

June 2019 Message from President Howie Hirsch

My Jewish Journey, Part III

This third part of my Jewish Journey picks up after Sharon Herson asked me to assume the role of temple president.

It was as president that I seemed to find my religious calling. I have loved being the lay leader of the congregation. The best benefit of this job has been getting to know all the people who have come through the temple, particularly the ones who have been with me since the beginning: Sharon, Helen Mattson, Rhonda Jordan, and Marsha Gross. I consider the entire temple part of my family and I will do everything in my power to make your lives better.

What I am probably proudest of in my tenure as president are the relationships I have formed. I have so many good friends at this temple, and I truly consider it my second home.

A great benefit of being president is that I became at ease speaking in front of people – giving the announcements at each service and leading services when the Rabbi was away helped pave the way. How did this help me outside the temple? In 2007, when I saw that my business was headed for a rough time, a friend asked if I would be interested in a job at IBM. When I started interviewing, it became apparent that the main part of this job was the ability to be able to speak to and in front of people. With the experience that I received at the temple, I was enthusiastic about trying to do this for a living. I was offered the job and have been with IBM for the last 12 years.

Perhaps my proudest accomplishment at the temple was getting the lift installed. The year before we began that project, there was a funeral at the temple; an older gentleman came in and was unable to walk down stairs to the restroom. Gwen Nagorsky, the president at the time, and I had to carry him down the stairs! I vowed that day to do something about it. When I became president, that was my first order of business. I called a special general meeting to discuss the project and hoped to get congregational approval to spend the significant amount of money necessary to accomplish this goal.

We sat in the simcha room and went around the room asking everyone their opinions. The first half of the room was enthusiastic about the project, and at about the halfway point, a past president gave many reasons why we couldn't do this project. As he was a builder, we gave his arguments a great deal of weight. As we went around the second half of the room, people were not as enthusiastic as the first group. I then gave the first people who spoke a second chance, since they had heard some valid reasons why we couldn't do this.

As we finished hearing everyone out, my feeling was that we were not going to get approval. But the vote was something like 80% for and 20% against. I looked at Rabbi Lewis and asked what happened, and she said, "I think they trust you to do the right thing." We were able to put in the lift and every time I see it used, I think of the two people who

were foremost in my mind when we did this. They were Stanley Schick and Maxwell Gross, both of blessed memory. While they were my inspirations, I knew that many others would find this gift a blessing.

I also must thank Jeff Berkowitz at this point, as Jeff ran a fund raiser outside of the temple for a Shabbaton for Rabbi Lewis and managed to raise the money to finance the lift.

My next proudest moment was being able to watch my class of adult women become Bat Mitzvah and to have our other teacher, Charlotte Fels, be able to celebrate with these amazing women.

The last accomplishment to this point was finding a new rabbi after [Rabbi Lewis](#) to lead us into the future. I believe [Rabbi Dubin](#) is the perfect rabbi for us at this point in time and that we are very fortunate to have him as our spiritual leader.

There are so many other moments that I cherish with all of you, but they are too many to list.

I love you all and wish you nothing but the best.

Love, Howie

NOTE: Parts 1 & 2 can be found linked from the [Past Messages](#) page.

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