

Many of you may not know me or know much about me. I would like to introduce myself. I am Barbara Lederer. My Hebrew name is Beruriah- honoring a woman of strength, study and faith. I have been a member of Temple Sinai for 17 years.

I was born to Jewish parents that came from Austria during World War II to escape Hitler. Their identity was that of being European Jews. They raised us as part of a Reform Congregation and we celebrated all of the major holidays and frequently lit the Sabbath candles. Both my brother and I went to Sunday school through confirmation but I did not have a Bat mitzvah and I never learned Hebrew. I never questioned my "Jewishness" but do not consider myself a highly observant or educated Jew.

When I married, it was to a non- Jew. Even so, I was very clear that I would raise my children Jewish and would not compromise on that. I was, quite honestly, surprised at the strength of my conviction at the time. I realized it had much more to do with a commitment I felt to my family's history and the persecution they and fellow Jews had experienced, as well as the culture of foods, and songs, and holidays, than it did to my own understanding of Jewish law or values.

When my husband, daughter and I moved to Connecticut, we searched for a Temple in which I would feel comfortable sending my daughter to Sunday school, and in which I could feel as though my family, which was considered interfaith, since my husband had not converted, would be welcome. We visited quite a number of Synagogues, and interviewed Rabbis in the surrounding towns. Once I met Rabbi Bennett, there was no longer any question for me. I was settled. I somehow knew that he was someone who I would learn from, and who would deepen my sense of my own Judaism. A few years later, when I divorced and entered into a new relationship with my current partner, Laurel, I had a new challenge. I had to find out if this was a congregation that not only accepted interfaith couples, but would also accept and welcome us as a lesbian couple. At that time, in 1992, the issue was not so public, yet once again I felt embraced by Jeff Bennett and members of the congregation.

Still, I was one of those congregants who came periodically to services, brought my daughter to religious school and was not very involved in Temple life. In 1997, my daughter was Bat mitzvahed. She was only the second girl in my extended family to receive that honor. The experience was everything I had

hoped for- I watched my daughter truly transform into a young adult on the bimah. What I was not prepared for- was my own transformation. I know the day was not supposed to be about me- but some of it was. As my mother passed the torah to me and I to my daughter, a depth of feeling passed over me. This day was my first time blessing the torah. It was my first time holding the torah. Quite honestly, It may have been the first time I truly listened to the reading of the torah. The rekindling of my participation in Judaism and in the Temple started on that day.

Timing is everything. Soon after that event, I got involved in the Social Action committee. After a couple of years later, Michael Feldman, then president, asked me to chair that committee and join the Board. Just like the Blood drive commercials with the byline "consider yourself asked.", I never would have considered becoming active on the Board had he not asked me. Becoming a part of the Board helped me realize the importance of the volunteer 's role in this congregation. We are relatively small with very little staff other than clergy. So it is the Board, the committees, the clubs and all of the individual congregants who donate their time that makes us what we are.

It is less than 10 years since I started this path of feeling truly connected to the Temple. I do not have the history with Judaism that some of you have. I certainly don't have the knowledge of Hebrew and the Torah. What I do have is a desire to learn all that I can about my own faith, and the history of the people who came before me. I wish to build on , and learn from, all of the great work done in the past by the people in this position. My hope is that the people who asked me to take this position will feel satisfied with their decision.

When the Rabbi told me I was to speak tonight, he said I should talk about my goals and vision for the next two years. At first I thought, "Oh my God, I need to accomplish something big". Then I remembered something talked about at the Scheit Seminar, which is a conference offered to incoming presidents. The facilitators there talked about Moses as a role model for leadership. I was reminded that God did not expect Moses to take the Israelites all the way into the Promised land. He took them to the edge and then transferred leadership to Aaron. We are told that, as leaders, the role is to take people one step closer to the goal or vision than we were before. I follow some great leaders and others will follow me. My goal is that two years from now, we will be a little bit more welcoming of new people coming to our congregational family, we will be a little

bit more financially stable, we will find ways to help a few more members connect to Temple life in a meaningful way, and we will build a few more volunteer leaders to carry this congregation into the future. If we are one step closer on each of these issues, I will feel that I have made a sacred contribution.

I want to thank the Board, past and present, for their preparation and support of me in this role, thank the Rabbi for agreeing to continue my Jewish education during this process, thank my parents for making Judaism something to be proud of and want to stay close to, thank my daughter for unwittingly re-starting me on this path and very importantly I want to thank Laurel, my life partner, for being willing to have me share me numerous nights a week, while I am on the phone, or at meetings, for helping me balance my many commitments, and for encouraging me to explore my faith, albeit different from hers. I am honored to stand here and represent this loving congregation in the role of President and I will depend on all of you to pave our path.

I ask for your prayers over the next two years for our Temple family and its continued health and good fortune. Shabbat Shalom