studying things

associated with Jews.

I am at the very middle of my stay here. With most of this semester's classwork behind me, and exams and summer work in the archives ahead, I already know that this semester is one of the most significant experiences in my life.

Irina Ashtasbkevich is a student at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Project Judaica, the Seminary's joint program with YIVO Institute for Jewish Research whose purpose is to recreate a Jewish intelligentsia in Russia. She is currently spending the semester at the Seminary campus in New York.

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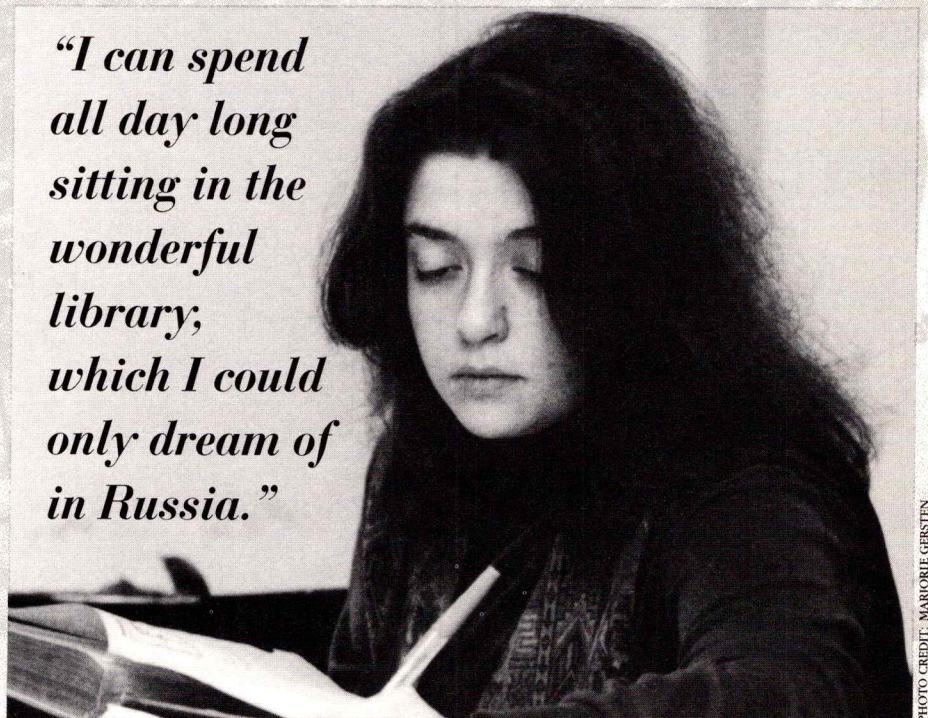


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