

Shabbat Personal Reflection

Shabbat shalom. My name is Joan Hakimi and my family and I have been members of TBI for 22 years. I'm here tonight because Susan Zoline asked me to share some reflections with you on my experience as a long time member of TBI. I don't think I have anything terribly profound to offer you. But what do I have to share, during the celebration of TBI's 100 year anniversary, is my tremendous gratitude for the place TBI has had the life of my family. My children, Nathan and Elizabeth, were 7 and 4 respectively when we became members. They are now 28 and 25 and they both have a strong Jewish identity and lots of memories of the years they spent in this building. They went thru consecration (we still have the little torahs they were given when they began their Jewish education), attended Sunday school, learned Hebrew, had their bar and bat mitzvahs and were confirmed in this sanctuary, all under the loving care and direction of Rabbi Weinberg and Lori Sagarin and a wonderful group of teachers. Their strong Jewish identity has its roots in this congregation, in the experiences we had here as a family, and in the relationships and friendships we've developed over the last 22 years.

I didn't always have a strong Jewish identity or connection to Jewish life. My life decisions weren't generally based on anything Jewish, yet somehow they led me to this place. I believe it was Albert Einstein who said there are no coincidences; coincidences are G_d's way of remaining anonymous. My ex-husband and I moved to Skokie because the schools were good and we could afford a house here. We serendipitously sent our kids to Gan Yeladim because we needed child care in a hurry when our nanny left for a family emergency and the Gan had space for them. The fact that it was a Jewish preschool was nice, but not all that important or meaningful at the time. That started to change when my kids started making friends at the Gan and I began meeting and making friends with some of the parents. I started to learn about things going on in the Jewish community – things like the Walk with Israel, the Folk Arts Festival – and we started participating as a family. Gradually, the thought occurred to me that we should start sending our kids to Sunday school, and that meant joining a synagogue. I met Lori Sagarin, who had recently been hired as the educator at TBI, in a mom and tots class when her daughter, Eliana, and my daughter, Ellie, were 2 years old. I told her we were thinking about joining a shul and she encouraged us to visit TBI. It took awhile before we got around to it. But when Nathan, at the age of 7, announced, "If the bible was in the library, it would be in the fiction section" and said that "Hebrew is a useless language, except for being able to read torah at your bar mitzvah, so why bother learning it," and Ellie announced that she was going to marry Nick, a Christian boy in her kindergarten class, so her children would be able to celebrate both Chanukah and Christmas, it was clearly time to follow up on Lori's recommendation and call to get information about TBI.

Our actual introduction to TBI came in the form of an invitation to attend a family Shabbat dinner and early service. I was skeptical, my husband said we couldn't afford a temple membership, and our kids resisted going someplace unfamiliar where they didn't think they'd know anyone and they were sure they wouldn't like the food. But when we came to our first family Shabbat dinner, we found warm, welcoming people, a dues structure we could manage, and families we knew from East Prairie School who we didn't even know were Jewish. It was a good start and here we are 22 years later.

TBI clearly shaped the lives of my children in so many ways – more than I'd ever expected when we made the decision to join. But even more surprising to me is all the ways in which our involvement shaped MY life and helped solidify MY Jewish identity. The connection to Judaism and Jewish life that had been missing all my life was made here at TBI. Since coming here, I've learned so much about what it means to be Jewish, both religiously and culturally. I've experienced what it means to be part of a strong, loving community of people with whom I've been able to share my life, to celebrate the good things and get tons of support through the bad ones. The connections were made at Shabbat dinners, at family retreats, at Torah study classes, in beginning Hebrew classes,. They were made with ten other adults as we studied with Rabbi Weinberg and had an adult b'nai mitzvah when I was 48. So many members of the congregation came to celebrate with us they had to expand the sanctuary to fit everyone! Connections were made when I was asked to join the temple board and spent four years learning about the inner workings of TBI, and again when I became a member of the sisterhood board. They continue to be made every time I attend a Purim spiel, a fund raising event, high holiday services, artisan fairs. They are made and strengthened every time I buy coffee at the nosh café and hang out with other people who are hanging out on a Sunday morning. I make new connections every time I mentor a b'nai mitzvah student from a family I'd never met before, and my spiritual connections are strengthened every time I see the students I mentored having the Torah passed to them by their grandparents and parents during their b'nai mitzvah service.

It's hard to imagine my life had we not found our way to TBI. There are so many things here that shaped our life as a family, my children as young, developing Jews, and me as an individual whose life has been so greatly enriched by discovering what it really means to be Jewish on multiple levels. It's hard to express how grateful I feel and how blessed I am to have this congregation, Rabbi Weinberg, Lori, and all the wonderful people I've met here and have the honor of having in my life. Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if our nanny hadn't had to leave suddenly and we wouldn't have found the Gan and I wouldn't have met Lori and we hadn't landed here. I agree with Albert Einstein - there are no coincidences and we were meant to be here. Happy 100th anniversary TBI, Shabbat Shalom, and Happy New Year!