

Shabbat Shalom. It is an honor for me to stand before you on this Shabbat to share my Jewish and TBI journey.

Like many of you, my Jewish journey started at birth. I was born into a very Jewish family. Every aspect of Judaism was important. Religiously, we were always affiliated with a synagogue, celebrated all major holidays and kept a kosher home. Socially, it was very important to my parents that their children grew up in a Jewish neighborhood and had Jewish friends and schoolmates. Educationally, I was given every opportunity to succeed. I was very lucky to have educated parents who could help and guide me and expected me to be successful as I grew into adulthood. I knew they supported charitable organizations and witnessed them help the less fortunate. My mother was the religious arm of the family. Her parents were founding members of Congregation Beth Jacob in Albany Park. It was her influence that kept us involved in synagogue life and the keeping of a kosher home. Though my father was not particularly religious, I have never met a prouder Jew—except maybe for me. His identity as a Jew was paramount to who he was. He spoke Yiddish fluently and loved talking about his old Jewish neighborhoods on the west and south sides. One final story about my parents. When telling them about a girl I liked when I was in the fourth grade, their first question was “Is she Jewish?” Yes, she was.

The seminal Jewish moment in my life was when my son Jacob was born. I had witnessed many members of my family, especially extended family, grow further away from Judaism, some even barely having a religious or cultural affiliation with what was the bedrock of our family for generations. I realized very quickly that Jacob was the future of Judaism in our family. I was and am dedicated to ensuring my son is a proud Jew, understands our religious practices, traditions and cornerstones of our faith, feels at home in the synagogue and will one-day pass all of this onto his children. It was this dedication and my desire to become more involved in the Jewish community that motivated us to join Temple Beth Israel when Jacob was sixteen months old.

As I have said many times and to many people, I love Temple Beth Israel and joining was one of the best decisions our family has made. We have truly found our home away from home at TBI. We loved it from the moment we joined and our dedication has only grown stronger through the years. When we joined, I realized that just “joining” a shul wasn’t enough. I knew if we were to set a good example for our son and to truly connect with the congregation, we needed to get involved. I have had so much fun and made amazing friendships through volunteering at events, attending services and holding various positions on the board. I hope I have positively impacted TBI and its members at least half as much as the shul has impacted and enriched my life.

Why am I such a firm believer in Temple Beth Israel? I thoroughly enjoy the upbeat nature of our services, but there’s so much more. The Rabbi is one of the smartest, patient and compassionate people I have ever met and he always greets my family with a smile. Our musical director has a beautiful voice and Michelle and I consider her family to be friends. The Educational Director has literally gone the extra mile to help my son feel successful in Hebrew school. A sixteen-year-old girl who works with my son in his Hebrew School class is truly dedicated to him. TBI has gone above and beyond for my family. What else could I possibly ask for in a temple? I also think about memorable events that make us special, such as Naomi Talsky’s Bat Mitzvah and the Erev Shabbat service when we honored the long-term members of the congregation.

At Temple Beth Israel, it’s not the size of your wallet that matters, it’s the size of your heart. We have the most amazing congregation and I am truly blessed to be a part of it. Our synagogue is a community and a community is only as strong as its members. I marvel at the intelligence, caring, friendliness, warmth and dedication of our membership. Every time I walk through the doors, I have a great experience and my belief in Temple Beth Israel and all that it represents is reinforced.

Shabbat Shalom.