

What kind of Jewish person am I?

The Jews are called People of the Book, which is how I like to think of myself. I have always connected my relation to Judaism with this feeling of being part of a group whose members value education and encourage the asking of questions. These are traditions I have have tried to perpetuate.

My mother, of blessed memory, was the daughter of a Rabbi. She traveled alone to this country from Poland as a 16 year old girl. She had little or no formal schooling, yet she delivered a clear message: Education is the key to success. Growing up in the Bronx, I had access to some outstanding educational opportunities, and I was able to attend competitive schools which ensured a challenging education with an emphasis on learning how to seek knowledge. The message was: do not fear to question, to challenge, and thereby to learn. As John Milton says: "difference of opinion among honest men is but knowledge in the making."

After graduation I started my career with NASA's predecessor agency in Tidewater Virginia. Here my social and professional environment was predominately with Christian friends and co-workers. Here I grew up.

After marriage to Marcia and moving to the Philadelphia area, our family joined a group of young suburban families that built a school for the Jewish education of our children. Eventually, that became the new suburban home of Temple Sinai. There, the prayer book spoke of giving thanks for the intelligence with which we were gifted and for having the will to seek knowledge. This was a message that reinforced the teachings of my parents and the training of the wonderful, and tuition free, high school and college that I was privileged to attend.

Some years later, I was invited to spend a year as a Visiting Professor at the Technion, the Israeli Institute of Technology. Marcia and I and our two young children, Lynn and Adam, arrived there one year after the 1967 war. I taught graduate students while Lynn attended an elementary school where few spoke English; not even her classroom teacher. This exposure to education methods led to me seeking election and becoming the first Jew ever elected to the Upper Dublin School Board; a school system that, until my service, did not have any of the High Holy Days as a school Holiday.

Throughout my subsequent career in my materials science R&D company, I continued my connection to education both as faculty and by professionally training and lecturing, both here and abroad. It was post retirement when Lynn and Evan steered our Jewish journey here to KI. Here we are able to combine our Jewish observances with intellectual stimulation in a setting where we can observe an extraordinary program of Jewish education. Customs change, technology changes, but the People of the Book continue on. How satisfying it is to be here as part of an effort that encourages one, young or old, to question, to challenge, and thereby to learn.