

Suburban Life

Loraine McClish editor/477-5450



Thursday, December 13, 1990 O&E

(F)18

Building bridges

A commitment to understanding those of different religions

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

ARNOLD MICHLIN has made a commitment to ecumenism. It's been a life long labor of love for him to see barriers break down between those of different religions and cultures. He applauds every bit of progress he sees or hears about as ignorance is erased through understanding.

Sometimes he calls bringing the Christian, the Jew, the Muslim and most recently the black together as "my calling." Sometimes he calls it "building bridges."

The Farmington Hills resident inherited that calling of building bridges when his grandfather, a Jew from Russia, was befriended and learned the ways of America by a Dutch Christian in Indiana. Not too long after that the Dutchman accepted Michlin's grand uncle into his home and did the same thing for him.

But when it was time for his grandmother to come to the United States she balked at having anything to do with a Christian.

"She was afraid the family's religion would be diluted, or the entire family was going to fall apart, or they would all be converted to Christianity," Michlin said. "It was a very real fear for her. She believed all Christians were bad and nothing good could come out of that situation."

"Yet, that man who lived about 100 years ago in Hudson, Ind. was what I have come to believe is the supreme example of what people ought to be — a man who liked people for themselves."

'She was afraid the family's religion would be diluted, or the entire family was going to fall apart, or they would all be converted to Christianity. It was a very real fear for her. She believed all Christians were bad and nothing good could come out of that situation.'

— Arnold Michlin

MICHLIN BELONGS to many organizations and uses his knowledge of history and religion to spread the ecumenical word through many of them.

He says, for example, that he has kept the job of program chairman over the years for Congregation Jhaarey Zedek's Men's Club "to keep the membership enlightened on these matters."

He was instrumental in changing the name of the Detroit chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews to "The Muslim, Jewish and Christian Dialogues."

It is the only chapter of the conference that has included Muslims.

"It was right that we be the first to do this because we have 250,000 Arabs here, one of the largest communities in the U.S.," he said. "And a Muslim is now the head of our interfaith round table. I consider that great progress."

"So many times if a Christian and Jew and Muslim did get together they would talk about baseball, politics, the weather, anything but religion. Here (at the round table) we do talk about religion and what we ac-

complish is exposing each other's prejudices."

He has been a member of B'nai B'rith for more than 40 years. He is an ardent worker on the Detroit Action Committee for Soviet Jews.

He was the first to arrange for a visiting archbishop to be welcomed by the Jewish community here.

And he arranged for the first Christian to ever speak from a Jewish pulpit — at least in the northwest suburbs.

He serves on the board of The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, a position he calls "one of the most important things I do."

But what he is most proud of now is the success of a group he initiated called American Arabic and Jewish Friends.

"We make no attempts to solve the problems in the Mideast," he said. "There are enough problems right here to be solved."

MICHLIN WON the Heart of Gold Award a few years ago for his work in ecumenism, notably for the friendships that have been made among the Arabs and Jews in the Detroit area through the group in-

cluded. And as pleased as he is about that, he says there is still a long way to go.

"About two years ago I started the Black-Jewish Dialogues. I was hesitant about this because I was afraid I was going to be spreading myself too thin. But it was something that had to be done and the time was right," he said.

The next on his things-to-be-done list is a class for Jews who will be taught about Christianity by rabbis.

"The Christians are way ahead on this one," he said. "The Christians have attended model sederes and have been learning about our Festival of Lights for at least the past 30 years."

"The new classes to be given in Midrisha, a branch of United Hebrew School will be sponsored by B'nai B'rith and are the first of their kind in Detroit."

MICHLIN IS one of a kind. For all the networking he's done in the area of ecumenism if he has a counterpart in the world — one who gives as much time and energy to the subject as he does — he is not aware of it.

When The Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies opened in Southfield about eight years ago, it was almost a given that Michlin would become involved.

Of that he says "I know (the Rev.) Jim Lyons doesn't have a counterpart. He is utterly unique. He is the only full-time minister in the country that heads up an ecumenical institute."

"He is known internationally, but our work is very local. You do what ever you can do right where you are."



Arnold Michlin says he inherited his feelings about ecumenism and has devoted a lifetime to breaking down the barriers that stand between those of different religions and cultures.

Clouds and rainbows

Muscular dystrophy victim refuses to be couch potato

By Louise Okrutsky
special writer

In many ways, Joseph Barnett considers himself a lucky man. He walked, ran, played ball and drove a

car. He and his wife Ann went on camping trips with their three children.

Now, at 65, Barnett's the author of a book of poetry and essays, "Clouds, Clowns and Rainbows," which draws

on his own experiences. After more than 30 years of fighting muscular dystrophy, he doesn't consider any of these accomplishments small victories.

"I started out just writing shorter articles and poetry since I retired in 1970," said Barnett who's lived at Oakhill Nursing Home in Farmington for the past year.

"I chose not to become a couch potato. For a long time, I would just stick them in a drawer. I'd rewrite until it's what I really wanted to say," said Barnett who gets around with the aid of a motorized wheelchair.

Although he hasn't studied writing formally, he follows a bit of advice given to all writers. He writes about what he knows best.

"Basically, it's how I truly feel about life," he says of his work. "You can overcome difficulties. You have to keep active in the world and not just hole up."

"It's stuff I think about a lot — nature, friendship, family. It's definitely not religious, but I have a couple of articles alluding to my belief in God," he said.

UNTIL NOW, his biggest publishing success was a short article published in January 1981 in Yankee magazine and is included in "Clouds." It's a wry account of his family tree which can only be described as a hybrid. His mother and father were stepbrother and stepsister. He winds up advising readers, "For a happy and uncomplicated life — leave your roots buried."

It was Ann Barnett, his wife of 37 years, who doggedly pursued the idea of publishing the rest of his work.

"She's sort of the backbone of the idea," Barnett says in a whisper yet firm voice. "She kept me at it."

It was she who helped strike the deal in which the Barnetts co-publish the book with Winston-Derek Publishers, he says.

"I was real pleased with the way it came out," Barnett said.

It's also Ann Barnett who helped arrange for the book to be carried by the Little Professor book stores in Farmington Hills and Plymouth as well as Waldbrooks.

He'll be signing his book in the Little Professor stores in both Plymouth and Farmington Hills. Although



FASHION FOR THE DOWNWARDLY MOBILE.

For 20 years, CB skiwear has been designed by racers. And worn by some of the fastest people on the mountain. So in CB, you'll be ready for all of skiing's ups and downs.



Bavarian Village

SKI SHOPS

*BLOOMFIELD HILLS	338-0803
*BIRMINGHAM	644-5950
*MT. CLEMENS	463-3620
*EAST DETROIT	778-7020
*ANN ARBOR	973-9340
*FLINT	313-732-5560
*GRAND RAPIDS	616-452-1199
*SUGARLOAF	616-228-6700
*TRAVERSE CITY	616-941-1999
*FARMINGTON HILLS	553-8585
*NOVI	517-332-3323
*EAST LANSING	517-337-9696
*DEARBORN HEIGHTS	562-5560

OPEN EVENINGS 'TIL 9, SAT. 10-6, SUN. 12-6



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Joe Barnett writes about what he knows best — his own experiences — in "Clouds, Clowns, Rainbows."

Please turn to Page 2