

As Howard will attest, you get a lot of things when you become President – responsibility, phone calls emails, headaches and occasionally a sense of accomplishment. So far as I can tell, you only get one thing as Past president – this smile.

However, One of the things I did not expect to get was a question from a few of you...it goes something like...Jeff, why are you still doing xyz or as a statement...I did not think you would still come to services now that you are not the President. Quite unexpected given that by some accounts, I am even more active now with Kol Ami than I ever have been. So allow me to explain why I continue to want to be so involved with Kol Ami

The answer, at least to me, is amazingly simply. Experience and Relationships...to paraphrase Einstein... 'only with experience comes knowledge.' I enjoy being a student of life and being President was quite the learning experience. In regards to relationships....Kol Ami is an integral part of our life...our being my family..and of our Judaism. I do what I do out of a love, commitment to my community and the sense of ownership that comes with the recognition of those responsibilities and obligations. Forging relationships is a really cool byproduct of that.

To appreciate my answer and to try to make it relevant to what many of us experience at Kol Ami, let me give you a little background.

I have told this story before of sitting where you are sitting now on Rosh Hashanah about 8 years ago or so and Rabbi Andy challenging us to make a communal trip to Israel. On my way out in the receiving line, I casually said that when the trip comes to fruition, I would love to go. By the time I got home, there was a letter waiting for me informing me that I was now co-chair of the Israel Trip committee. The trip is still in our future and my co-chair Ethel is now someone I am proud to have as a friend. And As Howard spoke about yesterday, for me - this is when Kol Ami went from being they and them to us and we. Next up for me was leading the Programming committee and one of our first efforts was to have a Poker night. A great experience that introduced me to synagogue bureaucracy. Seriously – it really was a great learning experience that helped prepare me future leadership roles. The Poker night was a success and the friendship I formed with my poker night co-chair, Emily is another blessing. Relationships and experiences. From there a Board position followed, then the Vice-Presidency, and then, of course the Presidency. Each bringing the opportunity to learn and to experience our community. And I don't even want to try to count all of the dinners...all without a kitchen. In a strange twist on what I am trying to explain today...as President I would be helping prepare for one our community dinners and the Rabbi would ask me why I 'the President' was chopping vegetables or whatever. My answer was...it is what I love...I did it before I was President...and I will continue to do it now that I have completed my term. There is no better why to enjoy what we have than to break bread with each other.

That is only half of my history with Kol Ami. Concurrent with all of those quote, unquote secular things; perhaps non-ritual is a better way to say that...on the ritual side, I renewed my relationship with Shabbat as I became a regular at Saturday morning

services. Some of the other regulars kept bugging me about coming to Torah Study. It was bad enough I was giving up my Saturday mornings now they wanted an extra hour. Initially I had a problem getting to Torah Study at 9 am so I started off by coming at 9:30 as could convince myself that coming a half hour late for Torah Study was easier than coming half an hour early for services. I have now been a regular for more than 5 years and simply put, it is the hour I look forward to most in my entire week. Gary and Isia and Alex and Eric along with some others (forgive me for not mentioning all of your names) have become an integral part of my life and the way I look at it and my Judaism.

Along this amazing journey of learning and experiencing and becoming part of a community through so many relationships there has been Rabbi Andy. It moves me in a way more than he could ever know when he calls me and starts a conversation with..."Jeff, this is your Rabbi"...your being the key word. I have a Rabbi! And that I can also call him friend...well, I really don't have the words. And most recently...a new relationship has started to blossom...Welcome to Kol Ami Ruthie. You are we – All those pronouns again, Howard.

So the point of this history lesson is that the Presidency was by no means my first involvement with Kol Ami and there is no way it would be my last. Let's put it another way – a perhaps from the communities point of view. Would we want the experience of the President to be such that, once the term is complete, the President would no longer want to actively participate in the community? I would hope the question answers itself.

The presidency was just another job in many I have had and will continue to have...ok, it is not 'just' another job – it is our secular leader and I don't want to diminish its importance but it is a matter of perspective. Let me try this...We will always have a President. And perhaps that is the way some of you viewed me – as the President not as Jeff. Well, I am not the President anymore but I am still Jeff.

Now some of you had the pleasure of meeting our friends, the Broads...that would be Brian and Brenda and their son Brandon, originally from Buffalo; they moved into our neighborhood a few years ago and then moved to Amsterdam last year. During the time they were our neighbors, we became very close friends and Cheryl and I and the boys miss them terribly. I only make a point of mentioning them because for me, it was so unique. I don't have a lot of secular friends. The ones I have I have known for almost my entire life. In our modern world, neighborhood does not equal community. Community is where you find and make it. This is my community; Kol Ami my 'hood.

I don't know where else in my life I would have the opportunity to meet and make friends with people like Howard or Gerry or Emily and the rest of her family – turns out her Dad, Julius attended the Yeshiva in Hartford with my mom. Without this community, I would never have met someone like Paula who will continue to talk to me in Yiddish until I learn it. The secular side of my life would probably not introduce me to people like Bernie or Jack or Morris or Rose or Sue or...well, you get the point. Again forgive me for not mentioning more names but the bottom line is one of the benefits of

my experiences is that I now know just about all of you – what a blessing! And I want to get to know the rest of you.

I have never had that sense of community in my life. Together, We continue to experience life and all its ups and downs together. And I could not and can not fathom that the end of my presidency would be the end of my relationship with this community. You and I have worked to hard on those relationships and as noted above, I don't get those opportunities that often in my life...and frankly, I am lazy and getting older and it is much easier to maintain a relationship than to forge a new one. So for better or worse, you're stuck with me.

My experience and my journey is of course unique to me as yours is to you. That is why we say you need to pick up your shovel and start digging...my shovel won't work for you. The rewards however are mutual...the sense of community and the wisdom that comes with the experience of doing something not just for yourself. I hope some part of this long explanation of why I continue to be so involved with Kol Ami resonated with you and I hope that as Howard so eloquently put yesterday there is no they and them...there is only we and us. After all, Kol Ami does not mean all those people...it mean All My People. We are All My People...and I remain yours.

From Cheryl, Jacob, Zach and Myself...to all of you...Shana Tova.