**WTB Monthly Minutes March 8, 2015**

At the invitation of the Sisterhood of Temple Concord, WTB members joined a group of about 40 women (and some men) to share a light kosher breakfast and “meet” Amelia Earhart. As we arrived, we signed in and were greeted by Ellyn Roloff of Temple Concord. Many of us had brought gently used bras to donate to the Sisterhood’s collection for Free The Girls, an organization using them to help women in Mozambique escape sex trafficking. WTB President Betty Lamb, who had to leave almost immediately for a family event, warmly thanked the Sisterhood for hosting us. The Sisterhood and WTB have worked together in the past on projects such as WTB’s upcoming Sycamore Garden Tour in May; Betty said Patti McGuire would talk about that event and have tickets available at the end of the program. Wendy Davenport and Fran Volinsky, Co-Presidents of the Sisterhood, invited us to eat and socialize before Ms. Earhart arrived. We gathered at large round tables chatting and enjoying a delicious buffet of fruit, pastries, bagels, tea and coffee. Our conversations were especially rich as we came from diverse communities-- including Temple Concord, WTB, the Turkish community, and Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

Wendy Davenport began the program by introducing Bruce Gentry, a member of Temple Concord; he shared that Amelia Earhart had been his lifelong inspiration since he made a connection her when he was a high school junior learning to fly an airplane. Wendy then introduced—Amelia Earhart—who entered in flight gear. Amelia was enacted by Eleanor Stearns—she spoke for about 40 minutes as if she were Amelia Earhart on the day before her last flight. She illustrated her “autobiographical” monologue with actual historic photographs of significant events in “her” life. Her dramatic presentation ranged chronically from childhood escapades and traumas, through learning how to fly (and stunt fly!) a Curtis Jenny biplane, to harrowing transatlantic flights and celebrity, courtship and reluctant marriage, friendships with iconic people like Eleanor Roosevelt, and her fateful decision to undertake an around the world flight at the Equator in order to test human reaction to long term flight--during which her plane vanished. Ms. Stearns highlighted Earhart’s commitment to the role of women in flight as well as her belief in the professional and domestic equality of men and women (a view not commonly held in 1931.) Ms. Stearns brought so much carefully researched detail to her monologue and was so engaging and assured, it really seemed as if Amelia Earhart was standing before us sharing her adventures. Her depiction of the Vega airplane May 20-21, 1932 trans-Atlantic flight was especially riveting: the altimeter failed, a fierce storm raged for an hour, ice covered the plane causing it to spin toward the ocean, the plane developed a flame in the exhaust system followed by a drip in the fuel system, and Amelia ended up landing in Ireland in Gallaher’s pasture where she spent the night in a farmhouse! We also learned that Eleanor Roosevelt asked Amelia to teach her to fly a plane. Though FDR refused to give his permission for lessons, in 1933 Amelia did take Eleanor on a surprise night flight around Washington DC! The monologue ended with Amelia Earhart, age 40, leaving us to check out her plane before her historic flight—unaware of its tragic ending.

Ms. Stearns returned to answer questions—and with such a fascinating and informative portrayal there were many. We were all impressed to learn that Ms. Stearns wrote the script for her presentation from her own research, even traveling to Amelia’s birthplace in Atchison, Kansas. Understandably, there were several queries about the Amelia’s disappearance--current theories about what happened to her plane and speculation that she may have been involved in espionage. Ms. Stearns herself favors the TIGHAR theory that the plane crashed on uninhabited Nikumaroro Island; evidence (such as a jar of freckle cream found there) suggests Earhart and her navigator Fred Noonan may have survived for a time. Ms. Stearns had copies of a “The Lady Vanishes,” a Smithsonian article from January 2015 available. Before she left to appreciative applause and a standing ovation, Ms. Stearns invited us to more closely inspect the photographs she had brought after the meeting.

Ellyn Roloff asked Patti McGuire to speak about the upcoming Sycamore Garden Tour, sponsored by WTB. The event is a self-guided walking tour through a privately owned garden that is only open to the public a few times a year; the event will take place Sunday, May 4th from noon-4pm. Children should find it fun; a golf cart is available for those unable to walk distances; families often bring a picnic lunch to enjoy on the grounds. Tickets are $10 at the door, $5 in advance. Patti had tickets available.

People lingered to check out the photographs in more detail, and discuss the exciting life of a woman pioneer in aviation whose final fate is still an intriguing mystery.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Bova, Sunday Secretary