

Barbara Fishman  
High Holidays 2016

L'Shana Tova, Good Yontif. I am Barbara Fishman, the President of Adas Yoshuron, and once again I am up here on the bima to welcome you and to tell you a little about who we are, where we have come from, and where we plan on going in the near future.

We started as a handful of Jewish Eastern European immigrants meeting in storefronts on Main St. in Rockland. We purchased this building from a church in 1912 with the help of the local Catholic priest, and we have continued as a congregation of Jewish families throughout the years, our numbers waxing and waning, but always continuing our Jewish presence here in Midcoast Maine. When I arrived on the scene in 1948, my family had been active members of Adas Yoshuron from the beginning, as was almost every Jew in the area. This was, and still is, the only game in town. As a child and young girl, I sat in the balcony with the other women, the men were downstairs, and except for High Holidays, the front door of this building was locked. There was very little going on, except for an occasional yahrzeit, religious school every week during the school year, and services on the High Holidays. Other than that, the doors remained locked. We were seventeen families by the time I started religious school, and our teacher drove every week from Biddeford, Maine to teach us. At least he tried to teach us. We tried to drive him crazy and I think we succeeded. But the point is, that we knew we were Jewish, we seventeen families socialized together, we walked to shul together on the High Holidays, we visited each other almost every weekend, and we felt like family, even those of us who were not related to each other. The Sisterhood, the Hadassah, and the B'nai Brith all met regularly and did what they could for our community and the greater Jewish community, and we grew up knowing who we were, where we came from, and hopefully where we were going. The "pushke" was always on the cupboard in our homes, we put in our coins, and we contributed in all the ways we could to the Jewish Homeland in Israel and to our Jewish home here in Maine, Adas Yoshuron.

I have been asked to tell a “story”, not a joke this time, but a true story about my childhood here in Rockland and the Jewish community. So, here goes. The president of the shul would make a call every summer to New York to find a rabbi for the High Holidays. When these rabbis would come to Rockland, they were housed at the Thorndike Hotel on Main St. since it was owned by a member of the congregation, Nate Berliawsky, who was Louise Nevelson’s brother. Just a little name dropping since they were my relatives. The rabbi would walk up from Main St. to Limerock St. to my parents’ home to eat all his meals. We did not have a kosher home, but my mother managed with glass plates, silver cutlery, and dairy meals to keep the rabbi fed. One rabbi, Rabbi Lubinsky, came for many years from NJ and brought with him his own kosher chicken, protected from our non-kosher food, in a paper bag. He placed it in the refrigerator and he ate it while he was here. When I was a student at the U. of ME, I came home for Rosh HaShanah, and my girlfriend come to visit one evening. Around midnight, she was starving, and I told her to go to the kitchen where there was a lot of food. My mother had been cooking for days for the holiday. My friend yelled to me from the kitchen that the chicken was the best she had ever eaten, and then I realized what was happening. Honestly, I have never laughed so hard in my life. My friend was standing in the kitchen with the refrigerator door open and she was eating the rabbi’s chicken right out of his paper bag! What was I going to tell Rabbi Lubinsky when he came for breakfast in the morning? When he arrived, I summoned my courage and I said, “Rabbi Lubinsky, I have to tell you something. My girlfriend ate your chicken by mistake. He replied, and I will never forget this, “you tell her that she ate it with my compliments”. He was quite a mensch. Maybe a hungry one too, although I doubt it.

I was in Israel about 11 years ago and my guide was a Russian/Jewish immigrant who was totally secular. Nothing religious for him. I told him about my involvement in our shul, and he said something very interesting to me that I had never before realized. He said “I can understand why you are involved in a synagogue. How else would you express your Jewishness living where you live?” He was absolutely right. This is how and where I express my Jewishness, coming together with all of you, especially on an evening like this, on Kol Nidre, such a holy evening and on a High Holiday.

I want to ask you all to think about how this small congregation, this small group of people, have kept this all going for 104 years. Our board and our committees are working extremely hard to keep the wheels turning, to make our community better, more active, to involve more of you in our Jewish “family” and I ask you all to help us do just that. We need you, we want you, you all make a difference. Your membership is important, your involvement is important, and your ideas and talents are of utmost importance.

We have spent the last year in a Strategic Visioning process. I spoke about it last year on Kol Nidre. As you know, the original date of Oct. 16, next Sunday, for our community meeting, had to be postponed because of illness and death in the family of those of us on the Strategic Visioning committee. We are compiling the data from the focus groups and you will be hearing more about this when we present our findings at a congregational meeting. These findings came to the strategic visioning from all of you. Thank you all for your involvement in the process, for taking the time to attend meetings, for participating in the wonderful morning we had with Rabbi Jillian Cameron of Interfaith Family last winter, for attending focus groups and sharing your feelings and thoughts, for facilitating focus groups, for whatever you have done, the committee and the board of directors thank you. I cannot urge you enough to attend the congregational meeting. We are at a turning point, we are hoping to move forward with more excitement than we have had in a long time here at Adas Yeshurun, and we need you all to participate in the discussion when we meet within the next month here at the shul. I promise you a bagel if you come. I’ll even make a kugel.

Of course, we need and count on your memberships, and your donations. I am here to make the Kol Nidre appeal, after all. We pledge to Tzedakah, charity, at this time of the year, and I am asking you to do just that. We do not raise nearly enough capital to keep our expenses paid from month to month with the modest dues that we charge. We depend on your donations and I ask you all to please think, on this Kol Nidre, how you can contribute to our congregation. In your Machzorim, your prayer books, are cards with envelopes for your donations. Please take one home to mail in with your donation, or fill one out and leave it in the basket in the foyer and Liz will be in touch with you for your donation after the holidays.

If you cannot contribute monetarily, than can you contribute your time, your ideas, your creativity, your hard work? We need you in order to continue what that handful of Eastern European Jewish immigrants started in 1912. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't be here tonight in this beautiful sanctuary, but we owe it to them, to ourselves, and to our children and grandchildren to keep our shul alive, vibrant, and growing. We want you all to be members of our congregation, and if the dues present a financial hardship, either our treasurer, Laurence Anne Coe, or I can speak to you about making an arrangement. We want you all to feel comfortable as members and we will do whatever we need to do to make that happen for you and your family.

I look forward to seeing you all soon at the congregational meeting, to seeing you all at Shabbat services, holiday celebrations, Books and Bagels, Adult Education, Hebrew School, Food and Jewish Culture events, lecturers, movies, and at committee meetings, at whatever is going on in our Jewish community here in Midcoast Maine. Good things are happening here. As a Brandeis professor told us a number of years ago, "The Jews are on the move" and now they're moving to Midcoast Maine! And here we are, celebrating our Jewishness together and living a Jewish life together.

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