

Looking back on 50 years of the Sholom Aleichem Club

The Club Officers

On May 2nd the Club will celebrate its 50th anniversary. These have been years of significant contributions to the secular Jewish movement, to the Jewish community of Greater Philadelphia, and to the cause of making our country and indeed the world a more humane, peaceful place in which to live.

Mildred Diamond in her letter to News & Comment last month summed up what the Club has been up to these many years: "...50 years of cultural activity, good Yiddishkeit, political savvy, community participation, singing, dancing, performing... For 50 years the Club has served as a major source of secular Jewish consciousness for a large number of people in the Philadelphia area...."

We have published books and CDs, including a creative, prize-winning Haggadah. We have sought out the very best in Jewish tradition and culture, and in the process have deepened Jewish understanding and Jewish identity for us all.

Month after month, year after year, we have had programs and published newspapers that have enriched the lives of our members. The officers of the Club feel a sense of great pride in our past accomplishments. Now we look to the future, holding high our own special light of Jewish consciousness, a beacon for our members and their families, and for the Jewish community around us.

The Officers of the Club—Dan Berger, Lillian Garfinkel, Sol Glassberg, Doris Kaplan, Bess Katz, Renee Levine, Beth Warmis

Iz and Liz Reivich

We have been members of the Sholom Aleichem Club for about 15 years and have enjoyed a sense of security as members of a secular Jewish organization, along with our many Club friends. During the past few years there has been a bitter struggle led by President Bush to overcome the historic separation of state and church. In this climate the Club is an especially important organization that fights to maintain the separation of state and church. That is one of the many reasons we are proud of our membership in the Club.

Renee Shai Levine

I don't remember how or how long ago it was when my husband and I first became acquainted with the Sholom Aleichem Club. It could have been through my cousins, Doris and Marty Kaplan, it could have been during the summer at the Beachcomber Swim Club, and/or it could have been from my colleague at work, Joe Soffen. Looking back, my first clear memory of the Club, other than the wonderful productions put on by the members, was my participation in the Yiddish Reading Group and the 35th anniversary celebration. That was another special event. I do remember that my husband, Ted, and I were always considered among the younger members.

Things changed when my husband became active in the Club and participated in preparing the programs that were held for Passover and for the Jewish High Holy Days. A special feeling began to be developed about the Club. The meetings were a place to be with friends, family and colleagues. The programs we looked forward to Ted wrote were included in the Rosh Hashonah/Yom Kippur program and the Passover Seder.

When I retired from work and began to have the same schedule as Ted, we both attended the social action committee meetings. Here too I met wonderful, caring, warm people we looked forward to seeing and being with each month as we worked together to identify social issues members would not only want to know about but have a way to influence. We enjoyed the work that went with being on this committee.

This year will be remembered as the 50th year of the Club. It will also be a special year in my memory. Being an officer of the Club, a member of the Board, as well as a member of the social action committee, and having relationships with the people who participate in these activities has been a great support to me as I begin life without Ted.

Nettie Salomon

More than 20 years ago I attended my first meeting of the Club. I was so very impressed with the program that evening that I joined right then and there. Having

been an ardent folk dancer for many years I was pleasantly surprised to see so many participating in the folk dancing. As soon as the music started what a stampede there was to get out there on the floor and dance.

For me it was very exciting. I knew then that I had found a secular group that filled my needs (including meetings with) great speakers, spoken on subjects that interested me. Working on committees is an asset and I've enjoyed being active in this organization. Sholom Aleichem Club, you are my extended family.

Buddie Stensky

In 1989, included in our 35th anniversary issue, NEWS AND COMMENT printed my rhymed tribute to the Sholom Aleichem Club. I called it "The Family of Choice." But it was back in the 1950s, after my return from California, that I had first heard of the Club from my dear friend Florence Olivenbaum who said "You'll love it, as Harry and I do. It's full of our kind of people!"

So I went to a meeting as their guest; soon a member, happy to share in the animated discussions and dedicated activities of my kind of people. All through the years I've been profoundly grateful to Florence for the introduction, and to the Club for the gifts of its existence, as my "family of choice."

Gerry Lauter and Sy Kornblum

In 1976 I moved from New York to marry Sy and to settle in Bala Cynwyd. Shortly thereafter Ruth and Bernie Marks introduced us to the Sholom Aleichem Club. As we began our life together, Sy and I also found the Club that enriched and enhanced our lives. For the first time we learned about secular Judaism and it helped us to define ourselves as Jews and provided us with a secular Jewish organization which welcomed and challenged us.

In the Club we found a community of vibrant, reflective, scholarly, warm and caring people, many of whom became our close and intimate friends. Friendship, support, intellectual stimulation and community participation are some of the essential building blocks of life and we have experienced all these components in the Sholom Aleichem Club.