

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF
BETH ISRAEL CONGREGATION
40TH ANNIVERSITY CELEBRATION**

**BY
MORT GLICK**

© COPYRIGHT 1994, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, MORT GLICK

Ladies, gentlemen, honored guests, and our favorite special person, Esther Lapeditis, it gives me great pleasure to personally welcome you to this special occasion - to celebrate, remember and enjoy the history and accomplishments of this small Congregation.

I have the honor and privelege to present to you, some thoughts that were compiled and written by Mort Glick, who has served this congregation for a long time and has established himself as our resident poet, and writer.

Mort, please stand and accept our recognition.
(Lead audience in clapping)

It would be rather easy to write a history of the Beth Israel Synagogue consisting of names and dates, and little else. However, it is my hope that this writing will bring back nostalgia and bitter-sweet memories, perhaps a few tears, and a lot of smiles.

To appreciate our Beth Israel Synagogue as it is today, we must also remember the past.

Our founding fathers came to Latrobe in the early nineteen hundreds. They built a Shule within two blocks of their homes on Derry and Washington Streets. It was an Orthodox Shule with outdoor plumbing, a pot-bellied black stove, and a second floor for the women. It was a time when the men clapped for silence from the women and bids for Aliyahs during high holiday services. It was a time when the Shule was only open for the High Holidays and Minyans during the year.

From the laying of the first conerstone 1954, each happening of Beth Israel has been recorded in the Golden Book or the Remembrance Fund. The wall plaques represented large donations.

We were fortunate to have men and woman dedicated to making Beth Israel congregation a religions institution that was and is a major addition to our community and to our own commitment.

We salute such families as the Lowensteins, the Millers, the Biggs, the Goldmans, the Berkofskys, the Kahanowitzs, the Sevels and Weiss families, the Cahers and the Friedmans.

The Golden Book contains the history of our synagogue. Donations to it are also an additional source of income to the Shule.

From birth to death, from births to birthdays, from weddings to anniversaries, from tears to smiles of remembrance, names and dates are recorded--and the pages accumulate with the passing of time.

In its forty years, Beth Israel has had its share of good times and bad.

We have had Jack Mazza alias Jackie Mason on his first assignment as a rabbi when he graduated from the New York Yashiva. He was strictly Orthodox and strictly kosher.

We have had acts of vandalism.

We have in our congregation a special person, that we may not appreciate, one who has been our Ambassador of Goodwill, who, despite being the victim of unspeakable atrocities in concentration camps, has become an orator

for remembering the Holocaust. We admire and stand in awe of this man for his courage and for his ability to smile and for his example of what the human spirit is capable of. He has brought honor not only to himself, but also to Beth Israel Congregation.

Please stand and accept our applause. We applaud you, Bob Mendler!

In the early years, there were New Years parties that were loud and raucous affairs, where dignified people let their hair down and their dignity (sometimes) in shatters.

At more sedate affairs, we had Art Goldman as Master of Ceremonies. He was also the congregaion Historian for many years.

We are now a part of the ministerium that brings the Christian church and Synagogue together for a better religious understanding. We fondly remember Edward Friedman as our first representative. When he died, our interest seemed to die with him. There was no communication until recently when Bob Mendler and Mark Kessler rejuvenated Yom Hoshoa. Their enthusiasm transferred to the whole congregation, and we look forward to the next rememberence service.

We have been blessed with congregants who respond to

every need with both time and money.

We have the personal commitment of each member to do their share--from conducting services, to painting walls, from issuing a Quarterly News Letter, to recording entries in the Golden Book, to the blessed Sisterhood who contribute by having rummage sales and socials.

This is not a Synagogue that will close because of lack of unity. This is a synagogue that will serve as a model to what can be done when there is a strong resolve.

There was a time when the elders died and many of the younger generation moved away and our membership decreased. There were thoughts of what would happen to the synagogue, to its contents and sacred scrolls.

But like the phoenix of old, we grew and prospered.

Several members of the Greensburg Orthodox Shule became members of our congregation.

Dave Balk and his family come to our services although they live in Monroeville.

We mention others who have conducted services--Mickey Radman, Bill Brill, Mark Kessler, and Dave Balk.

We mention Bill Dunhoff for what can only be a labor of love for his devotion to getting things done.

And Mickey Radman for the many little things he does quietly and without recognition.

We mention Mark Kessler, one of the new generation, for his leadership.

There is also a new-found talent discovered during the high holidays. Brian Balk has given new meaning to the term "long winded." His blowing of the shofar lasts forever. The sound is mellow and true and envelops the chapel like a warm blanket.

We would be remiss if there was no mention of Gladys Dunhoff, editor of The Bulletin. Without her quiet perseverance, there would be no news of our congregants and their families.

We also mention we congregants who have regularly attended Friday and Saturday religious services. Although everyone has not been included by name, we, all of us, are important to what our synagogue has become today and what it will be in the future. It is good to know we have no weak links.

We cannot forget the Sisterhood and their delicious oneg shabbats--their cakes and cookies are always a

delight.

At this time, we would like to acknowledge some very special people, Hyman and Frieda Weiss for their wonderful support through the years.

Sylvia Kihanowitz is with us tonight. Sylvia has come from _____ just to be with us. We are delighted you are here. Thank you for coming.

Will the three of you stand.

Last and most important, we mention God, our faith must sustain us and those who follow, those who will honor our commitment as we have honored those who preceded us, those who will say about us--a job well done!

Thank you.

end