



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Henry Ross-Grayman

My life began before I was born. Both my parents were Holocaust survivors. We emigrated from a DP encampment in Germany after WWII to Canada. Needless to say, the train ride from Halifax to Toronto in the middle of winter was frightening. The snow was up to the train cabin window and my parents moaned that we had just moved to Siberia.

In Toronto, the closest we ever felt to the Jewish community was at Kensington Market; our first Canadian habitat.

At age 10, my friends were starting to prepare for their Bar Mitzvahs, so I demanded that I have one as well. Off I went to Cheder for the next three years. With my new knowledge of Judaism, I became the “religious” one in the family. It was a battle, as both my parents were Jewish Atheists. God had stopped at the gates of Auschwitz, yet they still imbued me with a sense of Jewish culture (Yiddishkeit).

In graduate school, I studied family systems. As a member of the second generation, I wanted to understand the dynamics of a household that careened between one overblown crisis to another. With my psychology background, dealing with client traumas/crises seemed like a natural fit. I developed a private practice as well as being the executive director of a mental health clinic.

At the same time, I took on the role of Chair of the Belleville Police Services Board. The trauma of the front-line officers was significant enough for me to help them develop an Employee Assistance Program.

Before retirement, I worked for the Ministry of Children and Family Development for 16 years as a manager for social workers, psychologists, children’s mental health counsellors, and youth probation officers.

Today, I relish spending my time outdoors, kayaking, skiing, and gardening. I lead the shul’s Gardening Committee for the three grow boxes on the west side of the building and would welcome new members whether or not you have a green thumb. We grow vegetables for a Succoth celebration. I also enjoy being part of the Membership Committee.

My wife, Deborah, and I and our Cairn terrier, Bella, divide our time between Vancouver and Salt Spring Island where my father-in-law lives full-time. I am working on training Bella to become a truffle mushroom hunting dog. Ask me about my life-defining kayak trip to Alaska.

I was drawn to Or Shalom with its emphasis on community and inclusiveness. The opportunities to deepen my understanding about Judaism and our spiritual history has really resonated with me. In particular, one of Reb Nachman of Breslau's sayings struck a chord:

"It is a mitzvah to be joyous all the time."