

Phyllis Jerome

On the windowsill in the kitchen, there was a blue box. My mother would give me a quarter and I would put it in the box every Shabbat. Before candles were lit or dinner was served, the *tzedakah* box clinked with coins. That was my introduction to *tzedakah*.

When I was fourteen, I rode the subways of Brooklyn, clinking that same blue Jewish National Fund box, gathering donations from car to car. I had a whole spiel, beginning with: “Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please. Six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust...” When I finished collection, I would jump onto the



next car. And I would fill up that whole box with coins for JNF to sponsor the planting of trees to save the land which eventually became the state of Israel.

Growing up in the “golden ghetto” of Flatbush, Brooklyn, I did not know non-Jews. I never dated a boy who was not Jewish. My life was filled with Jewish experiences – it was the way we lived. My parents were committed Zionists, and they sent me to a Zionist summer camp. This is where I met Joe Jerome z”l, who became my husband.

Joe was just as committed to Israel as my family was. During the 1967 War, his donation was so large that we had to take out a second mortgage on our house. I was furious at the time, but I remember his passion and all I feel now is pride.

My commitment for doing *mitzvot* led me to become an educator. I was the director of an early childhood center in San Francisco. I clearly see the need for Jewish education as a way to keep young people committed to Judaism. To provide children with opportunities to participate in Jewish education, Jewish camps, and trips to Israel is to assist them in making a lifetime commitment to Judaism.

In 1994, after I was widowed, I left San Francisco and followed my daughter, son-in-law and two granddaughters to Greensboro, where they were living at the time. Once again, I was eager

to serve the community, and I spent the next 15 years as Director of Jewish Family Services. Greensboro is home, and I have been very engaged in Jewish life here.

My children and grandchildren have had many opportunities to become committed and involved Jews. I have always tried to be involved Jewishly wherever I have lived. I think that my progeny share the same core values that I have. I am proud of them, and I trust the future in their hands.