

Gail and Gene LeBauer

When we were college sweethearts, Gene invited me to his home in Greensboro for *erev* Yom Kippur. His mother brought out this wonderful tray with some kind of meat I had never seen before that had pineapples and cherries and cloves on it. As his father started to slice it, I noticed it was very pink. I said to Gene very quietly, “What is that?” Very proudly, he replied, ‘It is my mother’s holiday ham!’ I quickly realized that just because you are Jewish does not mean that you are on the same planet, and I slid it nicely underneath the sweet potato.

Gene was born and raised in Greensboro. His father was a prominent doctor from up North, who had made a name for himself in the community at large. He was a wonderful role model for his children, well known for his honesty, integrity and caring, and for making philanthropic contributions in both the Jewish and non-Jewish realms. The family’s religious emphasis focused on Jewish values. There were strong feelings towards assimilation, and I think the idea was to not do things that would make you different. They were decidedly Jewish, went to Sunday school and celebrated holidays, but they kept their spiritual practices private and, as I quickly learned, they added their own Southern flair to them.



Although the majority of members at the Greensboro Country Club were non-Jews, this club always admitted certain Jews because it was founded by the Cone family. Gene’s family belonged, and he played tennis there in his youth. When the team traveled, Gene sometimes had to be housed near the hosting country club, as Jews were not allowed to use the facilities. He claims this never bothered him as he enjoyed the home-cooked meals.

Growing up in Cleveland, I lived a completely Jewish life. My parents were what we called a mixed marriage—my father’s family were proud Litvaks, from Lithuania, and my mother’s family was Hungarian. My mother’s family was very Reform and went to the Temple, my father’s family went to Orthodox shuls, and I got the best of both worlds.

I understood that choosing Duke made me something of a rebel as everybody else I knew was going to schools where they were certain to find a comfortable Jewish community. But I chose Duke on purpose, because I knew intellectually that I was going to be a bit of a persecuted minority in life; but I had never been persecuted, and I did not know how to be a minority! When as a freshman I wore a Star of David, someone asked me at a fraternity party if I were lavaliered to a sheriff. I did not expect to meet a nice Jewish boy at Duke, but then I met Gene.

We moved to Greensboro in 1970 and I have appreciated living in a community where if you looked like you were interested in something and you had the skills, it did not matter which tribe you were from. In 1979, I served as president of the United Arts Council. I chaired the board at Greensboro Day School when our children attended, and I have also been on the boards of the North Carolina School of the Arts and United Way. I served as president of Family Life Council and am on the board of the Children’s Home Society. In my philanthropy, I want to help prevent problems—though I have a private practice in counseling, I effectively want to keep people out of the therapist’s office.

Gene has been involved on the Boards of the Greensboro Day School, the Eastern Music Festival and the Greensboro Symphony. He approaches each of these commitments, as well as the patients he treats in his Allergy practice, with the idea of making all who come into contact with him feel comfortable by being comfortable himself, treating people with respect, and being honest to them.

In 1992, Gene celebrated his bar mitzvah on Masada, together with his brothers. They felt that they had accomplished something themselves. They also made a statement to the four LeBauer cousins engaged to be married that year that this family values Judaism and Israel, and that it is a part of their lives too. We want our three children to love being Jewish and to realize that they come from a long tradition.

We chose to use the Jewish Foundation of Greensboro as our base from which to distribute all donations, not only because I am the current chair, but also because we want the institutions we support to receive those checks from the Jewish Foundation. It makes a statement that we were here, we are here and we will be here.