

Shabbat Hagadol 5763**April 11, 2003****Dedication of the 8th Stained Glass Window
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When you only get to the bimah once every thirty years, I suppose your speech should be all inclusive..... Forgive me if I ramble a bit and that I speak from notes—my heart and head are filled with so many things.

First, I am deeply gratified to see all eight windows installed and that the artists' vision is now complete. I know this is only a small bit mine—so many truly talented and generous hands are responsible, but still, I will feel forever grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this enhancement to the sanctuary. Also, I want to add my own voice to the chorus of bravos for the incredible and gifted work of Davi, Jerry, Victoria and Haim.

The theme depicted here—that of a path to freedom book-ended by the Biblical walls of water is one that strikes numerous chords within me. The Exodus story, made even more relevant by the calendar approach of our celebration of Passover, is one that even I can retell, though my memory perhaps has more to do with Cecil B. DeMille than with scriptural texts.

Like any good Bar Mitzvah boy, I feel compelled to link a personal story of freedom to the tale graphically depicted in these windows. And yet, my story is not so easily presented in stained glass format. Like most of you, the path to freedom was not so boldly shown to me, nor was I particularly adept at identifying the signs as they were presented along the way.

My journey was not the stuff of an Old Testament epic. What brought me here was a suggestion, actually a directive, from a well-intended therapist who said that I would surely benefit from getting far from my roots and creating a place with fewer challenges to my individuality than those places I had already discovered within my parents purview. If I say that L.A. was my carefully chosen land of freedom, I would be lying. Had there been a film school with significant reputation in Hawaii or even Alaska, I might be making this speech there.

It was a triptik from the Auto Club and not words sent down from a mountaintop that designed my path-- and I don't know what bored or sadistic mapmaker at AAA created my route, but it was through strange and dusty towns like Elk City, that I was guided westward toward the Big Orange. They have a gay bar in Elk City, one of the very first gay bars I had ever visited to that point. They were so happy to see new faces in this place, the first drink and maybe the second and third were on the house. No wonder I found West Hollywood nightlife so off putting in comparison.

Several of you have heard me say this before, but one of my very first Friday evenings in

Los Angeles was spent at the old Metropolitan Community Church where BCC had its initial home. Imagining what a gay temple must be like, I dressed in a three piece Glen Plaid suit, thinking that the “Jewish Doctor of my Dreams” was similarly attired and that downtown L.A. (which I had never seen before) must have been every bit as chic as downtown Manhattan.

Reality finally set in and BCC became an infrequent stop in my journeying but always a welcome one. At film school and then in my early jobs, I began to make a family and a routine. Friday nights were almost always taken watching the production of television series at CBS in Studio City and it was with Mary Tyler Moore or Bob Newhart or “Rhoda” or someone mythical that I spent most of my time—the process of creating these programs became like ceremonies and rituals in themselves. My work in the entertainment business was always more of an environment than an occupation and there I found support on many different levels. Perhaps it was for this reason that my external community awareness and my Jewish community awareness and my Gay Jewish community awareness were not a primary focus. Show business arms embraced and protected me and I buried myself deep within their warm folds.

And still, as I look back at the last thirty years, I really don’t know if I was actively seeking freedom or gladly giving it up just to be accepted in a grown-up world of my own choosing. Liberation was not simply attained by escaping my life back east and once I got that life back, I became responsible for what I did with it. At times it seems I had run from one “smothering situation” right into another, this one perhaps a bit more glamorous, but just as neurotic, intoxicating and demanding. If, in truth, I have any credentials to stand here at the parted sea, they have been earned only recently as I have begun to take back tiny bits of my own self and rethink how I might employ them differently. I suppose I have a plan in mind, but that plan was hard to come by and even harder to facilitate. How I envy those who had a Moses to take their hand, to have the Red Sea waters held back for them and for God to show the way.

What I know of liberation has come slowly and, as I think of it, in many ways it has come through examples demonstrated by friends. My individual relationship with the concept of being “free” is seen right here in front of me, in the faces of those persons who came here tonight to support me. By this I mean people who have shared the gift of open doors, open arms and open hearts. I guess you wouldn’t call it “free love,” but surely it would be unconditional love, love without strings attached. Added to this list of loving friends is the greater list of those who frequently fill the congregation seats at BCC—those who worship, study and celebrate here-- it is your dedication to our synagogue and your concern for its spiritual freedom that also inspires me.

I think of BCC as my religious home and though my attendance card looks pretty shabby, it does not diminish the very real pride I feel to be a member. Often, I have tried to justify my passive aggressive behavior with the synagogue; I won’t try to do that again tonight. With a certain pinched glibness, I have sometimes said: “Well, there are a lot of funny places you can fall into on a Friday night, I’m glad there’s also BCC.” What I really mean is: “Thank you for this wonderful alternative. Thank you for introducing me to folks who care more about accessing their souls than some of their more obvious body parts. I am glad that this temple exists for those who enjoy coming frequently; I am glad that it exists

for those who sometimes come. I am glad that it exists at all and that its presence in the community has such significant weight. I am so proud of Lisa and Fran, I am forever learning from my friendship with Tracy and I think each and every person who finds their way to 6000 West Pico Blvd, has been on a great journey of discovery and that they have landed in the right place.

I know I have. I thank you all for being here this Friday night. I thank BCC for being here every Friday night. If I can't always be here with you, I hope this window serves as a reminder of my support and love.