

Most of you probably recognize me as one of the smiling faces up on the bimah, singing my heart out while helping to lead the music during our services. Or perhaps you know me the way I so often identify myself: as the very proud mom of Sam and Ben (both away in college) who were each called to the Torah right here at KHN and later served as presidents of our youth group, KHTY. Maybe you recognize me from one of other roles I've played over the years: helping out with Galas and FRED events; Ed Committee; our 13th Year; as Treasurer on the Board – or whatever “role” Eddie lets me play in our annual Purim Schpeil (I do have a thing for King Ahashverosh)! This kind of involvement isn't unusual in a small congregation like ours where so many of you step up every day to pitch in or lead the good work of this community. I know, firsthand, the time and effort you give and I'd like to take a moment here to say thank you for all YOU do – Yasher Koach! Okay, now back to ME.....

What some of you may not know, or it may not be the first thing you think of – is that I'm not actually Jewish. I was born and raised Catholic in a small town in upstate New York. Eric and I were married on Cape Cod in 1990 by a rabbi and a priest and our sons have grown up celebrating both traditions. Ours is just one of the many multi-faith families who are active here at Kol HaNeshamah.

So, it's safe to say that my “Jewish Journey” began 29 years ago when I met Eric - btw, at Fenway Park during a Red Sox game. But that's a whole other story I'll save for another time! Eric and I found out very early that our faiths shared many common values: the importance of family and community, helping those in need, social justice and making the world a better place. Eric and his family welcomed me into their Jewish holiday celebrations and gently taught me their family traditions. I have such fond memories of those years of new foods, songs, stories and lots of great discussions and debates. But it wasn't always easy and required a lot of work and communication, almost daily.

Eric was raised conservative and we often struggled to find a synagogue that “fit” us as an interfaith couple and family. I remember when we got engaged at 25 years old, we set up a meeting with the Conservative Rabbi from Eric’s home temple out of courtesy and respect. We knew he wouldn’t marry us, and had no intention of even asking him. But not only did he tell us emphatically that he would never marry us, he went on to sternly chastise *me* for “taking one of his own.” Uh, *AWKWARD!* So, we dusted ourselves off and moved ahead. We loved each other, had the love and support of our families and friends – found a wonderful Reform Rabbi to perform the wedding ceremony alongside my family priest.

Not surprisingly, I was always drawn to the music – but the services at Eric’s temple in Boston and other Conservative shuls were hard for me since the siddur had almost no transliteration. The best I could do was quietly hum the melody and pretend I was following along. I would keep my nose in the prayer book and cast quick glances around to see if anyone noticed I didn’t know what I was doing. The minutes would tick by slowly and I’d try to occupy my mind by reading the English translations or commentary while everyone around me was worshipping together. I recall feeling like such an outsider and an imposter. It was frustrating that I couldn’t sing along – especially during the long HHD services. I remember one of the few prayers with a transliteration was V’al Kulam. I couldn’t wait to get to that part and would belt it out every time – so happy and relieved that I could join in. It’s still one of my favorite HHD prayers to this day.

After getting married, we moved from Boston to Berkeley, CA for grad school and joined Netivot Shalom, an intimate and welcoming Conservative Jewish congregation that had just started the year before. We moved back and forth across the country two more times and tried out temples as we went: a New Age synagogue in Woodstock, NY and a large conservative shul on Mercer Island. Each

had some wonderful aspects and I guess I got better at “faking it” - but I still felt like Goldilocks – none were “just right.” Until we found KHN.

We met Eddie and Marty Westerman in 2002. Their son, Adam and our son, Sam were in kindergarten together. Eddie and Marty told us about a new Progressive Synagogue community right here in West Seattle. We came for Purim (Pirates of Shushan if I recall), heard Geoff Greenlee sing and we were hooked – we’ve been members ever since. I finally had my transliteration and could sing along at services! We still celebrate the Catholic holidays, but over time, it felt very natural as a family, to focus more of our time and energy on this special growing community where everyone was welcome AND everyone was needed.

Journeys are an interesting thing. Just when you think you’re in a groove, at a safe comfortable cruising speed or altitude, something happens to change it up. KHN was a perfect fit for us. Reform, progressive, lots of other non-Jewish partners just like me, less than 1 mile from our home; AND the music and community were wonderful. Sam and Ben had found a safe place to be themselves, learn and grow. We had all started connecting with other members and making friends – it was good, it was comfortable. To quote a line from Hamilton “That would be enough.”

So you may be wondering - how did I go from being a regular member to as involved as I am today - a fact that I must say STILL completely astonishes me! Well one day, early on, after Shabbat morning services, I was chatting with Rabbi Michael. He looked me in the eye and said with earnest so typical of R. Michael, “Kathleen, it’s time.” I was confused, time for what? He said, “I hear you singing from the pew, week after week. You’ve got it down. It’s time to join the ensemble up here on the Bimah. We really need your voice.” “But Michael....” I whispered... “I can’t even read Hebrew and you

remember I'm not actually, you know....." He whispered back, "Yes, it's OKAY that you're not Jewish – you can still sing with the ensemble!" He nudged me to stretch and led me forward on a new leg of my journey. It's amazing how repetition, familiarity and engagement can lead to confidence and how confidence can give you the courage to step up and say "Yes". I was already well on my way to becoming "¾ Jewish" as my kids would say - when Debbie Levin asked me to serve as Treasurer. So I said yes – but that's probably also a testament to Debbie who does NOT take no for an answer! Serving on the Board was immensely gratifying for me personally. I came away with an even greater sense of connection, pride and faith in this rare community we have. I felt like the Grinch when his "heart grew three sizes that day" (sorry for the Christmas reference there – it just fit!).

That's when I took the next step on my journey – and this one I kind of did on my own. KHN was turning 13, a milestone year that I knew deserved extra attention. I was rotating off the Board and needed something to do "in retirement". So I nominated myself to coordinate our 13th Year. I put a proposal before the Shammes Committee for a year-long calendar of special events marking KHN's "B'art Mitzvah" year. I recruited co-chairs to help with each of the events and helped organize and put them on. And here was where my journey took another unexpected turn. Karen Weisser, my SIR co-chair, discovered an incredible scholar. You'll recall we brought Rabbi Benay Lappe to Seattle for our 13th Year weekend of study – she gave a provocative lecture on Friday night and a more intimate discussion on Sunday. But to participate in her all-day Saturday Talmud workshop, you needed to be able to at least sound out your Hebrew letters. We offered beginning and refresher Hebrew classes for free to anyone who wanted to learn. Well – there was no way I was going to help plan all of this and not attend - I didn't want to miss out!! So I did it – I learned Hebrew (well, just the letters) – and I took part in that Talmud workshop. Engaging with the text in that way gave me a whole new sense of

accomplishment and connection to Judaism. Now while I'm singing or listening to someone chant Torah, I actually follow along in the Hebrew. I still have long way to go, but it's all part of the journey.

I'm so grateful to all of YOU for giving me this opportunity to belong – because I do truly feel like I belong here, like my contributions are valued equally and I am an integral part of our KHN family. Among you are some of my closest friends with some of the most meaningful connections I have made in my life. You have celebrated with us as Sam and Ben were called to the Torah and cried with me when I lost my mom. We have worshiped together, camped together, shared countless meals together, and worked hard together; and it has been rewarding and fulfilling in ways I could have never imagined. Remember, what I said earlier: it's amazing how repetition, familiarity and engagement lead to confidence. I have learned that belonging, being a real part of this community, is like any relationship and requires commitment on both sides. Show up, be present, say yes even if you feel like it's a stretch, look for ways to engage that resonate with you. Hey, if the Hebrew singing Catholic girl can do it, anyone can! I look forward to seeing where the next phase of OUR Jewish Journey takes us, together.

L'Shanah Tovah!