

Centennial Year 3 Minute Talk

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The Shabbat pamphlet that most of you are now using as a bookmark in your prayer book declares that our congregation is a Bet Midrash, a Community of Study, a Bet T'fillah, a house of prayer, and a Bet K'neset, a place of gathering. Beth Israel has been all of those things to me.

One of the things I learned in this Bet Midrash was to be able to stand here without shaking too badly and not feeling like I might faint at any moment. I learned to print my talk in 16 point type and to triple space it so I could see it just by glancing at it – and I learned that from Rabbi Weinberg even before he needed reading glasses. It was learned as I became an adult Bat Mitzvah in 2005 along with 6 other women who were all young enough to be my daughters. Someone had just given me a bookmark that had a George Eliot quote, “it is never too late to be what you might have been.” At that late point in my life I had just learned to decode Hebrew and had spent a year in a great class with Rabbi Weinberg. The opportunities for study and growth continued to present themselves, both in lectures or classes, or in the kind of growth that comes when you accept a position of responsibility and you aren't even sure what you will be expected to do but you learn along the way. I have never – not even once - been sorry I dragged myself out of the house to attend a talk here or to take on a job.

Whenever one buys a new computer these days there is so much more memory that whatever one had on the old one just gets transferred. As a result, in my case, I have saved all sorts of TBI stuff: Sisterhood minutes, ads from the old ad book, recipes, committee reports and several of these three minute talks over the years. One was given on a Yom Kippur afternoon, also in 2005. Fortunately, Yom Kippur afternoon is not the most well attended event so I survived. However, in looking back at that talk I cannot imagine what prompted me to share a moment in my life in which I

thought I had felt that connection with the One. It was something I had never even communicated to my husband and I haven't spoken of it since. In leading up to that confession I explained that I had never felt especially moved by being in Evanston Township High School. To me, it was, and still is, just a high school auditorium. It looks quite nice with everything that has been brought from our home base here, but an architectural masterpiece that moves you to the core it is not. Neither is this room. It's our Bet T'fillah but it's really more like a Skokie bilevel than a mansion. Sometimes what I find most fascinating about it is the ability of our congregants to turn it back from a rowdy birthday party room into a sanctuary in minutes, including vacuuming the carpet. In other words, what really moves me is the people – not the space.

At this place of gathering, our Bet K'nesset I have been privileged to be included in a number activities to help in some small way to repair the world. It's more than 25 years ago that we were welcoming newly arrived Jews from the Soviet Union. For several summers I helped serve meals at the soup kitchen at the Second Baptist Church. The Just Congregations project opened my eyes to a lot of things, especially the need for universal health care. However, it wasn't until we began planning for the arrival of a family through Refugee One last year that I sadly became aware of the limitations of my years. I knew I couldn't schlepp heavy things or even carry groceries up the stairs to an apartment. I couldn't even count on parking in a crowded neighborhood and walk up stairs to tutor a child to help him or her catch up to an American class, and that's my specialty. I could write a check, and I did, to the best of my ability, but that's pretty small. And then I had the pleasure of watching the next generations jump right in to do what was needed. They are lighting the way to the future.

This space, this room, has also been the scene for me to celebrate and to mourn. As you know, when there is a funeral, the casket sits right there. After my husband died the image of it burned on my brain and I saw it every time I walked in to this place. The image blurs a bit after time, but even 22 ½ years later, if my mind wanders I can still see it. However, two weeks ago Rich Rotberg spoke about how this congregation comes together in support at a time of grief, and I can still remember how it felt like the whole synagogue had its arms around me.

Luckily, love walked into my life again and I was married in this very room. And not long after, the ultimate joy, the naming of a grandchild. On that occasion my son said a few words and in making a point he said, "My mother is right." Rabbi reminded him that he had a number of witnesses who heard him say that.

A month ago Sisterhood Temple Beth Israel celebrated its 100th birthday with a special weekend. Rabbi Marla Feldman, the Executive director of WRJ, spoke on Friday evening and Saturday morning services and on Sunday at our board meeting. Koleynu sang. There was an extra nice oneg on Friday evening and a lovely luncheon on Saturday. It was a great weekend. Because I had had some minor surgery in the fall I had missed several board meetings and wasn't there when the clipboards went around to sign up for tasks necessary to make the weekend go smoothly. I didn't bake, I didn't set up, I didn't have a speaking part in the service. I just sat and enjoyed and kvelled at how the next generation managed, lighting the way to the future. I'm learning to let go.

I mentioned before that I have never been sorry that I've taken on a job at temple. I need to thank the Jewish Life Council for putting me to the task of creating this talk because it has made me look back and reflect on the part this community and these people have played in my life. To paraphrase Jacob: maybe God was in this place and I didn't know it.