

Golda Meir

Pioneer Women's program evokes nostalgia

By Shirlee Rose Idan
staff writer

In the annals of the women's movement, one does not find, among the leadership, the name of Golda Meir.

"Golda never felt oppressed, nor did she ever feel anything but equality with men," is the explanation given by her granddaughter, Alice Golda.

Golda, an actress, who once portrayed her own grandmother, Golda Meir's older sister, Shana, in the Broadway production "Golda," made her observations during a program about her celebrated relative on Sunday.

Part of the observation of Pioneer Women's 60th anniversary in the metro arena and in conjunction with the annual donor luncheon at Congregation Adat Shalom, Farmington Hills, Golda's program was only part of the nostalgia of the day.

Emma Lazaroff Schaver, noted philanthropist and longtime Pioneer Women, a Southfield resident, enjoyed felicitations on her 10th birthday from the 340 participants at the luncheon which was Pioneer Women's 55th annual donor event.

According to Lee Wagman, chairman of the day, and Ann Kaplan, president of the Pioneer Women/Nat'l Greater Detroit Council, the day's event also marks the culmination of another successful year of fund-raising.

THE ORGANIZATION supports social services for women and children in Israel in homes, day-night nursery facilities, schools and by means of the Spiritual Adoption program of assisting needy young Israeli. Some 30 metro area members will leave this year for Pioneer Women/Nat'l's annual International Conference in Israel.

One of them, Frieda Levenson of Farmington Hills, a past national president, will attend the opening of a new equestrian program at Kanot Agricultural School, a high school in Gadera.

For many of the 340 gathered Sunday, tales of Golda Meir in the old days are a familiar reminiscence. Among audience members were people who knew and were close to Meir, once prime minister of Israel.

Sophie Sislín, who went to Chicago in 1925 to bring back a charter for a separate organization for women from the Labor Zionist Organization, was in the audience. The separate group, of course, became Pioneer Women.

Sislín's daughter, Evelyn Noveck, a past council president, once recalled that in 1932, Meir left her children, Sarah and Menachem, in Detroit with the Sislíns, while she barnstormed for funds for three months all over the country.

Meir and Sislín were close friends until Meir's death in 1978.

NOVECK recalls that Pioneer Women actually began as a Saturday reading circle that met after services. "Nothing could interfere with that meeting, just as nothing could deter my mother from her constant shipment of clothing to Israel."

Golda, in her dramatic program, read as Golda, as her personal secretary, and as Morris Meyer-son, Golda's husband.

"When I was very young, she was the foreign minister," recalls Golda, who has lived both here and in Israel.

"I lived with Golda for about a year while she was prime minister." Golda counts herself "an actress who has never imagined anything but to be an actress."

Most of her performances have been in Israel up to now. "Right now I am traveling and talking about Golda. This gives me a chance to do some work at fund-raising for Israel at the same time."



Golda Meir

Golda noted that Menachem, Meir's son, wrote a book about his mother, and that the play "Golda" starred Anne Bancroft and Ingrid Bergman for a Broadway stand.

"Bergman was so perfect, I found myself forgetting it was not Golda sometimes," Golda says.

"A LOT OF ISRAELIS didn't like the play, but that didn't alter the dramatic effect of it."

"For me, I have two special relationships with Golda, first, she is my grandaunt and second, I was intimately involved with 'Golda' on Broadway, playing my own grandmother as a young woman."

Stories related through Golda's dialogue include one from Meir's personal secretary who accompanied her to Moscow as the first ambassador to the Soviet Union.

In a distinctive accent, Golda has the secretary, recall that some 50,000 Jewish people mobbed the Moscow streets on Rosh Hashanah to see "Golda" and how Meir replied with just one sentence: "Thank you for remaining Jews."

Golda's excerpts relate how Meir decided to immigrate to Israel from her native country and how she struggled physically and mentally, working side by side with the men on Kibbutz Rehavia until her family moved to Tel Aviv.

Her inner struggle to be an active Zionist finally meant that Meir had to leave her husband, take her two children and work full time as a politician. It was only this way that Meir achieved her destiny as an Israeli and world leader, the niece says.

Golda also told how Meir related the writing and production of a play about her until the playwright proposed one about the founding of Israel via the life of Golda Meir.

Searching after rumors of a lover in Meir's life, the playwright came to the conclusion "her lover was the state of Israel."

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