



Confessions of a Lucky Guy

Some people commemorate their so-called mid-life crisis by splurging on things they don't exactly need. I considered that option but chose another path.

My wife, Patti, and I dabbled in volunteering at JFS for many years. We delivered food packages to the elderly for various holidays and Patti served as a Friendly Visitor for a Holocaust survivor. It whet my appetite for something more than an expensive toy or a foolish fling in hopes of turning back the clock. Instead, I wanted to play a part in changing lives.

Thumbing my Jewish nose at protocol (the mid-life crisis?), I invited myself to join the Board of Directors. Then I became President. Now, as my 2-year term draws to a close, I'd like to share the gift of that experience.

The past 24 months were a highlight reel of fun and adventure, but six moments will remain with me forever:

Embrace-A-Family. Everyone loves this program which runs from mid-November through late December. Take a tag shaped like a dreidel and fulfill the wish of someone in need with a gift. I'll never forget the sight of a father teaching the meaning of sharing to his 8-year old son. You don't need to be an adult to understand tzedakah.

Good Morning JFS. If you only have one hour per year to learn about JFS, this is it. Each story is heartwarming. The people are amazing. Breakfast is delicious. For me, the camaraderie of the community makes the biggest impression. It's palpable and lingers long after we return to our daily routine.

Pro Bono Legal Clinic. My family...your family...our family. People patiently waiting their turn to speak with an immigration attorney at JFS the evening of the first Thursday each month. Their eyes tell a story. They are us...100, 125 or 150 years after our ancestors made their way to the promised land. In a quiet way, it's spellbinding.

Staff and Volunteers. It's often said miracles happen every day inside Jewish Family Services. If so, the 18 staff members and 700 volunteers are miracle makers. The sense of *tikkun olam* is tangible. Clients with seemingly few options in life gain a measure of renewal. A slice of heaven is reserved for people who ease the pain of others while receiving a modicum of remuneration and recognition.

Chai House. JFS provided services here for many years but established a full-time branch office in 2017. The grand opening sparkled with enthusiasm. We declared to the residents, "You are not forgotten. You are celebrated". Although many considered Chai House a "Jewish Home For The Aged" in the 1970s and 1980s, the current inhabitants...both Jewish and non-Jewish...welcomed us with the warmth of a bubbe.

Girl, 6 – Shirt. That was the description on a tag for Embrace-A-Family in November 2016. Just a shirt. I think about it almost every day. Hopefully, JFS played a small part in preventing a life of poverty for that young lady.

While I'm leaving my official capacity at JFS, my heart will never stray very far. It's a fervent hope everyone in the community gets a chance to experience the life-affirming capabilities of JFS...whether as a volunteer, client, donor or perhaps member of the Board. Your support continues to make all the difference in our world.

Like a 10-minute swim in the pickle barrel of an old New York deli, I hit the jackpot.

We should all be so lucky.

Rich Namm
President

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