

Memoir/Tribute to the Congregation's 130th Anniversary

by Rabbi Bradley N. Bleefeld (our student rabbi from 1973-1975)

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July 10, 2015

Merrie and I have such fond memories of our two years with our friends in Jackson and many of them are mixed into the flavors and aromas of the food we shared. Luncheons with Gertrude Kisber and the time she boldly said (and I can still hear her voice), "Rabbi, you'd be a good lookin fella if you shaved the 'gaahbage' off your face." I did!

Family meals with my first president, Jonas Jr. and Jane, and the Richmans and the Friedmans and oh the times we had with the Cranes. I was a regular at Bess and Dave's Shabbat table, crowded with delight and the best chicken soup ever. It was lovingly made by Bess's mother Ethel. At her funeral I recall paying her tribute by saying that her soup was beyond compare as her secret seasoning was to 'sigh into the pot', flavoring its golden droplets with two thousand years of Jewish hopes and dreams. It was my sacred responsibility to bring the right dry curd cottage cheese from the big city so that "Mama" could make her blintzes just right. They were! I recall sitting at the luncheon counter with Don Friedman, my second president, as he introduced me (a native New Yorker) to barbeque. Thanks to one particular Saturday night at the Cranes, I have never been able to eat smoked ribs again. It took me over a year to be able to drive past a rib joint without getting an upset stomach.

At a memorable congregational Seder our two and a half year old Marshall (now 43) scooted away from us only to be found seconds later banging the table top with a great shank bone.

It seemed as if the whole town knew when the rabbi was in residence at the Days Inn, as I would zip around to the synagogue or a meal in my red convertible. I still own that car. But these days I enjoy seeing Marshall, who I taught to drive in it, teach his own son Ben to do the same. I preferred to drive rather than fly from Cincinnati to Jackson most weekends and as I would make the swing west from Nashville, the cloth top came down. I was the only rabbinical student with a year round tan.

George Axelrad's 90th birthday Shabbat dinner saw his family in attendance from around the country. He was a courtly man and though I was some 66 years his junior, he taught me that rabbis are ageless. Before Shabbat services in his honor twenty five of us were gathered around a grand table at the finest restaurant in town. The entrees were preordered and I watched one by one as the meals were placed before each diner as they patiently waited for the last to be served. It was me. I will never forget the looks at the rabbi when the waitress came out from the kitchen yelling "who gets the ham steak?" To this day I do not know why it was brought to me. It sat cold and uneaten as I pecked at the potatoes.

Such golden days they were as I remember Jackson and the families of B'nai Israel who extended themselves so warmly, so lovingly to the Bleefelds. You cheered my achievements, forgave my stumblings and spoiled me for every congregation since. I am still so proud to have been your rabbi and bless you all with great love. Merrie joins me in wishing each of you a hearty Mazel Tov on one hundred and thirty years. Clearly, the recipe of synagogue life for each and all of you is very sweet.

Rabbi Bradley N. Bleefeld