

I'd like to thank Rabbi Lyon for the honor of speaking today. Your invitation to talk about personal experiences and the importance Judaism has played in my life gave me much to think about.

As I look back through the years and delve into who and what influenced who I am today, I went back to before I was born. So much of who we are is passed down to us from our parents and grandparents and their parents and grandparents, from generation to generation, l'dor va dor,

My parents, Leon and Lena Aron, were first generation Texans, children of Russian immigrants who came through Galveston in the early 1900's. Both sets of grandparents left their families in Russia to make a better life. My Mother's mother, Shprintze Tapper, managed to keep kosher with their one cow as their family grew to 7. My Mother's father, Max Tapper, sold bananas from a cart at first and eventually opened a dry goods store. He was one of the founders of Temple Freda in Bryan, and was honored to name it after his grandmother. It still stands today over 100 years later as a historical site.

My father's parents met and married after they arrived here. Abe Aron, came to America with his four brothers and settled in Goosecreek, now known as Baytown, where they were in the furniture business. As newcomers to America my grandparents struggled with the language, missing their families, knowing they would never see them again, yet they adapted. They started their families and welcomed other Russian immigrants to their homes helping them begin their new life in America. My grandparents may have left their families and homeland behind but they never gave up their Judaism. They laid the foundation for us, the future generations, to celebrate the traditions of Judaism.

MY parents were married in 1935 and after five years they had twin daughters, Vivian and Joyce. I came along four years later. Mother and Daddy lived in Nacogdoches, Texas where Daddy had a creosoting plant. They were asked by the army base there if they would welcome 30 plus WACs, the Women's Army Corp, to their home for Passover. Of course, they gladly said yes. Mother described the evening beginning with the sound of footsteps that shook the ground as the WAC's came marching down the street to their little house. As one WAC wrote home to her parents said "this was the first time she ever heard Hebrew spoken with a Texas accent".

My parents worked hard to make a good life for them and their daughters. Daddy was busy with the creosoting business but his favorite things to do were collecting antique cars and flying his planes. He loved to buzz the house to let Mother know he bought another one. Mother stayed at home with her three daughters but, that all changed in 1967 when Mother became a Weight Watchers franchisees. Our whole family was involved with running the business for 32 years. It was a happy business and I am proud to have been a part of it. Our family worked side by side daily and celebrated Shabbat together on Friday nights. Our

Judaism was always a very important part of our life. To this day my sisters, their families and I, always sit together at services. We wouldn't have it any other way.

I honor my parents each and every day, for being loving, caring, devoted, sometimes over protective, supportive, and always available to my sisters and me. Judaism was always a part of who they were and how they lived their lives which was inherently passed on to us. Shabbat dinner was a tradition in our home and going to services Friday night and Saturday morning. Mother always lit the Shabbat candles and made two Challahs, one for us and one for another family. Her Challah was delicious. She changed her recipe over and over until she finally tweaked it to perfection and it was the best I have ever tasted. I make it and love to smell it baking. There is just nothing like it and the memories it invokes. Daddy would say the blessing over the wine and Challah (in his Texas accent) and then pass a piece around the table for each of us to pinch a little off. This was our life. I loved it. It was ingrained in us to be proud of our Judaism.

In 1970 I married Michael Spiegelman, who had just returned from Vietnam Nam. We were married for 7 years. I had a baby son who we named Matthew. When he was a few days old he was diagnosed with a heart defect and he passed away a week later. This tragedy was devastating, hard to understand. How could G do this? Had I done something terrible in my life to deserve this tragic loss? I couldn't understand how this could happen. Why it had happened. But, it did. It wasn't easy but I somehow I managed to put one foot in front of the other and get on with my life. After losing my baby I walked away from Judaism. I felt abandoned by G, the only one who could be blamed. As time passed the wounds healed. I had always heard that something good comes from something bad. But what good could possibly come from losing my baby? Yet something good eventually did come along.

I rarely talked about my son but the memory of his short life stayed deep inside my heart. After many unspoken years I finally found the perfect way to honor his memory and that of Mother and Daddy when I wrote a book entitled "I'm Glad I'm me, Weaving the Thread of Love From Generation to Generation". (L'dor va dor) It is a parenting book disguised as a children's book and teaches the language of love regardless of age. I give it to organizations that work with abused children.

I am very proud that my book is used today in the Children's Assessment Center's Psychology and therapy department. I am often asked if I am a Psychiatrist or psychologist and "how did I come to write this book?" Or "Was I abused?" I was never abused in any way, quite the opposite. My parents were kind, compassionate and loving. In answering the question about my qualifications my answer is "you don't need a degree to tell your child 'I love you'. I believe that my son Matthew was the guiding force behind my writing the book and every decision I have made since beginning this journey. I cherish his memory and were it not for him I might not have written the book. My precious son, who I would have told everyday over and over again, how much I loved him, made it possible for me to show others how easy it is to say the words "I love you". The pleasure that has come from writing this book is hard to put into words but, recently as I was walking down the street in Santa Barbara I happen to have a

book with me. I came upon a young mother who was in obvious distress with a two-year-old daughter who was having a meltdown. The mother looked like she was about to lose it so I handed the book to her and said that I hope this helps. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said “you have just defused a very bad situation”. I left them reading my book together. For me, that moment said it all.

In 2011 I founded The Thread Alliance, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending the cycle of Child abuse. I am very proud to share that there is now a chapter of TTA in Los Angeles, CA. started by my nephew Drew Singer and his friend, Jake Grossman. The purpose of TTA is to bring child abuse awareness and prevention to the forefront in the hopes that future generations will have childhoods free of abuse. My book and TTA allow me to give the words La Dor Va Dor meaning beyond our prayer books.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention my other sister. When I was 3 my parents placed an ad in the Brenham want-ads looking for someone to help take care of her three daughters. Cedella, 17 years old and just a child herself, answered the ad and waited a week before she got word that she had the job. We picked her up at the bus station looking for a girl in a blue silk dress. Then we saw her: 6 feet tall and skinny as a rail. Cedella was and still is a very happy person. She looked for any possible way to make life fun for the 3 of us. She is still part of our family after 70 years, only now we take care of her. She is back living in Brenham and I call her every morning. If she doesn't hear from me by a certain time she calls me. We argue over who loves who the most. Cedella says that she is the only African American Jew in Brenham and, for sure, the best cook of Jewish food from all the wonderful meals she helped Mother prepare over the years.

Beside my beloved sisters, Vivian, Joyce and Cedella, I have one more “sister” who has been part of my life for over 60 years. Sue Pfeffer, my lifelong friend, is what G meant about the testament of the power of friendship and what it looks like at its best.

Each week I look forward to attending Shabbat services and hearing all the beautiful prayers that I have heard all my life. Earlier this year I bought a small Condo in Santa Barbara, California. If you've never been there, it's one of the most beautiful places in the world where 80 degrees is considered a heat wave. To meet people, where did I go first? To temple, of course, where I was welcomed with open arms and instantly felt relaxed hearing the familiar prayers being chanted, saying the brucha over the bread and wine and the fellowship they extended. I was home.

I am thankful for this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to all those who came before me and all those who have been there for me along the way. On this Yom Kippur I wish everyone a happy healthy year for you and your loved ones.

L'Shana Tova Hag Sameyah