



When It Comes to the Cost of Student Loans, **YOU CAN'T BEAT FREE**

Financial-aid season is upon us once again, and JELF applications are open now through April 30.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT JELF.ORG, EMAIL INFO@JELF.ORG, OR CALL 770-396-3080.



Every once in a while, I write a story for J Life and think to myself, *"Keep this in mind, it might come in handy one day."*

Three years ago, an organization called the Jewish Educational Loan Fund (JELF) sent me a press release and asked if we could spread the word about its student-loan programs. I had never heard about the organization and was amazed to find out what they offer: interest-free loans to Jewish students pursuing a degree or certificate after high school.

You read that right... *interest-free loans.*

So when it came time for my oldest son, Joey, to start college, I pulled out my Spring '21 issue of J Life and reread the story. We hopped on JELF's website (JELF.org) and applied for a loan. The process was very simple. Joey and I filled out an application together and uploaded some documents – identification, W-2s, school acceptance letter, etc.

Shortly after we applied, we heard from Lisa Wayne, a longtime staff

member at Shalom Orlando, who serves as JELF's local liaison. Lisa set up an interview with Joey. He was nervous, but she was patient and kind. Lisa remembered him from his JCC preschool days and couldn't believe he was graduating from high school. It was a fun reunion.

Lisa explained how JELF loans work. Recipients have eight years to pay back their loans, but the first payment isn't due until six months after graduation. That gives graduates a chance to land a job and get established before payments begin. Once a student is approved for a JELF loan, funds are deposited directly into their checking account, and the money can be used for anything while they're in school – tuition, travel, food, rent, books, etc.

Not long after the interview, we were emailed with the loan amount Joey would be receiving. JELF provided zero-interest loans to 438 students in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia last year totaling more than \$2 million. In fact, 20 of those loans – worth more than \$82,000 – were granted locally right here in Central Florida.



Joey and Lisa on their check-in FaceTime call this spring

– Samantha Taylor



Samantha Taylor, J Life's publisher, with her son Joey who is attending Beacon College in Leesburg thanks in part to an interest-free student loan from the Jewish Educational Loan Fund (JELF).