

Shalom, Ya'll: Alabama's Jewish Community Makes an Impact

Alabama's Jewish community may be small—less than 1 percent of the population—but it has always made a lasting impact on the state.

Abraham Mordecai, the first recorded Jewish settler in Alabama and the first European American to settle in what is now the city of Montgomery, moved to the area in 1785 to trade with Native Americans. Later, he became a key diplomat in relations in the territory that later became the state of Alabama. Mordecai negotiated peace agreements with the Chickasaws and Creeks and spoke their languages fluently.

The Lehman Brothers, the former Fortune 500 global financial services firm, was founded in 1850 in Montgomery as a general dry goods store. Capitalizing on cotton's high market value, the brothers began to routinely accept raw cotton from customers as payment. Eventually, they moved to New York City, where the company helped found the New York Cotton Exchange.

Part of my personal connection to Israel can be found in my state's history, too. Here in the heart of Dixie, we have a proud history of supporting Israel and the Jewish people.

In 1943, in the midst of World War II, Alabama was the first state in the nation to pass a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

And in 2006, Alabama Gov. Bob Riley proclaimed Aug. 14 Alabama's official "Stand With Israel Day."

While learning about the support Alabama has given to Israel, I felt more empowered to do what is right: to support Israel

in its quest for safety and truth. I felt that supporting and loving Israel was not only a personal calling, but also part of my heritage. We continue to demonstrate support for the only true democracy in the Middle East today, and we hope to inspire others to do the same.

I felt the calling to learn more about Israel and her people 12 years ago. Over that time, my fondness for the culture has grown into a deep appreciation.

Israel, much like the small Jewish communities of Alabama, makes large and meaningful contributions to the world. Standing as a shining example of freedom, justice, peace and equality, she has been a tremendous blessing to the world as a global leader in science, technology, medicine and democracy.

The U.S. and Israel share many of the same values. We hold the same value for human life, love of freedom and faith in G-d. The inspirational Israeli people, who prosper in the face of constant attacks, display unwavering faith and courage to the world.

Alabama has been honored to have such a history of supporting Israel, and so should the entire country.

May we continue in the spirit of friendship and love, and may our bonds always remain strong. We were standing by Israel in 1943, and we are still standing with Israel today.

Last year, I found out, much to my surprise, that I have Jewish ancestry. I have always known that I was part Cherokee, but after having my DNA analyzed for ancestry purposes, I found out my ancestors were also Sephardi Jews. One of my ancestors' last name was Jaco, short for Jacob.

I couldn't have been happier to learn this. I had no idea that my calling to support Israel would later be confirmed by my own family history.

I am very excited to begin a new journey of sharing with the global community of Virtual Citizens of Israel. We all share a common mission in celebrating our personal connection to a place so far away. My love for the culture has grown into a deep appreciation. I am constantly inspired by Israel and the Jewish people.

Jamie Brooks *is the administrator of Alabama Stands With Israel's Facebook page.*

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