

IMAGINE ...

Imagine holding the hand of an eight-year-old child, walking together through a magic curtain and entering a time machine room. Once inside, you are greeted by Moses Ben Maimon and Don Isaac Abravanel. Moses Ben Maimon known as Maimonides, lived 1135-1204, was a philosopher and scholar and the first person to write a code of Jewish Law. He also was the physician to the Sultan of Egypt. Don Isaac Abravanel lived 1437-1508, was the highest ranking Jew for King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. He too was a scholar and wrote commentaries on the Bible. They introduce themselves to you and describe the journey you are about to begin. There are costumes, turbans, scarves, jewels, belts and shoes to adorn you on your journey »back in time.« You and your child follow the instructions and in the blink of an eye, you pass through another magic curtain and find yourself standing in a Sephardic home in Spain in the early 1400's.

Before you know it, you have visited the surrounding neighborhood, synagogue and outdoor marketplace. The smells of the fruits, vegetables and flowers, the people you've met along the way, the songs and sounds of your Sephardic journey, are reinforced by your next experience, and the next, and the next ...

No sooner have you and your child left Spain, than you are standing in the sandals of Judah Maccabee when he led the revolt against the Syrians. Then you are driving an ambulance to rescue and help people in need. You bring medical supplies and others to help community in crisis. You learn what it means to be responsible for others.

Then your child is transformed into an officer, who fought to liberate Jerusalem in the Six Day War in Israel. Just moments later, you board an El Al plane back in time through 3,000 years of Jerusalem, with your child as the captain. You fasten your seatbelt and the flight begins. In the museum, your travels knows no bounds. You blast off into outer space and discover new planets and create intergalactic communities based on Jewish values. You land back on earth at Ellis Island, New York in the early 1900's and learn about immigrants and different families and their journeys. You discover that your family's story is similar to theirs. It has been a busy afternoon, and now it's

time for you and your child to return home and end that day's special journey at My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum.

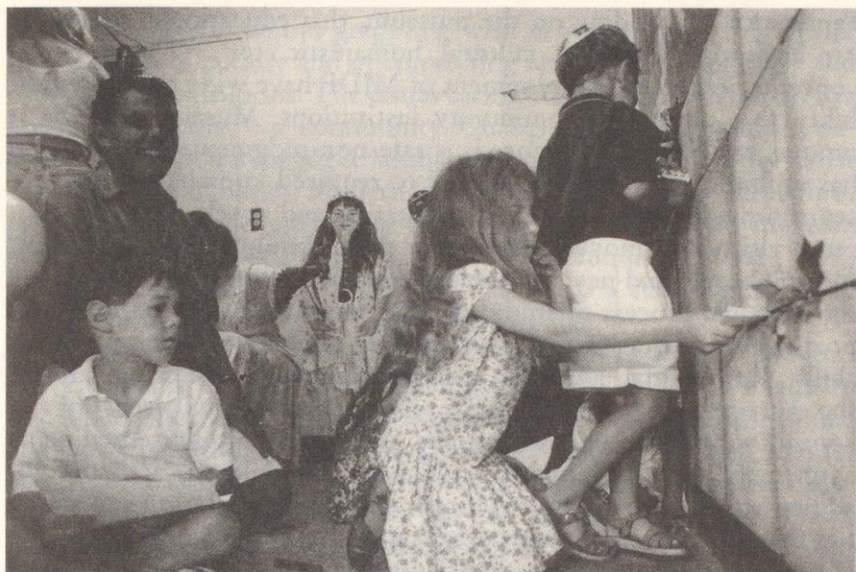
My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum of Jewish Community Centers of Greater Los Angeles is a museum for children 3-11 years old and their families and schools. It maintains a philosophy focused on teaching through discovering. The Discovery Museum allows children to learn in a unique atmosphere and setting where virtually all the numerous exhibits encourage the children to literally touch, explore and play. Throughout their playful discoveries, the museum teaches children and their families about the world's different people and their respective cultures, from the past and the present. Children and adults are introduced and taught about the richness of their heritage, about the depth of family traditions, and about the diversity that exists within our own community. The museum teaches that traditions are not only for generations of the past, but they add a special richness to the present and the future. Most importantly, the museum teaches in a non-threatening, nonjudgmental way.

Since opening in July, 1992, My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum has proven to be a highly effective tool for Jewish education within the Jewish community and for multi-cultural outreach to the greater community. Its methodology, approach and philosophy are applicable to other religious and cultural informal educational settings. More than 73,000 people have engaged in MJDP activities, 470 community institutions have brought groups to the museum, 260 households/families are members who contribute to it each year, and 55 docents have been trained to help guide visitors through the museum. The Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education has featured MJDP in their Lead Communities Best Practices Project in Early Childhood Education. In addition to extensive coverage in the international Jewish and general press, academic articles about MJDP have been published in Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education News, Jewish Education and the Jewish Community Center and Harvard Education News.

The goals of My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum of Jewish Community Centers of Greater Los Angeles are:

- to empower parents and adults to teach and learn with their children;
- to expand the knowledge and strengthen the identity and community connection of families through participation in the museum;
- to reach the unconnected;
- to build bridges of understanding between multi-ethnic communities.

The establishment of a children's museum to teach values, to provide cultural experiences and to give tools to families, provided a new



Wishes at the Kotel (Klagemauer); Fotografie: Roni Sofer

venue for informal education in the Jewish and general Los Angeles community. On a national and international level, the museum serves as a model for replication, consultation and training and has adapted its exhibits to travel. In just two years, traveling versions of MJDP have visited over 40 communities nationally and will soon be in London/England, Warsaw/Poland and Jerusalem/Israel.

The national traveling My Jewish Discovery Place is the result of research, design and fabrication of rotating new interactive learning exhibits which can be easily transported and assembled at sites with varying space configurations. MJDP has created support components for the traveling exhibits. The museum develops curricular materials, additional programs and teacher guides to accompany each exhibit. It creates kits containing age-appropriate projects and materials to be used by families in their homes. It provides pre-installation consultations to communities which will use the traveling My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum. It conducts training seminars for community-wide coalitions of professionals and lay people about the museum and how to use it to build or enhance ongoing family education programs in each host community. It utilizes initial evaluations to make needed modifications in the training program, exhibition modules and curriculum materials. It provides new traveling Discovery Museums for communities large and small. The creation of a museum-like space is a powerful way to reach and teach families with young children and to offer a positive educational

experience. Depending on the museum, that educational experience can be Jewish, Buddhist, cultural, humanistic etc. ... The ideas and concepts behind the development of MJDP have wide range applicability to a variety of community institutions. Museum learning is unique and powerful because it is safe/non-judgmental learning and has multiple entry levels as related to required knowledge. The museum provides answers, is self-facilitating and is self-paced for museum visitors to move at their own pace. Exhibits repeat and reinforce concepts and new vocabulary and then involve new learners in the dynamic process of studying. The museum is structured to support adults as educators of their children while reinforcing parenting skills. Non-formal education and environmental education informs the museum's programs. Exhibits are experiential, multi-sensory and appeal to different types of learners. All exhibits are presented on an adult/child level and include: activities for children, activities for adults, activities that require (encourage) adult facilitation and activities that do not require (discourage) adult facilitation.

If a community center or other institution has a permanent space which can be allocated, the museum can be replicated in full or in part and a relationship established to share exhibits and cooperate on the creation of new experiences. If an institution has space that can be allocated only on a temporary basis (i.e., one month per year), there are ways to design exhibits that will transform that space temporarily. Even if a community does not have a large space to designate, there are ways to apply the museum's approach to the transformation of space to create family learning environments in a classroom, a Center or school lobby, or in a corner of a synagogue or church foyer. At a time when the family needs strengthening and communities need more opportunities to celebrate living and learning together, the museum model provides some answers.

The museum is a new venue for Jewish education and it has raised issues from which other cultural, ethnic and religious communities can learn and apply. Within the Jewish community, Jewish institutions need to create and maintain several entry points for Jewish learners at all levels. We need programs to teach and build Jewish self-confidence. We need to provide opportunities for incremental Jewish learning and mastery. We need to involve parents and adults in all aspects of education for themselves and for their children. The museum is not a one-shot approach, it is cumulative learning. We need to provide for cumulative Jewish self-confidence building that is lasting and can be life transforming. Expert models of those that are more Jewishly knowledgeable teach those that are beginning by demonstration and sharing. Providing opportunities for our pluralistic community to join and blend allows for learning exchanges that enrich the community as a whole. The application of these issues

touch many communities grappling with new models and modes of transmission of culture and of connecting families to community and community institutions. The issues facing the Jewish community are not unique to that one community. Changing family structures, decreases in church/synagogue affiliation and religious identity cross community boundaries. Modern life makes it increasingly difficult to pass on community and family traditions and beliefs. This museum model has proven itself to be a successful new model of linking families to communities and linking individuals to a religious, spiritual and/or cultural identity and body of knowledge.

My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum of Jewish Community Centers of Greater Los Angeles started with under 1,000 square feet. There were 23 exhibits in the initial space, with a \$50,000 annual budget. A part-time museum director was the original staff in year one. In year two, the Director became full time and additional museum programs were added. At the end of year three, My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum in Los Angeles has moved into its new site of 4,500 square feet with expanded exhibits, staff and museum hours. In its first year, the national traveling museum was in 34 communities and the demand for more museums is increasing. This national network would function as a group of 'franchise' museums, sharing, exchanging and maintaining high quality, innovative educational exhibits. Many youth museums already provide individually centered learning experiences that educators use to complement school lessons. At the same time, other museums seriously dedicated to the mission of education are adding elements that are uniquely and ideally suited for individualized learning. My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum does this for children and adults focused on community themes and values. In this way MJDP is opening windows and doors to many otherwise disenfranchised Jewish learners. MJDP is an innovative work in progress: a drama ready to unfold, a script that is being rewritten, and a whole new cast of characters ready to step on stage.

My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum provides a connection between children, families, volunteers, the museum and community. The museum provides creative experiential Jewish learning opportunities for children, adults and families to learn together side by side. Most importantly, My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum can serve as a model for religious and cultural learning for communities seeking innovative, multi-generational experiential education that celebrates, engages and empowers.

Zusammenfassung

Seit seiner Eröffnung im Juli 1992 erfreut sich das »My Jewish Discovery Place Children's Museum« der jüdischen Gemeinden im Großraum Los Angeles großer Beliebtheit. Es richtet sich vor allem an drei- bis elfjährige Kinder und möchte ihnen – und gemeinsam mit ihnen Erwachsenen – nach dem Prinzip des entdeckenden Lernens die jüdische Tradition erschließen. Zugrunde liegt dem eine engagiert konzipierte und detailliert ausgearbeitete Museumspädagogik, die als modellartig gelten kann.