

People and Issues

By ALBERT W. BLOOM Editor of The Chronicle

Reizenstein's Green Thumb Nurtures Community Growth

[This is the second in a Chronicle series on senior statesmen of the community, who through force of personality and energy, plus the ability to work effectively with people, have, in signal fashion, helped to shape and build the Pittsburgh community and its network of democratic institutions.]

LOUIS J. Reizenstein, who was born on July 26, 1896, two and a half months ahead of schedule—has been busy keeping a hop, skip, and jump ahead of his time ever since.

In Pittsburgh civic and educational affairs, Jewish community organization, planning, and cohesion, Mr. Reizenstein's role has been that of keen diplomatist. But he was endowed not only with the exacting requirements of intelligence, patience, and negotiating skill, but also with an unflinching good humor, and a barrel full of funny stories and jokes which enable him to ease tensions in a serious committee room with a round of emotions-relaxing guffaws.

Perhaps the fact that he is an expert green-thumb gardener has taught him also how to nurture human beings, cultivate their good points and encourage ideas to flower.

Lou Reizenstein, the man, remembers when things were pretty tough for Lou Reizenstein, the boy.

So, when he wrestles with a way to integrate in fairness (and "soonest") the public schools, as a member of the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education, he recalls how it was on the Northside for a little Jewish boy growing up in a hostile neighborhood. Deprivation was a companion; it remains a memory.

When he was singled out to play a key diplomatic role in merging the United Jewish Fund and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies — with its then sharply emotional splits over "Israel and overseas needs" as against "local needs"—he could draw on starting his first job under a Russian chemist and threading his way along a thorny path.

When the thorny road to merger of the YM & WHA and the Irene Kaufmann Settlement led to the crossroads issue of a president acceptable to both groups, Louis Reizenstein was the harmony candidate to get the Y-IBC off to a head start onto new and broader paths of community service.

When Lou Reizenstein headed the community Jewish fund drive in 1952, or today takes on a key role in building up the endowment funds of the United Jewish Federation, he can remember how his concept of "needs" developed from the time he went to work—for \$8 a week, getting up at 5:30 a.m. to get to Carnegie.

He talks about his "German grandparents, who had enough sense to leave Germany for the United States around 1848, 1849 and 1850.

Son of Louis and Freida Jacobs Reizenstein, Lou was born into a family in which the child next to him was 10 years older. Reizenstein China patterns and artistry have been a Pittsburgh hallmark for decades.

Louis grew up on the North Side. "I had no Jewish companions there. It was a tough neighborhood. And it was not long before I grew accustomed to hearing such epithets as "dirty Jew."

"I become somewhat introverted, I guess," he mused, "and each summer I took up a different subject to study since I had no companions my own age."

Instead of athletic agility, he developed mental agility. It stood him in good stead.

The young Reizenstein has suggested to Rabbi J. Leonard Levy, of Rodeg Shalom Congregation, that he would like to become a rabbi. The boy greatly admired the stature and influence of the



LOUIS J. REIZENSTEIN

Diplomacy-cum-good humor.

spiritual leader. But Dr. Levy discouraged him because he lacked a deep traditional background.

Instead, a new world outside his neighborhood opened for him when he went to Allegheny High School. He blossomed like one of his well cultivated flowers in his proud garden at 618 Ellsworth Place, Shadyside.

At Allegheny High he edited his class Journal; captained the Debating Team, and wrote a good deal of poetry. In 1915 he was graduated with high honor.

He took a special examination at Pitt and was allowed to take advanced courses in chemistry.

Earlier, he had been recommended to Leon Falk, Senior, as "a good bright, young fellow," and thus began a relationship with the Falks that carried through many phases of his business career.

He met and courted a lovely and charming girl, with a mind as keen as his own. Florence Silberstein became Mrs. Florence Reizenstein.

From teaching Sunday school, Florence Reizenstein became a teacher of the civil rights to the community, city, county, and state, and nation. She is community and civic leader in her own right—and no one is more proud of her and her many honors than her husband.

In September 1966 they will mark their 42nd anniversary. Their home is marked by flowers, books, and art objects in rare and exquisite taste.

Their adopted son David Louis, 29, is a research biochemist. They have a grandchild Phillip Louis, 4.

Lou Reizenstein's wit is his trademark, no less than his snapping humor-laden brown eyes—and those butterfly like Sulka bowties which he has been wearing for nine on to 50 years.

("When you're working in a lab or in a factory they don't get soaked in chemicals or caught in rollers!")

His ability to encapsulate a situation, or a person, succinctly is proverbial.

At a United Jewish Appeal national convention, the late famed Moshe Sharett, former Israeli Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, was delivering a socio-economic address with his usual erudition and thoroughness.

Lou Reizenstein took his note pad and with a twinkle in his eye cocked his head in the direction of the rostrum and scribbled a note and passed it to me. It said:

"He has more answers than we have questions."