

## Arnie Oskin's Reflections on his Jewish Journey April 6, 2018

In 1976 Faye and I moved into Skokie and joined TBI when our daughter Sarah was named in temple. We were encouraged to turn our donation for the baby naming into temple membership and have been members ever since. Our connection to TBI began a bit earlier as our nephew, Neal Lieder was preparing for Bar Mitzvah. His father supported Neal's decision to become a bar mitzvah but he was not religious and did not want to be personally involved in the religious ceremony so 'Uncle Arnie' stood in. Rabbi Lorge must not have been able to conceive of a father not wanting to do this and we do laugh to this day as he kept referring to Neal's Mother as, the "widow" Mrs. Lieder.

My Jewish journey began being raised in Buffalo, N.Y in a Conservative Kosher home. My Father, at age 10, Jack, fled the pogroms of Ukraine of 1917-1918 Immediately after his Grandparents and most other family members were killed by Cossack Nationalists. Our Mother, Edna Levine's family, fled from Lomza, Poland during pogroms of 1893 when they came to the US. While undereducated only having an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education, Our parents spoke Russian, Polish and Yiddish. They eeked out a living selling kosher poultry, tailoring, aircraft defense factory work, bakery sales and taxi driver work-while raising 4 children all of who are college educated. It is a very typical Jewish immigrant/refugee story.

Knowing the benefits a temple could provide for their children, my parents involved us in a complete Jewish experience. We attended synagogue seven days a week. We had little money but family, synagogue and school were our priorities. I participated in Jewish Boy Scouts, sports and BBYO. I attended the JCC overnight camp as a camper, counselor and supervisor from ages 8 to 21. All of these are some of my fondest childhood memories. Which is why TBI has been important to me and my family. We were instilled in the enrichment of the temple life and the importance of 'giving back'.

As a member of BBYO I attended the Israel Summer Institute of 1963. Our group had the privilege of studying for two days with Otto Frank in Amsterdam that summer. Yael Dayan, Moshe Dayan's daughter was my group's mentor and leader for ten weeks. My youth and college experience led me to study history, social work and psychology.

Judaism impacted my Army connection which began during the Viet Nam era. While I was on active duty enlisted as part of my basic training at Fort Polk I made lots of friends in the mess

hall since I wouldn't eat ham, pork or anything cooked in bacon fat. Everyone vied to line up for my portions. I was never so thin again. Jews were discriminated against in the Army at that time and we were all treated harshly. Our best supports were from the African American drill sergeants. Many years later on active duty in Germany 1996, as I remained in the Army Reserve, I served as a Jewish lay leader for American troops. During that time I also volunteered serving with Jewish Christian Alliance with Jewish immigrant families from the Soviet Union. In Worms, Germany I was able to participate in the Progressive Reform High Holiday services. In 2000 -2001 I served as a civilian clinical social worker for the military in Cornwall, England. I also participated in the Cornwall Reform Congregation and Limmud Jewish Studies.

My journey at TBI has led me to many rewarding experiences. When we became involved with sponsoring a Lao Hmong family, Rabbi Lorge shared strategies and helped to recruit donations to assist this family, much as TBI has been recently involved in. It was my pleasure to serve on many TBI committees from the beginning and acting as Brotherhood President and Chaplain.

Our children are also very connected to TBI and hopefully now that they are parents they will also instill these values in their children. When Sarah and David were the right age they both had the joy and privilege of becoming volunteer aides to Suzi Lorge's toddler program. They both went to OSRUI camp and one year, Sarah even baby sat at camp for the Weinberg's youngest children while Rabbi and Jodi took time out to tutor Sarah in preparation for her own Bat Mitzvah. We are most grateful for these connections and to TBI. My own years at TBI have been a continuing warm and positive experience.