

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

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Editorial

"We are pleased to inform you that your community has been selected as a winner in the 1980 Council of Jewish Federations Public Relations competition."

The Charlotte Jewish News has done it again! More than 30 small cities (5000 Jews or less) submitted newspapers. Three were chosen as the best. *The News* was one of the three. What is even more outstanding, this is the second year in a row in which *The News* has received this award — and it has been publishing for only two years.

Frankly, the award came as no surprise. Given the time, energy, skills and dedication of the editors and staff of *The News*, the award came as logical recognition. But, it wasn't so easy at the beginning, and there was doubt *The News* would survive its first months. Sometimes Rita Mond, Ann Langman and I reminisce about those days. The original idea was a community newspaper representing and serving all the Jewish organizations and institutions. The drawback was money. When the JCC, Federation and Hebrew Academy agreed to cover the deficits it looked as if the path had been cleared. However, the three cosponsors were concerned. *The News* was designed to replace their monthly mailings; the question was would the Jews of Charlotte read such a paper or were they too attuned to their particular affiliational preferences.

The first issue was rushed into print in order to get registration for the Spring semester of JCC classes. The answer to readership came back loud and clear when more people registered for more classes than ever before.

From that point to this the quality of the newspaper has been a matter of pride to Ann, Rita and the staff. The community had shown its openness and had inspired the kind of commitment which wins awards.

It seems to me this is just one of many similar instances in the history of our Jewish community. We seem to have the kind of community which is open to new ideas, which cares about its constituents and about their needs now and for future generations. In the October issue of "The Jewish Times-Outlook" Lazar Chotiner asks, "When was the last time you heard a Jewish organization talking of a bold new venture and saying, 'Why not?' Is Charlotte, N.C. the only great exception with its plan for a great combined Jewish Religious and Community Center Compound?"

I can't speak for all the other Jewish communities in this country, but, delightedly, I can reply to Mr. Chotiner's question by pointing out that he has sold the Charlotte Jewish community short. Charlotte Jewry has been saying "why not?" for a lot of years — why not have a Hebrew Academy? Why not have the most outstanding B'nai B'rith programs in the nation? Why not have prize winning Hadassah and ORT chapters? Why not ask 400 members of the Amity Club to donate their stock and create a JCC? Why not have a prize winning community-wide newspaper? And, Mr. Chotiner, the Charlotte project will be a religious, recreational and educational facility.

In a world where most people and most communities seem only ready to tell why things should not happen, it is wonderful to live and be part of a community which puts a question mark at the end of "why not?" and answers with an affirmative exclamation mark!

So congratulations Ann, Rita and the staff of *The News*; congratulations to the leadership which has made our Jewish community great, and congratulations to you, dear reader, because if you weren't who and what you are, there would be no community at all.

— Marvin Bienstock

Random Thoughts...

by Muriel Levitt

Several of my readers have expressed interest concerning how I go about writing a column. Up until now this has been a well-kept secret which I will share with you simply because you asked. Writing on a regular basis is not easy and can sometimes be a drag, but I'll try to explain how it all begins.

First off, I need peace of mind, a quiet atmosphere, and a cluttered, messy desk. This calculated array of disorder seems necessary for me to pursue my own personal muse. Lots of reference material, research books, and an overflowing waste basket don't hurt either. So I sit me down at my dirty desk, take pen in hand and approach the blank paper.

Where do I start? What will I write about? It boggles the mind to sort out all the possibilities. It's a puzzlement as to what next month's topic should be. Shall I write about family? With my background and a mespuchah of assorted weirdos, that shouldn't be too difficult.

Maybe I'll do a profile on Tanta Draisel. She was the aunt who was born with a cleanliness fetish. She actually washed, waxed and polished the tops of all canned goods that came into her house. If your cigarette hit an ashtray, Draisel immediately cleaned, washed and dried it. And if you got up from an easy chair in her living room, she was right behind you plumping up the feather cushions. No shoes ever trod on her wall-to-wall carpeting since you were requested to remove your footwear in the foyer when you entered. Yes, indeed, Tanta Draisel was a little nutty, but her house was laboratory clean.

Or possibly I could do a piece on my cousin, Crazy Shirley. Shirley was a sucker for causes and could change from one crusade to another without blinking an eye. One month she was a bleeding heart liberal commiserating with the underdog and picketing against social injustice. But the next month

Shirley became an arch conservative, supporting big business and free enterprise. Any good looking guy could smile at Shirley and sway her belief to his persuasion. She was desperate for a husband and thought this was as good a way to find one as any. Come to think of it, maybe Crazy Shirley wasn't so crazy after all. She's the one who married a labor relations lawyer and is now wallowing in luxury above a canyon in Beverly Hills.

Well, let me try another subject. My many summers in the Catskill Mountains ought to be good for a laugh or two. Ten summers spent in a bungalow colony should offer some rich material. The Saturday evenings in our casino had to be seen to be believed. The management gave us what they called Broadway entertainment but it was so bad that it was hysterically funny. Real professionals they weren't, but cheap they were. And I also recall the summer when the owners bought a job lot of cheap pink paint. They refurbished the pool, the paint bled, and we swam in pink water till Labor Day! I also remember the marathon mah jongg and canasta games that went on day and night, only stopping when the kids had to be fed. And who could ever forget the husbands who drove up every weekend to be with their families? That's worth a column all by itself. Oh, what stories I could tell about my Catskill years!

While I am on the subject of summer, how many readers have spent July and August in Far Rockaway? Well, I have. All through my formative years our parents took us, bag and baggage, to a rooming house in Edgemere. Huge, old hotels were converted into one and two bedroom apartments with cooking facilities. This is where the phrase kuch-alayne originated. Anywhere from 30 to 50 families lived under one roof with minimal privacy. The big plus was that you were right on the

beach and practically at the water's edge. The large minus was an oddball variety of strangers you had to put up with for 10 weeks. Your bedsheets were damp, you ate sand, and flies were everywhere, but you were out of the hot city and caressed by ocean breezes.

How about a column on the depression? Anyone over 50 would relate to that. Steak for 25¢ a lb., milk for 10¢ a quart and a really nice dress for under \$5.00 were typical values of the day. Do you remember bread lines, soup kitchens and apple vendors? But who needs a column about all that tzurus. Better we should dwell on happier times.

Did you live through World War II and what are your recollections of the 40's? What about pompadours, dirty saddle shoes, zoot suits and pegged pants? Weren't the big bands wonderful and wasn't jitter-bugging more fun than the frug or the funky chicken? It was a stimulating era and the post-war boom was an exciting, vibrant experience.

Certainly all of the above topics offer themes aplenty to write about and enlarge upon. But if you think that putting ideas into written form is easy, go get your own cluttered desk and sit yourself down. Look at the blank paper and try to write. Pick your brains for likely people or interesting situations and let your imagination soar. If nothing happens then you'll finally realize how hard it is to compose a column and meet a deadline.

One word of caution. The laws on plagiarism are very explicit. Should I come across an article on Crazy Shirley, Tanta Draisel or Far Rockaway, be prepared to meet me with crossed pens at high noon during Tu B'Shavat on Trade Street in front of the bus terminal. You can embezzle my hard-earned money, or pilfer my expensive jewels, but never, never will I let you steal my precious, original material!

What is a Congregation?

by Rabbi Robert A. Seigel

It's a nice, warm feeling to spend time in Charlotte and once again serve a congregation as its rabbi. In some ways I feel myself to be quite fortunate. Over the years I have not only served as a congregational rabbi, but at times as an active lay congregational member. This diversity has broadened my vision in a way I never could have conceived years ago. I find my words from the pulpit tempered by my experience in the pew. But I have also come to develop a concept of the meaning of CONGREGATION.

One can define a temple in many ways. It is a building; it is the aggregate total of its members; it is a religious educational program for children and adults; it is the center of many Jewish lives. That is the shell, the body of a temple but it is not the soul. Its soul lies in the meaning and ambience that permeates its members. Yet so many neglect the *n'shama*, the soul. A prospective member approaches a temple and inquires, "What are your dues?" Granted, this is an important question. But far too often it overshadows a greater question that ought to be asked. The question ought not be "What are your dues?" but rather "What do you do?" What do you do because of your

religion? What form does your commitment take? Is temple nothing more than a magazine subscription that one can choose to renew or let expire? Or is it a commitment that will take a lifetime to fulfill?

I learned a tremendous lesson during my years working with college students at Hillel. On a college campus there are no social pressures to associate with Hillel. Only those who truly want to associate do so. And yet, even the skeptical, critical and sometimes hostile college student can become a Hillel "regular" if the Hillel congregation meets his needs.

The formula for attracting young people — and, I believe, for attracting most Jews of every age — is simple. The congregation should first and foremost be an extended family where congregants know and are really concerned about each other, where they study together, pray together, socialize together. The worship service should be alive and exciting. I recall a cartoon strip a few years ago where a young man was asked, "Are you a leader or a follower?" After thinking it over, the young man responded, "Spectator." Synagogue worship so often is a "spectator sport" where the congregants get read to, sung to, talked to. After a while it gets

SPEAKING OUT

dull. A vibrant congregation is a participatory experience where everyone reads together, sings together and the talking is a two-way street.

I don't for a moment claim to know the answer as to what makes a congregation tick. I only know what turns ME on — to Judaism and Jews. And that is feeling deep inside that being Jewish is exciting and fun and enjoyable to share with friends. That's the *n'shama*, the soul, of being a Jew for me, and, I feel, for a congregation as well.



Across The Editors' Desks

The Editors welcome comments and letters expressing all points of view and reserve the right to edit.

This space is reserved for our readers. Please let us hear from you.