

MY JEWISH JOURNEY – Glenn Kersey

I am not sure exactly where my journey began. I was raised by my very Fundamentalist Christian mother who insisted Sunday, every Sunday was for attending Sunday School, as well as both morning and evening worship services. I learned the “Old Testament” the New and memorized the Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith with the best of them.

However all of this immersion in the faith did not keep me (even as a child) from questioning, from doubting. Try as I might, I never quite understood what a close and personal relationship with a savior was.

Growing up in a housing project in East Savannah, GA I did not have much contact with Jews other than the merchants with whom everyone in Savannah purchased what they needed. I did not meet a Jew my age until I went to High School when nearly ¼ (or so it seemed) of the student body was Jewish. ‘

In College my best friend and one of my roommates were Jews. It was in College that I like many young people begin to seriously question my faith. To solve my crisis of faith I did the most logical thing. I decided to become a Presbyterian Minister. I thought that if I was required to teach and counsel others about their faith I could solve my problems. I guess it was a little like someone with significant emotional problems studying to become a psychiatrist so they could fix themselves. Fortunately I had two adult friends who kept me from making a grave mistake. One of my friends was a former Presbyterian Minister and the other a school teacher and a Jew.

It was by the examples of my best friend (his family), my roommate and my school teacher friend that I saw who Jews were. They were people. These guys were honest to a penny, generous, and they genuinely cared about me. As a young man living on his own for the first time I was certainly grateful for the dishes with the tiny cracks in the glaze that I received from my friend Leonard’s wife every year just before Passover. This was also my first introduction to Rabbinic Kosher laws. I was also the first time I noticed that my friend was in an interfaith marriage. His wife was orthodox and he was agnostic. She kept a Kosher home and he ate bacon double cheese bagels with a side of fried shrimp. However, their marriage is still working after more than 50 years.

It was during my college days that I decided that I would convert to Judaism. However, little things such as meeting the love of my life, getting married and starting two careers and having a child, caused me to delay my decision for a little while. Well a rather long while actually, 25 years. During those 25 years I studied all things Jewish, I read novels by Jewish authors. It is amazing how much one can learn about Jewish life and thought by reading well written and researched novels.

I was once asked by a Rabbi if I was running away from Christianity or running toward Judaism. If I was doing anything it was not running, perhaps it was a slow amble.

I finally at age 47 decided it was time to find a congregation and begin my life as a Jew. I asked my best friend Herbert Victor if he or his Rabbi could recommend a congregation. Rabbi Mark Belzer now retired, but then the Rabbi at Temple Mikveh Israel in Savannah GA, without hesitation recommended Congregation B’nai Israel. I attended services one Friday in August 2001, on the night

before a young man was to become Bar Mitzvah. I was welcomed, ushered into the social hall after the service for the Oneg and introduced to too many people. I was home. It was as if everything I had planned for years before was now coming together. The new student Rabbi received permission from his Mentor to begin conversion classes for me. I was soon joined by two more students. We completed the conversion classes went to the Mikveh and less than a year later I became Bar Mitzvah. Finding Congregation B'nai Israel saved my life. Not in the literal sense. I was not going to commit suicide or anything. I just did not feel completely fulfilled. I had a loving wife, a good job and a beautiful child, but something was missing. What was missing was a sense of community. I found that here at B'nai Israel. I was immediately put to work: building a playground, singing in the choir, teaching religious school, leading services and serving on the board of trustees. This is the best job I have ever had. B'nai Israel not only saved my life it has become my life.