

HUG Speech – Wayne Sussman

I have vivid memories of the 2005 reunion on Kibbutz Yizreel. Arnie Freedman with his soothing voice welcoming one and all to his beloved Kibbutz. I remember being transfixed by the site of Zvi Pantanowitz on the stage and hanging onto every word. “Until Habonim, I thought that the world revolved round Arithmetic, English, Kennekie, and Cricket. Now came something that turned my life upside down: There were new terms, new to me at least. A new language, and a new dress. But beyond woggles and scarves and bricks and badges, there were new ideas and concepts. There was Pinsker, and there was Hess. There were new sounds in music to listen to, often intently in the dark. There were new songs to sing. About Israel, of course, but also about negroes in bondage, and workers fighting for their rights.”

I also remember the embrace and the tears of Jules Browde and Kibbutz Tzora’s Foggy Peleg when they reunited. These two grown men who had endured so much were overcome by emotion and by memories. Yes it was a friendship, yes it was about a *chaverschaft* but there was something more to it. I remember in the early days of HED, during those uncertain days in the first season of horrible COVID when we would gather on Zoom. Our anchor Stephen Pincus with his warm words of welcome, Dave Bloom and Belinda Copitch’s slide shows, a presenter who had made a mark on their world, their vocation for our benefit, often for humanity’s benefit. We would then break out into groups on Zoom (By the way Zoom’s programme for breaking us up into groups was never as creative as the way the movement taught us to break kids up into groups). We would connect with people we might never have met, people who camped at a different campsite, chavre whose issues of the day were wildly different to the issues of our day.

What was clear from HED, what was clear at Kibbutz Yizreel, what was so apparent during Kaleidoscope, and what is clear today at beautiful Tzora is that this movement and our experiences at Machaneh, in the *kenim*, our life experiences with the movement, often in the form of a *garin* were profound. HED did not just succeed because of the determination, creativity and passion of Stephen, Dave and their wonderful team, it also succeeded because of what this movement meant to all of us. I can not think of another South African club, a school, a membership organization where there was something as long lasting as HED.

This leads me to today. This movement has faced tremendous challenges over its 92 rich years. Many of the best and brightest men had to go and fight the Nazis and Fascists in WW2. Many of its leaders in the prime of their *madrich* years would go to Israel to assist it in its most vulnerable hours.

Machaneh was cancelled because of polio, offices were raided by the Apartheid police, the movement had to rebuild its cadre of leadership after a big *garin* Aliyah. We must and will always remember Neil Freed and Dudi Silbowitz who made the ultimate sacrifice in 1973. This must have been harrowing for the movement to deal with. I also think back to Alan Razor, Gerald Goldstein, Ashleigh Kaimowitz and Gideon Producers to name but a few. These were committed *madrichim*, friends of *madrichim* who died while being active members of the movement. How did the *madrichim* pick up the pieces?

We celebrated that Apartheid was over and that a new democratic country had to be built, but the movement had to dig deep to see where our focus should now lie. We had to deal with the hopes of Oslo being crushed. The mid-90s were supposed to be our halcyon days. It also saw a community (as so expertly captured in Giddy Shimon’s Community and Conscience) become more inward looking. Habonim was not seen as offering the solutions a more insular community needed and soon the Jewish Day Schools’s informal educational programmes and institutions would only be open to

madrichim who were *dati* (religious) not to talented madrichim who wore a blue shirt with red strings. All of those above-mentioned events shook our movement but upon deep reflection, surely nothing shook Habonim as much as what occurred over the last 3 years because of Covid-19

No Machaneh

No Tochnit

No writing tochnit

No singing songs

No crafting ice breakers

No erecting tents

No Personal Hadracha

No experience, no memory

Lost connections, lost opportunities. This was devastating.

We stand here today to remember this rich, incredible past but also to know that to remember the past we have to ensure the future.

I ask you today to join me and help give back to the movement you love so much. I say this as someone whose son has recently returned from his 2nd Mini Machaneh and whose daughter waits in the wings until she is old enough to start going to events.

I shudder to think of a SA Jewish community without a strong, vibrant Habonim Dror SA. We need to secure its future.

I have 4 requests

1. Give generously to the Shimoni Fund. There is no better way to help the movement right now. The Shimoni Fund assists those who want to attend programmes in Israel. We have a generous donor who is willing to match every Dollar, Pound, shekel and Rand pledged today.
2. Give of your time and help to continue to document the great history of this movement. We need to continue to record the oral histories of your time in the movement. We need to continue to collect the photos, anecdotes, and articles of interest from the 92 great years of Habonim and build a museum telling our story.
3. Give of your time, skill, and energy to aid the movement, be it helping with Hadracha, mentoring a Hanhagah member, helping with knowledge transfer or pro bono advice where needed
4. Let us start working to the centenary now. We need to be together again

Aleh Vehagshem