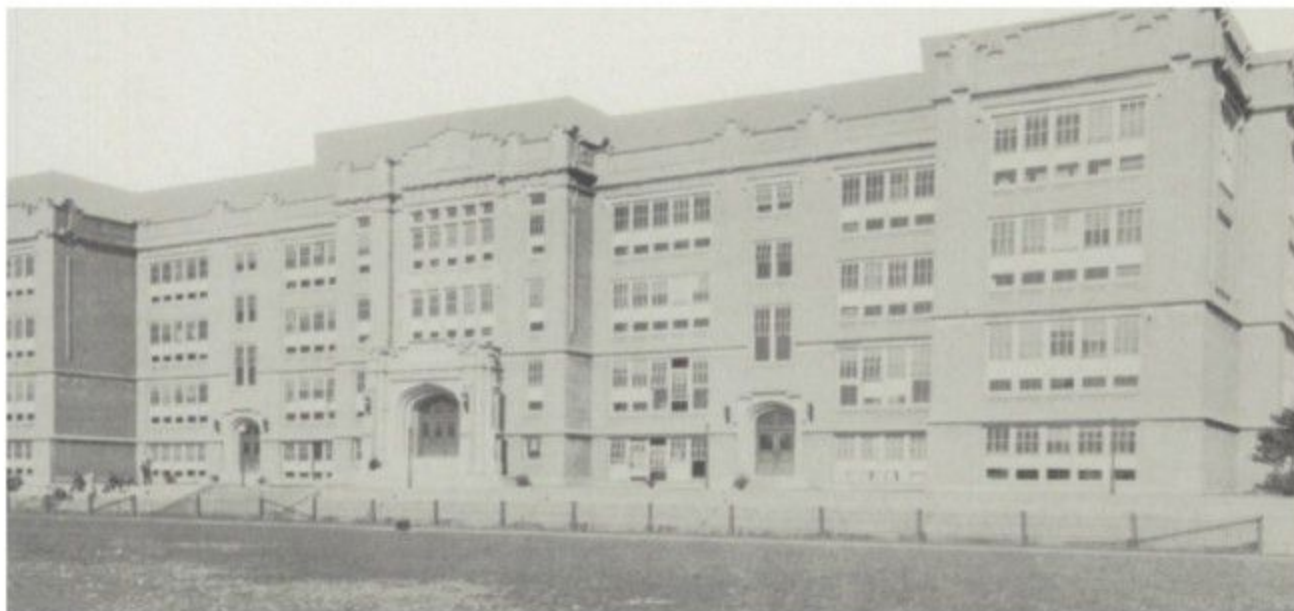


Max A. Sobel – Teacher and Mathematics Leader for Over 60 Years

Yes, Max A. Sobel was truly an AMTNJ GIANT!!!!!! It would take several books to list and describe all the accomplishments due to Dr. Sobel. This Tiny Treasure segment will look at the personal side of Max and his relationship with his family, friends and former students and colleagues.

Our story begins at Paterson Eastside High School where he met his future spouse, Manya, and was married to Manya (nee Lerner) for 70 years until Max passed away at the age of 92 on Veterans Day - November 11, 2016 . During World War II, Army Sergeant Max Sobel was wounded at the Battle of the Bulge and awarded a Purple Heart. He also never backed away from challenges in teaching and training future teachers and leaders throughout his career. Even late in his life when he had several physical setbacks he learned to walk again with the encouragement of his close friends.



Paterson Eastside High School shown in a yearbook photo in the early 1940's

After World War II, Max Sobel completed his studies at Montclair State College and graduated in 1947. He taught high school mathematics for 8 years at Newark South Side High School nka Shabazz HS and returned to Montclair State College nka as Montclair State University for the remainder of his teaching career.

In 1957 , Sobel was joined on the MSC faculty by a young mathematics teacher, Evan Maletsky, and became known as "peanut and jelly" – a great combination. They conducted mathematics teacher training institutes from 1958-1965 which drew national attention. At one time, MSC produced the most number per year of certified senior and junior high school mathematics teachers in the country.



***Max in 1947
MSC senior photo***



***Max in 1965
Teacher of 15 years***



***85th birthday with Max & Manya
and Janice-Lynn Shuhan***



***"peanut butter and jelly"
Evan Maletsky & Max Sobel
in the early 1960's at MSC***



***Max walking with Janice-Lynn Shuhan
wearing his WW II medals at the mall
on Veterans Day, November 11, 2015***



Max Sobel at Montclair State University



L to R: Paul Lawrence 1995-1996, Jim Rahn 1994-1995, Mary Froustet 1970-1971, Margaret Cotter 1964-1965, David Glatzer 1980-1981, Max Sobel 1958-1959, Arthur Collard 1971-1972, Ginger Cullen 1978-1979, Stephen Krulik 1987-1988

(Photo taken in October 1997)

Max Sobel returned to visit with Past-presidents at AMTNJ conferences and kept in touch with his former students who were attending these conferences as mathematics teachers now.



Nancy Cook Schultz was one of Max Sobel's last undergraduate students at MSU. She became a Max Sobel awardee in 2010 and served in several offices within AMTNJ.

An Interview with Max Sobel, Professor Emeritus, Montclair State University
Respectfully submitted by Deborah Ives

"The teacher is the single most important aspect of the learning process." Dr. Max Sobel emphasized his strong belief in this statement at the very start of a recent interview. Originally published in the September 1981 issue of the *Mathematics Teacher* during his tenure as NCTM president in an article titled, "Recipe for Revival: Recommendations for the Twenty-First Century," Dr. Sobel expressed his personal conviction that the mathematics educator remains the most vital key to their student's success.

Exactly thirty years later, Dr. Sobel spoke passionately about the creativity and imagination that is at the heart of the teaching profession in mathematics. "I tell my students that some math lessons must be rated with 3-D's: Dull, Deadly, and Destructive of all interest. These need to be replaced with 3-A's: Acceptance, Affection, and Achievement!"

Teaching in junior and senior high school into the 1950s after his undergraduate studies at Montclair State (BA, 1947), Dr. Sobel also taught at Rutgers University, Columbia University's Teachers College, and Stanford University while returning to Montclair State University in 1957. He subsequently served as AMTNJ president from 1958 – 1959. An author of over sixty books, Dr. Sobel has also served as Chairman of the New Jersey section of the Mathematical Association of America, Consultant to the National Science Foundation, the School Math Study Group, the National Research Council, and the Educational Testing Service, as well as NCTM President from 1980 through 1982.

During this time, the landmark publication, "An Agenda for Action" was released which led the way for NCTM's *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* in 1989. Dr. Sobel shared that he devoted much of his time emphasizing the area of problem solving because of the critical need to engage students in the thinking process. He stressed that teachers

learners to encourage an interest in mathematics.

As his students will fondly recall, Dr. Sobel has an enthusiasm that generates excitement and an energy for learning mathematics that is unforgettable. He shared his secret, “Always look for interesting items, puzzles, a problem that kids would never hear about unless you pose it to them...that is the whipped cream on the cake. No matter what you are teaching that day, spend five minutes during the period to stimulate your students to begin thinking about mathematics.” Despite the pressures of testing, “we must make the time for lessons that students will never forget.”

Dr. Sobel said that the most exciting recollections of his teaching career is contained in a huge folder filled with correspondence he has received from his former students. He recounted several examples and shared that he enjoys hearing about their progress and updates and will respond to any who write. Recently, he heard from a couple now teaching in New York, one of many who met in a methods course he taught and who have stayed in touch with him ever since!

As the first recipient of the NCTM Lifetime Achievement Award in Leadership, Teaching, and Service, Dr. Sobel stated that he is proud to recognize an outstanding mathematics educator in New Jersey each

year with an AMTNJ award that bears his name. He expressed a wish that in the future that individual also receive a famous reference book to help provide ideas that would interest their students, and implemented this suggestion by making the first donation for this purpose. He did so by awarding the most recent recipient, Nancy Schultz, with one of his favorite books, *Mathematics and the Imagination* by Edward Kasner and James R. Newman. Dr. Sobel wholeheartedly believes in supporting mathematics teaching and learning.

For your vision, Dr. Sobel, we are forever grateful.

*Article reprinted with permission from
Deborah Ives written in 2011*

Max Sobel 2003 MSU Math Dissertation Committee with Tamara
Lucas, Carla Narrett, Deby Ives, and Evan Maletsky
From Deby on 12/12/2016



Dr. Janice-Lynn Shuhan, 1/27/2017

Dr. Max Sobel and I became acquainted at “freshmen orientation” at MSU in the 70’s. He was the keynote speaker. Had I not been truly sold on the teaching profession, this amazing speaker and writer inspired me enough to complete MSU’s Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral programs while pursuing a long career in math education. Has Dr. Sobel inspired my style as an educator? Well, throughout my 35+ years of teaching I have been very fortunate to be recognized nationally, statewide, countywide, and districtwide as a high school math teacher who entertained “creative” methods of teaching Algebra and Geometry through the *multiple intelligences*. I can surely avow that Max Sobel ignited those dormant ‘outside the box’ methodologies in me to motivate high school students to enjoy mathematics for many years. Dr. Max Sobel *was* the ideal host for welcoming students into the math program, and the teaching profession.

After attending many NCTM and AMTNJ conferences in the 80s-90s and experiencing Dr. Sobel’s “standing room only” inspirational lectures on “Motivation,” it became apparent that there were hundreds of other teachers who needed to take a professional day for their “jumpstart,” or as I call it, “The Max Fix.” Invariably he would arrange for me to participate as an audience “plant” for his many “math-magic” tricks. (Oops, sorry Max! The secret is out!) One time he had me come up and sing “Happy Birthday” to *Évariste Galois*. In a variety of ways, Max Sobel clearly succeeded in engaging and enlightening every teacher who needed to return to their classroom with something new and exciting to motivate their students. He was a true rejuvenator. It was also at these conferences that I met his lovely wife, Manya. Max and Manya Sobel eventually began attending some of my theatrical performances. We struck up a warm and mutually supportive friendship, and met and corresponded with each other quite often. In the early 90s, quite unexpectedly, Max announced his “quasi-retirement” from MSU, and it seemingly corresponded with some conferences that he asked me to sit in the front with Manya--a place where she would normally prefer not to sit. Given his 40 years of service it was not unrealistic that he would retire; it just seemed out of character at the time. But in retrospect, it was *exactly* in his character.

After 15 years of teaching under my belt I had returned to MSU to complete a Masters in Administration and Supervision. (I was only fortunate enough to sit in Max Sobel’s classroom as an undergrad for a short course of “Methods of Teaching Mathematics,” before student teaching). A few years after completing the Master’s program- with Max’s encouragement- I enrolled in the Doctoral program. Two years into the Doctoral program I lost my mother to a rare and inoperable brain tumor and was

not sure how I would find the strength of spirit to continue with any program. When it was diagnosed, my mom was already in stage four of a rapidly growing 'butterfly' tumor, and given eight months to live. Naturally the teacher in me planned the next eight months of our lives together. As Murphy's Law would have it she hemorrhaged in eight weeks, went into a coma on Mother's Day, and died ten days later at age 64. Max had met my parents and was very supportive during these gloomy days. In fact, it was around that time when he told me he had to retire from everything to personally take care of his wife Manya, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Max Sobel's natural nurturing nature was extraordinary both in his professional and personal life.

Max continued to supportively inspire and encourage me to continue by writing and publishing throughout the program, which I did. Max and Manya attended my dissertation defense on December 4, 2006, and together their special warmth provided me with the strength I needed to persevere into becoming the seventh candidate to complete the Doctoral program at MSU. On the elevator on the way out of the building, Max shyly requested that if I "now had some extra time, [he] could use some help with Manya?" (who was then in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease). Naturally, having some first-hand experience in caring for my mother this way, I was more than willing to volunteer and my meaningful friendship with Manya was born. Unknowingly at the time, this choice ultimately became the path to healing my own broken spirit. Continuing the care for another woman in need was the answer to easing the pain of losing my mother so quickly. It was a God-sent request for me to provide the support that the Sobels needed. Max Sobel's wisdom about such spiritual issues of life was endless. We became the best of friends.

Needless to mention our many trips to Valley Hospital over the next few years put us on a first name basis with many of the angels on their caring staff, until Manya's health stabilized. Max had finally relinquished his hesitation for hiring aides to care for Manya (at home) by the end of 2008. Nevertheless, I knew in my mind and heart that my role was to continue to visit, cover open slots, and oversee the daily activity -if only to inspire and encourage him as he had done for me and so many others throughout their teaching careers. Joining 'Max's mall walkers' at Garden State Plaza was the beginning to bringing Max back into the swing of his own life. He and Manya, my husband and I also frequented the Fairlawn dining circuit twice a week to keep the spirits high and the faith alive. We even celebrated our joint anniversaries together each year. Aside from sharing the same wedding anniversaries, Max's birthday was ironically the same day as my father's and Manya's birthday was only three days after my mother's, which always seemed numerically uncanny. They were a wonderful loving couple for us to emulate.

It was unfortunate that just as Manya's health was in a safe holding pattern, it was now Max's turn. He found himself fighting back from three near-death events: a stroke which caused a right-side paralysis for about a year, a sodium deficiency that seemed to cause unexpected collapses, and the horrific backwards-fall-of- 2013 on the night of his wedding anniversary in 2013. I was in the fortunate position of being able to help Max learn to walk, type, and write again. (We even later co-authored an article together,

which appeared in (Vol.69 Issue 1 of) *The New Jersey Mathematics Teacher* journal, 2011). Imagine the feeling of being given the opportunity to give back to a teacher who helped you? But then even a bigger challenge fell into my lap (literally). During his sodium collapse I happened to be the only one left in the house. The night aide had left, and after calling 911 so many times in the past, I knew that there was only one volunteer-ambulance which would usually take much too long to arrive. I hoisted him onto my right shoulder in a fireman's carry (down a few steps) to my car and rushed him to ER where he was immediately treated. (Somehow when one needs the strength, one finds it). Though Max overcame the first two incidents, the third was surely his biggest battle of all-next to WWII: The Battle of the Bulge of course, when he was awarded a purple heart for taking a bullet in the line of duty. But when all of the doctors claimed there was "no hope for his return," he made it back to us once again—from Van Dyk to Kessler to home -and even learning to walk about 2000 steps again at Garden State Plaza (with and without his walker or wheelchair). Like in the Battle of the Bulge, it was a long hard march. But Max was always up for the challenge. From the day after my dissertation defense until Max Sobel's death, I never regretted spending a few hours of my day with the Sobels. Max was always a kind, respectful and appreciative individual. His stamina was remarkable. It was indeed a decade of blessings.

Professionally, Max Sobel was a champion of the classroom, an insightful writer, an innovative motivational speaker, and an inspiration for all math teachers. Personally, he was a hero, a visionary, and a *true warrior of the human spirit*. which makes it ironically symbolic that he should take his final breath on Veteran's Day. It was an honor to be his friend for 39 years. I will miss his sense of class, his insight, his encouragement, his wisdom, his wit, and his smile.

In the word cadence of one of his own lecture introductions: "2,4,6,8, [...knowing him was] truly great."



Dr. Max Sobel, Dr. Janice-Lynn Shuhan, and Manya Sobel (Max's wife) on his 85th birthday.