

Because of This Community

Lynne Kass | Secretary, Jewish Long Beach Board

My Jewish Long Beach story began in December 1996 when I attended a “From The Beginning” Mommy and Me class at the Alpert Jewish Community Center (AJCC) with my oldest daughter, Sara. I was a transplant from Yonkers, New York, where I was raised Catholic (including 12 years of Catholic schooling!). During my college years at Boston University, I met and fell in love with my husband, Jonathan, who is Jewish. Before marrying, we made a decision that we would create a Jewish household for our children, and when that time came, the AJCC was our gateway into the Long Beach Jewish Community.



Prior to taking time off from work to raise our family, I had been the Fund Development Director for the Coastal Cities Unit of the American Cancer Society. That experience led me to jump in “feet first” as a volunteer in this community. Sara and I became part of the Jewish Family & Children’s Service “Friendly Visitor” program. I was asked to join the Business & Professional Women’s Network of the Jewish Federation (now Jewish Long Beach), and I quickly found myself co-chairing the Parent Support Association for the AJCC’s Early Childhood Education Department (ECE). The AJCC and Federation became our second home – while I learned to sing Ha’Motzi, made Purim Parade decorations and picked out Passover Hagaddahs.

I was inspired by the Jewish values of tzedakah and tikkun olam, and by the amazing community leaders with whom I was privileged to work. I felt fortunate to be part of the Federation Family and to have the opportunity to help build, nurture and enrich my new community. But it wasn’t until a very personal experience in March of 2001 that I truly understood the power of this community. I spoke about that experience at the 2002 Visions Event – and thought I would share that story – my Jewish Long Beach story – with you again.

I’d like to take a moment to share a very personal story with you. It began about a year ago when I arrived home with my 2-year-old daughter on a Wednesday in late March to take my mother, who was visiting from New York to the hairdresser. When I walked inside, I didn’t find my mom downstairs waiting to leave, but rather upstairs, in the bathroom, where she had collapsed in the shower from what I thought at the time was a stroke but turned out to be a

*ruptured cerebral aneurysm. In the moments after I found her, I made three phone calls. The first, of course, to 911. The second to my husband, who was working in Laguna Hills and carools to work (so I had no idea how quickly he could return to Long Beach). And the third to the Alpert JCC preschool. When I made that third call, I immediately knew two things. First, that my older daughter who was attending the preschool would be safe and sound for as long as necessary. And second, that a staff member from the preschool was on her way to my home to pick up my two-year-old and make sure that she, too, was safe and secure. Why that kind of help? Because I am a member of **this community**.*

*An hour or two later, I was joined in the emergency room by a friend I’d met – **through this community**. She was on her cell phone in an instant to find out the name of the best neurosurgeon in town. By the next day, there were a group of women, **from this community**,*




Lynne with her mother, Rita Bruederlein.

*who had set up a meal schedule so my family didn’t have to worry about dinner for the next two weeks, and for the next several months there were dozens of families, **in this community**, who offered to help with babysitting so that I could spend time with my mom each day. When it was time to move my mom to a skilled nursing facility, it was Jewish Family & Children’s Service [JFCS], **in this community**, that guided me in where to look and what questions to ask. And as I struggled with the daunting task of getting a power of attorney and handling financial matters, there were professionals, **in this community**, who answered my calls and steered me through a maze I never dreamed I would have to navigate. All I can say is – this is*

an incredible community!

A few years ago, the Federation had a slogan that struck a chord with me. It said “No Gift Touches More Lives.” But what I’ve learned in the past year is that the slogan should say – “Your Gift Touches A Life.” It may be the life of a family, like mine, that needs help through a crisis and receives that help, thanks to services made possible by our community’s Federation campaign. It may be the life of a young child who is able to attend the AJCC preschool, thanks to a scholarship made possible by our community’s Federation campaign. It may be the life of a teen at risk who receives counseling through a JFCS program, made possible by our community’s Federation campaign. It may be the life of a senior who receives a welcoming hug at a Wednesday lunch, the life of a Hillel student who has a place to celebrate Shabbat, the life of an Ethiopian family airlifted to a “new life” in Israel, or the life of an elderly Russian in the former Soviet Union who receives a much-needed food box – all made possible by our community’s Federation campaign.

In the 20 years since that day in March 2001, I’ve never lost my passion for this amazing Jewish community, and I’ve continued to volunteer my time to make sure that those here today, as well as generations to come, will have the opportunity to be part of this very special Jewish Long Beach family. All three of my children are proud graduates of the ECE program at the AJCC, and I can’t express how important the warm, welcoming and inclusive atmosphere of the AJCC was for me – especially as the non-Jewish member of an interfaith family. I was honored to be part of the AJCC Board for 14 years and to serve as its President from 2009-2011. My family also became active members of Temple Israel and it was there that I continued my personal Jewish story – officially converting to Judaism in 2009 and then celebrating my B’nai Mitzvah (with nine other incredible women) in January 2018.

As we begin to emerge into a post-COVID world, I look forward to serving on the Board of Jewish Long Beach and to writing the next chapter in my Jewish Long Beach story. And I invite all of you to join me – as we work to guide our community to a strong and sustainable future, and as we continue to build our legacy as a warm and welcoming Jewish community that helps to nurture and enrich the lives of others – both here in Long Beach and throughout the world. 

Yom Ha’atzmaut – April 15

**Jewish Long Beach salutes
the 73rd anniversary of
Israel’s Independence.**

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