

**May 19, 2023**

One of my favorite items in my mother-in-law's house was a needlepoint picture that read: "There are two things you give your children: one is roots and the other is wings." This quote became central to how I thought about parenting even before the arrival of our children Bailey, Jacob and Cole. The first goal - roots: help them develop enough confidence and strength to know who they are and where they came from to withstand life's gusty winds. The second goal - wings: give them opportunities to think, explore, and experiment that test their aerodynamics, witness their awkward fluttering, and then watch them fly. Two of our children have grown and flown, and our third will be a Confirmand with his amazing classmates tomorrow morning.

None of this – roots or wings – would have been fully possible without our connection to Temple Beth-El. It is in these walls that our children learned about our people, our history, and our traditions. They learned our sacred language and our songs. And they met others who shared their cultural and faith stories. While they may not be yeshiva-level experts, they know who they are and where they came from, which allows them to speak about that identity with pride and confidence. And this root system was developed by kids who were not all that excited to head to 211 Belknap on Sunday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. This root system was built long before Beit Midrash and Ellen Barshop. Imagine what's possible now.

These roots allowed them to develop wings. For example, Cole came home from confirmation class the other day and couldn't wait to share his speech with me. Let me be clear: this is not a common occurrence about any of his homework. I wasn't very far into it, and I got choked up. It was not only good (you should come tomorrow to hear it), but I realized in that moment, Cole had wings. He thought about his life, grappled with his own beliefs, and developed a perspective to make sense of difficult concepts. Isn't that what we do in adulthood – with religion and with life in general? These life lessons were taught here, under our dome with Rabbi Nathan, Rabbi Yergin and others. Engineering wings is hard work, so to see a solid prototype in action is pretty rewarding. Don't get me wrong – Cole can't even get his driver's license for three days yet, so his wings are somewhat clipped. But he is in fact flying, thanks in part to Temple.

These wings give me both pride and bit of melancholy. The likelihood that any of our kids will return to San Antonio is small, which means the likelihood that they will return to Temple Beth-El to live their Jewish lives is also small. While Temple Beth-El is blessed with multigenerational families, we are overwhelmingly a congregation of transplants. My own wings brought me over 900 miles away from Omaha and my synagogue of Temple Israel. Marty's wings brought him a little over 300 miles from Port Arthur. We were both lucky enough to land here, at Temple Beth-El, where our congregations builds both roots and wings for the next generation.

While Marty's and my children may not return here, someone's children – or friends, or parents, or siblings – will make their way to San Antonio and they will need a strong, vibrant, Reform congregation to catch them. Without a doubt, that is us. While we can get stronger and more vibrant, we have the tools to do so because we already have the people and the intention to do

so... just look around. We are builders of roots and the fashioner of wings, and I cannot wait to see where both of those things take us, this year, next year and in the next 150 years.

## **May 26, 2023**

In the last several months, I've seen the most remarkable thing happening at our synagogue: the reemergence of committee work and congregational engagement. While some will argue that we've always had it, I will counter that COVID did a nasty number on enthusiasm, communal interaction, and motivation. But the flywheel that provides essential energy to our institution is beginning to gain momentum.

These functional teams of congregants and staff have emerged to host a beautiful fundraiser, grapple with our budget, and consider the needs of our building and cemeteries. They've united to worry about our collective safety as well as our partnership with Great Hearts. They've volunteered to seek our next musical spiritual leader and they've thoughtfully considered how this institution should run from both a governance perspective and an ethical one. They've imagined and hosted beautiful congregational dinners and created opportunities to train a cadre of greeters. And they are beginning to envision a year-long celebration of 150 years' worth of our congregation's existence, a process which will produce other committees and groups that will bring the efforts to life.

While there are some folks involved in multiple efforts, there are many unique and fresh faces, including some first timers to Temple work. This kind of involvement and diversity has me additionally excited. We are a beautiful mosaic of a congregation, but often we rely on a small subset of congregants – or even staff – to make our magic happen. Expanding our talent pool expands the creativity of our programming, shares the load, and emphasizes the point that WE are Temple Beth-El, not just some of us.

I am further excited about this new surge from an entirely different vantage point. When people engage in committees, they learn how Temple functions, who the players are, how to get things done, and acquire new skills in the process. This, in turn, is how leaders are grown and how the pipeline to the board is built. Don't get me wrong – committee work does not commit folks to board service. But it starts to create options for everyone – congregants and our nominating committee alike. Think of it like this: for those of us with partners or spouses, or who know people with partners or spouses, no one would ever enter into a relationship without dating for a while. Committee work, for lack of a better analogy, is like dating Temple. Some folks love it and are inspired to take a more dedicated approach; others are good to keep it casual. Both are good routes, but committee work is where those options are considered. There are many ways to get involved at Temple. If you have an hour or two or five, I promise you, we can find a place to plug you in. Please contact me or a member of our staff, and we'll put you in touch with the right person. And if there's not "a person," you may have invented something that we just might consider doing! But getting involved is THE way to move our flywheel and increase our congregational momentum. I look forward to working with each of you!