

# “Mr. Norway” Abel Abrahamsen

By: Joyce Brooks

Abel is probably best known to New Yorkers for the fabulous Norsk store which he opened on 57TH Street and Park Avenue. The store was a unique combination of elegant and affordable Norwegian furniture and gifts. Due to his award winning taste combined with a charismatic personality, he affectionately became known as “Mr. Norway.” Although the store no longer exists Abel remains active in promoting Norwegian –American business and culture. Abel, who is 82 years young is constantly finding new projects.

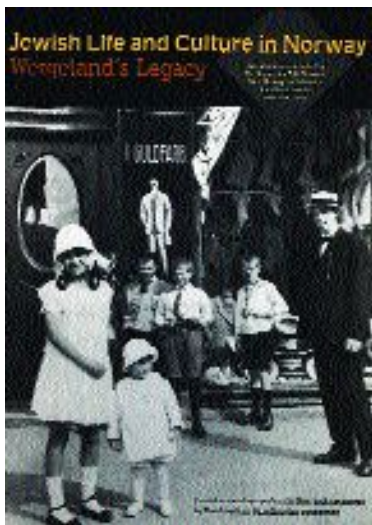
Recently Abel published a book called Jewish Life and Culture in Norway – “Wergeland’s Legacy”. One of the fascinating aspects of this book is that the poet Henrik Wergeland, who was born in Kristiansand in 1808 was not Jewish. His original plan was to become a minister, however because of his literary and political activity, the Government refused to assign him to a church. He became very concerned with the situation of the Jews in Europe and due to his diligence the “Jewish clause” which in the 1814 Norwegian Constitution prohibited Jews from entering Norway was repealed by the parliament in 1851. All of his works were characterized by a concern for human rights a term he used more than 100 years before the United Nations adopted its Declaration of Human Rights.

Abel’s book is based on the stories and photos of a 2003 exhibition at Scandinavia House New York, which Abel had brought over from Norway and then toured museums, libraries and other institutions in the US and Canada. The book is a continuation of the exhibition and is dedicated to all those who resisted anti-Semitism and racism, injustice and intolerance, as well as the equivalent evil of indifference.

Currently Abel has been using his people skills in the area of medicine. In 1998 he brought The Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine at New York University Medical Center and the Norwegian Sunnaas rehabilitation Hospital in Oslo together. Abel understands the value of shared knowledge and believes that bringing different organizations together so that new concepts for healing can be shared will greatly improve the world of medicine. The leading Chinese hospital, China Rehabilitation and Research Center in Beijing, joined Norway and the US in 2001 which resulted in a three-way cooperation exchange of medical and rehabilitation research. On September 7-8, 2006 seven countries: USA, China, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Israel and Palestine will meet at a seminar in Oslo hosted by Sunneas Hospital to plan the formation of an International Rehabilitation Research Alliance, where Norway’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Kjetil Skogrand will be the keynote speaker. A discussion will take place as to how medical rehabilitation can and will serve the cause of Peace in the world where also the Red Cross is intended to play an active part.

Abel’s journey has been filled with the agonies of war, the joys of success and the never ending desire to make the world which we all share a better place to live. In acknowledgement for all that he has achieved Abel was appointed Knight First Class, of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav and recently awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor.

Abel resides in New York City and continues to be a source of inspiration both here and abroad. Please contact Abel Abrahamsen at 212 861 8069 for more information regarding “Wergeland’s Legacy”.



3 year old Abel (front left) celebrating Passover seder with his family

Abel with Eleanor Roosevelt-1957



Robert Wagner’s Deputy, Mrs. Tulla Abrahamsen, Norwegian Ambassador to Washington Paul Koht, Mrs. Koht and Abel at the grand opening of Norsk, March 28, 1963

**Commentary by Gabe Pressman**  
Senior Correspondent  
Originally aired on WNBC TV, March 14, 1999  
Shown at Scandinavia House, January 16, 2003

Congratulations to Norway for taking the lead by righting a wrong, half a century old. The Norwegian Parliament has voted a 58 Million dollar settlement to compensate Jewish families for property plundered by the Nazis during their occupation of this country.

When the Nazis invaded, there were only 2200 Jews in Norway. About one third died in the Holocaust, but when the survivors got back, much of their property was not returned. One Norwegian political leader said, “No one can buy a clear conscience. The treatment of Norwegian Jews will remain a black mark that can never be wiped clean.” But fifty –four years after the end of World War 11, it is heartening that Norway, which fought the Nazis so gallantly, leads other European nations in seeking justice.

Abel Abrahamsen is a Norwegian businessman who lives here. His family got out just one step ahead of the Nazis. “I am happy,” he said, “not about the money, but about what this settlement says about my native country.” He is right. If they value justice, other European nations should follow Norway’s example.

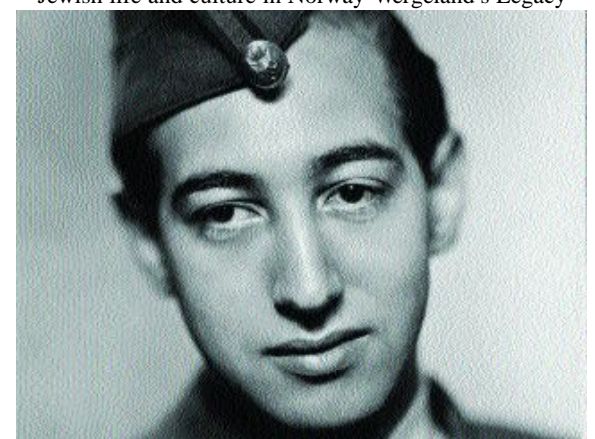
This is Gabe Pressman



Jewish life and culture in Norway-Wergeland’s Legacy



Mrs. Abrahamsen, Synnove Abrahamsen, Crown Prince Harald, Norwegian Ambassador to the U.S., Hans Engen, Erna and Abel Abrahamsen, 1965



Abel, Sergeant, Norwegian Air Force, 1945

