"The Future of Family and Tribe," a seminar of CLAL's Jewish Public Forum held January 28-29, 2002 in New York City, brought together a dozen leading thinkers on gender, gay rights, adoption, reproductive law, bioethics, and aging. **eCLAL** is publishing a series of articles based on participants' contributions to the seminar. To view other essays from "The Future of Family and Tribe" seminar, click here.

This seminar was part of Exploring the Jewish Futures: A Multidimensional Project On the Future of Religion, Ethnicity and Civic Engagement. For more information about the project, <u>click here</u>.

Dan Reingold participated in "The Future of Family and Tribe" seminar. He is the Executive Vice President of The Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale in the Bronx. Mr. Reingold serves on the board of directors of the Greater New York Hospital Association and the Council of Senior Centers and Services of New York City. He holds appointments on the Governor's Managed Long Term Care Advisory Council, and the Advisory committee of the Aging Law and Policy Program of Albany Law School. His contribution to the JPF Seminar follows below.

How Will Baby Boomers Age?

By Dan Reingold

Eighty million Americans were born between 1946 and 1964. This constitutes the largest generation in American history, and stands in stark contrast to generations before and after. Baby Boomers have affected every system, every institution, every aspect of life. The creation of the diaper service, the suburbs and shopping malls, the explosion of school construction in the 1950s and '60s, the enormous growth in the number and size of colleges and universities, and the changes in political structure and parties are only some of the changes this generation has left in its wake.

And as this generation ages, it will have profound effects on how we think about old age, how we think about family relationships and how we construct services for the elderly population. As I look at the future of our facility, the Hebrew Home for the Aged of Riverdale, these are the things I am thinking about.

The elders of today, who will be entering the 65 plus cohort in the first decade of the 21st century, married earlier than their own parents and earlier than their Baby Boomer children. They also had more children than did the prior or the succeeding generations and had them in a shorter period of time.

Baby Boomers, with their delayed marriages and smaller families, thus tend to be more like their grandparents than like their parents. The proportion of never-married is higher among Baby Boomers than among prior generations. The divorce and re-marriage rate began its upward climb with the parents of Baby Boomers, but the proportion of divorce is much higher among Baby Boomers and the re-marriage rate is much lower. Baby Boomers will be more apt to enter old age without spouses, either as never-marrieds, divorced, separated or as widows. There will be more and more childless adults and

parents of one child. There will be more single parents, more stepchildren and blended families, some with "his," "hers" and "ours." Given the delay in marriage and childbearing, the generation span for many Baby Boomers will be longer than for the previous generation. That is, we will see more parents in their 70s who have children in their 30s and early 40s still in their child-bearing and child-rearing years. This is in contrast to a prior generation, where an 85 year old's children would have been in their sixties, grandchildren in their 30s and 40s and great-grandchildren in middle or high school.

As we think about the centrality of spouses in particular, but also about children, siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces in the lives of older people, and as sources of company, support and help, we must take into account differences in the family structure of Baby Boomers. Older people today, and for the next decade, are more likely to be married, to have three or more children and to have only one sibling. When the current generation of elders (those who are 70+) reaches their eighties, their children will have completed their child-rearing years and will likely have three or even four descendent generations.

Baby Boomers, in contrast, will have a nice supply of siblings, of course, and many will celebrate their 65th birthdays with their own parents, more likely their mothers, in attendance. Baby Boomers are more likely to enter old age without a spouse, with one or no children. Family relationships and definitions of responsibility will be complicated by divorce – among Baby Boomers themselves, the divorces of their children, or even the divorces of their parents.

More Baby Boomers than before will enter later years as partners in long-term and stable homosexual and lesbian relationships, with responsibilities and expectations clearly defined, and sometimes with adult children as members of the kinship group. Fewer Baby Boomers will have spent long years in the closet, and fewer will be estranged from members of their families of orientation. Estrangement in the current older generation reflected the inability of parents and siblings to accept the social and sexual orientation of their gay or lesbian relatives, or the unwillingness of gays and lesbians to face family disapproval by telling their parents or siblings about their sexual orientation.

The other major difference, of course, is that the Baby Boomers will be economically stronger than the preceding generation. This is primarily because there are many more women who have careers, while their parents did not. There will be two pension checks and two social security checks. It will be less likely that a woman who survives her husband will live off a survivor benefit. Instead, a widow will live off a survivor benefit plus her own pension and social security. There will also be subtle consequences down the road for Baby Boomers regarding the stress-related effects of working. Women who had careers will be just like men in terms of chronic conditions usually associated with stress. This will require that we formulate a very different approach. In addition, there will be a huge transfer of wealth when the current elderly population dies

 a transfer of massive proportion. I don't think many people have really begun to consider the implications of this.

It is important to remember that the generation in this huge cohort spans twenty years. The life courses of people born in 1946 are very different from those born almost a generation later, though this younger group is still considered part of the Baby Boomers. To illustrate, the leading edge of the Baby Boomers reached adulthood in the tumultuous 1960s. For better or worse, they altered many prevailing customs and beliefs including rules that governed courtship, marriage, family formation, divorce and definitions of proper gender associated behavior. The older boomers were at a different point in their careers than were the younger part of the cohort when the economic woes of the late 1980s hit. Members of the younger group were still in school or in the early years of their careers. In all likelihood, 65th birthday celebrations in the year 2011 will be dramatically different from celebrations that occur 20 years later.

What are some of the futures that we can imagine for this population as it ages? And what in particular can we imagine about the aging of the Jewish population? First of all, today's children, those aged 20 or below, will probably have significantly less interaction with the elderly than Baby Boomers had with their parents and grandparents. That is unfortunate. There will be fewer family support systems in place. There will be a greater need for nursing home care because there will be less support in the community.

But, at the same time, Baby Boomers will be less interested in the current nursing home model. Thus we at the Hebrew Home will face a real conflict, which will require us to develop a new paradigm. And this holds true for our identity as a Jewish institution as well.[1]

Baby Boomers will not want to share a room; they will not want to go down the hall to take a shower. And they're probably going to want a lot more drugs, a lot more sex, and maybe a little more rock and roll. We've implemented two out of three at the Hebrew Home - and sex is one of them.

When it comes to drugs, Baby Boomers will look for magic bullets to cure their ills. We will have to figure out how to sustain an ever-increasing medicated world. Telemedicine will be critical for those who stay at home, and many more people will be able to stay at home. I suspect there will be a large increase in euthanasia.

When it comes to sex, Baby Boomers will look for sexual rights in long-term care that simply don't exist today. The Hebrew Home is the only nursing home in the United States that has a Sexual Bill of Rights. There will be tremendous issues of privacy, which is a constant challenge in any institutional environment. How do you preserve privacy and independence while providing institutional care?

We will be using advanced technology with chronic care, which will be the single biggest type of care we will provide. Due to current shortages of nurses and nurses' aides, and

www.jcpa.org

low admissions to training programs, there will be fewer nurses and home-care aides, home-care workers and nurses' aides.

Other trends that we need to keep in mind are that there will be a more significant distinction between two classes of healthcare - poor and rich. There will be age-based rationing of care as younger, healthier people seek more and more health care.

The Hebrew Home is already working on building an innovative and different nursing home prototype for the next generation. But there are remaining questions for the future that we must ask ourselves:

- v Will the next generation be healthier than today's older generation?
- v Will they be more independent?
- v Will they be more financially secure?
- v Will our society change its view of ageism and provide more productive and purposeful roles for elderly people?

^[1] All nursing homes are facing a ten-year demographic dip corresponding with a ten-year period when the birth rate dropped dramatically in the 1920s and '30s. And this applies to Jewish demographics as well. This has led Jewish nursing homes around the country to a real struggle over their identities. We are fortunate at the Hebrew Home because we are at the vortex of many Jewish communities, and we anticipate the future will stay that way.