

You must be joking! This was my immediate response to Rabbi Lyon's request to participate in the Symposium. Apparently, Synagogue attendance is not a requirement for Symposium speakers. On Shabbat, given a choice of prayer book or popcorn, I choose Popcorn. I need Google Maps to find my way to Beth Israel. I don't even answer half the Old Testament Questions Correctly on Jeopardy.

After my initial reaction, I gave it some thought. I love speaking to an audience, and am immensely proud of being Jewish and my Jewish heritage.

My faith is like Mort Foxman's, a character in Jonathon Tropper's novel "This is Where I Leave You." Mort's dying wish is for his 4 adult children to come together sitting Shiva after his passing. The children reminisce about Mort, an atheist, who still attended services two or three times a year. When Mort was asked why he went to synagogue, his response was, "well I have been wrong before." Like Mort, I am unsure of my belief in G-d, yet something draws me to services a few times year. Rather than having strong faith, I am drawn to Judaism by cultural, social and family connections.

My Jewish experience began with my upbringing in San Antonio. My parents, Seymour and Jane, were both heavily involved in the Jewish Community. My father's, grandparents left Manheim Germany in the 1870's and settled in Livonia, Louisiana, becoming store owners and planters. After moving to San Antonio, my Father became a President of Temple Beth El, was involved in the Federation, and Morningside Manor, and helped lay the ground work for Greene Family Camp. My mother's paternal grandparents emigrated from the Ukraine in the 1890's. They lived originally in Chicago and moved to San Antonio where My great grandfather Nathan resumed his career as a harness maker, became a store owner, then a prominent Farmer and Rancher. Recently an elementary school in San Antonio was named in Nathan Kallison's honor, and the book *The Harness Makers's Dream* chronicles his journey. I had a great uncle, Perry Kallison, who had the longest running Farm and Ranch Radio report in Texas. Uncle Perry "the old trader" had interviewed Lyndon Johnson during his 1948 Senatorial campaign and on election day of the 1960 Presidential campaign. Kallison's Store was a San Antonio downtown institution. My mother's maternal grandparents emigrated from Poland in the 1870's. My great grandfather Ben Dubinski was an accomplished inventor, whose contributions included inventing the Nickelodeon Juke box. During my Senior year of high school, I worked at Kallisons, getting my first taste of the retail business.

My sweet, kind mother Jane was involved with both the Sisterhood and the National Council for Jewish Women. Despite having a smaller Jewish community in SA, my parents built a strong network of Jewish friends. My siblings; Kathy, Mark and I, remain close to our parents' friends and many of their children. Our parents instilled in us important Jewish values; treating others with dignity and respect, demonstrating integrity and honesty at home and work.

My selfless mother assisted those less fortunate than herself. She was instrumental in establishing Child Advocates in San Antonio through the National Council of Jewish Women. She advocated for children's rights in the courts. Mom always thought of the needs of others' first. Both parents were avid readers, encouraging us to be lifelong learners.

We attended services and went to Religious school regularly, as Talmidim under the watchful eyes of educator Milton Bendiner and Rabbi David Jacobson. Because of my gregarious father, we were often the last to leave the Oneg. I was somewhat involved in Safty, our youth group, traveled to the big city, Houston, for a Tofty convention and ventured to Camp Carter with Tofty one summer. I barely dipped my toes in the pool of Jewish activities, but did not dive in. The allure of the grid iron and hardwoods; playing for the Woodridge Wolverines and Alamo Heights Mules in Jr School, overcame any considerations I had of becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Growing up, I discovered something that gave me a strong personal Jewish connection. Dad brought home 2 records, Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner's 2001 Year Old Man and an Album called "You Don't Have to be Jewish". We wore out the grooves on those records. To this day, Kathy and I will be happy to perform one of the bits from "You don't have to be Jewish" at the drop of a hat. "Honey, I've got a surprise for you!" Kathy loved listening to Oscar and Hammerstein show tunes and singing with Barbra Streisand. I remember watching the Ed Sullivan Show, seeing Shari Lewis, Buddy Hackett and Joan Rivers. Tuesday nights were reserved for Red Skelton. I remember Dad taking me to see Woody Allen's Take the Money Run, Neil Simon's The Odd Couple and Billy Wilder's the Fortune Cookie.

One day sitting at home, I discovered my first Marx Brothers Movie, Horsefeathers. I was hooked. They were irreverent. I loved the word play and slapstick endings. I was elated when Dad told me the Marx Brothers were 5 Jewish boys from New York. I bought every Marx Brothers Book and album, and memorized many of Groucho's wise cracking dialogs. I even taught a Marx Brothers Mini Course in High School. My love of Jewish humor continues. My favorite comedians include Mel Brooks and Rodney Dangerfield. Take Henny Youngman....Please , Albert Brooks, Dave Atell, Seinfeld, Richard Lewis who said "I am an observant Jew, I love to observe Jews", the brilliant Andy Kaufman, yes Pee Wee Herman, Larry David, Abby and Ilana from Broad City, and Sasha Baron Cohen to name just a few.

I attended UT Austin, joined a Jewish fraternity and made a lot of new friends. Although studying Business, I started frequenting movies on a more regular basis. I was fascinated by film and was proud of so many of the great Jewish contributors including Stanley Kubrik (my favorite director). I am also immensely proud of the many Jewish contributors to music and the arts. I get inspired listening to Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, and American in Paris. Ira Gershwin's lyrics are S'wonderful, and S'Marvelous. I can stand mesmerized looking at the ethereal works of Rothko, Modigliani and Chagall. Randy Newman's brilliant satiric album Sail Away and Paul Simon's Graceland are among my favorites. I can't tell you how many times I've watched Blazing Saddles and Annie Hall.

After graduation, I moved to Houston beginning my career at Foleys. I felt comfortable in the retail environment. Most of Foleys upper management, many vendors and some my fellow associates were Jewish.

At 23, I felt compelled to enroll in an adult Bar Mitzvah class at Beth Israel. I was not exactly the star pupil but enjoyed the experience. I was proud reciting the prayers and Torah portion at my class's Bar Mitzvah.

At Foleys, I met my future wife Debby Meyer from Meridian, Mississippi. On our first date, we heard the Neville Brothers at Rockefellers. She liked Movies and entertainment; I liked Movies and entertainment, she loved going to Sporting Events. I loved going to Sporting Events. She enjoyed traveling. I enjoyed traveling. She loved to cook. I loved to eat. It was a match made in heaven! We have been happily married for 31 years. She is our Family's steadying presence, our Rock of Gibraltar.

Our first child, Jessica, was born during our second year of marriage. We were invited to Beth Israel with baby Jessi for a Shabbat blessing. There was a power outage that night. Rabbi Karff blessed her in the parking lot in the dark. It was beautiful! 14 months after Jessica's birth, Debby went into labor with our 2nd child, right here during Rabbi Karff's Yom Kippur evening sermon. I did not think it was appropriate to leave during Rabbi Karff's sermon. To my astonishment, Debby overruled me. 2nd daughter Lisa was born. 14 months later, Debby was pregnant again, this time with Identical Twin boys. A young assistant, Rabbi David Lyon, named Charlie and David in our home. We had 4 children during our first 5 years of marriage. Whew!!!

The kids began their educations at Shlenker and attended Religious school. In an effort to save a few shekels, Jessica and Lisa became Bat Mitzvah together at the ages of 12 and 13. Lisa made me promise that I would not force her and Jessica to get married together. Charlie and David also became Bar Mitzvah at Beth Israel. The boys had attended public school and transferred to Emery Weiner their Junior year. It was a great move for both boys and helped contribute to their future success.

As the kids grew, I climbed the corporate ladder at Foleys becoming a Senior VP of merchandising. I had many unforgettable experiences, including being in New York City Sept 11th and during the big black out. My career came to an abrupt halt, when I was fired after 25 years of employment. It was a shock and still stings a little to this day. During my 2 year work hiatus, I received support from friends and family, and even received some career advice from Rabbi Lyon. I ventured on my own, purchasing Sprint Bindery, a small business I have owned for 12 years. I also help my Dad conduct his business affairs.

Our daughter Jessica, was engaged to Colin Bozarth a bright and talented engineer. The wedding was planned for October 17th 2015. My beloved Mother's health had been declining for some time. She was determined to make it to Jessica's wedding. Unfortunately, Mom fell into a coma 6 days prior to the wedding and passed away 2 days before it. In Jewish tradition

we choose life, moving forward with the life cycle events, by doing so honoring my mother's memory. Seeing your first child get married is an incredibly emotional experience. My emotions were raw. We all managed to pull through the wedding and funeral together. The experience was more powerful than you can imagine.

Jessica, in my mother's tradition of helping the less fortunate, is a social worker living in Austin. She is a Program Manager helping families with autistic children.

Lisa was joined under the chuppah this January with Richard Robbins, in a service led beautifully by Rabbi Scott. Currently Richard and Lisa reside in Houston. She uses her bubbly personality to develop Champagne branding opportunities for Moet Hennessey. Richard is a GI Doctor specializing in Therapeutic Endoscopy who finishes his fellowship this spring at Baylor. If anyone is looking to add a nice GI doc to their practice, let us know.

I am also very proud of the accomplishments of our sons. Charlie is an Investment Management Associate for Gerald Hines. He moves to London next month with his girlfriend Danielle Levy. David is enjoying a successful career as a Mergers and Acquisitions Associate for Sun Trust. He shares time with his girlfriend, Kait McGann-Ludwin, in Atlanta.

With all 4 kids away from home and free time on my hands, I began looking for a new challenge. It was time to volunteer my services like my parents did. I jumped at the opportunity to join the Film Committee at the JCC. I was immediately engaged by the other cinema philes, eventually co-chairing and chairing the committee twice. I helped develop new programs including the 13th anniversary Mazel Tov video and Chairman's Choice. As chairman, I selected 3 Marx Brothers movies including A Night at the Opera and Duck Soup. I actually cried sitting with Kathy watching A Night at the Opera, smudging my grease paint mustache and eyebrows having dressed as Groucho.

In addition to the J's film committee, I am Co Chairman of the Book and Arts Festival which begins November 3rd and will Chair next year. As a film lover and avid reader, I've discovered a niche that fits my interests perfectly.

All 4 kids had traveled to Israel. Now it was our turn! Having heard rave reviews from friends and family, we joined the Beth Israel Trip in June. Rabbi's Lyon and Scott, led 21 congregants across Israel, venturing to Tel Aviv, The Sea of Galilee, Safed, the Golan Heights, Jerusalem, Masada, and the Dead Sea. Both rabbis, provided excellent leadership, along with our extremely knowledgeable, passionate guide and guest lecturers. It is one thing to see Israel on a map, on the evening news or watching Fauda or Israeli films. It is an entirely different experience being there.

I was awestruck by our tour of the Golan Heights. At the Lebanese and Syrian borders, we were flanked by members of the IDF our kids' ages. From our vantage point, we heard artillery fire from the Syrian civil war. Shortly afterwards, we took a short jeep ride to

purchase chocolate and cappuccinos, followed by a tour of a winery. This is a part of everyday life in Israel.

An added bonus, was reacquainting with old friends and meeting new ones. Energized by the trip, I immediately stopped deleting the Congregation's emails and look forward to attending more programs.

Despite my initial assumption that I wasn't very Jewish; I've been involved in Jewish activities and enjoyed Jewish culture my whole life. Having wonderful parents as role models to guide me, having strong relationships with my siblings, extended family and friends, building a strong marriage, raising 4 exceptional kids, celebrating life cycle events, engaging in the community with Film and Book Festivals, traveling to Israel; maybe I am more Jewish than I thought. Like Mort Foxman said, "I've Been Wrong Before."

Shana Tovah