

Mom and dad started taking us to Sinai Temple in Champaign when we were toddlers. My earliest memories are at our first temple. I don't even know where it was, but I think there was a beautiful chandelier. Mrs Brotherson was our preschool teacher. Then there was a fire.

Fast forward a few years and then we were taking what felt like really long drives out into the corn fields to get to our new temple. It was a big beautiful modern building. It was out in the middle of nowhere surrounded in every direction by corn. We loved that temple. Everything about it. Our classmates. Our teachers. The community. The climate and the culture. The feeling of belonging. The small intimate family-like feeling even though it was quite a large congregation.

Our rabbi, Rabbi Neuman. He raised us in a way that we thought no other rabbi could.

Looking back on what we had, this quiet, isolated, insular, community, surrounded by corn fields, may have just been a preview of what was to come. A hint of what was waiting for us. A link, a bridge, a connection to the Jewish community outside of Champaign.

And, what we didn't know then, what would become the foundation and a turning point in our lives: Olin sang. Someone at Sinai Temple knew about Olin sang. People were going there in the 70s. Maybe earlier.

We went to Osruil for our first summer in 1975 and never looked back. For some reason they only sent us for 2 weeks. Little did they know, we quickly found a home away from home! We went for 8 weeks for the next 6 years as campers. And then another half dozen years on staff, from machon through multiple years as unit heads.

Camp became everything. There were camp friends and school friends. The countdown to next summer started the minute we boarded the bus on the last day of camp or the last day of take down as staff or as unit heads.

When we came home from camp, we went into our rooms, locked our doors, and alternated between sleeping and crying for a week. It didn't matter if we were 10 or if we were 18. We were home with our parents who loved us unconditionally, but we weren't connected to OSRUJ anymore...

The cornfields still surrounded us. School friends didn't or couldn't understand camp.

Remember: In the 70s and 80s, if I wanted to get in touch with my best friend from camp in Evanston, I had to pick up a pencil and write a letter or make an expensive long distance phone call. Remember the cornfields? We had broken through, but now what? The word connection had a completely different meaning 35 or 40 years ago when we were desperate for a "camp fix."

Fast forward through college. Mom and dad were still in Champaign. We would go home for some holidays and they would come up to Chicago for some, but it didn't always work out. A group of us from camp used to meet religiously (Let's use that word loosely) at Jack's on Touhy. Every Tuesday. For years. We met there so often that,

although she might not agree with me, it's possible that subconsciously, Lisa Friedland's oldest daughter, Emily, just named her son, Jack. Some of the Jack's crowd went to tbi and one time we heard them say that high holiday services were held at ETHS. One year when we couldn't make it work for the holidays with mom and dad in Champaign, we went to the high school.

We had both been teaching for a while, so walking into a high school felt comfortable and normal. Why not? As we walked down the hall, the first thing we saw was a bunch of little kids in the cafeteria having fun. So we went in. As we approached, we found a lot of happy people. Our camp friends, with their small children, celebrating the holiday. We found the right place. An hour later, another group of camp friends, some of our counselors, came in with their children. Definitely the right place. We went to services there for years. Looking back, it's possible that we didn't even know there was another service going on in the auditorium!

Fast forward again. We each had kids of our own and it was time to join a temple. Tbi feels very much like Sinai. That was a strong contributing factor. Everyone is welcome. Anyone can find a place. Camp is everywhere and in everything. It is difficult to separate camp and tbi. The people who we consider family, who have raised us, who have done for us what we want done for our children are all in some way connected to tbi.

Lori Sagarin gave us our first jobs right out of college. She supported us without question. She believed in us because she had the courage to. She stood by us, even when it wasn't good for her. Lori did what we only hope we can teach our children to do someday. That had to have been almost 30 years ago. Now, we are together again at tbi.

When we were 10, Michael Lorge was our first unit head in tzofim and Susie Fox was our first counselor. We were nervous to be away from home for the first time, but they made us feel safe and happy. More than 40 years later, Michael and Susie continue to make us happy, together at tbi.

When my parents first moved to Chicago, they asked us if we were going to join a temple. We said we go to ETHS for services. They said, good for us.

They had belonged to a synagogue in the city, but it closed, so they wanted to know more about tbi. They said that it sounded in some ways like Sinai Temple. But Sinai Temple did not have Mike Weinberg. When Rabbi Weinberg is leading the service or playing the guitar or doing everything that he does, as far as I'm concerned, I'm still at camp.

Rabbi Weinberg brings the best of camp with him: the love, the compassion, the kindness; he has brought the genuine feeling of making people want to be there; and he has brought a soft sweet sense of humor that keeps us coming back for more. I remember the feeling of sitting in services at camp like it was yesterday.

That was 35 years ago.

My parents joined tbi almost 10 years ago so the family is together again. We are so happy to have tbi. And to have had tbi throughout the years, planting seeds and leaving deep roots to grow throughout our lives.

We hope that our girls are growing at tbi and at camp much in the same fashion as we did at Sinai Temple. We are grateful to have been able to stay connected throughout the years. Even though the manner in which people stay connected may be ever changing, may the need and the desire to be connected remain a constant.

We don't know if we found tbi or tbi found us. And We're not sure if the distinction is that important.

Kate and Mary