

## Ellen and Sigmund (Sig) Tannenbaum

My family was very assimilated into the greater Greensboro community, as opposed to our friends who moved here from majority-Jewish communities in the Northeast. As a child, I learned to do many of the things that my non-Jewish friends did. We did not keep kosher, and I grew up playing more sports than my northern counterparts did. Ellen, who came of age in Savannah, Georgia and Virginia Beach, had a similar experience.

But because we were friends with so many non-Jews, both our families concentrated on our Jewish roots. And at the same time, being a minority, gave our Jewish traditions a greater importance; we appreciated them all the more because of how scarce they were.

Ellen and I believe that being Jewish really means that you need to give back to your community—the Jewish community as well as the greater community. I have been involved in the Natural Science Center because of my science background in medicine, as well as the Family Foundation, which supports the arts and lots of human interests, including specific Jewish causes and the Eastern Music Festival (EMF), which my parents were integral in founding. Among serious concert musicians, EMF is known to be the best summer music on the East coast, and I am pretty proud of that because it puts Greensboro on the map.



My mother, who was a big proponent of EMF herself, is an inspiration to both Ellen and me. She taught us that if you are able to volunteer your time, that is wonderful; and if you are able to donate funds, that is also incredibly important. Ellen's father, who assisted in liberating concentration camps at the end of WWII, taught us the importance of remembering our Jewish roots. We strive to pass these lessons on to our son.

Certainly his education at B'nai Shalom has been instrumental in helping us reinforce both the concept of *tzedakah* and the value of tradition to him. We enrolled him in pre-school there because we wanted him to have a basis in Jewish tradition that we could not have given him on our own, and he certainly received that. And B'nai Shalom also became a lifelong investment in an incredible secular education.

At one point, Ellen asked Rabbi Havivi if he would teach a Bat Mitzvah course for her and several other women who had never been bat mitzvahed as teenagers. He agreed, and she began her yearlong course of study, which involved learning basic Hebrew. When she asked if she could use our son's first grade Hebrew text as a guide, she was told that it was too advanced. So the Hebrew happened right away for him.

Eventually Ellen did learn to read Hebrew and chant Torah, and she performed beautifully at her bat mitzvah. In fact, we have both become a little more observant because of our exposure to B'nai Shalom, and our son's experiences have given us a greater appreciation for Judaism.

We both think it is important that Jews continue to lead the way in *tzedakah* in the greater community, as well as they retain and build the Jewish population.