

# Report On Annual Membership Meeting

by Dorothy Corner Amsden



Planned and chance encounters added another dimension to the NMJHS Annual Membership Meeting, held at The Screen Theater in Santa Fe on Sunday afternoon, June 26. The sold-out event featured the documentary *Watermarks* by Israeli director Yaron Zilberman, about a champion women's swimming team that was part of the legendary Jewish sports club Hakoah Vienna. (Hakoah means *The Strength* in Hebrew.)

*Watermarks* tells the story of seven members of that team and brings them together for a reunion in Vienna 65 years later. Images of the vibrant young women from the 1930s are juxtaposed with footage of their reunion.

Adding depth to the film are interviews with the women, now in their eighties, who reflect on their youthful experiences.

Visually, the film is beautifully done, weaving back and forth in time. Most of the older images are black and white photos of the young swimmers and other athletes, although some old footage was filmed at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, where the Austrian Jewish team was booed from the grandstands. Interviews filmed in

color with the women, who now live in England, Israel and the United States, are particularly moving. The spark still burns in them from their youth, yet in their maturity, they reflect on what has happened since those innocent days. The interviews are conducted in the language of the country where they settled. Those who went to England and the United States had no need for subtitles, at least for English speaking audiences. Those who made it to Israel spoke in Hebrew. I had a great time making

out part of what they said, though I would have missed a lot without the subtitles.

The sound track soars with romantic Viennese music. To younger ears, it might sound syrupy, but for those who miss the old Vienna, it recaptures a poignant period in time. Two disconcerting moments occur during

the otherwise delightful reunion. One of the women athletes, who now lives in Israel, is filmed riding in a Viennese taxi. As she chats in German with the driver about events in the late 1930s, he remarks "It was difficult for non-natives," implying that the Jews were something less than native Austrians, despite having lived there for generations. Another disconcerting moment happens in a ritzy café with a singer in a tuxedo, who, after serenading the women and their families with old familiar

songs, launches into a song that Jewish prisoners were forced to sing at Auschwitz, composed under duress by the librettist for Franz Lehár.

The showing of *Watermarks* also made possible another reunion of sorts, one planned, the other a surprise, between two former members of Hakoah Vienna in the audience, who remembered swimmer Annie Wagner from ever so long ago. Dr. Annie Wagner Lampl had been scheduled to come to Santa Fe from Los Angeles where she now lives for the film showing, but couldn't make it at the last minute due to illness. Dr. Henry Grant, one of the former athletes, now a Santa Fe resident, had been looking forward to greeting Annie in **continued on p. 4**



Lance Bell and Rabbi Leonard Helman at the 2005 Membership Meeting. Photo by Harold Melnick



Rabbi Leonard Helman. Photo by Harold Melnick

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