

Ellen and Gary Fischer

Though we grew up in neighboring suburbs of St. Louis, Missouri, our childhoods were remarkably different. Ellen's Jewish background was limited, whereas mine was strong. But for both of us, our most significant Jewish education occurred in our 30's, in Greensboro, North Carolina, of all places – go figure.

I grew up in a largely Jewish suburb, University City, Missouri. My family observed Shabbat and kept kosher. My high school was 90 percent Jewish, and my experiences at Jewish summer camp were formative for me. I attended an Orthodox shul and the rabbis tried to persuade my parents to send me to Yeshiva. Although I chose not to, my sense of Jewish identity remained strong.

Meanwhile, in Clayton, Missouri, the next suburb over, Ellen spent her childhood much differently. Her family never denied being Jewish, but did almost nothing Jewishly. Her best friend was Presbyterian and on many Sundays, Ellen would go to church with her and sing in the choir. Her parents were unconcerned when she was confirmed in the Presbyterian Church.

Our move to North Carolina was meant to be temporary. I chose to do my medical residency in Chapel Hill because we both wanted to explore another part of the country. We always assumed we would go back to the Midwest. But we fell in love with North Carolina. When we moved to Greensboro, the Jewish community welcomed us with open arms, and we have never looked back. This community is a wonderful place to be Jewish; it was easy to get involved.

Most of Ellen's Jewish knowledge was acquired in Greensboro. Sara Lee Saperstein and Janice Hyman adopted us for the holidays, and they taught Ellen everything she needed to know.

I learned too. Despite my strong knowledge in Jewish identity, I realized through our participation in Young Leadership that my Jewish education was lacking, especially my knowledge of Jewish history and the significance of Israel.

The Greensboro Jewish community reinforced the importance of *tzedakah*. My father made a decent, middle-class living in the scrap metal business, and always donated his time and money to Jewish causes. But it was not until after his death that my family learned just how committed he had been to *tzedakah*. During his shiva and for years to come, people would tell us how Dad's generosity had changed their lives. He did these acts of kindness behind the scenes, neither



seeking nor asking for recognition. My mother was also involved with charitable giving, mostly to Jewish causes. As long as I can remember, she ran a little jewelry business out of the house, and all the profits went to charities.

Ellen and I wanted our children to learn the importance of giving. Whenever there was an opportunity to do *mitzvot*, we would include them. They were involved with the Hadassah Gift Wrap, Russian resettlement, and food drives, among others.

Our experience chairing Young Leadership in 1980 was a catalyst for further involvement in the Jewish community. Both of us have chaired the Annual Federation Campaign, and we have led community missions to Cuba and Israel. I am a past president of the Federation and continue to serve on the board. Ellen has been very involved in NC Hillel for years, serving as chair of the board. She has been on the boards of the Jewish Foundation and the Federation. She is a member of Women's Cabinet and life member of Hadassah. Civically, she has also chaired the NC Ballet Board and the Enrichment Board for the Guilford County schools.

From living 30+ years in Greensboro, we have come to realize that what counts most is building Jewish community, here and everywhere, in order to insure Jewish continuity. We hope we have passed this on to our children and future generations.