



Witty writer lived life to the fullest

Renee Skoglund was a writer. She had an easy, graceful style that belied the meticulous care she took to fashion just the right words in just the right way.

When you read Renee's stories it was like hearing it from a friend - an intense, intelligent, witty friend. Her feature stories were rich with detail that illuminated the real person she was trying to profile. Her news stories were factually rich but never lacking in the human element at their base.

Renee's writing was a mirror of Renee herself.

Renee died Monday, far too young at 57 and much too vital to be taken. Yet, she had battled cancer for a long time, quietly, bravely, determined not to be a drag on the wonderful party of life that she embraced with everything she had.

For the last couple years, Renee and I have been a team of sorts. She was the Observer's Community Life and Health writer and those sections are one of my editing responsibilities. Renee made it easy; she was a never ending source of ideas. She was interested in everything, cared about everything, could handle the most serious topic with proper solemnity and slide into the silliest stories with a comic's glee.

She took the writer's dictum "write about what you know" and turned out hilarious and loving columns about her family. She told of sausage making with her mother and aunts, who wore underpants as hairnets. She wrote of funny cats and being a grandmother. She wrote of her Polish roots. And everything she wrote had that special, conversational voice, so unique, so Renee.

But she also ventured far from what she knew. Renee was also a reporter, a vacuum of facts and figures, an intrepid pursuer of information, a skeptic with an open mind. Once all the facts were in, she found the human story that made the facts mean something. Renee could talk anyone out of their story and make it special.

Our relationship was not always smooth. Renee did not fit into the office routine easily. Newsrooms are not too different than other offices. We have our cubicles, we have our rules. Renee didn't like any of that and found any number of ways to rebel against it.

She made the office a warmer place with her baked goods, her chocolate addiction, her contest ideas, her abandon. Her mind was so fertile with ideas that time and place couldn't contain everything she wanted to do. And now, this is the part she would hate. It needs to be said, and she'd probably agree in the end, but she'd still hate it.

Renee was one of the strongest people I've ever known. She knew how serious her situation was, she understood that this time the cancer would not go away. But she carried on, through backaches and weak legs, she carried on. She wanted to keep writing. She wanted to keep meeting interesting people and turning their lives into instant literature. She wanted to continue being part of a newsroom, part of

PLEASE SEE WRITER, C3

Breaking barriers

Wine leaves a legacy in Humanistic Judaism

BY JONATHAN BERNARD
CORRESPONDENT

As Birmingham Temple celebrates its 40th anniversary, its founder leaves a lasting legacy.

For many years, Rabbi Sherwin Wine has been a pillar of the Humanistic Jewish community in Birmingham. He has been a mentor to many, and his influence is felt in the community today.

But when Rabbi Sherwin Wine retires from his temple duties next month, co-rabbis will take his place.

"This is a different model for a synagogue or church," says Rabbi Tamara Kolton, who at age 32 will share rabbinical duties with Rabbi Adam Chaloni, 27, a Farmington Hills resident. "It is a tribute to humanism. The vision is people working together to make something good."

The two, who grew up in the Humanistic Jewish congregation in Farmington Hills, will divide most pastoral duties. Kolton, who lives with her husband, Isaac, and small son in Farmington Hills, will run the Sunday School. Chaloni, who recently married temple member Allison Jervis Chaloni, will handle adult education.

Like many in the congregation, Kolton is having difficulty adjusting to Birmingham Temple without its founding rabbi. "I love the way it is," she says. "I understand it can't stay this way."

TEMPLE ESTABLISHED

Forty years ago, Birmingham Temple, its founding rabbi and members, were the pariahs of the Jewish world.

The media, locally and nationally, Jewish and secular, portrayed Sherwin Wine as "the atheist rabbi" and Birmingham Temple as the equivalent of the temple of doom.

The congregation took root as 16 families met in a Birmingham home in 1962, looking for an alternative to the established Reform Jewish temples.

For eight families, Wine's idea of forming a temple, but letting the ideology come later, was too radical. But the other eight signed up to be part of Wine's pilgrimage.

Indeed, the temple's Articles of Association "filed in Lansing on Dec. 11, 1963, describe Birmingham Temple as a 'Reform Jewish Church.'"

As the ideology evolved, the focus moved from God to people, prayers gave way to meditations, and the Torah was placed not in the sanctuary but in the library. The simple wood and white-walled sanctuary is dominated by the Hebrew letters that spell out Adam, which the



Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine and Michael Stone speak for a moment before the beginning of the celebration. Stone celebrated his bar mitzvah in 1982.

BY LAURA COVINO
STAFF WRITER

The National Council of Jewish Women recently honored two area high school seniors for their active roles in the Jewish community, as well as high academic achievement and leadership abilities.

Shira Stooman of Huntington Woods and Perry Telcher of West Bloomfield each received \$1,000 when they were

presented with the Jewish Youth Award at a ceremony May 18 at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield.

"We usually give one top prize," said Bobbie Patt, a NCJW Greater Detroit Section board member and chair of the Jewish Youth Awards. "But the judges just could not choose one of this year's winners over the other. They were both really outstanding."

Four judges were appointed to review the applications and individually inter-

view all 19 applicants, some residing as far away as Flint, Ann Arbor and Windsor.

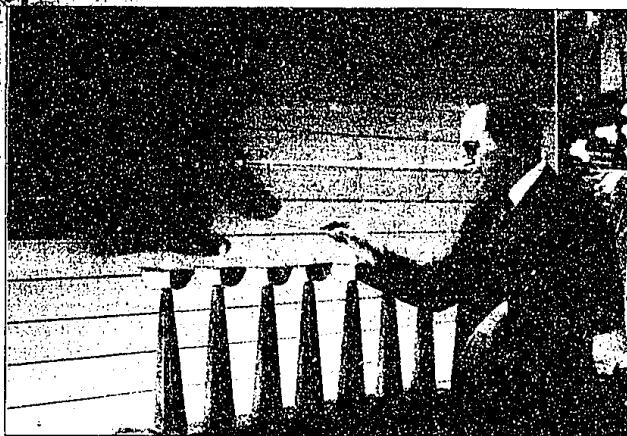
The winners were kept secret until the awards ceremony. "At first, one of the judges didn't think an awards ceremony was even necessary," said Patt, "but after he met the applicants, he changed his mind. He wanted to meet the parents of these outstanding young people."

Both winners are members of the

National Honor Society, and each is involved in a number of diverse activities.

Nominated by Congregation T'Chiyah, Stooman currently serves as president of the Bnai B'rith Youth Organization's Bnai B'rith Girls, as well as president of the Berkeley High Drama Club, where she attends school. During her four years at Berkeley, she played a role in nearly a dozen school productions.

PLEASE SEE TEEN, C2



Rabbi Sherwin Wine saved the last candle for himself at a May 30 grand reunion of bar mitzvah and Confirmation alumn at the Birmingham Temple, because the evening's service represented the kind of ceremony he had wished for. The Jewish religious ritual marks a boy's 13th birthday, with a similar ceremony being held for girls.



Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine explains what his own bar mitzvah was like and how he had really wanted it to be.

MEMBERSHIP GROWS

Within a year those eight families had grown to 120. Then the hard and continuing work of creating the framework of an alternative religion began.

As Wine prepares to leave, more than 400 families belong to Birmingham Temple, many of them through intermarriage. Others are secular Jews who otherwise might never have joined a congregation.

"What he really created is something that kept me Jewish," says Chaloni. "My family would have ended up nowhere. He not only created a movement but a niche."

When Bill Trapp becomes temple president next year, he won't be the first Jewish convert to lead the congregation. He and his wife, Caroline, who grew up as a reform Jew, have been active since they joined about seven years ago.

"I wasn't sure what Birmingham Temple was," says

Rabbi Wine named 'Humanist of the Year'

Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine has been named Humanist of the Year by the American Humanist Association (AHA).

Founder and president of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, Wine was honored for having given over 40 years of leadership, guidance, and care to the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills.

Joining previous awardees including Kurt Vonnegut, Alice Walker and Betty Friedan, Wine spoke at the AHA's May 9 meeting to highlight the need for humanists to set aside their inhibitions and reach out to others.

He said he makes it a point to be nice to Mormon missionaries, because they are acting on integrity and "telling you what they believe is essential to your welfare."

Rabbi Wine also called on humanists to practice Humanism, infusing the philosophy into their lives.

"People are not their mouths or their intentions, but their behavior," he said. Wine further added, "If we don't have the behavior, then all the language doesn't matter."

Other awardees at this year's AHA conference included Gloria Feldt of Planned Parenthood, Kate Michelman of the NARAL Pro-Choice America, and Hearst Newspapers columnist Helen Thomas. Other speakers included Lester R. Brown of the Earth Policy Institute, former Eagle Scout Darrell Lambert, and Public Citizen Ralph Nader.

The American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org) is the oldest and largest Humanist organization in the nation.