

Shofar article, July-August, 2012

Shalom! This is the first article I've written for the Shofar in many years. Actually, the last time I wrote an article, it was on a typewriter. So, first things first, allow me to explain why I have accepted the role of President of Temple Beth Ahm -- for the second time. The first was 32 years ago. Some might ask, "Hasn't he learned anything?"

The answer is yes.

I became president in 1980 by accident. True, I was First VP. But everyone knew that I would not take the Presidency because I had a young family and I travelled extensively. I still have the note that was handed to me by a secretary while I was in a large conference room in Chicago. Today I would have gotten a text. But we didn't have cell phones then. Anyway, the message was from my wife, and said simply, "Milt resigned. Congratulations! "

It took several minutes before I understood the meaning behind those three words. Milt Markowitz, TBA's President, had resigned suddenly for health reasons, leaving me to fill the void. With the help of some terrific people, especially Phyllis Brooks who was here when I could not be and took care of so much without even being asked, I was able to step into the shoes I didn't want to fill, and to serve a full term.

So why am I here now? Well, the easy answer is that Board Chair Audrey Rabinowitz, whom I've had the pleasure of knowing since JoAnn and I joined the temple, pulled me aside one Friday evening after services and asked me to consider taking the job. Audrey is small of stature but a powerful persuader. So I said yes. The longer answer, however, requires some background.

Throughout the past 30 years I have put what I learned here at TBA to use in other settings. I've been President and Chairman of the Board of the Jewish Federation of Monmouth County, twice. I was on the Board of Rutgers Hillel. I've also been a Trustee of the Homeowners Association in the development where JoAnn and I live.

In each instance, I've built on the knowledge I gained during my service to TBA. Thirty two years ago, I thought this synagogue was a special place. Now I know it is. Our children, and their children, consider this their spiritual home. My nephew married the daughter of another member, so our Temple family really is our extended family.

This reality was driven home for me several years ago, when I needed a kidney transplant. The people associated with this synagogue were unflagging in their support and provided endless comfort to our family. Thank God, the transplant was and continues to be successful. One minor side effect is that my immune system is suppressed, so I no longer shake hands with anyone. It's a small price to pay for a new life, one I am grateful for every single day.

While we've maintained our membership throughout the years, I really have done very little, except help when asked, donate what I can, and attend services regularly. Plus, as one of the many past presidents who are still members, I have the honor each Yom Kippur of walking in with the Torah. When Rabbi Malik came, however, I felt I really wanted to re-engage, to be part of what I thought would be a renewal of our shul. So here I am, on the eve of the temple's 50th anniversary.

What will the year bring? I'm not sure. I know I am looking forward to the pre-Selichot program on September 8th, because I've been told by the 50th Anniversary Committee that it's going to be something extraordinary. I am confident that it will be the kick-off of an exciting, invigorating, and -- thanks to the Rabbi -- inspiring year.

The most important lesson I learned 32 years ago is this: when we work together, nothing is impossible. I look to you to help Temple Beth Ahm reflect its name and truly be a House for All The People.