

Making A Jewish Memory

By Nancy Huntsman

I attended the UAHC Biennial in Orlando (December 15^h through December 20th) with Barb, as second delegate from CT and as spouse. The whole thing was great, from attending morning services each day to shopping in the exhibit hall; from seeing and greeting people we've met before to making some new friends; from introducing myself as her spouse to being recognized as one of a couple, and knowing that each of us was one of nearly 5,000 Jews in attendance (counting the children).

But, for me, the most special moment happened during the Torah service on Shabbat morning. There were four *aliyot*. Three were chanted beautifully by lay women, the fourth by the outgoing Chairman of the Board of UAHC, Jerome Somers. The second *aliyah* was given to all those in attendance who are converts to Judaism, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Outreach. We were all asked to come forward to the *bimah*. First, I was dumfounded! Then, I was shy, not because I was embarrassed that I was a convert, but just because I have to prepare myself to do things that make me more visible.

Rabbi Rosie, sitting two rows in front of me turned around and mouthed the words, "You go up there!" at me. I decided to go forward. There was not enough room on the *bimah* for all of us! I would estimate that between 80 and 100 people came forward (and I wonder how many other shy people there were?). We said the blessing. The Torah was read. We said the second blessing. Then, Rabbi Schindler, a short little man with a kind face, a skirt of white hair around a bald crown, and a nimble step, offered some remarks. Actually, I was in enough of a haze that I don't remember what he said word for word. The essence of it was that 20 years ago, the Reform movement decided to hang "Welcome" signs on their synagogue doors rather than "Do Not Enter" signs in the belief that people who chose Judaism would bring added strength and vitality to the movement. We, all of us on the *bimah* and around it, were the proof that the thinking and the decision had been correct.

As I was returning to my seat, Rabbi Rosie had left hers to greet me in the aisle with a hug. When I got back to my seat, the people around me greeted me with "*Yasher Koach*" and hand shakes. The woman sitting next to me gave me a kleenex! I was not the only one crying. It was an incredibly moving experience, one that I will never forget. It is an essential memory in my personal Jewish history. Later, I spoke with Marcia Elbrand, the Outreach Coordinator for our region of UAHC, and she told me that there had been concern that giving the *aliyah* to converts would be offensive given the Jewish stance that, once you're a Jew, you're a Jew! No adjectives! I appreciate the concern, but the decision to recognize us was right for me, at least. The day we came home, I saw Rabbi Rosie in the airport. I thanked her for her support and her hug. She told me that she was proud to have one of "hers" there, on the *bimah*.