

Looking back on 50 years of the Sholom Aleichem Club

Mildred Diamond

FIFTY YEARS! Fifty years of cultural activity, good Yiddishkeit, political savvy, community participation, singing, dancing, performing..... For fifty years the Club has served as a major source of Secular Jewish consciousness for a large number of people in the Philadelphia area. Activities shared, bonds forged, friendships developed and maintained, policies hammered out, principles adhered to: this is what the Sholom Aleichem Club has offered to its members. And some members, reflecting on their participation in Club life, have written some of their thoughts to share with the rest of us. A few messages follow.

My late husband Bernie and I joined the Sholom Aleichem Club in the 1980s. We had been attending meetings with friends for some time before we joined. From the beginning our membership brought us close to people who soon meant a great deal to us; and when Bernie became ill and died there are not enough words to describe the support and comfort that came to me from so many Sholom Aleichem people.

But on another level the real meaning of the Club is that I feel involved in making an impact on the political and social issues of the day. Sharing ideas with Club members and helping to plan activities has given me a feeling of empowerment and purpose. Good friends and purpose. What can be better? The Sholom Aleichem Club has enriched my life.

Joan Reisman

Maurice and I attended a Sholom Aleichem Club meeting about 25 years ago. We immediately liked the people we met there. We seemed to have much in common and shared similar ideals. We enjoyed the various readings from the Haggadah and poems from the holidays. I was on the Membership Committee and Maurice would hang up the banner at meetings. We finally found our niche. We weren't happy with synagogues; we were rebels. Unfortunately Maurice passed away after a long siege of dementia. I enjoy writing the Mishpocha column for NEWS & COMMENT. I look forward to future meetings and the celebration that's coming in May.

Pauline and Sherm Labovitz

In the beginning there was..... the late 50s and 60s and 70s. It was a very turbulent period; the children were young and the Sholom Aleichem Club became our extended family, our frame of reference, our way of identifying with something larger than just ourselves but not as big as the whole wide world that needed so much fixing. Everything seemed possible in a Sholom Aleichem Club that was rooted in East European Socialist Jewish Secularism.

The Club's membership, with varied skills and rich in brains and talent, could do just about everything; they were ideologues and philosophers, and they could write, dance, sing, and otherwise build and create. And so it was that the two of us threw ourselves into building a chorus, into all of the "message-laden" annual May productions, into summer picnicking and into celebrating our heritage with cultural events and special ways of observing our traditions. At the same time, at seemingly "never-ending" Executive Board meetings we somehow managed to hammer out "policy" positions on all of the important current political issues.

While much has changed, as we have aged and mellowed, our membership in the Sholom Aleichem Club continues to enrich our lives just as it still provides us with avenues for expression.

Fran and Bob Kleiner

For the last 30 or more years the Sholom Aleichem Club has given us a place and a community to be part of. It has provided us with many close caring friends over the years, some of whom go back to our first days in the Club. The Club has also provided us with a true secular Jewish life, with the opportunity to celebrate the holidays communally - a life that we appreciate and enjoy. Lastly, it has provided us with a climate for being socially and politically active in the society around us.