



B'nai B'rith First Unity Lodge

OUR MEMORIES



1967 - 2017

We are both members of Yitzchak Rabin Lodge but I think it is great that First Unity Lodge has reached its half century and is still thriving. I hope it will continue in good shape to its 100th. You will probably have your meetings in cyberspace!

Best wishes from

Wendy Fireman, National Secretary, BB UK
Tony Etherton, National Treasurer, BB UK

We have many fond memories of our 25 years in the Lodge, especially our week-ends away, when we've had fun, whilst getting to know others more intimately!

Above all, we appreciate all the very hard work that goes into our meetings and activities, and value the friendship and companionship of our brothers and sisters that we continue to enjoy.

Enid and Harold Gurvick.

It is hard to believe that it has been 10 years since we last communicated when it was the First Unity Lodge's 40th Anniversary. Unfortunately I will not be able to join you for this celebration, but my best wishes to all of you and have a wonderful time on that special day. Please see attached a message to all members for the 50th anniversary.

I really don't remember any of the old timers apart from Deena and Max Sulzbacher and I remember you gave me bad news about them 10 years ago.

Now briefly about myself: I retired from full time engineering in 2010 after nearly 40 years. Since then I have been contracting to the Department of Immigration and Department of Human Services as a language interpreter to/from Turkish. What started to be occasional casual work now is no different than full-time work but the good part is that I am not committed and I choose my time. My wife Susi still works part-time as School Administrator.

Albert Arditi

Do you know how the whole thing started?

My father came back from a Leo Baeck Lodge meeting one day and said there was a member there who was some 30 years younger than anybody else - that was Peter Summerfield.

Anyway he suggested that Peter and I should meet, which we did, and we then got the Leo Baeck lodges to send a letter (this was of course long before e-mails) to their members to see if they had children, or more probably grandchildren, who might be interested in setting something up as a sort of "Nachwuchs" as their members were already getting older and they were concerned about the future of the lodges.

Although at that time I think that between them they probably had some 700 members. Anyway this produced a list of people who were invited to that first meeting at the Newtons (I forget their first names) although neither of

their children Irene and Anthony played any further part.

I am afraid that, shamefully, Peter and I then did our own thing and started the B'nai B'rith Circle and the rest as they say is history - so I am afraid the Nachwuchs idea never materialised.

I don't think there were that many people at that first meeting. George was not there as I think he may have been on his honeymoon - and possibly the only person who might know would be Michael Heppner. Anyway I certainly think there were less than 20 and maybe as few as 12.

Hope the above is useful - Peter's memory is sure to be better than mine - anyway it was all my father's fault!

Marjorie Power

Over the years we have had many funny moments together in the Lodge. But the funniest moment I recall was at a weekend away playing a game of True or False.

The game was very simple, one had to describe an object correctly or make up a fake story about it. The audience then had to decide if the description was true or false.

For Allan Greenburgh's turn he picked up a sweet little doll dressed in Hungarian national costume; suddenly in his hands, her leg fell off, then her clothes fell off, revealing that the doll had no underwear.

Laugh, it was just so funny that we all nearly fell out of our chairs.

Adele Gibson

My earliest memory of First Unity is Hilary phoning me several times and saying "just come to a meeting, you will love it". I eventually did. I then found out I knew several members already, so it went from good to even better.

I was made to feel so very welcome and part of a family – from the first meeting. The very best thing that has happened to me is BRIDGE.

I cannot thank members enough for their patience and endurance. Wow, that must have been and still is a painful time. But I do try!!

I have many special friends in my life going back to my childhood, and

some lodge members have joined this part of my life.

So to sum up First Unity – I hope we will be around for a very long time to come, fund raising for good causes, celebrating special dates in our lives, birthdays, anniversaries etc. Just looking after each other's welfare, and appreciating the hard work in programmes – so we can enjoy the Lodge .

Vivien Nathan

My involvement with the Lodge began in the Sixties when I read a notice at Swiss Cottage Library asking for volunteers to help with an outing for handicapped youngsters culminating in tea at a restaurant organised by the late Jeff Green .

So started my involvement with welfare. At first most of our "old people " were from the East End - we held monthly tea parties and an annual outing to Southend organised by Judy Rebak, nee Simmonds, who was the driving force on the committee.

Now it has come full circle and we are the "old people". Sometimes it is hard to believe that we are all of the age of those we ferried to and fro and hopefully our ethos of welfare will continue both internally and with those less fortunate than ourselves.

Angela Walker

I thought: What happened to me 50 years ago? I moved into a new house which had growing in the open garden two peach trees full of fruit. They had been grown by a teenage daughter from stones and this was their first year of fruiting

David Kalms

First Unity gradually became part of our lives, we first started coming relatively infrequently and we got to know a few members. The Levys come to mind.

After about a year we were coming regularly and enjoying the varied speakers and home grown programmes. We both became friends with many people, some who are sadly not with us any more such as Helen Don, Myra Green, Victor Arenias and Walter Hoffman.

We both became more active in the Lodge when I went on Council nine years ago, The next year for my sins, I became President, a job I dreaded at first but came

to enjoy. I dreaded talking to a large audience because I was afraid I would stammer but I didn't. I never stammered again thanks to BB.

I remember the fun we had on the weekend away before last organised by George. We were unable to go on the last one due to Ruth's illness. The Lodge became part of our lives and we looked forward to meetings.

Tragically Ruth died this year but I will continue to be an active member.

Robert Bruckner

Memories of B'nai B'rith First Unity Lodge

Laurie Don once said of me that wherever you cut through me the words B'nai B'rith will be printed.

I took that as a great compliment and truism. For 54 years my life has revolved largely around B'nai B'rith and all it stands for. I admire it for being such an all encompassing organisation, one in which one can fulfil one's full potential by having good ideas and bringing them to fruition through B'nai B'rith.

I was proud of us to achieve the creation of many unity lodges throughout the world through our own perseverance in changing the rules. I have enjoyed the cultural, welfare, and social aspects of our First Unity Lodge.

Sunday evening meetings, local group meetings, weekends away with all the hair letting down that they caused, outings, special events – all arranged so enthusiastically and efficiently. We can feel very proud of the difference we have made to the wider world of B'nai B'rith, as well as those who benefited from our work and care.

May we enjoy many more good years together as a cohesive group who enjoy being together on a regular basis.

Sylvia Lewin

**BB First Unity Lodge Memories
Geraldine Auerbach MBE**

Ronnie and I arrived in London on a cold grey February day in 1962. We had come straight from our joyful wedding in bright sunny Kimberley and had spent two weeks on honeymoon on board ship from Cape Town. The contrast was quite a shock.

We were greeted by Ronnie's grandparents Siegfried and Minz Auerbach, both born in Frankfurt in 1886. They had left Germany in 1935 after Siegfried had been thrown out of his metal firm and eventually settled in Cleve Road. Their son Albrecht had stayed behind to finish his baccalaureate. He managed in 1936 to make his way to South Africa where Ronnie was born in 1937.

The grandparents were overjoyed to have Ronnie who was about the same age as when they last saw their son who had meanwhile died in South Africa. So, it was a happy 'reunion'.

But, from our dreary bedsit in West End Lane, things were looking quite bleak. Siegfried and Minz, members of Leo Baeck Lodge, knew of a new B'nai B'rith social and cultural group being established for young people, called the Basil Henriques group. We joined and were immediately introduced to

a cluster of fun loving people, who created fascinating programmes and were very welcoming. This was a pivotal moment in our settling in London and had given us friendships and intellectual stimulation as well as lots of fun ever since.

A few memories stand out from those early days and the transition to the first ever 'Unity' Lodge where men and women could be together on equal terms.

On one occasion, there was a tall moustachioed man in a black raincoat bounding in from the back of the hall announcing in a loud Northern accent that he was from Barnsley and had come to do I forget what. I was really scared – until I realised it was Jeff Green!

I remember a garden fete in the grounds of Otto Schiff House, where Ronnie sat outside a small tepee with a fez on his head luring people inside to tell their fortunes! Ronnie once created a series of hilarious indoor games for the 'Shlump-Olympics'. I remember incredible play readings where quiet, seemingly shy people like Walter Sinclair, let their hair down to become amazing characters with strange accents in the plays. We loved the weekends away at Brighton Hillel House with our children.

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I became President sometime in the 80s. (Actually, the invitation had been to Ronnie not me. And the person asking - I think it was David Lewin - was becoming desperate saying they had scoured the membership list – starting from Z). Ronnie was too busy, but helped me to organise a series on medical issues with experts in their fields. I loved editing 'First Unity' Magazine, with cartoons drawn by our son Anthony and jokes in the corners.

We have enjoyed amazing speakers and hosting meetings and parties in our home. Though I found the rituals too formal and the enormous consideration that the members gave to issues of the constitution etc, insufferable, I liked the preamble to the meetings with its lofty ideals. I preferred it in the old 'King James' version, where the words seemed holy and lofty, rather than the ordinary modern English version, but the ideas were the same.

Those ideas of dealing with 'science and art' provided a platform to launch the Bnai Brith Jewish Music Festival which Sylvia Lewin strove for, when she became National President in 1983. The opportunity to work with Sylvia and other members of our Lodge and other Lodges for ten huge Jewish music festivals has been enormously meaningful for me and enabled

me to make Jewish music available to music lovers and scholars in ever-increasing ways for nearly thirty years.

Though I retired in 2011 as Director of what became the Jewish Music Institute, based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, the legacy remains.

There is still the lectureship in Jewish music. The summer schools in Yiddish language, music and song and cantors' conventions that I started; continue, as does the annual 'Klezmer in the Park'. Many of the 'students' we 'trained', once we arrived at London University, are today's esteemed professional teachers and performers in Jewish music. And all this came out of B'nai B'rith First Unity Lodge.

**Geraldine
and
Ronnie Auerbach**

My BB Story

It started on a warm summer's evening in June 1963. Two months earlier, in April, I had returned to the UK after three years in New York.

On Monday 27th of May I started work with IBM at an office in Newman Street, off Oxford Street in the West End. I can vouch for the date because two days earlier Manchester United beat Leicester City 3-1 at Wembley Stadium to win that season's FA Cup.

I was living temporarily in a small hotel in Bayswater. It was still the era when it was possible to leave my car parked there all day without hindrance. But I was keen to find a place of my own and through an accommodation bureau on Oxford Street rented a bedsit at 15 Belsize Park Gardens, NW3.

Those of you who recall that bedsit will remember that it was a very large room with a high ceiling and a curved bay window leading to a wrought iron balcony overlooking the garden below. And what was most memorable was the curved wooden door that intrigued everyone who visited.

My nearest 'high streets' were Belsize Park (the Odeon cinema there is now a Budgens supermarket) and the Finchley Road. This had the late-lamented Cosmo restaurant, frequented by mittel-European émigrés, and the Louis Hungarian Patisserie, of a similar ilk.

One Sunday evening in June, I was at a restaurant just north of Finchley Road tube station and got into conversation with another young man. I explained that I was newly settled in the area and he invited me to join him at a meeting of a group of young Jews in nearby Eton Avenue. That was the Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge of B'nai B'rith at Zion House. I never saw him again but the rest, as they say, is history.

It immediately became my regular Sunday haunt and very soon I was invited to join the Welfare Committee and later Board and Council. (What is the difference between Board and Council? I still don't know.) I became chair of the Welfare Committee and then for a while Treasurer of the Lodge. My whole social life revolved around the Lodge.

One of my welfare tasks was to organise an outing by coach to Brighton for a group of under-privileged children. Part-way there we had to stop the coach

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because someone was suffering travel sickness. That someone was me!

By 1967 it became obvious that the designation of 'Young Adult' was becoming less appropriate but we didn't want to join separate men's and women's lodges. Hence the establishment of the First Unity Lodge. But that's a story for someone else to tell.

Harold Fineberg

When my daughter Hilary was three years old I met Sylvia Lewin at Goodwyn School. She asked me to look after Karen as she had a B'nai B'rith meeting. I said "yes" as friends from Maidstone, my previous home, had said I would enjoy BB.

Next time I went along with Sylvia and it changed my life. I met Brothers and Sisters who had the same values as me – love of Israel, care for the less privileged, cultural interests, enjoyed listening to good speakers. Ian, my husband, also joined but said he couldn't get involved as he had just become a Freemason. BB changed my life.

I was involved in welfare and became President and Ian became very involved – treasurer, editor of our Lodge magazine and President the year our son Daniel was born. I have wonderful memories from BB: family weekends at Brighton, great weekends away together, the Marks and Spencer Fashion Show, stimulating Unity lectures and excellent Sunday night programmes. Our installation dinners were great, especially the loyal toasts proudly presented by people with different accents.

Doreen Natoff

**How we joined the Lodge -
*Or the impossible only takes a little longer!***

My Dad and Mum were both very active in First Lodge and were both Presidents at various times.

Dad met George and Peter Summerfield through B'nai B'rith. George and Peter had been members of the Basil Henriques Lodge, they told Dad that they were now members of the B'nai B'rith Circle which they were very much enjoying, they thought that Walter and I would be about the same age range as most of the people who were members of the B'nai B'rith circle and would enjoy it.

Dad agreed with George and Peter and suggested to Walter and myself that we give it a try, however, our son Julian was only two and as I was pregnant with Debra (who is now 49), we therefore said that we thought we had enough on our plate for the moment.

However, Dad who came over from Germany by himself at the age of 17 and who was a very determined man, was not going to give up. Whenever he could he said how much he thought we would enjoy the B'nai B'rith Circle.

Finally to keep Dad quiet we went to a lovely garden party where we met Peter Summerfield. After this, if things had been left to us, that would have been that. However, Dad found that there was a meeting of the B'nai B'rith Circle at the home of Anne and Michael Oppenheimer. Again to keep Dad quiet we went along expecting to hate it, however, we had a lovely evening and everyone was so friendly, I still remember saying to Walter 'these people are nice'!

In all fairness to Dad he refrained from saying 'I told you so!' However, one of his favourite sayings was 'the impossible only takes a little longer'!

We have now been members of the Lodge for 50 years.

We subsequently introduced Hilary and Tony to the Lodge who in turn introduced Henny and Michael and the rest is history!

Margaret Sinclair

'Don't be late or you'll get no tea!'

In preparing the display for our 50th anniversary, I have been looking through early newsletters.

What has amazed me is how much welfare work was done in the early days: decorating old people's flats, helping with the disabled children at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt School, taking disadvantaged children on outings, old people's tea parties, etc.

All this when members were bringing up their own young families and building their careers. First Unity members had energy and enthusiasm. Their programmes matched this as well – study groups, drama groups, outings, fund-raising concerts and, of course, the establishment of the Stepney Hillel House for Jewish students. It's quite mind-boggling.

In the first newsletter in the collection (March 1969) there is a report on a debate with the members of Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge on "The justification of force in settling international disputes" – how topical now! The outcome was that "it was agreed that force was acceptable".

Subscriptions was another topic. A discount for prompt payment. Subscriptions were 50 shillings, (discounted to 45)! Refreshments at meetings seemed to be offered **before** the formal meeting.

It seemed people were arriving late, so the threat was made that "the urn will be removed at 8.30pm so late-comers will go without!". Strict eh?

Among the forthcoming programmes was: European Integration by Eric Moonman MP (things don't change over the years), there was a home-grown meeting on Travel led by Evelyn Bacharach, Unusual Views on Education presented by Charles Guttman as well as a talk by a representative of Amnesty International.

It seems First Unity started out strong and enthusiastic and I like to hope that it is still continuing in that vein – though perhaps we are all older and a little weaker but still strong in our support for this wonderful Lodge!

Jo Bieber

'I said I was working in advertising, so they asked me to be Treasurer.'

I remember I was at boarding school when my father had a serious heart attack which meant he could no longer work or pay the fees, so I had to leave.

Suddenly I was back in London with no real friends, having left them all behind at school. My first year thereafter was difficult. I was a good footballer, so my father took me along to Maccabi in Compayne Gardens and I played for them for a year but found their style of football ordinary and unsophisticated compared to what I was used to and also found I couldn't make friends easily with people with whom I seemed to have very little else in common.

At the end of my first year with the team, I gave up the football to study for professional qualifications at night school and weekend workshops. I also began to pick up on friends I had met through the Belsize Square Synagogue and also one or two who had left school and made their homes in London, plus one or two from work, but it was a slow process.

One day as I recall, my parents or I received a letter about a possible new group for the young adult children of members of the Leo Baeck Lodge and I was persuaded to go along and see what it was all about.

I was extremely shy and very apprehensive when I met the Summerfield twins and Marjorie Power, Irene and Tony Newton and maybe others I cannot remember. At some point we must have met again. I was asked what I did for a living. I mumbled "advertising" and I think Peter or George thought I said "accountancy" because they asked me to be Treasurer! Actually this didn't pose any problems for me because as a "Yekka" I was good with money and hopefully, proved a good custodian.

The best compliment I ever received was after presenting the accounts at an AGM. The fulsome praise is something I will always remember because, after all.....it came from Jeff Green!

In any case, at last I had found people I could relate to and I can honestly say that I have treasured every moment of my membership of B'nai B'rith.

I was fortunate to meet my future wife, Joanna Gumb, at the Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge. I was President and she was my secretary and although I never had any intention of marrying before the age of 30, she captured my heart. The rest as they say, is history.

I often wonder what would have happened if bad health would not have struck my father when it did. The trajectory of my life would have been completely different. Sometimes someone else's bad luck can prove to be one's own good fortune (although it didn't seem like that at the time).

My good fortune was to have found "the B'nai B'rith Circle" which eventually transformed itself into a successful Adult Lodge – The First Unity Lodge – the conception and development of which has had such a profound influence on the last 50 plus years of my adult life.

Charles Bieber

1952 – Emigration to England

England was a shock to my system. For one thing people did not seem as hospitable as I was used to in Israel. It was often a matter of “you must come for tea” – a totally hollow and meaningless invitation that never came to fruition.

It took me about 10 years before I first came across a group of young people in London where I felt comfortable. That was the group of children of ex-Germany B’nai B’rith members.

I joined and became part of that group which existed not only to entertain itself, but it also remembered that there were others less fortunate in society, who needed our help. Thus I became one of the founder members of the Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge and later, as we outgrew that stage, the First Unity Lodge.

It was in this group that I was to get to know my future wife Sylvia Goldschmidt. It was thus also a natural progression when one day I turned to her and said “One day you will be President of Bnai Brith District 15” – which she then proceeded to do. So it was this B’nai B’rith group that actually allowed me to feel that I could belong in this strange country.

After 50 years there is a large proportion of members who have been there since its start, a most unusual fact in our ever shifting population.

As my hearing deteriorates and noise has become a problem, I pull myself out of crowds even more than before. I fail to see what pleasure anyone can get from holding a plate with something on it in one hand, a cup of tea in the other while making small talk. Often, mid sentence someone butts in and the small talk turns to something else. That is supposed to be called “social intercourse”. I get no pleasure from it. The din of the general hubbub in the room makes my tinnitus so much worse that my head threatens to explode. On the other hand, if you ask me whether I have a workable alternative, the answer clearly is “no”.

May we continue to enjoy being members of a worthwhile organisation which has a proud heritage.

My grandparents and mother were members before me – a tradition which I am pleased to uphold.

David Lewin

The Harold Godfrey Hillel House Stepney

Towards the end of the 1970's when I was serving as District 15's (now BBUK) Hillel Liaison Officer and representative on the Hillel Foundation, I learnt of First Unity's proposal to establish a residential Hillel House here in London. This excited me greatly because this would be the first occasion when a BB Lodge here in the UK would undertake such a project.

Many members of both First Unity and other London Lodges accepted an invitation from Geraldine Auerbach to attend the official opening ceremony which took place during her Presidency of First Unity in 1979-80.

If I recall correctly, this took place on a Sunday evening when Geraldine with great aplomb fixed the first mezuzah and with equal efficiency produced a shopping list of items needed to equip the Hillel.

I believe there was a good response because by then a number of the Lodges, whilst not prepared to embark on the daunting task of running a Hillel, were willing to support those that were. She also mentioned that they would like to double the size of the Hillel by including the second floor of the

building which at that point was owned by the Stepney Settlement.

Eventually this happened and my own Lodge (Ilford Mens Lodge later to become Ilford Golda Meir Unity) became junior partners.

The project lasted well over twenty years which is a considerable achievement that First Unity can be very proud of.

I am sure that the many First Unity members who contributed so much to the project will be happy if I highlight the unique contribution of Jeffrey Green for it was he who drove this and other similar projects forward and was generally able, because of his position on the Hillel Foundation, to persuade it to provide funding when this was beyond the capability of the Lodges.

Norman King

My Life With First Unity

At the age of 16 my world was very lonely. I was an only child and my mother had died after a long and painful illness the year before. I was introduced to Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge by friends of the family. Within a short time, I was a member of the group - a haven of fun, friendship and comfort. I met and married Manfred, a fellow Lodge member and we had two lovely children.

At the age of 36 years, within a space of three weeks, I lost my husband and dearly beloved mother-in-law. My neighbours shunned me and walked on the other side of the street when they saw me as they were too embarrassed to speak to me or did not know what to say. First Unity Lodge came to my rescue and again gave me friendship, support, company and comfort in those very difficult times.

As Chairman of the Programme Committee (even then), I would greet all visitors and encourage them to become involved in our activities and so, in 1990, along came Michael to a meeting at my home invited by long standing members of First Unity. Michael had been a member of the Otto Hirsch Chapter and so knew all about our BB Lodge. During tea time, he and several other participants stood in my hall with tea and cake in their hands and discussed bulldozing my house to make way for a new six lane motorway and you will know that the rest is history.

And now, in our declining years, we all need each other even more for support and comfort. I will never forget the kindness and safety afforded me in my dark times and hope that I can reciprocate with others in offering Brotherly and Sisterly love to all our members on good and bad occasions.

Henny Levin

I have been a member of First Unity Lodge since its inception 50 years ago and even before then at the Sir Basil Henriques Young Adult Lodge. For me the Lodge has been invaluable. I have formed many long lasting friendships and have cherished their continuing support through good and not so good times.

It has always been very rewarding to work together with all our wonderful members and I wish the Lodge many more happy years together.
Best wishes,

Miriam Godfrey

So sorry we can't be with you at the celebration. We send very best wishes and congratulations to the First Unity on their milestone.

Tony and Lyn Clayden