

Debby Miller

The most life changing event in our lives was Kenny starting the Young Leadership program in Greensboro. That led to our first trip to Israel which was eye opening in many ways. Kenny and I had two small children, and it was about time to decide where our oldest child would go for first grade. We had always assumed we would put him in public school because we were both products of the public school system and we felt very strongly about public education. But our trip to Israel made us realize how little we knew about our Jewish roots, and that was when we decided that we wanted to do more for our children than what was done for us. At that time, the Hebrew Academy—what has now become B'nai Shalom—was maybe a year old. We decided to send our children there; and I know it was the luckiest, most wonderful thing we could have done for our kids.

Neither of us had the tools to raise our children Jewishly. I was born in Washington, DC. Though I grew up surrounded by Jewish experience, most of it came through social clubs and high school sororities. Any time I could skip out on temple or Sunday school, I would, and my parents were not particularly involved either. Kenny grew up in Greensboro, and I would have to say that his Jewish education was also nil.



We learned about Judaism through the eyes of our children. We started celebrating Shabbat, which neither of us had done growing up. When it came to the Jewish holidays, school was closed and we would go to the Synagogue. We had our first *Simchas Torah*, built our first *sukkah*, and did all the things that we never did as children.

I have been involved in the Jewish community through National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), AIPAC, B'nai Shalom and the Federation. I was president of the local Women's Division and campaign chair, and through that I got involved in the National Women's Division. On one of the national missions I took to Prague and Israel, I got it in my head that all of the Greensboro women on this trip should become Lions of Judah. The donation amount was a big jump from what most of us were used to giving, but in the end it turned out that five of the seven of us became Lions and the program was born. This would never have happened all at once had we not gone there.

But the greatest Jewish work I have done has been through JDC, the 911 of the Jewish people around the world. When I found out about the program, I was so excited by the idea that I asked to be nominated to the board. It worked, and now for 15 years, I have just loved every single meeting I have been in, and each trip I have been on. Kenny and I have been fortunate to go on many trips to Israel and around the world to see where this money we have raised has gone. We have been to Siberia, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Turkey, and North Africa, to name a few places. Wherever there is a Jew in need, JDC is there; and I am grateful to have been able to visit these places and to see how much of an impact the projects we funded have made.

When my grandson wanted a Bar Mitzvah project, I told him about Agahosha Shalom, a youth village in Rwanda partially funded by the JDC. He really took to the idea; and he even had a showing of the movie *Hotel Rwanda* for all of the kids in his class, as well as a representative from Agahosha Shalom who came to Charlotte to talk with them about the program. Instead of gifts, he asked that his friends give money to the youth village. He raised close to \$20,000.

Our children know more about Judaism than we did, and now they have taught their children even more. It is so gratifying to see our grandchildren continuing that work that I care so much about, and I am very proud of what we have accomplished.

