

Dorothy Schroeder—Judaica Library Visionary Extraordinaire

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Dorothy Schroeder, a past Treasurer of AJL and former Librarian of Wilshire Blvd. Temple, died this year in Los Angeles. The following is a tribute to her, delivered at a memorial service held on February 1, 1987 at her Temple. Barbara Leff was speaking as a representative of the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California; however, because of the significance of Ms. Schroeder's activities for synagogue and school librarians nationwide, we are publishing this piece in Judaica Librarianship.
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I'd like to speak about Dorothy Schroeder—the Librarian, whom I'd known for almost 20 years.

Dorothy was as far removed from the stereotypical librarian image as one could be. She smiled a lot . . . she dressed beautifully . . . she was assertive in a quiet way . . . and she even encouraged people to talk out loud in her library!

Dorothy was more than a wonderful librarian at Wilshire Boulevard Temple. She reached out into the community—and changed it so significantly that Los Angeles will be forever in her debt. She was known as the “Dean of Jewish Librarians in Southern California,” and we, her colleagues, are so very proud of her.

I'd like to share with you some of Dorothy's accomplishments:

—In her early years, she established an elementary school library which became a model library for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

—More than 25 years ago, she organized our local professional organization, the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California, and served as its first president. Until two months ago, she attended meetings regularly (even while ill) and *shepped nachas* knowing we were the largest, the best, and the most active regional group in the country.

—She created a Judaica librarianship course of study, which Hebrew Union College—Los Angeles still sponsors. This is the only long-term continuing course of study of its kind in the nation, and her students were responsible for the development of most of the synagogue libraries in this area.

—She made a *shidduch* between Hebrew Union College and the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education, and with a lot of *nudging*, professional know-how and Association support, two things happened: The BJE began to grant certification to qualified Librarian-Teachers, and librarians joined administrators and teachers and were written into the BJE Code of Personnel Practices. Again, this was a “first” in the United States and has become a model for other communities.

—She inspired us to work together and to share—on the local and national scenes. Several of us have joined Dorothy in holding Executive Board positions in the Association of Jewish Libraries and have made significant contributions to our profession on the national level.

—Long before computerization, Dorothy talked about central cataloging—to eliminate duplication of effort. Last year, one of her former students, originally inspired by Dorothy, set up a central cataloging pilot program, which has the potential to network with small Jewish libraries everywhere.

Dorothy Schroeder was a dedicated librarian with vision, and a mission. She believed that promoting the use of Jewish books was one of the highest priorities within a synagogue or school. She loved matching the right book with the right child and reaching people who did not know that they needed help. She believed in involving people wherever possible; her teaching methods included sharing and problem solving, resulting in a unique camaraderie among her students. She was a positive thinker; when we became discouraged because our synagogues would not support our library programs with adequate time, money, or recognition, she kept up our spirits while helping us develop strategy. She was always available to anyone in the community at any time, as her family well knows. Dorothy carried out her mission with love, honesty and dignity; she provided information along with inspiration, and she accepted the many accolades with modesty. She conducted her professional life in the same manner as her personal life—as a *mensch*.

On a personal note, as you have undoubtedly guessed, Dorothy Schroeder was my mentor—and I was but one of many. She turned my life around. She gave me self-confidence, encouraged me to get my master's degree, and instilled in me a commitment to Judaica librarianship beyond my own library. I am a different and better person today, because of her.

Dorothy has been recognized and honored often in the Jewish community for her professional accomplishments, and today, we'd like to add one more—a posthumous honor that we know would please her. I am proud to announce that the Association of Jewish Libraries of Southern California is establishing the Dorothy Schroeder Memorial Fund for the Enhancement of Judaica Librarianship. Its purpose will be to promote those ideals that exemplified Dorothy Schroeder. Among our goals will be to provide awards and incentives to those who excel or make significant contributions to our Jewish libraries, and to make available funds for interest-free loans or for financial assistance for Judaica librarianship courses and special programs. The project will be administered by the Stephen S. Wise Temple Library in West Los Angeles.

In conclusion—Dorothy's memory is alive and well—and will continue to raise professional standards in our community. Her life had great meaning as defined by Albert Einstein:

“The life of the individual has meaning only in so far as it aids in making the life of every living thing nobler and more beautiful. Life is sacred—that is to say, it is the supreme value, to which all other values are subordinate. The hallowing of the supra-individual life brings in its train a reverence for everything spiritual—a particularly characteristic feature of the Jewish tradition.”¹

We loved Dorothy and we will miss her—and we will carry on. . . .

¹Quoted in: *The Eternal Light*: a heritage album mirroring four thousand years of Jewish inspiration and wisdom. New York: Bloch Publishing, 1966, p. 141.

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