

THE MARY ROSENFIELD STORY

By Ilene Rosenfield Robinson



Mary Rosenfield - now

As soon as I began to speak, my mother, Mary Meyers Rosenfield, taught me to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Mother understood the freedoms we have in America and her patriotism was more precious than gold.

Mary Rosenfield is a naturalized citizen. She was born in Lubcha, Minsk, Russia in 1910, where her family was not allowed to own property, could not travel outside their town without permission, could not attend school, could not vote, and had no religious freedom. When the Meyers (Osheerovsky in Russian) family arrived in America, she learned never to take these freedoms for granted. She worked to instill love of country in her family and worked in her community to enhance its meaning and importance.

Mother lives by the philosophy "make the world a better place." She has spent her ninety-three years in El Campo doing just that. If there was a civic project in El Campo, Mother was always there, offering support. I recall the Bees, the El Campo beautification group, (of which she was a Charter member), starting the Planter Project. Mother called her brothers in Hawaii and California to encourage their support, and we all joined her in buying planters to be placed in downtown El Campo.

My sister, Rita Sue, was born mentally challenged. Mother did not even blink an eye at the enormity of this problem, but attended to our needs, helped my father in his business, and still had time for tremendous volunteer projects and service clubs.

She served as President of the Ladies Auxiliary of the American Legion; held various positions in the El Campo Garden Club, where she is now an Honorary Member; was a Brownie leader; Sunday school teacher; founding President of the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) in El Campo – the third Texas chapter of

ARC; served on the State Board for the Mental Retarded; was a member of the Art League; worked at Nightingale Hospital as a Pink Lady, and volunteered at the El Campo Museum. Because of Mary's encouragement, her family donated a building, known as the Normana Theater, to the El Campo Theater group. It is believed that Mother is the oldest living Lifetime Charter Member of Hadassah. She joined the Wharton Chapter of Hadassah when she was four-years-old because the founder, Henrietta Szold needed three more members to organize the Chapter. Mary still remembers Miss Szold as a tall lady wearing a hat that afternoon in Wharton. Mother is still active in the Wharton Chapter.

Rita Sue was the catalyst for a new approach to education in El Campo. Mother started the first school for the mentally retarded in a little cottage in her back yard. Several families benefited from Mother's efforts in this "home school" where Grace Dittert was hired as the first teacher.

The school expanded and was later incorporated into the El Campo public school curriculum now known as Special Education. Even though her daughter, Rita Sue, was unable to be part of the special classes in the El Campo School due to her profound retardation, Mary Rosenfield kept working for all the children of Texas - especially in El Campo. She worked diligently to bring a special education teacher to El Campo. She and her dear friend, Alva Spellman, traveled to San Marcos to the college to find a teacher, and furnished her apartment.



Mary Rosenfield - then

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Mary Rosenfield had drive and vision. She looked ahead and questioned what would happen to these children when they became adults. Although she was unable to find land in Wharton County, she did encourage the George Foundation to support the Richmond State School that was built in the 1960s. This school has been an outstanding home and special community for the thousands of people from eleven countries who have lived there – including Rita Sue. Mary remains an active member in the Voice of the Retarded, Parents' Association for the Retarded of Texas, and the Richmond State School Parents' Association. Remembering what her parents instilled in her about Russia and the closed doors to education Mother took education seriously.

The El Campo Schools have deep meaning for her. They provided her with an excellent education. She established the first pep squad and still has an engraved cowbell from the 1920s. She attended the College of Industrial Arts (CIA) in Denton, TX, majoring in design and art. This led her to lifelong hobbies of painting and needlework.

Mother loves to read. While in high school, she and her aunt, Esther Bishkin, gathered books for the first library in El Campo. She exposed her children to art, ballet, drama, music and nature with endless after-school activities. She took my friends and me to many plays, concerts, ballets and museums in Houston. She formed a Junior Garden Club and we learned to compete in flower shows held in the USO Building.

Because of the religious persecution experienced by her family in Russia, Mary Rosenfield did not take the privilege of religious freedom lightly. Hebrew School was held in our home every Tuesday afternoon with the rabbi from Shearith Israel Synagogue in Wharton. We would travel to Wharton for Sunday school every week, and Mother taught there for a number of years.

Mother always remembered the teachings of her grandparents and of having the privilege of freedom of worship. She would always win arguments with me about attending Friday night football games. One of her great leadership qualities was the ability to lead her children in the right direction.

Mary Rosenfield is typical of the Jewish immigrants who came to Texas in the early 1900s. She is a long-time member of the Texas Jewish Historical Society. An area of the Wharton County Historical Museum features a history of Jews in Wharton County, and her biography will be among the records. She was honored as El Campo's 2003 Citizen of the Year.

She is now a member of Congregation Beth Yeshurin in Houston and her oil painting of Moses and the Ten Commandments was accepted as part of the congregation's art collection. Mary Rosenfield is a gracious lady, and El Campo would be a much different place without her numerous deeds.

■ TJHS

HONORABLE MENSCHENS

By Dorothy Harelik

Chase Leshin, son of Pam and Richard Leshin, has been named to the first team of the Texas 2003 All-State 5A Football Team. Members of the Texas High School Football Coaches Association made the selection. Chase is a senior at W.B. Ray High School in Corpus Christi. He is the grandson of TJHS members, **Yetta and Marvin Leshin**.

David W. Hart, son of TJHS members **Charles and Jan Hart** of Temple, Texas, will receive his Ph.D at the University of Florida commencement on May 1, 2004. David's degree is in English, with a specialty in Post Colonial Caribbean Literature.

Do you have news to share with your TJHS family? "Honorable Menschen" lists members and their families' births, marriages, accomplishments, graduations, degrees earned, get-well wishes, condolences, announcements and more.

Email your "Honorable Menschen" information to Dorothy Harelik at dkharelik@htcomp.net or mail to 602 South Bell Street, Hamilton, Texas, 76531. Dorothy can be reached at 254-386-3538.

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