

The Lady Is A Rabbi, But It Wasn't Easy

By JACKIE KLEIN

Sally Preisand's mother boasts about "my daughter the rabbi."

But Rabbi Sally's mom's first reaction was "what kind of a job is that for a nice Jewish girl?"

The 35-year old rabbi, first tentative to be so ordained, has changed historically the role of women in Jewish religious life and has broken through the barriers of time.

She shared with a packed town hall audience in Congregation B'nai Moshe last week the experiences and insight that influenced her to break with tradition.

Rabbi Preisand, a native of Cleveland, was ordained last June after eight years of religious training and is serving as assistant rabbi at the reform Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York.



RABBI SALLY J. PREISAND: "Most people thought I was looking for a husband; nobody thought I would follow through."

HER PARENTS weren't exceptionally religious, and Rabbi Preisand was raised in the conservative tradition. She was taught that a sense of "obedience and desire to help are integral parts of religion."

She decided to become a rabbi in the 10th grade and applied to the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College. "Most people thought I was looking for a husband. Nobody thought I would follow through with my religious education."

"The faculty and students were skeptical and figured if they could marry me off, I would leave and there'd be no problem. I knew that if I didn't have the guts to continue, I'd never be happy."

RABBI PREISAND'S first taste of discrimination came when she applied for the rabbinical program at Hebrew Union College.

"I was the only one who was told to reapply, and that meant updating my file, which is not exactly overwhelming. I took the pulpit at

With support from classmates and some of the faculty, she was accepted and served as student rabbi in a small southern Illinois congregation. "The people there knew me, but they didn't accept me."

In her second year, she was sent to a 210-family congregation in Champaign, Ill., to take over the pulpit until the new rabbi came. "I was scared to death. I was ushered into the rabbi's study and told to sit down. I forgot I was the rabbi, so I sat in the corner."

CONGREGANTS called her "Rabbi Sally" and a rapport developed. Her next assignment was in Hattiesburg, Miss., where the synagogue was prepared for the shock of having a woman rabbi.

"The president of the congregation quit, and so did the woman secretary. I was accepted by a vote of ten, which is not exactly overwhelming. I took the pulpit at

work after the big hurricane in Hattiesburg and figured the people had enough trouble and didn't need me."

"But it was a challenge. Half the congregation was orthodox and not thrilled about a woman rabbi, but it worked out."

Rabbi Preisand didn't think about being a "first." It was all important to her to be a rabbi. She tried to avoid publicity, but a front page article about her was printed on the front page of the Hattiesburg American.

"I figured not many people would see that article, but residents in Hattiesburg sent it to their relatives all over the country. After that, I was bombarded by publicity."

NEXT CAME assignments in Tennessee, where congregants said, "no women." Milwaukee, Cincinnati and Jackson. In June, the lady rabbi accepted the

pulpit at the synagogue in New York.

"I roomed with a Catholic girl. When her mother heard she had moved in with a rabbi, she was a bit concerned. Our black mailman couldn't believe I was a rabbi. He said, 'It's as difficult for you to be a rabbi as it is for me to be the head of the Ku Klux Klan.'"

SHE VIEWS a rabbi as scholar, teacher, preacher, counselor, comforter, leader and (most important) a human being. She believes women are more open, emotional and compassionate but aren't much different from male Rabbis.

Rabbi Preisand wears a royal blue robe, rather than the traditional black, and a prayer shawl when she's on the pulpit. She gives sermons on Vietnam, abortion and politics. She is attempting to change the male-oriented liturgy to include the words "individual," or "human being" instead of "he."

She predicts in 10 years the conservative movement will ordain women if it works in the reform movement.

Rabbi Preisand sends half of the money she receives for speaking engagements to a small synagogue for the deaf in Chicago.

She admits she isn't an active supporter of the women's liberation movement, but believes she has contributed to the cause. "The basic message is that it's time for everyone to overcome psychological and emotional objections to women in professions and religion and regard them as human beings with talents and potential."

"I feel I have somewhat succeeded in transferring women out of the classroom and kitchen to the synagogue altar and board room. Little girls can now grow up knowing they have the option of becoming a rabbi if they want to."

Rabbi Preisand believes the Jewish way of life is worth perpetuating and is in total commitment to Judaism. She believes the children of Israel were chosen, not as superior, but with a sense of responsibility.

"It isn't easy to be a Jew. It takes courage, fortitude and guts. The Jew has become the conscience of the world."

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Clarenceville School District will continue to give financial aid to the Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA) Region 9 efforts in the legal battle against cross-district busing.

To date, the Clarenceville district has spent \$8,287 in legal fees in the court battle.

Of that, the district spent \$6,028.66 for the services of the law firm of Deil, Shantz, Booker and Schulte, according to figures reported at the board's Jan. 25 meeting. The remainder went to Region 9 for use in the Bradley vs. Milliken litigation before Federal Judge Stephen Roth.

The board voted to retain the law firm for another year and agreed to pay an additional Region 9 assessment of 25 cents per enrolled pupil that will be based on the official fourth Friday count.

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Program Set Fish Heads On Real Estate Metro Office

A public service program entitled "The World of Real Estate and You" will be offered at no charge at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 9, at 9600 Commerce Rd., Union Lake.

Sponsored by Real Estate One, the program will answer questions on how to get into the real estate business, what it entails and what can be expected from a career in real estate.

Richard A. Fish of 20250 St. Francis, has been appointed sales manager in Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's Livonia office at 35275 Plymouth Rd. The appointment was announced by District Sales Manager Charles G. Skene, CLU.

Fish joined Metropolitan as an agent in the Livonia office in March 1968 and is a graduate of the life underwriter training council course.

A native of Detroit, Mr. Fish is a graduate of Holy Redeemer High School.

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