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PHOTO | RACHEL SIMON

Students watch as Annie Kosar, a staff member at the University of Rhode Island, reads a poem commemorating transgender lives lost to violence.

Joy Ladin keynote at URI transgender observance

BY RACHEL SIMON

KINGSTON - Professor Joy Ladin presented a keynote address at URI's observance of the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Professor Ladin is the David and Ruth Guttman Chair in English at Yeshiva University and the first openly transgender faculty member at an Orthodox institution in the United States. Sponsored by URI Hillel, the URI LGBTQ Center and the URI Gay-

Straight Alliance, Ladin's talk described her struggle to live an authentic life and to balance faith with a transgender identity. The event united students, faculty and community members and was followed by a vigil memorializing individuals killed as a result of anti-transgender violence.

Ladin's audience filled the meeting room at the Norman M. Fain Hillel Center. Though she spoke to an audience of about 30 people, her presentation

was very intimate. The keynote speech followed the narrative from her autobiography "Through the Door of Life." She described her own struggles with issues of suicide and her efforts to build a personal connection with God. A short question-and-answer session followed, in which some community members shared their own narratives blending faith and LGBTQ identities. One of the most pressing questions was how allies and friends of

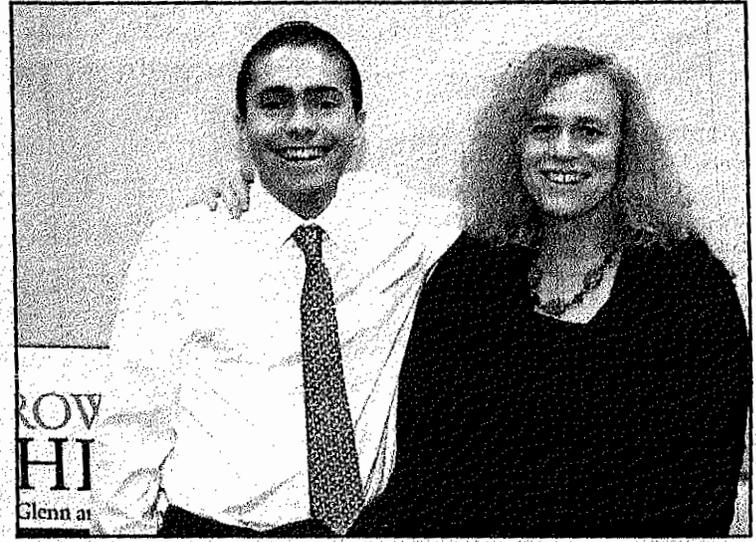


PHOTO | BROWN RISD HILLEL

Sam Rubinstein, head of JewQ (a confidential space for Jewish LGBTQ+ students at Brown and RISD to explore their identities) and Joy Ladin, following her talk at Brown RISD Hillel on Nov. 20.

transgender people can best support a friend or loved one going through transition. Ladin stressed the importance of being understanding and patient, as it is a difficult experience that can be hard on supporters as well.

After the keynote, a candlelight vigil was held in the Hillel Center's Sanctuary. The Transgender Day of Remembrance is observed each year to recognize transgender people killed because of hate or

bias. The vigil was marked by poetry reading and addresses from community leaders. Finally, Amy Olson, director of Hillel, led the vigil in a recitation of *mi-sheberakh*.

Ladin also spoke at Brown RISD Hillel later in the evening.

RACHEL SIMON, of Warwick, is a graduate student at the University of Rhode Island.

