

As you may know, I'm a Russian scholar, so you won't be surprised to learn that I've titled this brief talk "War and Peace." Why "War" ? (Actually, "gentle skirmish" is more accurate, but that doesn't sound as good.) Because as a child, to my parents' dismay, I dropped out of religious school at three Hyde Park synagogues, one after the other: Rodfei Zedek, Isaiah Israel, and KAM. Why "Peace"? Because decades later I finally found meaningful and enjoyable Jewish education here at TBI.

You might wonder what was wrong with those three religious schools, and the answer is: I don't know! The blame may well be mine, or maybe mine and theirs. All I know is that I loved regular school, and did not love religious school. The only pleasure I remember was at KAM; I stuck it out there longest because I was able to sing in Max Janowski's children's choir, which was a joy. I expect I would have responded well to Bat Mitzvah preparation, but that wasn't available to girls in my time. I tried to study Hebrew at the University of Chicago Hillel while I was a student, but I was deeply into Russian then, and couldn't keep up the Hebrew..

Fast-forward to 1969, when Harvey and I and our four-year-old twins, Kate and Mary, moved to Champaign, where we remained on the University of Illinois faculty for 33 years. We loved Champaign's Sinai Temple and our many friends in Champaign-Urbana, especially Rabbi Isaac Neuman. A Holocaust survivor of several camps, including Auschwitz, he made Jewish history come alive. I could have had a good Jewish education at Champaign's Sinai Temple if I hadn't been traveling so often to Russia and other exotic destinations. For some years I chaired the Adult Education committee, and brought in some wonderful speakers, but I was rarely there to hear them.

We came back to Chicago in 2002 and lived in the South Loop for nine years. In the city we joined Kol Ami, a friendly all-adult congregation that had been South Shore temple. (We met in Water Tower Place, on the professional floor, above the stores, so the shopping was good.) Again I organized adult education programs, but Kol Ami didn't last long after our longtime rabbi, who was a wonderful educator, left, and after a series of short-term rabbis, we closed our doors.

Finally, in 2007, Harvey and I arrived at TBI. Our daughters, longtime friends of Rabbi Weinberg, Lori, and many members from their OSRUI days, had joined, and our four granddaughters were beginning religious school and having lots more fun than I ever did.

Here I've been learning about Jewish music, and singing it, with Koleynu and Marla. I study Torah with Rabbi Weinberg and Hebrew with Rabbi Sagarin. I mentored Jessie and Cooper as they prepared for their b'not mitzvahs, and will do the same for Jamie and Teagan. I still fly around the world, but less frequently. After 100 years, TBI is thriving, a good place to be for me and my family. And I'm delighted to be back in religious school. This time I won't drop out!

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