Charlotte Hurwitz

I call myself an "itinerant teacher." I have always been a student and an educator, as was my late husband, Melvin. We even met at school, at a Hillel gathering at the University of Chicago. I was an undergraduate, and he was working toward his master's degree.

After we married in 1943, we both studied and then taught at Cornell. Melvin got a job as a textile engineer in Pennsylvania, and we moved to a town that had a Conservative synagogue nearby – but no Reform congregation.

My father was a kosher butcher in Roger's Park, Illinois, so we kept strictly kosher. I did not like the Orthodox shul we belonged to and avoided going whenever I could; it was humiliating for me to be crammed with the other women and girls into the back rows while the men sat up front and ran the service. There was no Sunday school for women, and certainly no bat mitzvah celebration. I found no joy in this religion filled with these blatant inequalities, and I wanted a different experience for my three children – especially my two daughters.

So instead of joining the Conservative synagogue in Pennsylvania, we founded Temple Zion, a small Reform congregation with services held in the nearby Southampton Friends Meeting House. I taught Sunday school and provided bar and bat mitzvah tutoring. The temple is no longer there; but we formed close friendships, and I am still in touch with our Rabbi.

Temple Zion was always small, a labor of our own love. When our children outgrew the religious education we were able to provide for them at our own Temple, we sent them to Hebrew school at Knesset Israel, the oldest Reform congregation in the United States. In 1978, after our children had grown up, we moved to Greensboro and returned to teaching, Melvin at UNCG and I at Guilford Tech, as married couples at that time were not allowed to teach at the same university. We joined Temple Emanuel, and I once again got involved teaching Sunday school and tutoring bar and bat mitzvah students. I was active in the Sisterhood for a long time.

I love to teach, and I love to help others. My parents, who were Russian immigrants, instilled this value in me as they worked to bring other family members from Russia to the United States. In our lives, Melvin and I tried to teach our children by example as well. They have been honest and honorable and worked very hard, and I hope that they continue to do so.