**A Brotherhood History Memoir**

by Richard Schupper

In November of 1984, Rich Schupper called for a meeting of men who would be interested in discussing the possibility of a men’s group at Temple Israel. Among the reasons for calling this meeting was a feeling that there was a lack of involvement by men in the Temple. Some men felt like strangers when they stepped into Temple. There was a lack of comradery among men. After a typical Friday night service at an Oneg Shabbat, women seemed to know and converse with each other while many men were strangers to each other. Rich Schupper, Larry Rosenblatt, Harvey Bender, Norman Newman, Bob Lavenberg, Jerry Reinlieb, Charlie Linz, Ely Kalish, Milt Poler, Steve Cony and Howard Phillips were the ten men at the first meeting on a Sunday morning.. There was much discussion about the need for a social men’s group that would serve to help develop relationships among the men of Templer. Our programs would be held mainly on Sunday morning. At the conclusion of the first meeting we formed a men’s club at Temple Israel and eventually joined the National Brotherhood Temple Association affiliated with Reform Judaism. A small committee with Charlie Linz as chair put together our by-laws. We all worked together to attract new members to our group and had our first Sunday morning breakfast in January where officers were elected and we planned the future of a men’s club at Temple Israel.

The first official breakfast was held on January 27, 1985. The cost for our breakfast program was set at $5.00 per person. By the time of that first meeting the men’s club had 45 paid members. These men met and elected the following people: President- Rich Schupper, Vice Presidents- Harvey Bender and Larry Rosenblatt, Secretary- Bob Lavenberg, Treasurer- Stew Brickman, Board members- Joel Brandt, Jack Heilpern, Hank Helbraun, Charlie Linz, Norman Newman and Jerry Reinlieb. The new by-laws were presented by Charlie Linz including the suggestion that we call ourselves The Brotherhood instead of men’s club. We also committed ourselves to supporting the Jewish Chautauqua Society (an organization to foster knowledge of the Jewish religion). We put together a proposed list of events for the following 6 months. At that meeting we decided to sell the entertainment book as our first fund raiser.

Our second breakfast was held in March at which time we had a speaker on Financial Planning. In April, Ed Burchman joined the board. Charlie Linz became the chairperson of our Jewish Chautauqua Society committee. In April, we held our first Passover breakfast and had 65 people attend. This was followed in May when we had our first Mother’s Day breakfast. We also led our first Brotherhood service at which time we honored Rabbi Mike Robinson. We ended the year by putting together a picnic for the children in our Hebrew school at George’s Island. By this time we were well on our way to establishing ourselves as an integral part of ourTemple. In June we elected the officers and the board for the New Year and held our first cruise on the Hudson River aboard the boat, The Commander. Because of the great job that Hank Helbraun did in organizing the trip, he was nicknamed the Commander from that time on. In September the Brotherhood took on all of the responsibilities associated with ushering for the High Holidays. Our speaker at our September breakfast was Rabbi Robinson, speaking about business ethics and Judaism. In October, Representative Ben Gilman spoke about Soviet Jewry. The theme for our November breakfast was Jews in South Africa. We ended 1985 by making potato latkes from scratch on Hanukah for the children in our Hebrew School. We were well on our way to becoming a success.

Over the years since that very first meeting the purpose of Brotherhood has slowly evolved as we have become an important arm of the Temple. We have gone from an organization that began as a social one into one that would become more spiritual in nature, more supportive of Temple Israel in general, and more in keeping with the meaning of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world. In addition, we would do more fund raising to be in a position where we could offer more educational programs for all the members of our Temple and to support our congregation’s children and finally to give us funds in order to make donations that helped other people outside of our Temple. An example of an early fund raiser was the successful Tagmania sales that we held at the Temple. It was basically a multifamily tag sale. The men would rent a truck to pick up heavier items at the homes of Temple members. It would include everything from couches to TV’s. Also, congregants would drop off all types of items that we eventually sold. As a means of becoming more spiritual we began holding retreats in 1986. The subjects of which have varied from the Jew as a warrior, Jewish business ethics, relationships with our fathers and with our children, the Jewish soul, our relationship with God and many other topics. As a result of this, we have sung together, danced together, hugged, laughed, complained, talked and cried together. We got to know each one of our Brothers in different ways. We have come to understand and appreciate each one of them and ourselves more than we ever did before. From the beginning, our retreats have been unique. The first one led by Rabbi Robinson at the Thayer Hotel at West Point was unique in that Rabbi Robinson was known to be anti-war, yet agreed to be our leader at a retreat that was held on the grounds of a military institution.

A good example of what these retreats meant to us can be understood by examining my personal feelings that I had at the end of our retreat having to do with relationships with our fathers. I came to appreciate the fact that the lack of a relationship that I had with my dad was not very much different than many of the other men who attended that retreat. I came to understand that the most important goals of my dad, being a child of the depression and fighting in WWII, was to provide any way possible the financial means to make the lives of his children better. His priority was to protect his children without showing lots of emotion. He was still part of that generation where men had to show that they were tough on the outside. I walked out of that room after listening to my fellow Brothers knowing that many of them had the same misguided feelings about their dads as I did. This was what Brotherhood had become. It became a place where we were not afraid to share our thoughts and emotions with other men. It became a place where men respected the thoughts of others and embraced each other. One just has to observe this feeling at each Brotherhood Shabbat service that we have held over the years. It has become a wonderful tradition at the end of the service for all of us to unashamedly hug each other. We have come a long way since the beginning when we didn’t even greet each other at a Shabbat service. We have become more spiritual, more involved with our families, our Temple and each other.

We have donated money and time to the Temple over the years. We have given to funds for our building additions, music funds and Rabbi and Cantor endowment funds. We have purchased equipment for our office and for our classrooms. We have sponsored tot Shabbat dinners for our younger children and their families. We support our Confirmands with grants to help them go on their trips to Washington DC. We also give grants to our youth group to help defer the cost for their NIFTY trips. We have given money for a new playground and to help establish a young men’s Shevet Achim group. One of the most important accomplishments of Brotherhood is that we have become a stepping stone where many of the men have gone on to become leaders of our Temple. They became committee chairs, members of the board of trustees, executive board members and Presidents of our Temple. We are very proud of all of these men and what they have contributed to our Temple over the years.

We have sponsored many exciting and meaningful programs. Our most successful breakfast was the one where we had some of the survivors from Schindler’s list come and speak. We had well over 165 people attend this very successful program to listen to an emotional presentation. Another important breakfast we held in 2005 when rockets were raining down on Israel and had representatives of the Israeli Mogen David speak at this breakfast. As a result of it we mobilized the Brotherhood and within two weeks we held a telethon and raised thousands of dollars to help Mogen David in Israel. We have sponsored many programs in and outside of our Temple. One of the most meaningful to all of us has been the midnight run. Founded and organized by Peter Goldich, two to three times a year we make meat loaf sandwiches and collect all types of toiletries and clothing. With the help of many teenage members of our Temple, late Saturday night we go into Manhattan and distribute these items to the homeless and offer them needed friendship. In a small way we are trying to help those that are less fortunate than ourselves. When the economy went downhill, we established a Temple wide job bank for those who were out of work. Even today, thanks to the work of Norman Newman, the job bank remains. Also, thanks to Norman, since 2011 we had begun an adult educational program with speakers on many different subjects. We are proud of the fact that over the years we have been supporters of the Jewish Chautauqua Society by donating over $50,000 in the names of people whom we have honored over the years with Torch Bearer plaques. (A list of those that have been honored is included in the summary). This money has been spent to fight anti-Semitism on high school and college campuses as well as to teach the non-Jewish students what being Jewish is all about.

We have sponsored many social events over the years. Twice we have gone to Yankee Stadium to witness a no hitter by David Cone and a perfect game by David Wells. At each one of those, over 75 members of our Temple were there to see baseball history being made. We also were very successful in holding a 50’s & 60’s party at Temple attended by well over one hundred people. We have put on talent shows and have sponsored a comedy night with professional comedians once a year in the middle of the winter for over 20 years. We also organized tennis parties, a golfing event, softball/baseball games and trips to shows and museums in New York City. Even many of our meetings reflect the social aspect of the Brotherhood by having been held at Italian, Portuguese and Chinese restaurants. We even have had get-togethers at a local bar in Peekskill attended each time by over 25 men. Recently we’ve incorporated both a Jewish Food Festival called “Nosh” and an annual Steak, Scotch & Cigar Night. Our Sunday morning breakfast programs have not only been educational and sometimes entertaining, but have become very social. To see 15 men working together to set up tables and to prepare food for our breakfasts, while having so much fun doing it, is a sight to be seen.

In the past 30 years, we have held over 200 educational programs by way of our breakfasts and evening programs. We have raised and donated over $100,000. We have had more than 300 men participate as board members of the Brotherhood. We have led close to 30 Shabbat services, helped over 1,000 homeless people, and guided thousands of people in and out of our building during High Holiday services. We have cooked thousands of hot dogs and hamburgers for school picnics and Brotherhood picnics, broken thousands of eggs, cut hundreds of bagels and made thousands of cups of coffee at our breakfasts.

The years have come and gone, but we know that this dedicated group will continue together into the future to strive to improve ourselves in becoming better Jewish men in our daily lives, as family men, temple members and members of the human race. We will continue to reach out to the men of Temple Israel so that they can use us as a vehicle to becoming more involved in our community.