

In Memoriam

On The Passing Of Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor

Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, spiritual leader of the United Synagogues of Greater Hartford for 50 years, passed away on November 24 at the Sephardic Home in Brooklyn, New York.

Rabbi Avigdor was born in Sanz, Poland in 1920 to a rabbinic family. He was the son of Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, known as the Drohobyczer Rav and later the chief rabbi of Mexico City. As a 15-year-old boy, Rabbi Avigdor studied in the Yeshiva of Chachmei Lublin, the Mir Yeshiva in Poland as well as the Belz Yeshiva. When World War II broke out, he was separated from his parents and incarcerated at the Mathausen

concentration camp from where he was liberated on May 5, 1945.

After liberation, Rabbi Avigdor founded a rehabilitation kibbutz in Abbiate Guazona, Italy where he gathered refugees and survivors of the war, rehabilitated them and relocated them to Israel. After reuniting with his father, Rabbi Avigdor relocated to the United States where he built a new life in New York City as the executive director of the Shlomo Kluger Yeshiva on the East Side, and the director of the National Hapoel Hamizrachi.

He was a well-known author who published five books and countless articles in Hebrew, English and

Yiddish and a contributing member and writer for the Rabbinical Council of America.

Rabbi Avigdor leaves behind his beloved wife Esther, his four sons, Rabbi David Avigdor, spiritual leader of Cong. Bikur Cholim of New Haven, Rabbi Morton Avigdor, Rabbi Merrill Avigdor and Jacob Avigdor of Toronto as well as his brother Dr. Abraham Avigdor of Mexico City. He also leaves 15 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren.

Rabbi Avigdor used to say that he wanted to live to be a *tzaddik*. He passed away at the age of 90, which is the mathematical equivalent of the Hebrew letter *tzaddik*. May his memory be a blessing.

Congressman Stephen J. Solarz

By Dr. Amy Neustein

The news of Congressman Stephen J. Solarz's passing sent shock waves through Jewish communities in Brooklyn, Washington and Israel.

For me, his loss meant something more personal. I was a mere schoolgirl when he began his meteoric political career as a Brooklyn Assemblyman in 1968. "Steve," as he was known to his neighbors and friends, maintained a home at 241 Dover Street, Brooklyn, right next door to mine – and he quickly became a role model for me as well as a valued neighbor.

I was proud to see him promoting democracy throughout the world, in keeping with Jewish values. That is what I told the Brooklyn Daily Eagle just days after Steve died. But there were also more personal reasons for my feelings. In the late 70s – at the peak of a busy career that included long meetings with heads of state in remote parts of the world – Steve took the time to sit with me on my front porch, sharing my enthusiasm over my doctoral studies in sociology at Boston University. He told me confidently, "Amy, make sure to champion the interests of the less

fortunate, and use your education to make a difference in this world!"

I kept those words close to my heart during my years in graduate school at Boston University and long afterwards, when I became a champion for divorced mothers fighting for their children, and more recently as an advocate for sisters



of *bechorim* struggling to hold on to their inheritance.

Steve eventually left the Dover Street house, and I lost touch with my own family home next door during a long-drawn-out ownership dispute. But just last year, when a Brooklyn court restored my access to the house and I retrieved personal files that had been languishing there for nearly a decade, I got a surprise: in a file assembled by my father, a rabbi, lawyer and law professor, I found a letter from Steve Solarz to my mother, Shirley Neustein, dated September 23, 1992.

The date itself was significant: Steve's long career in politics had just come to an end, following the elimination of his Congressional district and a bitter primary campaign in the newly-minted district in which Steve competed unsuccessfully for the nomination against Nydia Velasquez. In his letter, Steve wrote feelingly to my mother about her "extraordinarily moving letter of condolence and encouragement in the wake of my defeat in the primary." He expressed the hope that his friendship with my family would endure,

and ended on this note of gratitude: "Thank you so much for all your many kindnesses. I can't think of how anyone could ever have a better neighbor than you."

Looking back just after his death, I find I have the same feeling about Stephen Solarz. Steve was human, and I'm sure had his faults. But I still remember him as a neighbor: one who inspired me as a child and a young woman, and who at his best was a man of extraordinary vision and commitment, who fought for justice at home and abroad.

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