



Roots and Branches

By MIRIAM WEINER

Honor Thy Fathers

It is commonplace to extol the virtues and accomplishments of people who are no longer among us or those contemporaries who have won prominence by virtue of their current contributions to Jewish life. What occurred recently in Omaha was rare and could be an inspiration for other communities.

At its fifth anniversary celebration, the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society (NJHS) honored 120 octogenarians (those over 80) for their service to the Jewish communities of Omaha, Lincoln and Council

Bluffs. These men and women, representing 10,000 years of Jewish service, were photographed and presented with a gift honoring their good deeds. The photos will ultimately be displayed in the "Corridor of Jewish History" at the Jewish Community Center.

According to Mary Fellman, founder and president of the NJHS: "You are the builders of these communities. You are the people who were the workers, the dreamers, the visionaries who helped create the Jewish communities in which we live today... We

are so proud of this opportunity to thank you for what you have accomplished and to promise you that we will continue to carry on in the generations to come that which your generation did."

When I was invited to Omaha to speak at this event, I knew it would not be like my other lectures. These people, many of them immigrants themselves, had lived through some of the experiences about which I generally lecture. When I talked about the importance of preserving family records and identifying photos, they understood, nodded and

smiled. When I spoke of the importance of creating oral histories with the oldest family members, their children turned to them and they both nodded.

At one point in my Omaha lecture, I described the Landsmanshaftn societies that were such an integral part of the lives of many immigrants, I referred to the Sudilkov Sick Support Society, holding up one of their anniversary journals. This particular journal included a rendering of the synagogue in Sudilkov, a small shtetl southwest of Kiev. At that moment, one of the honorees, Jacob Wine, snapped to attention and said, "Did she say Sudilkov? ... I was born there!"

After the lecture, Mr. Wine came up to me and pointed to the picture of the shul. "See that basement door - I used to run in and out of there as a child!" he said. For the next few minutes, Mr. Wine and I became "Landsmen" as we discussed what was once Sudilkov. The synagogue, it

turned out, was destroyed during the Holocaust and Sudilkov no longer exists, having been absorbed by neighboring Shepetovka.

During my presentation, I described the Galveston Plan whereby over 10,000 Jewish immigrants, mostly from the Ukraine, immigrated into the U.S. through Galveston, Texas, and then settled throughout the Midwest. I had a list of about 25 of those immigrants who settled in Omaha, people who were extensively interviewed and revealed a great deal of biographical information. Mary Fellman, who was in the audience, was delighted to find her grandfather's name among those listed.

The mood of the evening was one of nostalgia, pride and love. For that brief time, problems were set aside, aches and pains forgotten and families shared in the naches from the recognition of their loved ones.

During the reception that followed the program, many

people came up to me to discuss their "roots" and their resolve to conduct oral histories within their own family.

I couldn't help thinking about the good feelings generated within the community from this program. More importantly, in an age when we are so busy with our lives and often don't set aside time for our parents and grandparents, this event demonstrated a community that is aware of the good deeds of its senior citizens and takes pride in saying so!

It is my hope to be part of many such programs.

A Beginner's Kit (55 pages) on how to research your family history, which includes charts, list of archives and libraries, maps, bibliography, family group sheets and more can be ordered from: Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094. (Cost: \$10)