

## **More than 4 Questions with Jacqui Lipschitz**

Interviewers: Josh Herz and Margie Searl, via Zoom, February 3, 2022

Jacqui grew up in Cape Town, South Africa, where she attended Jewish day school. In South Africa, she met her husband, Wayne, who told her 1) that he was never getting married and 2) that he was moving back to Rochester where he was going to get more training in dentistry at Eastman Dental Center. Clearly, (1) didn't remain in force, and she moved to Rochester with him in 1995. They stayed with Wayne's first cousin, Cyril Meyerowitz, and his wife Shula, and through a Shabbat dinner at Isobel Goldman's, she met Karen Zivan, who introduced her to Eleanor Lewin and Carol Leichtner. Karen suggested that Jacqui would be a good asset for the religious school at Temple B'rith Kodesh, and Eleanor hired her. As she had gone to a Jewish day school in South Africa, she was fluent in Hebrew and Jewish religion and culture. She "moved in" to TBK and taught, ran Kollel, taught every age, family education, did filing, anything that needed doing. So - like many, they "came for a year" and stayed. She immediately felt at home at TBK, and felt very warmly welcomed. Still, there were differences from South Africa. In her community in South Africa, around 95% of Jewish kids in her generation went to Jewish day school, whereas it was a much smaller minority who attended Jewish day school here. In Cape Town, if a family had a simcha, it would be in the newspaper and the whole community would be invited to celebrate. There was much more affiliation with synagogue in South Africa, even though people's level of observance might be very different within one congregation. People were much more physically affectionate. However, the support that she received from TBK was wonderful...when she had her babies and was teaching, she put the baby in a one of the offices, and everyone helped to take care of them.

The Rochester Jewish community was very much like where she had come from in South Africa, with a passion for Israel, social action, small communities or chavurot. She remained working at Temple B'rith Kodesh for ten years, but chose to attend synagogue at a different congregation, first Beth Shalom, and then Beth El. As she became more comfortable with the idea of working and praying in the same place, Jacqui and her family became members at Temple B'rith Kodesh. Her older child, Gabi, was named at Temple B'rith Kodesh, so her family connections go back around twenty-five years.

In 2006, Jacqui left TBK and worked at Hillel School for five years. A five-year stint at Federation gave her experience as director of family education and involvement with the with the PJ Library, which is now an international program that provides books with Jewish content to children and families. Jacqui's postgraduate education was obtained at Hebrew College in Boston in a Masters in Jewish Education program. This was a three year mid-career fellowship online program. As part of her PJ Connect program, Jacqui designed a project to bring families together. She selected four families who would each pick another four families and those twenty families would have Shabbat dinner once a month. She says that there are still connections among these families. An opening at the Temple B'rith Kodesh religious school as director brought her back to work at TBK, where she is proud of the way that the religious school continues to offer new ways of connecting with families and temple. For example, she has older students design and lead programs for the younger students because she feels that kids relate better to others who are closer to them in age. Jacqui wants everyone to be able to find something that is meaningful in the religious education program. During COVID, the school ran a full program, including delivering activity boxes to all the families in the region.

While she grew up within an Orthodox community, she is drawn to the Reform movement because of its commitment to social action in a structured way. She has been involved in many different projects: RAIHN, Keeping Our Promise, TEMPRO, the literacy project. She feels that if a social

action project has support by individuals in the congregation, the leadership will embrace it. She thinks that TBK does a good job keeping members focused on social action, on thinking about others. Jacqui also supports many charities in South Africa, where the need is so much more “in your face” than it is here. She comments that It is harder to help people to connect with the need here because people are much more insulated in the suburbs. She tries to integrate the social action piece into the religious school as much as possible. For example, they are having a day of collecting for TEMPRO, in K-7, where students bring an item to distribute to TEMPRO families. The Shinshinim will be helping by organizing a beach party to celebrate. To help the kids understand homelessness, Dan Gurell came into the classroom with two people who talked about their own experiences with homelessness. There is always a tzedakah element brought in when possible.

In her work with Keeping Our Promise, she assisted refugees that came to Rochester from Iraq and Afghanistan by accompanying them to the bank and helping them get their financial affairs set up. As an immigrant herself, she understood what their experience was like, and the culture shock coming to the United States, although being a native English speaker, she was mindful that their experience was so much more difficult because they did not speak the language. Through her experience with KOP, she was able to relive her own arrival in Rochester and she knew she could make it easier for someone else. Helping one person at a time is very satisfying for her, as she can see how much it matters to them and how it can help them become more confident in their American experience. Jacqui is a strong believer in the “starfish” story, in that you might only be able to help a small percentage of starfishes on the beach, but it really matters to each individual starfish, like each individual human.

Jacqui sees the future of TBK in continuing to encourage more members through programs like “Giving to Your Heart’s Content,” because no one is devalued because of giving less. It provides an opportunity to increase connections as no one is excluded because of ability to pay. The kid-centeredness of TBK is seen as a plus, and that there are so many ways to connect.

After COVID, she hopes to see TBK move in the direction of renewing a commitment to Chavurot, or something similar to the program that she developed in her MA thesis. She hopes that being a member of TBK will continue to mean all kinds of things, a place for everyone. TBK does a good job of being warm and welcoming, and she hopes to see it continue to be a place of diversity, where families feel comfortable bringing their embrace of religion in different ways. This diversity is and should never be a “thing,” it’s never an obstacle at TBK. We know who we are, and we can embrace all of our neighbors. This adds to our experience and doesn’t take anything away.

In her words, “It’s okay to leave the walls of the building and be out there in the community.” Jacqui encourages us to believe that you can be out there in the community without taking anything away from the Temple community. We do a good job doing this, and she would like to see us continue to do more.

Jacqui and Wayne have two adult children, Gabi and Matthew, and four animals. They also have many family members in South Africa, whom they visit twice a year. While they are a long way from their beginnings, they find Rochester to be a comfortable home, as they spend their 27th winter here!