

Planting Seeds for Family Trees

By Carol Ungar

Library Lines

By Amalia Warshenbrot

During Jewish Book Month we were so busy promoting books that we've overlooked the Jewish magazines.

The various periodicals in the Speizman Jewish Library cover all aspects of Jewish life. We are proud to have subscriptions for twenty adult periodicals and five children magazines. Here are some of them:

COMMENTARY is published monthly by the American Jewish Committee. It became the most influential magazine on the political right. It is in line with the general program of the American Jewish Committee to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern.

TIKUN is a bimonthly critique of politics, culture and society. It started in 1986 as the liberal alternative to **COMMENTARY** and the voices of Jewish conservatism. People today are talking about TIKUN as one of the most creative and innovative forces on the liberal end of the political spectrum.

MOMENT, a monthly magazine of Jewish culture and opinions, presents views on the difficult questions facing the Jewish community. Its publisher claims to be non-ideological; therefore, he provides balanced coverage to more than one side

of the issues.

JEWISH MONTHLY, published by B'nai B'rith International, offers Jewish perspective on events and personalities of our time the world over.

PRESENT TENSE, a bimonthly periodical, gives thought-provoking material of world Jewish affairs. The writers don't take any specific line. It offers beautiful photographic essays.

LILITH, the nation's only independent Jewish women's magazine, includes all the timely articles that affect women as Jews today (published four times a year).

SH'MA, published bi-weekly, is a journal of independent opinion on current issues in Jewish life. It contains many different readers' articles of Jewish responsibility.

MIDSTREAM is published monthly by The Theodore Hertzl Foundation, Inc. Although a Zionist publication, the articles cover a wide variety of Jewish topics. I like its fiction and poetry sections.

The periodicals listed above are only some of the periodicals in the Speizman Jewish Library. They represent many different points of view. You may borrow them for two weeks, except for current issues.

Miriam Weiner is the Johnny Appleseed of family-tree planting. A U.S.-board certified genealogist, Weiner has drawn up her own 1,000-member family tree.

She teaches others to do the same through her column, "Roots and Branches," which appears in 88 North American Jewish newspapers, and in lectures she gives across the U.S. She is also co-authoring a two-volume encyclopedia of Jewish genealogy due in mid-1990.

In Jerusalem recently as a guest of the Tourism Ministry, the petite and soft-spoken genealogist said, "I want to motivate people to discover and preserve their family histories."

Her highly organized presentation consists of a "show-and-tell." "I take documents and books with me. I show people what I've done and I give them the material to do it themselves," she said.

Born and raised in the mid-western U.S. to American-born parents, the 46-year-old family historian began her own search eight years ago following the death of an elderly cousin. "I realized that when he died everything he knew was gone," she recalled.

She started interviewing other aging relatives and wrote away for documents. Although she speaks neither Hebrew nor Yiddish, she succeeded in tracing her own roots back to the mid-19th century. "I can read enough to pick out the names of towns, and then I get others to translate for me," she explained. Her curiosity is insatiable. In her Secaucus,



Miriam Weiner

New Jersey, townhouse she has 2,000 books related to Jewish history and genealogy, and the collection is growing.

A former private investigator, Weiner feels that her background has helped her research immensely. "Taking witnesses' statements requires the same skills as taking oral histories," she points out.

Weiner insists that anyone who delves deeply enough into family history is bound to uncover some surprises.

One of her own unexpected discoveries was that her maternal grandmother, Miriam Odnoposov Rabkin, after whom she is named, was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in 1924, and not shot accidentally, as Weiner had been led to believe. Weiner eventually traveled to her grandmother's hometown where she read front-page newspaper accounts of the murder, the subsequent trial and the acquittal of the accused.

Weiner also obtained a copy of a letter from the Klan accepting responsibility for the murder. She gave it to the Simon Weisenthal Centre in Los Angeles, which researches the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.

"People often ask me whether I am the child of [Holocaust] survivors. I am not, but my grandmother was a victim of the same kind of anti-Semitism, and I feel a special obligation to learn as much as I can about her."

Weiner has traced her maternal lineage back to 1840, discovering Odnoposov relatives in Denver, Colorado; Holland; Latin America and Herzliya.

"The Herzliya relative whom I found through the Jewish Agency's Search Bureau of Missing Relatives calls himself David Ud, which [in Hebrew] means 'firebrand,' left over from the fire [the Holocaust]," she says.

Using Soviet telephone books she found in the Library of Congress, Weiner contacted 12 relatives living in the Soviet Union. "One of my goals is to visit the Ukraine [where the family comes from]. I'm waiting to get in the door to the little places that are off limits," she says.

"My research enabled me to discover my roots and understand more about my Jewish identity," she added.

She entertains thoughts of aliya. "Our spiritual roots are here," she notes. "There are invaluable sources for family history research here. If I had my druthers, I'd like to live here at least part time. I don't see it happening next week or next month, but I see it as a real possibility."

Editorial Note: Reprinted from the Jerusalem Post. Ms. Weiner's column "Roots and Branches" will periodically appear in The CJN, courtesy of CAJE.

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Walesa is a Friend of the Jews

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He then proposed that he would like to sit down with me and other Jewish representatives in Poland and work on projects that would lead to improvement of understanding, both about

the past history and the present.

When Walesa met with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, he was unambiguous in condemning anti-Semitism.

"There is no room in the new Poland for anti-Semitism, and Poles who harbored hatred for Jews deserved to be spat upon." Those were Walesa's own words.

The charismatic Solidarity leader also predicted that Poland would soon establish diplomatic relations with Israel — Israel has already agreed to rebuild Poland's telephone communications system — and that he wanted to visit the Jewish state.

There were some reservations at the Presidents' Conference meeting over Walesa's defense of Cardinal Jozef Glemp as a religious and not as a political leader.

But it is clear to me that Lech Walesa, hailed as the hero of Europe, is taking his first serious steps on a long journey to empathize with and better understand Jews, Judaism, anti-Semitism, the Nazi Holocaust and Israel.

It is our common interest, I believe, to strengthen and support his and Solidarity's commitment to constitutional democracy and human rights. It is in the Jewish interest to bring him closer as our friend, and not alienate him from the Jewish people.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum is international relations consultant to the American Jewish Committee and is immediate past chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations.



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