Shana tova, everyone. It’s a joy and a blessing to be with all of you here, at our first High Holy Days as Congregation Am Tikvah.

My Jewish journey began with growing up in Portland, Oregon. We weren’t super religious or observant, but my family participated at our synagogue and in the community.

We went to services on holidays and on many Friday nights. Even as a child, the music and words of the prayers and blessings brought me a feeling of calmness and peace. I loved watching the candles being lit on Erev Shabbat and watching the Torah being walked around the sanctuary.

I wish I had time to tell you about my family’s Jewish roots and the people, past and more current, including many here at Am Tikvah, who have influenced me along the way. The road is filled with relatives, friends, teachers and others.

While in my heart I always maintained a strong identity, feeling and love for things Jewish, over the years, I became more and more disconnected from those things as life involved me in other activities.

Then, about seven years ago, I had this deep feeling (It was a voice in my head.) telling me that I wanted to become closer to Judaism. It was a craving for the comfort of the words and music of our prayers and the camaraderie of our community.

When I found B’nai Emunah, I felt so comfortable and was inspired by such dedicated and knowledgeable people. I ended up on various committees, on the board, and became involved with the merger. I mentioned craving community. So where did I end up, but as a co-chair of the Community Building Team that had been given several tasks aimed at bringing all us together.

It was inspiring during the process to observe a huge amount of dedicated and committed people working diligently to make the merger happen. Being part of that process to create our new shul has been incredibly meaningful to me and has been part of my story.

The journey continues. Today, it’s difficult to imagine being separated from our community and my Jewish life.

May everyone’s Yom Kippur be meaningful and may your fast be easy.