

## #Jew-ish or #Jewish

Sara Phillips Brown | Member, Jewish Long Beach Board

While I am currently a proud leader in Jewish Long Beach, my path to Jewish leadership was mired with uncertainty and detours.

Judaism was always a part of my identity and it took on different forms along the way. I was never really connected to the Long Beach community other than through my family's very deep roots here. My great-grandfather Paul Phillips started Phillips Steel in 1915, as a scrap metal and raw materials business. The family business grew and expanded over the



Sara Brown with her parents, Sandy and Daryl Phillips.

years. My father, Daryl Phillips, was president of the company for more than 40 years and now I am proud to be carrying on that role. My father, his siblings and cousins all grew up in Long Beach at Temple Israel. Our family truly were among the early Jewish pioneers in the community.

I grew up in Huntington Beach and we were members of Temple Beth David, where I attended pre-school, became a Bat Mitzvah and was affiliated with B'nai B'rith Youth (BBYO).

My first Jewish memory in Long Beach was spending the night in a red nylon sleeping bag on a chilly and damp floor at the Alpert JCC (then known as the Long Beach Jewish Community Center). This was the mid-80s and the JCC was still on its original campus with the linoleum tiled floors and dim lighting. And while I have no idea why my parents shipped me off for the night, I do remember the smells, all the smells.

After graduation from high school in 1996, I moved away for college. Emory was a college with LOTS of Jews, but of course I joined the non-Jewish sorority. I participated with the Hillel during the High Holy Days. During those years I was #Jew-ish, not overly seeking Jewish involvement. When I was 19, in-between my second and third year of school, I did make my one and only trip to Israel with Young Judea (which was a predecessor of Birthright). It was

awesome, liberating, exciting and created in me a desire for Jewish life. I remember hiking Masada at dawn, being impressed by modern Tel Aviv versus old Jerusalem, and eating lots of hummus. One of the highlights of the trip was the coincidence of reuniting with a friend from pre-school that I had not seen since we were 13. However, once I landed back on US soil that light quickly faded as I became immersed in life back home.

Upon graduating from college, like most 20-somethings, I wanted to have an adventure so I moved to NYC to be with friends, and live the city life.

Once I realized that I was ready for the next phase of my life, I wanted to move back home and be closer to my family. In 2005, I returned to California and lived with my parents until I eventually moved to Belmont Shore, in search of a more vibrant community. I didn't know Long Beach and I certainly didn't know any young people that lived in Long Beach. So I joined a running group, immersed myself in the family business and loosely socialized with the local Jewish young adult groups, still #Jew-ish.

In 2009, I was asked to be part of the reincarnation of a Community Leadership Development Program (now known as the Alpert New Leaders Forum\*). I was delighted! Something new, philanthropic, local and even a way for me to meet other young professional Jews. Boy, did I throw myself into this group. After completing the class in 2010, I volunteered for Super Sunday, joined the board of the Federation, sat on the nominating committee for the next incoming class of leaders, served as the co-chair for the program and met some lifelong friends. I also traveled nationally to the Jewish Federations of North America Boston Leadership Conference. I came back motivated to implement new ideas for young leadership. In 2011, I earned the Neuburger Young Leadership Award together with Paige Fingerhut Charnick. (The Neuburger award is given to young leaders with a vision for strengthening our Jewish community, the desire and ability to motivate others to become active in the Jewish community and the ability to become a top Federation leader. Awardees receive a grant to attend the Jewish Federations of North America General Assembly.)

This period of my life was defined by total immersion in all things Jewish. However, I knew that this level of involvement was not sustainable for me. I then moved to pursue an MBA from Pepperdine, did some traveling, and spent five years at the Hartford Financial Services group. But I always had the goal of eventually returning to the Long Beach area and starting a family of my own one day.

It's been seven years since I moved back to Long Beach. The "I" is now a "We" and I/we have no intention of leaving. Long Beach is home for me, my husband Richard Brown and our two children,

Max (6) and Isla (4). Jewish Long Beach is our home away from home. Our kids, go to school at the Alpert JCC, attend Camp Komaroff, where they have taken



Sara Brown with her husband, Richard, and children Max and Isla.

a zillion swim lessons (only to still wear floaties in the deep end). We love that our children are learning about Jewish culture and values, and that they sing the "hamotzi" in "engbrew." I'm back on the Jewish Long Beach Board, a Lentzner Fellow,\*\* and yes made still more lifelong friends.

Most importantly though, I'm following in the footsteps of my parents and their parents, who were always passionate in supporting Jewish philanthropy and serving the community. I am now extremely proud to be #Jewish. 

\*Alpert New Leaders Forum is a community wide leadership development program that is free to participants who want to further their knowledge of our Jewish community and network with other Jewish leaders.

\*\*Lentzner Fellows is a select group of leaders who are committed to immerse themselves in deepening their leadership skills to serve Jewish Long Beach.



Paige Fingerhut Charnick (L) and Sara Brown

