

## President's Message January 2014

'Tis the season. Hanukkah, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years. It is a busy time for an interfaith family and possibly a confusing time for a young child of an interfaith family being raised Jewish. I personally have firsthand experience, having grown up in a small Christian town in Western Maryland with an interfaith family.

My mother converted to Judaism to marry my father, who was raised orthodox in New York City. My mother brought to the marriage my two oldest brothers, who were then 7 and 10 years old. My father couldn't possibly take Christmas away from my brothers, and, thus, he allowed for a Christmas Tree and the interior of our house to be adorned with Christmas lights. My mother's family never missed a Sunday church service and one of my aunts was ordained as a minister. My mother's family hosted an annual Christmas party for my 25 cousins. I think I won the Christmas prize every year.

For many of my school years, I was the only Jewish student in the classroom. I was the only Jewish student in my high school graduating class. My teachers decorated the classroom for Christmas, the weekly spelling list was full of Christmas-related words and we were taught Christmas carols. My 10th grade English teacher was aware that I was Jewish and she added some Hanukkah words to our spelling list, and she asked me to discuss Hanukkah with the class.

I could easily have struggled with my religion, become shy about being Jewish or confused during the holiday season, but I did not. I attribute my religious pride to my parents. My parents were pro-active with me at an early age in educating me about other religions, comparing them to Judaism and most importantly, expressing the import of our heritage and how proud I should be of being Jewish, and its values.

I took my parents lead and explained Hanukkah to my classroom peers. I compared the family gathering and gift giving of Hanukkah to that of Christmas. I think my friends were jealous of the eight nights of gifts. I shared the story of the Maccabees and taught my classmates the draydel game. I clearly had a decided advantage. My friends even tried latkes, a delicacy that they never would have enjoyed, but for knowing me.

In reading this, you may think I made it a competition, Hanukkah vs. Christmas. I did not. I did not present Hanukkah as "better" or "right." Rather, I took the opportunity to show my teachers and classmates what happy holidays meant to me. For us all, it meant the season of bringing families together.

Hoping you each enjoyed your families this holiday season.

Mo Bauer