

Life Membership Acceptance Speech  
By Toby Rossner

Thank you, my dear friends and colleagues for selecting me for this prestigious award. Thank you my dear, dear friend Merrily for your beautiful introduction. I am truly honored.

Just one week before I was scheduled to be installed as the President of the Association of Jewish Libraries at the convention in DC, I had several attacks of the dizzies, each one lasting an hour or so. I was in a panic. What was I going to do? How could I go to convention? How could I get installed? My husband, who had nursed me through these episodes, large pot in hand, told me that he would go with me. I said to him, "Larry, you've never been to a Convention. You've never wanted to go. Why this time?" "This is very important to you. I won't let you miss it," was his reply. Fortunately, my dizzies abated before the end of the week, and he was "saved" from having to accompany me to DC. I would not let him be saved this time. This moment, too, is very important to me; and I'm pleased that he is here to share it with me.

I've been a member of AJL since 1986. At the time I was the Librarian at the Bureau of Jewish Education of Rhode Island. Our Executive Director, Carol Ingall, also a librarian, had a strong commitment to supporting the Judaic librarians in our affiliated school and synagogue libraries and to having the librarians' status as professionals on an equal footing with that of the teachers in our Jewish schools. Together with Lillian Schwartz and me, she developed a Judaica Librarian certification track similar to the Bureau's teacher certification program. The Bureau offered financial support to its librarians for professional development courses in library-related topics and in Judaic studies. At the time it was the only such program in the country. In 1986 Barbara Leff, AJL's former president and the first chair of the Library Education Committee, got the idea of developing a similar librarian certification program administered by AJL. She was aware of the Rhode Island program and called Carol to ask her to work on the national program. Carol was too busy to accept, but, she told her, "I'll give you Toby." The rest is history. When I attended my first convention in Montreal in 1986, I was hooked. It was like coming home. In fact, my convention evaluation was so glowing that Hazel Karp read it to the entire group at the closing lunch.

Working for AJL has been my adult education. I have learned from each person with whom I have had the pleasure of working. As you became my teacher, you also became my friend. Edith Lubetski was President when I started my AJL journey. Each letter she wrote to me was its own "lesson plan." She was precise, concise, and eloquent. I wrote to her telling her how much I was learning from her letters. In her beautiful style she wrote back, "We all appreciate one another, but we seldom take the time to tell one another." Today I am taking the time to tell you how much I appreciate you all.