

TBI Presentation
January, 26, 2018

Good Shabbos, I am honored to have been asked to speak tonight about my Jewish Journey.

My Jewish roots and I go back a long time. I grew up on the west side of Chicago, one block south of St. Thomas Aquinas Church. My family lived in a large 3 story apartment building, and we were the only Jews there. Everyone else was of good Irish Catholic stock.

My parents were culturally Jewish, and spoke excellent Yiddish, however, neither had any formal religious training.

My first Jewish experience, aside from my bris which, thankfully, I don't recall, came at five or six years of age while playing with a neighbor, Patty Horan, who, while practicing her catechism, accused me of murdering her god. Tearfully, I raced up two flights of stairs and in near hysteria cried out, "Mom, I didn't do it!"

A few years later my father told me that it was my grandmother's dying wish that I have a Bar Mitzvah. "Great," I said, "What is it and when do I get it?" As you can see, I was fairly ignorant of Jewish law and custom.

I was promptly signed up at a traditional congregation and I hated every minute I was there. The school building was housed in an old Victorian Mansion that had been re-purposed. Think the "Addams Family" and you'll get the picture. The environment was repressive as were the teachers.

I rebelled and refused to go. My parents then signed me up at a conservative congregation where I had one friend. Here I learned to read Hebrew and sight read tropes. I was pretty good at both. Eventually my Haftorah was assigned, however, I had no tutor or mentor as we have here at TBI.

I learned to chant about two thirds of the Haftorah, figuring I'd do improv on the ending. After all it was baseball season. Only the rabbi and a couple of old men who were always at services knew I was faking it. I could tell from their glares. My family was busy talking to each other and kvelling, no one listened.

That concludes part I.

After my Bar Mitzvah I didn't set foot in a synagog again for more than 30 years. I had forgotten how to read tropes and my Hebrew was very rusty.

Betsy, who many of you knew, advised that it was time for the kids to get their religious training. I said, "Okay." She said we should join TBI as we knew people there. I said, "Okay."

We attended our first shabbat at the building in Albany Park. I was impressed with the stained glass windows and said to Betsy, "Hey, just like St. Thomas!" She said, "SH." Then an organ started to play and I said, "They have an organ here, just like..." And she said, "Sh." A choir began singing from a balcony and I said, Hey..." and she said, "SH."

But the biggest shock came when the congregation, none of whom wore yarmelkes or talit, began to recite prayers. Everywhere I knew that a S sound should be in the Hebrew,--- was pronounced with a T sound. I whispered, "Amazing, everyone here appears to have a speech impediment!" And you know the response I got.

But TBI was where my real Jewish identity began to develop. The kids received a good Jewish education. We began to participate in more activities, services, social and educational programs. I made good friends, and was asked to be on the Board. My interest in Judaism and study of it deepened here. I was asked to co-chair the search committee that hired rabbi Weinberg. This was for me a very great honor.

I've since taken on many other temple offices and responsibilities. But the true meaning of belonging to the TBI community was not fully realized until Betsy's death, when so many people reached out and gave me their love and support. This was the experience that helped me fully understand what it means to be a proud and connected member of this congregation.

I started my talk with "Good Shabbos and will end with Shabbat Shalom. Thank you.

#