Chapter 7
Born-Again Brotherhood

From each of your tribes, men who are wise . . .
—Deuteronomy 1:13

The Brotherhood comes and goes. It thrives and declines, rises and plummets. With each rebirth, the Brotherhood springs to life, energizing the Temple in a new direction.

Henry Simon Sr. “reactivated” the Brotherhood in 1948 in conjunction with the rebuilding of the synagogue after the fire. During the 1960s, Temple President Manny Rosenthal declared the Brotherhood “awakening . . . with ‘vigah,’” a reference to JFK’s New Frontier. Wally Nass spearheaded a 1970s rebirth. In 1982, Jerry Zodin, the first Brotherhood president after a three-year lapse, pledged to “reorganize . . . and . . . rejuvenate” the phoenix-like group. (“It has been too long since Temple has had an active brotherhood,” Zodin wrote, motivating 83 men to pay their $15 dues.) Little happened with that money until Jerry Weiner launched a chapter in 1932, but “during the present economic stress . . . it is not possible to organize a club of any kind.”

Rebirth was around the corner. In 1935, Brotherhood rebounded. Beth-El’s trustees invited three non-voting Brotherhood representatives to attend each Temple board meeting. Subsequent minutes do not mention any of them in attendance.

The next official mention of the men’s organization came during the congregation’s annual meeting in January 1948. “Henry Simon, . . . the president of the newly reorganized Brotherhood, . . . announced that since the rebuilding of our Temple, the Brotherhood would take an active interest and would assume its full share of responsibility.”

The following year, when charismatic E. M. (Manny) Rosenthal assumed the presidency, Brotherhood got down to business—show business!

Sisterhoods far exceed Brotherhoods in chapters, membership, and continuity. The National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods (NFTB) began in 1923 “with the intention of giving men a more active role in synagogue life,” writes Michael A. Meyer in Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism. “The men would simply attend services from time to time and a few of them manage the Temple’s financial affairs.” Women and rabbis dominated synagogue life. “Brotherhoods were created to change that.”

Brotherhoods were intended to bring the Reform men home, to redirect energy into their own congregations and to promote male bonding through service projects within each Temple. As a byproduct, Brotherhoods became a training ground for congregational leadership.

At Beth-El, the Brotherhood’s first incarnation was short-lived. The Temple board minutes of October 1925 state that the Brotherhood could meet at the Temple any time except Friday evening. The men apparently did not meet often enough to keep the chapter afloat, because the Brotherhood is not mentioned again in the minutes for a decade. The chapter’s early existence was forgotten.

A subsequent Temple anniversary book asserts that Beth-El’s Brotherhood began in 1932, with Joel Rosen its founding president.13 Joel Rosen’s son, Sam, says that is news to him. The anniversary book’s assertion also runs counter to correspondence between Rabbi Harry Merfeld and Brotherhood national headquarters. Merfeld wrote that he had planned to organize a chapter in 1932, but “during the present economic stress . . . it is not possible to organize a club of any kind.”
with Eleanor Wilson at the Star-Telegram and Jack Gordon at the Press, was touted in the program as a “very good comedian” who got his training while on active duty with Uncle Sam.

For an encore, the Brotherhood produced Slashboard Parade of 1950. Men in drag took to the stage at the Temple Center, performing a skit written by Joy and Seymour Spiegel, with piano accompaniment by Don Gernsbacher. “I dressed those guys,” recalled Joy Spiegel. Another year, she assisted with a production of Kosher Carmen, a Yiddish spoof on the French opera. During these years, Brotherhood members developed a strong rapport with Rabbi Milton Rosenbaum—strong enough to persuade the Temple board to rescind a 1953 vote against raising the rabbi’s salary. At Brotherhood’s insistence, Rosenbaum’s pay increased from $9,000 to $9,300. Rabbi Rosenbaum attended Brotherhood meetings, including stag dinners at The Big Apple restaurant. At one “men’s night out” at the Cattlemen’s Café in 1952, the rabbi spoke about “Jewish Humor.” Two years later, the Brotherhood instituted monthly luncheons downtown at the Blackstone, where the rabbi brought the men up to date on Jewish current events worldwide.

Throughout the 1950s, Brotherhood also sponsored bimonthly oneg Shabbat and joint meetings with the Ahavath Sholom Mens Club, including a dinner with Dick Maegle, the Southwest Conference star who later played with the San Francisco 49ers and Dallas Cowboys. Brotherhood awarded gifts and prizes to Religious School students, sponsored the annual Lag B’omer picnic, and held a men’s retreat at the Baker Hotel in Mineral Wells. Installation dinners were jacket-and-tie affairs with wives in attendance. When the Sisterhood launched a project to repaint the Temple interior, Martin and Jack Siegel donated the paint for the kitchen, while other Brotherhood members provided the labor.

The 1950s heralded the start of the Brotherhood’s most enduring social get-together—the Mickey Goldman Spaghetti Supper. M. M. (Mickey) Goldman was the vivacious founder of the White Rose liquor distributorship. With a cigar in one hand and a wooden spoon in the other, he jovially cooked up a pot of pasta at Brotherhood gatherings. A flier promoting the spaghetti dinner features a mustachioed chef raising a fork full of noodles and declaring: “Lika Da Spaghetti, Coma to Brotherhood Mickey Goldman Spaghetti Dinner . . . . Lotsa . . . . and Continuing Service to Beth-El. Mickey Goldman Spaghetti Supper and an award for Extraordinary Family Camp for Living Judaism. After Nass’s two terms, Brotherhood slowed down. Periodically, Wally Nass stepped in to galvanize a project. Len Schweitzer filled his shoes in 1974, reprising past activities such as a Hoody Dance, the spaghetti supper and guest speaker forums. Brotherhood assigned Bud Schwartz (with his wife, Rosalie) to initiate a Yom Kippur break-the-fast, now overseen by the Ritual Committee. The group also produced a memorable evening of dance promoted as “Last Tango at Beth-El.” Then decline set in again.

Jerry Weiner picked up the ball during the mid-1980s. “Apathy conquered,” he declared in the Beth-El Bulletin. This time the cure for apathy was an ambitious project—landscaping the Temple grounds. The gardening venture, led by David Eich and master gardener Guy LaMere, built momentum. It involved grading, sodding, weeding, tree planting, installing an automatic sprinkler system, and continuing service to Beth-El.”

SEYMOUR SPIEGEL

wrote, produced, and starred in Kosher Carmen, a 1950s spoof on the French opera. The cross-cultural production was set at Fort Haysa Hazen. Jewish for “Camp Hot Pants.” Left, Spiegel dons a rose in a classic Carmen pose.

WALLY NASS

gave heart and soul to the Brotherhood. His legacy is recalled with a spaghetti supper and an award for congregants who go over the top.