

A Place to Call Home

Sherri Selmanson | Past Member, Jewish Long Beach Board

When I was asked to tell my “Jewish Long Beach” story, I was overwhelmed about how to put so many years of memories into one place. As I got started, I realized that through so many years and so many experiences the one constant was that our community has a place to call home. The Weinberg Jewish Long Beach Campus and the Alpert Jewish Community Center (AJCC - although they were called different names in the past) played a crucial role in my family’s sense of Jewish identity.

My family moved to Lakewood in 1954. My parents, Bea and Morris Hyatt were members of the Lakewood Jewish Temple (which has subsequently become Congregation Shir Chadash). I was immediately enrolled in 1st Grade at Sunday School. That is where my Jewish education and community involvement began. After completing four years of Hebrew school in 1960, I had my Bat Mitzvah and was later Confirmed; the first Bat Mitzvah at Lakewood Jewish Temple. I also co-taught a Kindergarten Sunday School Class for two years.

In 1968, I moved to Long Beach; a product of the Long Beach Unified School District; Long Beach City College and Long Beach State. My parents remained in Lakewood and eventually moved to Seal Beach in 1989.

However, it was in the 1960s when our family joined the then “brand-new” Long Beach Jewish Community Center (LBJCC). My parents thought it was important to be with other Jewish families. I remember summer days at the pool and snacks at the snack bar. Also, Wednesday family nights at the pool. Everyone was there!

Soon I was entering the Tween Program (yes, there was such a thing) activities, dances, and it ultimately became the Teen program. We even had social events, clubs, and a Jewish high school sorority, Phi Beta Gamma, at the Center.

My mom, worked at the AJCC as the receptionist. She was the first person you saw when you entered the old building. Her desk was off to the left when you walked in and she knew where everything was. I guess you could call her the concierge. She was known to everyone as “The Shalom Lady,” answering the phones with “Shalom Jewish Community Center, may I help you.” She would then precede to transfer calls, with those old-fashioned switch boards (you know the ones with plugs). Her work started there in the late 60s and she retired around the early 1980s.

My mother and father were involved in Senior Activities and Lunches. Mom was in the Knit Wits, crocheting hats and blankets for the needy. The LBJCC along with the activities in the Jewish Community were very important to them.



Bea Hyatt

Once we became parents, our involvement centered around activities for our daughter Melissa. Since I was a working Mom, my mother took Melissa to Mommy and Me classes. She became the Grandmother to all the little ones. Melissa didn’t skip a beat at the JCC because the Shalom Lady was her grandmother.

Melissa was in Early Childhood Education (ECE) for two years and then completed Kindergarten at the “J.” In those years, I volunteered and chaired the Chanukah Happening and even received a volunteer award. This was only the beginning!

After Melissa left ECE, we were not as actively involved, but as time progressed



Melissa and Sherri Selmanson

it was my daughter who brought me back to community to become more involved. Melissa participated in the Alpert New Leaders Forum in 2013 and soon after that joined the Women’s Philanthropy Cabinet where she designed and created the logo being used today. Soon, my daughter said, “Mom, it is time for you to get back into volunteering for the community so you have to come to the meetings,” and I did. I followed her lead and the rest is history. Jewish philanthropy holds a special place in my heart and was renewed by my special daughter. Melissa has since continued her involvement as a Lentzner Fellow and is serving on other boards in the community.

Alongside my daughter, I joined the Women’s Philanthropy Cabinet in 2013 and later that year also went on the community trip to Poland and Israel. The memories of that trip will stay with me forever. It heightened my connection to our history, sense of peoplehood, and created lasting friendships that I treasure.

My involvement continued with Women’s Philanthropy and I went on to co-chair the Arlene Solomon Visions Dinner in 2015 and 2016. I also spent several years on the Jewish Community Foundation Board and ultimately chaired the Grants Committee. I was active in the Legacy Society and worked on their yearly brunches.

Currently, I am a member of the Jewish Long Beach Planning and Grants Committee and still active with Women’s Philanthropy. However, during my years at the Foundation, I learned how important it was to leave a lasting legacy.

The Hyatt/Selmanson relationship with Jewish Long Beach and our community goes back many years. I am glad they have been there for me and my family, and I want others to have the same opportunities.

I have been coming to this building for more than 60 years and feel there should always be a building to house Jewish events and Jewish community involvement. Therefore, we have decided to establish the Selmanson Family Fund in order to leave a bequest through Jewish Long Beach to benefit the Weinberg Jewish Long Beach Campus. I have learned how easy it is to provide in our estate plan for our loved ones but still leave something to the organizations that we have invested in and cared about for decades. Please join us.

As we head out of this pandemic, I cannot wait to see all of you at our campus very soon and welcome you home.

The possibilities for helping to ensure the future of our community are endless. For more information on how to open a new fund, contribute to existing funds or create a legacy that benefits all the charities you care about, please contact Sharon Kenigsberg at sharonk@jewishlongbeach.org 562.426.7601 ext. 1008.



Melissa, Bernie and Sherri Selmanson

In 1972, Bernie and I were married at the LBJCC. There used to be a courtyard that was framed by classrooms and social rooms along with an old Auditorium. Off to the center of the courtyard was a big beautiful tree. My mother had the florist hang garlands on the tree and converted it into a Chupah. Quite creative. We had 300 people in that courtyard and a big reception in the auditorium followed.

As newlyweds it was important to Bernie and me, that we remained involved. We were invited to join the Leadership Program hosted by Lynne Rosenstein, our trainer, who later became the assistant director of the LBJCC.