

*High Holy Day Appeal*  
**Rosh HaShanah Morning**  
**September 19, 2009 / 1 Tishrei, 5770**  
**George Mayer**

An unlikely journey has brought me to the *bimah* this Rosh HaShanah as I was invited to share with you what Temple Beth El has meant to me and our family over the past 35 years.

My journey to Temple Beth El began in Poland, where I was born in January 1940. My improbable childhood journey was totally out of my control, but I have no doubt that my adult life is also guided from above and I sometimes just delude myself that I am in control.

When the Germans occupied my hometown of Lwow, my parents acquired false papers for the three of us to relocate to Warsaw. Three different, remarkable Catholic families risked their lives to hide me from the Nazis, during parts of the first 5 ½ years of my life.

During the last year of the war, the building I was living in with my third Catholic family was destroyed. My parents thought I had perished in the building and only after the war, found that I had survived and was living with that family in the mountain town of Zaczopane. After we were reunited, my parents and I were smuggled into the western sector of Vienna on a Russian truck. I had so many name changes that I assumed all children's names changed throughout their life. Now, reunited with my parents, I asked them what my name would be when I grew up.

We came to the United States in 1947, and I received my final name change.

In America, my parents were reluctant to practice their faith or expose their children to a Jewish education. Gratefully, my parents remained "Gastronomic Jews" so we enjoyed eating all of my Auntie Frieda's wonderful Jewish dishes and going to a number of Jewish delis.

Oddly, my parents became passionate Jews, when I announced my plans to marry a bright, beautiful Methodist girl I had met at Torrance High School. Their newfound Jewish fervor was somewhat tempered, when they learned that Barbara was converting to Judaism. So when Barbara and I entered the Intro to Judaism class, it was for both of us, our first formal exposure to Judaism.

Some 35 years ago Barbara and I bought a home in Rancho Palos Verdes. Like many of you, it was by chance that we found this temple in San Pedro. Like many others, we joined to give our children a Jewish education—an education I never received. We wanted to make sure that another generation of Jews would thrive, so the family we lost, as part of the six-million who perished, did not die in vain.

As new members, Barbara and I felt, at first, like outsiders.

We became more comfortable after taking a few classes, our first being "The Jewish Holidays" class, taught by Maxine Lebowitz. To this day, we enjoy the Haggadah she gave us, with many modifications made over the years. Also like some of you, we joined a Havorah where we made some dear friends.

After some time, Rabbi Lieb invited me to a leadership class. Thereafter, with every new position I accepted, I received much more than I gave, with unanticipated gifts, like getting to know so many special people. The only gift I didn't appreciate as much, was the invitation by Jeff Riker to be the VP of Finance, which redefined for me the meaning of "tsuris". And I thought Jeff was my friend. It was a challenging position, and I have profound admiration and respect for all those who have chaired it before or since. And now, looking back, I have served in almost every position of our temple life.

**So...we joined the temple for our kids, but we stayed for ourselves. Our entire family became the greater beneficiary of all that our temple has to offer, especially the circle of wonderful friends, we have all made here.**

When our oldest child, Jay, was preparing to become a Bar Mitzvah, Zorica Sorkin, with her usual generosity of time, energy, and heart, helped Jay with his Hebrew. I often sat in on his tutoring sessions and we both learned how to read Hebrew, at least phonetically.

My side of our family is very small, so to have our daughter Lori and her family with our two wonderful grandchildren, Sophie and Jeremy and my sister Marlene and her family including my two beautiful nieces, Nicole and Lauren, all being members of our congregation is an extraordinary gift Barbara and I cherish.

Because Barbara knew that I was a trumpet player in my school years, she bought me a shofar from our temple's gift shop. That year, I enthusiastically joined in on the *bimah* when Rabbi Lieb invited forward all who had a shofar. We were all asked for a *Tekiah* and I responded with a terrific *Shevarim*. Even though following directions was not my strength, I must have made enough of a positive impression to have had the honor to blow the shofar for our temple ever since.

We all recall many special moments and have vivid memories with Rabbi Lieb. We respected him for his intellect, his teaching ability his sense of humor. He taught us how to give our children the greatest gift of all – which is Jewish pride and knowledge. His final lesson was teaching us how to conclude our lives with a positive attitude and humor, surrounded by the love of family, friends and fellow congregants. In his memory, I, together with so many of you here today, have dedicated ourselves to help our Temple become fiscally secure for this and future generations.

Today, we have the opportunity to provide support for the meaningful life cycle events, holidays, and Shabbat services lead by our own Rabbi Briskin, our talented Cantor Ilan as well as providing support for our enthusiastic program coordinator and director of education Debi Rowe.

Today, think about what activity at Temple you would like to protect, for future generations. Is it making sure Rabbi Briskin has the time to continue to care for you and your loved ones when you are troubled or ill, or need spiritual guidance?

Is it our Hanukah dinner featuring our exuberant youth choir, accompanied by the Moody Jews, singing with the same joy that Cantor Ilan brings to us each week?

Is it making sure our Torah School has the quality teachers, programs and resources that we have come to value under the direction of our educator Debi Rowe?

Perhaps, like me, is it the beauty and peace you find during our Meditation Shabbat.

Is it attending the Monday speaker series under the direction of Esther Taus who brings us such an extraordinary selection of speakers?

Or, like me, is it ensuring that our Thursday Torah School classes will continue to come into the sanctuary near the end of the school day, kiss the *mezuzah* as they enter, and sit with all age students, the older helping the younger ones, in reading from the Torah, reading, chanting, and singing together.

For these few and many other reasons, it is so important for us to ensure that our temple remains fiscally strong so future families can be enriched, as much as all our families have been.

Your generous support is needed more than ever during these challenging economic times. For those of us who have not lost our home or have not lost our job, I appeal to you to help cover the cost of our Temple's operations which for this year has a projected \$85K deficit. As we have learned before, in our size Temple, dues and school fees only covers 60% of the cost to operate our Temple. But these are unprecedented times. When some of our congregants have lost their jobs, and are having difficulty make their mortgage payments and other household bills, let alone their Temple annual commitment, please consider how very blessed you are, and help our Temple in this unique year, with as large a gift as possible for this annual pledge.

Switching gears to a new area I want to speak to you now of eternal protection for our temple and those things we hold dear:

Implementing a new strategy to break our cycle of financial instability, started with the generosity of numerous members over the years, such as the Halaj's generosity, which paid off our building loan in the 1990's, then another example in 2001 when Linda Herman and her committee helped create the documentation for our endowment.

We are grateful to many of you who stepped forward to contribute over \$1,000,000 to fulfill the goals of Phase I of the endowment, appropriately named the Rabbi David Lieb Endowment Fund.

When Phase II is complete, we will have raised a total of \$3,000,000 for the endowment in Rabbi David Lieb's memory, and provide eternal financial protection to the religious home we all love.

We may be fewer than 300 families, but we are a caring, passionate, forward-thinking congregation which can provide for ourselves, and build a strong endowment to provide eternal financial protection to our Temple home.

We are now ready for ALL OF YOU.

I ask that you consider a tax-benefit through a contribution, a contribution the Endowment invests, in safe, government guaranteed instruments, so together we can underwrite our Temple's programs and activities, IN PERPETUITY.

Our Board members are distributing cards so all of us can indicate our level of support toward our Temple's programs and services for today. Additionally, please check the box on the right side of the appeal to meet with our Rabbi, with me, or with a member of the endowment committee to explore the many ways that may save you taxes while providing a once in a lifetime, lasting legacy to the Endowment Fund in memory of Rabbi Lieb, as well as to honor your family name... your children's names... or in memory of your loved ones.

Thank you in advance for your generosity and thinking about the many ways each of us is incredibly blessed, to have the opportunity to give back.

*L'Shanah Tovah*