

# THE LITTLE MEN:

Al haLevy

BY SIDONIE ROGERS

second of a series

*Sidonie Rogers*

A profile of Al haLevy does not do him justice. He requires a full face, if not full length portrait.

Had it not been for the depression of 1929, this phenomenon would never have been ours: his father, Nathaniel Hertz Halevy, was born in Rishon le Zion, Palestine. In 1924 he went to Berlin where he spent five years studying to be a cantor. He returned to Palestine in 1929, met and married Joan Goldsmith there. In the same year the cantor and his young wife emigrated to New York. The effects of the Crash reached as far as Jerusalem.



ALVA ROGERS '62

His father's aunt, and her Rabbi husband, who had settled in Los Angeles, persuaded the Halevys to join them there. Al's father secured a cantorial position in a "very poor" section of Venice, California. The Halevy's first son Eliahu (Elijah in Hebrew) or Alvin was born in Boyle Heights, April 5, 1931.

The family moved to Long Beach. Al says his earliest memory is being put gently into a car to escape the 1932 Long Beach earthquake.

Memory becomes sharper as small Al enters school. You have only to visualize the five year old boy; skinny, large eyed, big eared & frightened to death, to know he was bound to have a rotten time in school. He was. The school, on Temple street in Los Angeles, had a student body that was 40 per cent Jewish, 40 per cent Negro, and 20 per cent Spanish.

All through school, Al says, his test grades were high, his school grades low and his spirits lower.

A lot of successful adults have made a miserable job of being children. Perhaps childhood is so abhorrent to them, they grow up quickly to get away from it.

In 1940 Al's father secured an appointment at Temple Beth Abraham, in Oakland. Al attended Lakeview grade school. He still did not care for education, but took a stride socially by being the chairman of a record breaking War Stamp sale.

People such as Al are, at once, the delight and despair of their instructors. They have brains, intellect, and are loaded with ability, yet they regard the school scene as a necessary nuisance to be endured until time removes them from it. Meanwhile all their mental assets sit around unused.

The teacher who reviews the test scores of the Al-type person in his class, begins the term eagerly rubbing his hands mentally together in anticipation. This brainy bonanza will be his to cultivate all year. Come June, these self same hands are wrung in an agony of self appraisal. Where did the instructor fail? He couldn't even make a break through.

The bright student remains above it all. Clutching his barely passing report card, he slogs ahead to confront a new set of pedagogues. In Al's words, "I was in the top ten per cent of the school----very bored. I refused to concentrate in class or do home work."

All this time he was reading four or five library books a week. Otherwise he was just goofing along.

In 1946 he attended an extreme leftist Zionist camp in the Angeles Forest. He spent three wonderful weeks which apparently laid the ground work for the nationalism which was to cause him trouble later.

Recently Al said he knew at birth that he was a Jew and although he is not religious, he feels that his cultural origin should play a larger part in his life.

For three years he belonged to a group called Habonim. They spent summers at a camp which simulated the conditions of an Israeli Kibbutz. The training the young people received would be put to practical use when they migrated to Israel. Later, in San Francisco, he taught a group of twelve-year-old boys and girls, instructing them in Zionism and Judaism. He established a rapport with the kids and enjoyed every minute of it. He also met a girl who planned to "find a life in Israel." A week later she lost that life in a truck accident.

Al's college career, at the University of California, Berkeley, got off to a rocky start in January 1949. Because of his less than sensational high school transcript he barely managed to be accepted. These days he probably wouldn't have made it at all and the pixillated Ph.D. would be lost to science.

As a freshman he wanted to go into medicine and took a course in chemistry because it "intrigued him." He vacillated between a biology and a chemistry major.

He began seeing a psychiatrist in 1951 trying to iron out some of his complexes. Apparently some of his problems were his intense nationalism and what could be done about it. He remained very interested in Zionism, but his three years with Habonim enthused yet confused him.

An incident in speech class further deepened his confusion: He says he was making straight "D's" in the course and didn't give a damn, until he made a speech, "Why I Dislike the Germans." The rebuff he received from a girl student put him into a state of shock for weeks. Her topic, "Why I Hate the Jews."

Still floundering scholastically he went to a counselor in 1952 to find out "what the hell I was doing in college."

Also in 1952 he began two years of psychiatric treatment. These two years might not have resolved his conflicts completely but they did point him toward a career----psychology.

He changed his major to psych and received his first "A" in college, in psychology.

In 1953 he graduated from Cal with a BA in psychology and was accepted for graduate school. He'd come a long way from the lackadaisical non-student of four years earlier. He took courses in zoology and was the only psychologist in graduate school who was taking biochemistry. He passed a written psychology exam on a Master's level in 1955.

Enter the Mad Scientist. After talking to a friend in the zoology department at Cal, he decided to go into physiology. He worked under Dr Nello Pace in Berkeley

and then moved to the UC Medical Center, San Francisco, to begin working on his Ph.D. His work and his thesis were on "Serotonin and the Hypothalamus."

During his work at the Hospital, Al delighted friends with his graphic descriptions of his little rat-sized guillotine, explanations of why a dog could not be anesthetized while it's nervous system was being explored, and other snappy table topics. Table topics they were, as he usually discoursed on them while shovelling down fried shrimp and drinking beer at the Anchor. His audience would listen with rapt attention and rising gorges.

He began reading science fiction in Astounding, July 1947. This led him to visit the Little Men at the Garden Library. He began his really active fanning as their chairman in 1959.

Al as a chairman is legendary. Even out of office in the Little Men he will convene a meeting if he and one or more active members are in the same room. Anyone with the temerity to break into his impromptu conclave is silenced with a curt "shut-up" from the chairman extem. If Al possessed a gavel he would probably use it as a slap stick. Currently he is editor of Rhodo, and chairman of the Western XVI and the "64 Frisco or Fight!!" committees.

In 1960 he was offered a post-doctoral fellowship in pharmacology which he accepted and finished in 1961. Then he took a job at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto and is putting his research to work on humans.

With his extensive education, especially in the foibles of rats, dogs, and people, you might expect Al to be an intellectual snob. He is not. He is mundane and, at moments, almost frighteningly naive.

He collects Israeli folk records, will dance the hora until he drops and once embraced a bottle of Israeli beer caroling, "This is the wine of my country."

He will argue passionately on any subject from Irish folk tales and Hobbits to pharmaceuticals and psychoses.

His disguise of the Mad Scientist is perfect: spikey black beard and mustasche under his impressive nose, and above that deep set piercing black eyes. As the coldly clinical man of science I like him best. Recently at a party I was relating Al's scientific adventures to a less than credulous acquaintance. Al wandered up amiably dribbling punch down his trouser seam.

"What do you do with your Waring Blendor, Al?" I inquired hopefully.

"Beat up rats in it," promptly responded Dr haLevy.

The now credulous guest shot wild looks at both of us and cut a swathe through the mob, back to the punch bowl.