



SOUTHERN JEWISH

VOL. 9, NO. 2

HERITAGE

SUMMER 1996

Nina Katz

by Dr. Selma Lewis

Voice of the Holocaust • Humanitarian • Speaker for Freedom
Tireless Worker for the Underprivileged

This is the fifteenth in a series of biographical sketches of Jewish community leaders included in our forthcoming book, "Chronicles of the Jewish Community of Memphis."

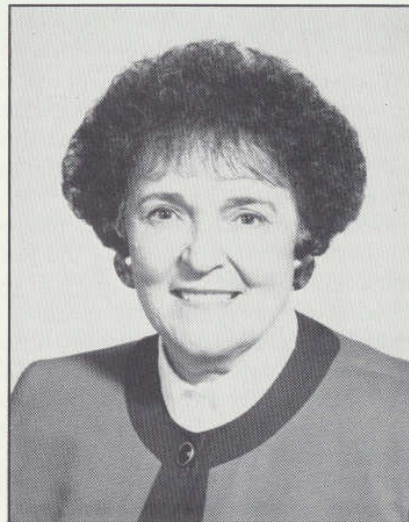
Four years after the end of World War II, Nina and Morris Katz were finally able to leave D.P. Camp for the United States, they were told they could take only six or eight pounds of goods with them. The choices they made reveal much about the young couple: a candelabra, so that they could keep the tradition of lighting the Shabbos candles; a featherbed, which had to be sent back; and an encyclopedia of philosophy, music, religion, and art. The encyclopedia was bound in leather; in order to comply with the weight limit, they tore off the leather covers which, Nina assured her husband, could always be replaced when they arrived in their new home.

Tears welled up in the eyes of Nina Katz as she told of her realization that America's freedom, the first she had ever in her life experienced, did not include blacks. Her arrival in the United States in 1949 came after twelve years of childhood in the prejudiced environment of pre-World War II Poland followed by the horrors of four years in a labor camp, two in a concentration camp, and four in a camp for displaced persons. She alone, of her entire family, survived. Freedom was a heady and intoxicating experience for the new arrival and her husband, childhood sweetheart, and fellow camp survivor, Morris. How bitter, then to find that the glorious freedom she had gained was restricted to whites. She related to the eyes of those who were forced to ride in the back of the bus. They reminded her of the haunted

eyes which she remembered in the concentration camp. On vacation with her family in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in the 1950's she saw an old black man thirsting for a drink of water but finding only a fountain with a sign: "For Whites Only."

Her own painful experiences made Katz keenly sensitive to the pain of others. She "could not accept the second-class status of blacks." She does not understand why she was spared when so many died in the Holocaust, but feels that perhaps she was chosen to give witness to what happened and to try to prevent its reoccurrence. "If you see injustice and don't speak up, you are guilty," she believes. Thus she has devoted her life in Memphis to serving the needs of humanity. She realized the "Jews have not enjoyed this much freedom since Spain before the Inquisition. It obliges us to pay our dues." She is paying hers by developing programs to equip the underprivileged members of our

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Nina Katz

Dr. Tom Stern Elected President

At our annual meeting May 26, 1996, Dr. Tom Stern was elected as our new President. Serving with Dr. Stern are Vice Presidents Sumner Levine and Lynne Mirvis. As Secretary, Marjean Kremer and as Treasurer, Mannie Ettingoff. The Directors for the coming year are Abe Kriegel, Emily Baer, Marcia Bicks, Berkley Kalin, Joel Felt, Buck Boshwit, Laurie Scheidt, Michael Parker and Rabbi Micah Greenstein.

The meeting was well attended and everyone enjoyed listening to Able Kriegel, Professor of History at the University of Memphis, as he gave his impressions of Southern Jewish life through a "Northerner's eyes" when he moved to Memphis. There were many interesting

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Clarksdale Next Bus Trip

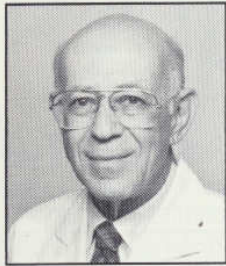
The Jewish Historical Society will follow our successful bus trip to Brownsville with a visit to Clarksdale, MS on Sunday, October 27. We will depart the Memphis JCC at 9:30 am, Sunday and return around 5:00 pm. The trip will feature a tour of the Temple Beth Israel, the Jewish Cemetery, the Blues Museum and other historic landmarks, with enlightening comments by several outstanding local hosts.

As on our last trip, you are to "bring your own picnic lunch" with drinks and dessert furnished by the Society.

The cost will be \$8 for members and \$10 for non-members. Please send your check for reservations to Phyllis Levine, 33 E. Yates Road So., Memphis, TN 38120 or call 682-5935. Don't be disappointed, make your reservations now because we are limited to 45 participants. ☼

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS AND THE MID-SOUTH - FOUNDED IN 1986
P.O. BOX 17304, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38187

President's Message • • • •



Dr. Tom Stern

Welcome to another year of activity for the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South. last year was an excellent one, a year that will be hard to match much less exceed. Fortunately for you and for me as president, our committee chairmen and women have agreed to continue in their posts.

Elsewhere in this bulletin you will read of our planned trip to Clarksdale. Last year's excursion to Brownsville was a resounding success; this one should be no less. We will be limited by the capacity of the bus so be sure to sign up early.

Your Society will co-sponsor the forthcoming visit by Eli Evans on November 3 for the Jewish book fair. His most recent book, *The Lonely Days were Sundays*, is a series of essays exploring the meaning and interactions of American, southern and Jewish history. Those of you fortunate enough to have heard him at the Southern Jewish Historical Society meeting several years ago will recall that he is an excellent speaker and raconteur as well as a distinguished author.

I look forward to seeing you on the bus to Clarksdale.
Tom Stern

Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South Officers 1996-1997

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WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

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Election *Continued from Page 1*

comparisons about the Southern way of life compared to living in the North. His topic was "A New York Jew in the Land of Elvis."

From pronunciations, inflections and accents to the Southern Jews' local political involvement, he touched on

many humorous antidotes as he experienced the "culture shock" of his move. His musings about Southern Jewry were especially entertaining because they struck such a familiar note for most of us.

It was truly an interesting meeting. ✨

*Your President, Officers and Directors
of the*

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MEMPHIS & THE MID-SOUTH *extend*

Rosh Hashana Greetings

To Our Entire Membership and Friends



*Best Wishes for a Year of
Health and Happiness*



Plough Towers Housing for Special People

by Marcia Levy

The summer of 1980 was one of the hottest on record in Memphis. Construction workers who were assigned to the project at 6580 Poplar Avenue donned their hardhats at dawn in order to finish the day's labor by early afternoon before the sun and humidity became unbearable. As layer upon layer of bricks were mortared into place, the structure began to take shape. Today that endeavor, a 150 unit high-rise apartment building for the elderly, is a familiar East Memphis landmark: Plough Towers.

For the residents and staff of Plough Towers and for the dedicated individuals who helped to bring a longtime dream to reality, the memory of that hot summer is just one of many interwoven threads in the story of this remarkable place which represents so much more than mere bricks and mortar.

The dream began in 1975 in the minds and hearts of Tillie Alperin and Ida Lipman, who recognized a need for decent, safe, affordable housing for the Jewish elderly. Initially they received little encouragement for their idea, but they would not be deterred. They continued to spread the word to everyone who would listen, and gradually, the concept of such a project gained momentum, as others in the Jewish community were inspired by these women's overwhelming enthusiasm and determination.

At that time, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was making long term, low interest loans available to qualified communities to build housing for the

elderly and handicapped under its 202/Section 8. With the potential for financial assistance from HUD, the goal of a Jewish-sponsored home for the elderly in Memphis seemed achievable.

Before any application for funds could be made to HUD, however, it was necessary to establish the fact that this type of housing was a primary need for the community. The Jewish Welfare Fund (now known as the Memphis Jewish Federation), then headed by Sam Weintraub, agreed to allocate \$10,000 for a needs assessment study. SNAP (Senior Needs Assessment Project) was the name of the community survey, which the National Council of Jewish Women agreed to sponsor. The survey project, conducted among the over sixty age group of the Memphis Jewish community, was headed by Sally Grinspan and Shirley Summerfield.

Summerfield explains how NCJW became involved in the project. "I had just served a term as president of Council," she recalls. "My mother, Edna Iskiwitz, came to me one day and said that two of her good friends were trying to generate some interest in building housing for senior citizens, but no one would listen to them. She asked if Council could help. So, being a good daughter, I invited her friends, who, of course, were Tillie Alperin and Ida Lipman, to a Council board meeting. They were so convincing that we voted



Plough Towers

to sponsor the survey."

A questionnaire was developed for the SNAP survey, and volunteers from a number of other organizations assisted in administering the personal interviews that followed. When the results of the survey were tallied, it was evident that there was, indeed, a need for senior housing. "Of all the volunteer work that I've ever done," says Summerfield, "that was the dearest to my heart."

The months that immediately followed the completion of the survey were a journey through the morass of rules, regulations, and red tape involved in dealing with a government agency. Paul Schwartz, a former executive director of the Jewish Community Center, played a major role in preparing a grant proposal for HUD, and Memphis Jewish Federation was the local sponsoring agency. After the proposal was submitted in May, 1977, much needed support was provided by elected officials at the city, county, state, and federal levels, including vital assistance from then Eighth District U.S. Representative Harold E. Ford. HUD ultimately agreed to provide a 40 year loan in the amount of \$5,143,600.

On December 21, 1978, the Memphis Jewish Housing Development Corporation was formed to fulfill HUD's requirement for a separate corporation for ownership of the housing facility. Howard Weisband, who was serving as executive director of Federation, also began serving as executive director of the Housing Corporation. This was made possible through the cooperation of the Federation board and its president, Sam Weintraub.

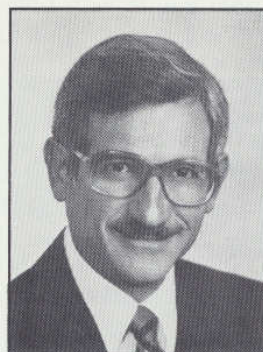
H. Kirke Lewis was elected as the first president of the corporation, and a



Tillie Alperin



Ida Lipman



H. Kirke Lewis

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Plough

Continued from Page 3

board of directors was appointed. According to Lewis, the mission of the board of the Housing Corporation was "to develop a facility to enhance life and to extend life." Bernard Danzig, current executive director of Plough Towers, praises Lewis for his strong leadership throughout the entire building process. "How many times has the right leader appeared when you needed it? Kirke was that leader."

The first task of the newly organized corporation was to purchase a site on which to build. David Okeon, of Marx and Bensdorf, was retained to research available sites and to present his findings to the Site Committee, chaired by Martin J. Lichterman. After considering several parcels of land, which included a piece of property near St. Francis Hospital, now the site of Hillhaven Convalescent Center, and property just north of Kroger and Walgreen's fronting on Kirby Parkway, the board selected a long, narrow seven acre strip adjacent to and immediately east of the Jewish Community Center. The cost was \$50,000 per acre for a total cost of \$350,000. This land was divided into three lots, with the housing facility to be built on the northernmost portion. The center portion is presently owned by the Memphis Jewish Federation, and the front portion, which faces Poplar, was sold for an amount which Lewis proudly acknowledges was equal to the original cost of the entire parcel.

After a series of interviews, the Selection Committee, chaired by Jerome Hanover, presented its choice of architect and consultant to the Housing Corporation board. A local architectural firm, Gassner, Nathan and Partners, was selected, and the National Development Corporation (NADCO) of Pittsburgh was named as consultant and general contractor. "We wanted to choose a contractor who was 'immortal,'" says Lewis, "that is, we wanted a large firm with plenty of backup in case anything happened to the individual who was assigned to this job. Also, we realized that we were totally unsophisticated in terms of dealing with the government. We needed someone who had contacts with HUD and experience with government contracts." Lewis recalls the interview of Seymour Baskin, the

consultant who represented NADCO. "He was the last one, late in the afternoon, and we almost instinctively knew that he was the right choice. He was knowledgeable and well-informed, but also we sensed that Seymour Baskin was a 'mensch,' and that was a winning combination."

The Building Committee, under the chairmanship of Avron Fogelman, worked diligently with the architects to develop a first-class facility which could be built within the amount of money allotted by HUD. Fogelman still expresses his feeling that the project was "basically a dream." He recalls, "I didn't see how we could pull it together, but it

*Abe Plough
Addressing the
Plough Tower's
Board of Directors*



turned out to be such an exhilarating experience, far beyond our everyday expectations of what we could do." Fogelman also remembers the tenacity of Tillie Alperin. "She would battle with me about quality and standards, but she had such good instincts that I always tried to take her advice."

Staying within the budget often required design changes and trade-offs. The original plan was for 150 apartments, with every unit having its own balcony. It became necessary to compromise this plan by having 80 apartments with balconies and 70 without, in order to have sufficient funds for a full kitchen and dining room for the building. This created somewhat of a backlash. After the announcement that the building would be named for Abe Plough, he was deluged with phone calls from prospective tenants, each of whom wanted his assurance that they would get an apartment with a balcony.

Groundbreaking ceremonies took place on a rainy day, Sunday, May 27, 1979. "It was pouring rain," says Danzig.

"We couldn't have the groundbreaking on site, so we brought buckets of dirt and shovels indoors into the Jewish Community Center." According to Lewis, his own slip of the tongue added to the fiasco. "When I introduced George Gragson, Deputy Superintendent of Development from the Department of HUD, I said he was from the Department of FUD," laughs Lewis, "and I did it more than once!"

The construction process was, at last, under way, but it did not proceed without incident. It was necessary to connect a drainage line from the building to the main line which lay underneath a road within an adjacent apartment complex. The city had granted a permit to do the work, but the manager of the apartments telephoned the Federation office, asked to speak to the "head Jew," and announced that the construction company was forbidden to set foot on the apartment property. Refusing to be intimidated, the contractor assembled his crew at 6:00 A.M. the next day and completed the connection by 9:00 A.M. before anyone had time to get a court order to prevent the work.

Kirke Lewis stood his ground as well in trying to guarantee an up-to-date facility of the highest quality possible. When it was suggested that money could be saved by purchasing a cheaper trash compactor rather than a more expensive model, Lewis insisted that trash was not an item on which to cut corners. The decision was made to go with the better quality system, and no one has ever regretted that choice.

As the building grew nearer to completion, the board met to choose a name for the facility. After dismissing such names as "Shalom Towers" and "Menorah Towers," it was suggested that the building be named for an individual, perhaps for someone on the board. The idea of honoring an individual was well received, but only if it were a person who was unique to the Memphis community. When someone on the board mentioned the name "Abe Plough," there was instant agreement.

A group made an appointment to visit Plough at his office to seek permission to use his name for the new building. They took the architect's rendering of the building to give him some idea of what it would look like.

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The Arks and Bimas of Memphis (Part One)

by

Sue Dickerson and Harriet Stern

The ark is the central element of every synagogue—the most sacred place, as was the “Holy of Holies” in the Biblical tabernacle. Within it rest the scrolls of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, the “Five Books of Moses”, the most revered portion of the Holy Scriptures.

The arks in each of our Memphis synagogues express religious feeling and meaning, how they do so will be the topic of this and a subsequent article. Now we invite you to visit with us these Houses of Prayer.

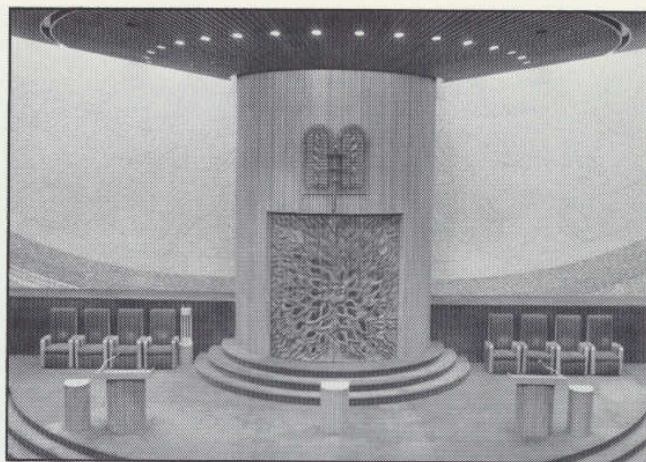
The “new” Temple Israel was dedicated in 1976 in the third move for this now 143-year-old congregation. The property was donated by Abe Plough, and architectural artist Efrem Weitzman of New York was chosen to work with chief local architects, Gassner and Nathan in creating the new facility.

The main sanctuary is a half circle shape and is symbolic of incompleteness, implying another half beyond its confines. There is a totality: one half, the congregation within its walls; the other half, the community at large. It is the Jew in relationship with himself and his God and the Jew in relationship with the world.

When the edifice was designed, the rabbis felt this representation was meaningful not only in the abstract but in the particular. It was a statement that Temple Israel, since its founding in 1853, had shown a unique involvement with the Memphis community. During his distinguished rabbinate, Rabbi James Wax most clearly demonstrated this commitment.

Moving down the center aisle toward the ark, one recognizes Weitzman's basically monochromatic color scheme. Color speaks from within the ark as well. Weitzman chose as the artistic theme of the ark “The Burning Bush”, one of the turning points in Judaism. Here and in the Temple's overall design, he emphasizes occasions when God revealed Himself either to individuals or to Israel as a whole.

Ark in
Main Sanctuary
At
Temple Israel



The large ark doors, sculpted of bronze-coated aluminum, represent the bush in an openwork of flame shapes. The Hebrew letter “Shin” for Shaddai (one of the Biblical names of God) forms the center closing for the doors. Through the openwork a brilliantly hued tapestry “burns”, symbolizing the vibrant inner cord of Judaism and the Jewish people. Its design repeats that of the doors, a symbol that the inner and outer person are to be the same. The five Torahs are enclosed in colorful woven covers of blue, coral and purple. Their histories are not recorded, though the Temple keeps in the foyer a Torah which came from a Czechoslovakian congregation destroyed in the Holocaust.

Extending the meaning of the ark and its contents is a “Tree of Life”, a large, fluted column of pale wood into which the ark is set. This forms the trunk of a tree which spreads above. The reference is, of course, to the Torah, “the tree of life to them that hold fast to it.”

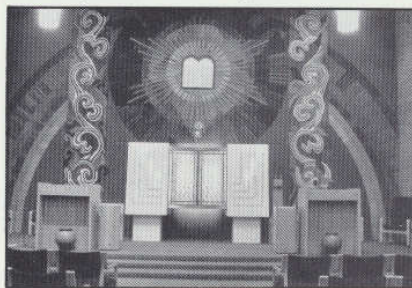
Above the ark on the tree trunk are the Tablets of the Law with one abstract flame shape to represent each commandment and a torch holding the Eternal Light in the center. All are made of bronze-coated aluminum. Visually, the flame shapes could also be

leaf shapes—on the doors of the ark as well as here, thus serving to blend both symbols.

On either side of the ark are broad mosaic walls of varied sizes and colors of neutral and white stones. The design sweeps upward as a representation of the wings of the cherubim. (In the Biblical account, two golden cherubim hovered in symbolic protection on the lid of the ark.) Hence the implication of God's presence becoming known to man. On the far right side, a menorah given by the Temple Sisterhood forms a wall relief.

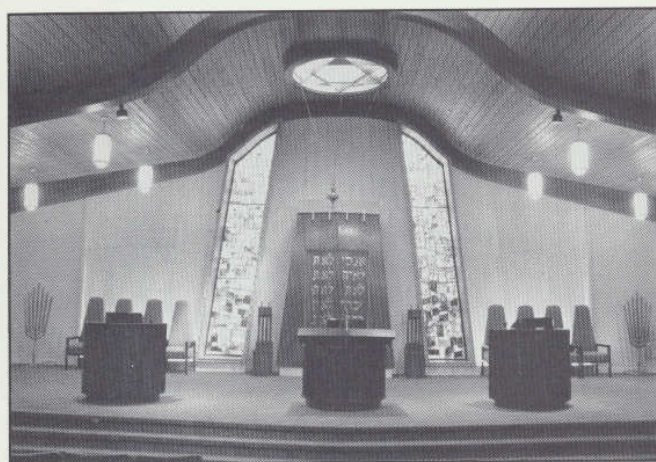
Although there is a balcony in the rear, repeating the semicircle, it is not an area for women only. In Reform Judaism there is sexual equality. Women are ordained as rabbis and cantors. Women have the same opportunities for leadership and service as men, and any knowledgeable Jew may lead a congregation in prayer.

The smaller chapel at Temple Israel serves for many functions, including small weddings, evening meetings, and worship services for small groups. In this chapel can be found the Eternal Light and the Ark doors from the previous location. The bright bronze doors have been set into two slabs of white marble, suggesting boxes intended to be reminiscent of the portable Ark of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness. Above the Ark is another semicircle, forming an almost psychedelic rainbow in whose center is a radiating Star of David. On either side of this back wall of tapestry are curving colored areas representing on one side the pillar of cloud and the



Temple Israel -- Daily Chapel

Please see Arks and Bimas, Page 6



Ark in
Main Sanctuary
At
Beth Shalom
Synagogue

the theme of manifestations of God's presence.

It is a geographic move of several miles west to Beth Shalom, a synagogue chartered in 1955, almost 100 years after Temple Israel. When, in 1995 this congregation celebrated its 40th anniversary, Senior Rabbi Peter Light wrote, "Forty is the age of wisdom." To be a wise institution is to understand that every voice carries a message worth listening to."

Beth Shalom is a congregation that has striven to listen to each and every voice. Women, as well as men, participate in the services in Conservative Judaism, there are also women rabbis and cantors.

For Memphis, it was the first new Jewish congregation in half a century and for the Conservative movement, it was the first and only conservative synagogue in the Mid-South area.

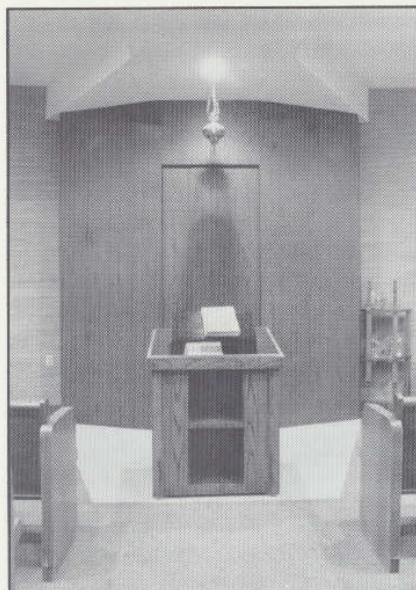
By January, 1955, the State of Tennessee issued a Charter of Incorporation. By late 1962 an architect was selected and preliminary building designs were drafted. The dedication in 1967 was resplendent.

The members of Beth Shalom feel that their congregation has a remarkable history, particularly in light of its youth. Conservative Judaism took root and its continued growth gives evidence that it is here to stay.

The Torahs of Beth Shalom have a history all their own. The year after the dedication of the present sanctuary, Beth Shalom became the repository for

a Torah from the Holocaust. Presented by Dr. and Mrs. Justin Adler, this scroll had become scarred, but essentially intact, through the Germany of World War II and its infamy. Later in the same year, another Torah was presented to the synagogue and in 1971, Mrs. William Shefsky was the generous donor of a third Torah. The ark was brimming full with Holy Words.

In 1980, a tragic event occurred. The Sacred Scrolls were stolen and then thrown into the Wolf River. An attempt was made to restore the defiled scrolls. This was only possible for the scroll that had survived the Holocaust. This Torah once again survived and was



Beth Shalom -- Daily Chapel

sufficiently restored and returned to the Ark. Gifts of many Torahs from local and distant contributors were soon collected. One of the "new" Torahs, in fact, is a scroll that escaped from behind the "Iron Curtain".

Enter the sanctuary of Beth Shalom and you are in a unified, seemingly square enclosure of dark woods and unobtrusive soft green carpeting and upholstery. The ceiling is heightened by beams of dark wood arching to a point in a series of four bays. The wholeness and unity of the space reflect the reputed spirit of this congregation as an intimate and friendly one.

The ark is set into a high cabinet of dark wood trimmed at the top in copper. The shape is a slightly tapered rectangle, reminiscent of the door shape sometimes pictured for Solomon's Temple. The doors of the ark are square Tablets of the Law, each commandment represented by the traditional Hebrew letter abbreviations sculpted in bronze.

Tall, frosted glass tapers form the menorahs on either side of the ark. A bronze Eternal Light of a traditional censer shape hangs above the ark, descending from a Star of David circular window. Soft, filtered light falls upon the Bimah through this window, perhaps to heaven. A stained glass panel of abstract glass shapes in shades of brown, greens rust and gold adorn each side of the ark. The handmade tapestry Torah covers carry out this color scheme of earth tones.

Beth Shalom's ark bespeaks simplicity and tradition, reflections of the colors of earth and light from heaven, modernity and tradition, as is the import of Conservative Judaism.

Beth Shalom's Arie Becker Chapel was donated by Murray N. Murray in memory of the congregation's most beloved leader, Rabbi Arie Becker, who died in 1979. The chapel serves many purposes. Its small and intimate environment lends itself well to minyans.

This has been a visit on paper. Both Temple Israel and Beth Shalom welcome anyone who wishes to visit their Houses of Worship. Both take pride in having created expressive and meaningful sanctuaries where one may worship in the beauty of holiness. ✡

Nina Katz

Continued from page 1

society to take their places as fully equal citizens.

Her civic activities have taken many forms. Since the American Red Cross saved her life, "brought her back to life after twelve lost years," she has always worked with that organization. She became a Gray Lady to help rehabilitate the wounded veterans of World War II. The Red Cross awarded her a Certificate of Appreciation in 1965 and again in 1975.

A past president of the local chapter of Hadassah, Katz is a member of the Life Board of the national organization, in which she continues to be active. She was the first woman to be elected Chairman of the Board of the local chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, later serving as a member of the National Life Board, and presently as Human Rights Lecturer and Facilitator. The local organization gave her their 1990 Humanitarian Award. She helped to organize the local chapter of Facing History and Ourselves, a curriculum for school children concerning the Holocaust and is Consultant and Instructor for the group.

When the Memphis Literacy Council was in its early stages, in 1974, Katz became a VISTA volunteer under the auspices of the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association assigned to help the young organization to grow and become more effective. So successful was she as their Director of Public Relations that she has conducted workshops for literacy awareness in Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, California, and Missouri. Her efforts have been recognized by an award from Laubach Literacy Action in 1985. Further recognition was the Coors Literacy Luminary Award, in 1991.

Nina Katz has been awarded many honors in many areas. Certainly her contributions to the lives of the underprivileged are immeasurable as she has helped them acquire the ability to read, understand, and take their places as a part of our society. But perhaps her most important contribution has been her remarkable ability to interpret for others the reality of the Holocaust. She is in great demand as a speaker, and while it is always painful for her to relive the



*Nina Katz Receiving CBU
Doctorate of Humanities*

agony, she continues to dredge up the past in the hope that she can "turn a few bigots around." Her confidence as a speaker began when a friend, Barbara Horn, asked her to speak to the Medical Auxiliary in 1952. She was reluctant, feeling uncertain of her ability in a still-foreign language, but she went anyway, and received a standing ovation. This speaking engagement gave her the courage to continue a career in speaking that has taken her into many areas of her own and other communities. Always her eloquent testimony touches hearts and changes opinions. She is evidence of the ability of the human spirit to endure, refusing to be "robbed of her own humanity by Hitler's inhumanity."

Her speaking career was boosted further by Dr. Fred Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of the Shelby County Schools, who attended a seminar she conducted for Red Cross youth. The seminar "worked so well" that Dr. Johnson asked her to repeat it for all the social studies teachers and the West Tennessee Teachers Association conferences and to conduct lecture tours and discussions for all the county schools. Mrs. Katz feels that "other people have set a direction" for her life, asking her to perform tasks she did not know she could accomplish, and convincing her that she could do them.

Speaking engagements have included

an unlikely one for the Daughters of the American Revolution, who invited her to give a patriotic speech. Her topic was "Count Your Blessings, America," emphasizing how fortunate we are to life in this country. The D.A.R. gave her their Americanism Medal in 1977 and their Public Service Award in 1992. Among other awards are the Outstanding Service Medal of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, Jerusalem, Israel, in 1983; Women of Achievement's Heroism Award in 1986; the Memphis City Council's Outstanding Contribution Award in 1986 and in 1990; and The Commercial Appeal's "Thousand Points of Light Award," President George Bush's selection of significant volunteers.

Today, the honors and awards continue to follow Mrs. Katz as her great efforts on behalf of equality for all knows no bounds. In May, 1996, Nina Katz received an honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Christian Brothers University at their commencement ceremonies at the Mid-South Coliseum. Dr. Gerard Vanderhaar, Professor of Religion and Philosophy at CBU, introduced Mrs. Katz, noting their long friendship and shared concern. Brother Michael J. McGinnis, President of CBU awarded the degree to Mrs. Katz. ✦

This honor was especially meaningful to Mrs. Katz because the University is famous not only for its high academic standards but also for the great emphases it places on moral values. In accepting the Doctorate in memory of her loved ones, Mrs. Katz urged her fellow graduates to "set our goals high and reach out to meet the challenge that lies ahead of us, let us mark a new beginning of a new era full of hope and human kindness, of respect and

Please see Katz, Page 8



*Nina Katz Honored by the
Memphis Community of Muslims*

Jewish Book Celebration at MJCC, November 3-10

Eli N. Evans to Speak Sunday, Nov. 3, 10 A.M.

The Jewish Historical Society will co-sponsor Jewish Book Celebration with Temple Israel, Memphis JCC and Solomon Schechter Day School. We are especially happy to bring Eli N. Evans to Memphis as our first speaker. Below is the schedule and a few brief facts about each speaker.

Sunday, November 3, 10 am

Eli N. Evans

Author, *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner*

Eli N. Evans brings to his writing the unique perspective of one who has grown up Jewish in America's Bible Belt. His insights in his latest book move from southern subjects to those of worldwide scope. This volume of essays is anchored in pivotal themes ranging from the abolition of slavery to the tragedy of the Holocaust, from the agony of the Civil War to the creation of the State of Israel. This book has taken its place beside his other books as a unique contribution to southern, Jewish, and American history. Bagels and coffee will be served.

Sunday, November 3, 2:00 pm

Barbara Sofer

Author, *The Thirteenth Hour*

With a unique perspective on today's headlines, Ms. Sofer's first novel, *The Thirteenth Hour*, enter the perilous world of international terrorism. Although this novel is fiction it helps readers understand the conflicts of the Middle East. Ms. Sofer is a lively, emotional speaker on aspects of life in Israel, the writing life, family and women's issues, Zionism and Judaism. She has written a family travel guide about Israel, a children's book, *Shalom, Haver*, about Yitzhak Rabin and hundreds of stories

for dozens of magazines and newspapers. She and her husband currently live in Israel.

Tuesday, November 5, 7:00 pm

Dr. Karin Gubin

Facilitator, *"Raising Responsible Kids Through Love and Logic"*

Dr. Karin Gubin will provide valuable information sure to help parents improve their daily lives with their children. Her relaxed, informal discussion will offer a fresh outlook towards parenting. Recently, Dr. Gubin has been a guest on various TV and radio talk shows in Memphis. Dr. Gubin, author of *Healing the Hungry Heart*, is also the founder of The LIFE Institute and a pioneer in the development of a therapeutic approach that treats eating disorders by addressing the causes rather than the symptoms. Originally from St. Louis, Dr. Gubin lives in Memphis with her husband and three children. Free baby sitting available, reservations required.

Sunday, November 10, 2:00 pm

Harriet Roth

Author, *Harriet Roth's Deliciously Healthy Jewish Cooking: 350 New Low-Fat, Low-Cholesterol, Low-Sodium Recipes For Holidays and Every Day*

You, too, can be a Jewish mother...or just cook like one (only healthier)! Harriet Roth will show you how—with her eagerly-awaited new cookbook. The best-selling cookbook author and former director of the Pritikin Longevity Center Cooking School, Harriet Roth proves that healthy Jewish cooking is both possible and delicious, as she updates favorite traditional recipes for today's health-conscious

Plough Continued from Page 4

Lewis recalls the dialog that follows:

Plough: What do you want me to give you?

Lewis: We want nothing from you. We want to thank you for what you have meant to the community at large and to the Jewish community.

Plough: I've never had this happen before. But I want to tell you one thing. I won't let you name it "Abe Plough Towers" for me. Maybe you can name it "Plough Towers" for my family.

Lewis continues: "Then he called in his staff and held up the drawing of the building. He told them that we wanted to name this building for him, and we wanted nothing in return. And that's how Plough Towers got its name."

In October, 1980, the first tenant moved into Plough Towers, and the building was formally dedicated on November 9 of that year. By December the building was filled to capacity. Of the 167 persons who are currently living there, approximately 30 per cent were among the original residents. The average age of Plough Towers residents has risen each year since its inception. "Because there are more community support services available to residents, people have aged in place," says Danz volunteer services, so that they can live in dignity, with self-respect and a feeling of self-worth. Soon residents also will be on the cutting edge of technology through a recent grant from the Plough Foundation, which will make possible the purchase of computers and the hiring of an instructor to teach the use of the internet.

Although she does not live at Plough Towers, Tillie Alperin visits regularly. She knows many of the people who are there, and she regards the building and the quality of life within its walls as a matter of great personal pride. She serves in another important capacity as well. Now that Abe Plough is no longer living, it is Alperin who gets the calls from all those incoming tenants who want a balcony. She loves every minute of it. ❖

Marcia Levy is a native Memphian and free lance writer. Her articles have appeared in Memphis Magazine, Mid-South Womens News and several trade publications. She is on the National Board of Brandies University and teaches Hebrew at Temple Israel.

Katz

Continued from Page 7

understanding, of justice and love."

In March, 1996, Mrs. Katz was presented an Outstanding Achievement Award by the Muslim community in Memphis for her service toward peace. It is quote noteworthy that Mrs. Katz was honored at this event sponsored by the Community of Muslims in association with Imam W. Deen Mohammed, a world renown Islamic

scholar who is highly noted for his efforts in establishing interfaith cooperation and dialogue between the leaders of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. And on August 25, 1996, at the Anshei-Sphard Beth El Emeth Congregation Tribute Dinner, Nina and Morris Katz were recipients of the Tikkun Ha Olam Humanitarian Award

Please see Katz, Page 9

Fish Market *Continued from Page 10*

Abraham Sacharin, and in 1966, he moved the store to its present location at 2887 Broad Avenue. In the early '50's he acquired the large grinder from a fix it store on South Main and thought it might be good for grinding gefilte fish, but nothing much happened with it. It wasn't until he moved the store to Broad Avenue and Pearl Katz, a frequent customer, encouraged him to use the grinder for gefilte fish. She even wrote ad copy for him. Mrs. Katz herself had never made fish while her mother was still living. After her mother died, she cooked with her mother's recipe, but instead of chopping the fish by hand, she and her sister, local caterer, Shirley Bluestein (who has been known to make 100 lb. of fish at a time) used the kosher grinder at Buffalo Fish Market.

"Rabbi Nathan Greenblatt would come in and get his fish ground here and make sure everything was okay," Mr. James says. "Jewish people here know how we do it and what they were getting, would call in their orders and when the women or their maids would come pick it up it would all be wrapped and ready for them," he adds. Some people come in and watch the fish being cut, washed and ground. Rabbi



Three generations making Gefilte fish.

Belle Rosenberg, daughter Saralyn Weiss, granddaughter Susan Tobey

Greenblatt, head of the Vaad haKashrut in Memphis says that although the market is not under Vaad supervision, only kosher fish is placed in the grinder. Separate knives are used to skin and bone the fish.

Before the kosher grinder became popular, very few Jewish housewives were getting their fish ground then; they preferred to chop it at home. After all, that was the traditional way. "I remember Mrs. Sacharin taking the cleaver and chopping that fish," he says.

Fagie Schaffer, a long time customer at the Buffalo Fish Market remembers, "Mama would buy buffalo fish at Abraham Saccharin's market on Maine Street. She sliced it and cut it back, chopped it up and stuffed it back into the skin. No one used a grinder back then. In the early days, Mama would go down to the river and buy a live fish." Mrs. Schaffer makes her mama's recipe, but she doesn't stuff it back into the skin.

Grinding the fish really caught on when Memphis started to get the jar gefilte fish from New York. After that, many people stopped chopping and making their own fish. Priorities changed; women didn't spend as much time in the kitchen as their mothers had and were looking for ways to save time. Yet even though Jewish families got used to jar bought gefilte fish, it wasn't nearly as tasty as the real thing. So if the fish market did all the work of skinning, boning, and grinding, home-made gefilte fish would be easier to make and might again become a feasible gastronomic option. In Memphis, during the sixties and seventies over 500 families ate home-made gefilte fish for the holidays, all ground at the Buffalo Fish Market.

One of Mr. James' employees is Mayo Hill who has been grinding buffalo fish at the market for close to twenty years. Although he skins, fillets, and washes the buffalo fish and puts it in the grinder, he himself had never tasted a piece of gefilte fish until one Jewish housewife brought him one before Rosh Hashana. Although he said it was okay, he prefers fish cakes. It's probably an acquired taste. Mr. Hill always asks if you want the head, skin and bones to use for your fish. Belle Rosenberg, who has been getting her fish ground at Buffalo Fish market for "as long as I can remember" uses several fish heads, skins and bones at the bottom of the pot of boiling water to give flavor and to keep the fish balls from burning." She and her daughter Saralyn Weiss will make over twelve pounds of fish before Rosh Hashana.

Despite the grinder's activity, Mr. James notices a tapering off over the years of women coming in to order ground buffalo fish. He thinks fewer Jewish women might be making gefilte fish. Perhaps the more recently



*Billy James
Grinds
Buffalo for
Gefilte Fish*

introduced frozen gefilte fish loaves have become more popular than the home-made variety as more women trade the apron for the briefcase; perhaps, the younger generation prefers artichokes for appetizers rather than pungent sometimes sweetish taste of fish. Although today there may be less people making fish than twenty five years ago, the kosher grinder at the Buffalo Fish Market is still an institution for the traditional Jewish community; for some Jewish families in Memphis, getting your order at Mr. James' Buffalo Fish market marks the start of their holiday preparations. ❖

Katz

Continued from Page 8

in recognition of their devotion to various humanitarian causes.

Nina Katz's words and example have inspired those who hear her story. Instead of remaining mired in a brutal past, she says: "How blessed we are; if only our parents could have been here." As a young person she looked for answers, but as an older person, she has learned to accept that "there are no answers." In spite of all that she has survived, she retains her faith in a higher power, hopes to "make a difference," and has a belief in the basic decency of human beings. ❖

Southern Jewish Historical Society
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Reminiscing about

THE KOSHER FISH GRINDER ON BROAD STREET

By: Lynne Nirvis

Billy James, 76 year old owner of Buffalo Fish Market at 2887 Broad Avenue, wouldn't touch a piece of jar bought gefilte fish. "No faith in jar fish," he says. Although he's not Jewish himself, he probably knows more about how to grind buffalo fish for home-made gefilte fish than most people in Memphis. In his market on Broad Avenue, past the shelves of Louisiana Hot Sauce, Omega Corn meal Mix, and lard, sits a large electric grinder that is over thirty years old. In this grinder, Mr. James grinds only kosher fish, that is fish that has both removable scales and fins as defined in the Book of Leviticus. Mostly Mr. James grinds buffalo fish, a native southern fish that is found in what he calls the "good part of the Tennessee River." In the North, Jewish cooks use carp and white fish to make gefilte fish; in Memphis it's buffalo. No cat fish or turtle meat is allowed in the grinder, though he sells both at the market which has a diverse clientele—

African Americans from the neighborhood, Indian vegetarians, Jewish cooks, and fish marketers from the surrounding areas.

Buffalo Fish Market's kosher grinder helps carry on a very old tradition of using fish to celebrate Jewish holidays and the Shabbat. Preparing fish for Jewish celebrations goes all the way back to the Biblical days of Nehemiah when so much fish was sold in Jerusalem that the nearby gate was called The Fish Gate. (Jewish Holiday Kitchen by Joan Nathan, 1979) In the Talmud, one finds, "When may those who possess less than fifty shekels have the dish of vegetables and fish? Every Friday night of the Sabbath." (Encyclopedia Judaica)

Gefilte fish which is the Yiddish for stuffed fish actually originated in Eastern Europe where many Jews had migrated and were so poor that they invented the dish to make the fish go farther. The Jewish prohibition on Shabbat against separating fish from the bone made gefilte fish an ideal choice for Friday night dinner. Today in Memphis, especially before Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, and Passover in the Spring, Jewish cooks frequent the market to pick up their order of freshly ground Buffalo fish ready to "season, mix and cook" into gefilte fish, southern style. Mr. James estimates that during the year he grinds over 1000 pounds of buffalo fish, all strictly kosher.

On January 1, 1920, Mr. James' father, a fisherman, opened his fish market at 899 Pennsylvania in South Memphis. Billy James was born the next day and grew up in the fish market. That same year, Abraham Sacharin opened a fish market on 273 North Main Street. Billy James and Benny Sacharin, Abraham's son became playmates and friends. "I grew up knowing a lot of Jewish people," Mr. James says. "Once Abraham Sacharin was rounding up everyone for prayers and I found myself in the synagogue on Market Street helping to make a Minyan (a prayer quorum) so the services could begin." Mr. James' friendship with the Sacharins led to many delicious fish dinners at the Saccharins and to a future business agreement as well.

In 1951, Mr. James bought the Fish Market at 273 North Main (where the Convention Center stands today) from

Please see Fish Market, Page 9

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