

# Photographing things Jewish From his Japanese base, former Silver-Springer records history, culture of Jewish communities

by Aaron Leibel

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It all started with an article he read in Washington Jewish Week and a trip to Brazil's Amazon River Valley in 1988.

Those led to Jono David's online collection of some 15,000 Jewish images from 80 countries ([www.jewishphotolibrary.com](http://www.jewishphotolibrary.com)) and his newly posted "HaChayim Hayehudim Jewish Photo Library" on YouTube ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz6AI9k0Sh8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz6AI9k0Sh8)), a 3 1/2-minute, fast-moving slide show of Jewish images from around the world.

"Before I departed for South America, I read an article in this paper [WJW] about a Jewish community" in Manaus, in Brazil's Amazon, the former Silver Spring resident says in e-mail interview from his home in Osaka, Japan. "So when I arrived to Buenos Aires, where Heidi [his high school friend] had just finished up a year of university, I proposed the idea of an Amazon jungle trip and seeking out the synagogue too."

"So we did ... . We managed to find the synagogue and I wrote one of my first published articles about it."

A decade later, he made his first "Jewish photo tour"; he continues taking such trips today.

"As my collection of Jewish images grew, my interest in photographing things Jewish grew too," he writes. "I cannot say I deliberately set out to create this Jewish photo library. It just kind of fed on itself. ...

"My mission is to contribute to the preservation of Jewish communities of the world by documenting them photographically. ...

"I do it because it is important to preserve heritage, all heritage. My library was born out of cultural curiosity and matured into absolute commitment. I do this work not just because it is important, but because it has given direction and purpose to my life, and it is therefore very personal. And because it is personal, my mission has become a part of my identity. Doing this work also allows me to combine two of my passions: travel and photography."

David sells his photos at his online store, as well as other items, including Jewish calendars. The sales are "to try to cover expenses," he says.

His yen for travel may well have to do with his early years -- he was born in Stoke-on-Trent, England, to an American father and an English mother who had met in Israel. When he was 2, the family moved to America. (Growing up in Silver Spring, he was known as Jono David Feldman, but professionally, he goes under the name of Jono David.)

His family belonged to Temple Israel (which later merged with Beth Tikva to form Tikvat Israel Congregation) in Silver Spring, where he became a bar mitzvah.

After graduating from John F. Kennedy High School and the University of Maryland with a degree in English literature, David realized his "lifelong dream of returning to England." While there, he got a master's in modern English language from University College London, University of London.

In 1994, he went to live in Japan, where he teaches English at several area universities, including Osaka City University.

Working at those universities affords him up to five months a year to travel, he says. So far, he has visited "120 nations and territories worldwide," he says.

Locally, he has photographed 12 Jewish institutions: in Rockville, Magen David Sephardic Synagogue, Tikvat Israel Congregation, Temple Beth Ami and Jewish Social Service Agency's Ina Kay Building; in D.C., Adas Israel Congregation, Keshet Israel Congregation, Ohav Shalom-The National Synagogue, Tifereth Israel Congregation, Washington Hebrew Congregation and Lillian & Albert Small Synagogue; and, in Frederick, Beth Shalom Congregation.

Trip planning begins two to three months before leaving home, he says, "with a veritable journey via the Internet and e-mails, lots and lots of e-mails. I plan everything as meticulously as possible in order to maximize my time and money. ..."

His parents, Doreen and Leonard Feldman, who live in Rockville, and others "have raised eyebrows" over his travel choices, which have included Syria and Libya.

"I travel to experience, to learn, to have adventure," he says. "But my reasons for specific trips have varied and matured over the years and are now utterly dictated by my Jewish photo interests and projects."

Recently, he has devoted much time to the Caribbean and Central America regions.

"There is so much Jewish history, culture, and life in corners of the world such as these that even many Jews are unaware of," he writes. "So I am drawn to these areas to give them a higher profile.

"I am also interested in communities in peril, such as those in India, Indonesia, South America, and Central Asia."

This month, he is off to India, "with a Jewish history said to be 2,000 years old, I am sure to have some remarkable experiences and photographic opportunities."