

Member Profile: This issue we feature Temple Members Debbie and Steve Herman.

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Steve and Debbie Herman moved to Florida from New Jersey in 1983 with their 2-year-old daughter, Melanie. Their son Jeffrey was born in Feb. 1986.

Steve was born in Brooklyn, NY. Steve's father owned a construction company. His mother attended Erasmus Hall High School (Barbra Streisand and Neil Diamond). She was the consummate travel agent with first-hand knowledge travelling extensively including Europe, China, Russia, India, South America, and Africa.

Her father was born legally blind, and together with his twin brothers (who came as a 1st birthday present) attended a one room schoolhouse, Independence School, with just seven other children, one teacher and no electricity, no running water, no indoor plumbing, and heated by a wooden stove. It was so cold in the winter that the students couldn't write for hours until it was warm enough to take their heavy coats and gloves off. There was no homework, as the students had farm chores. The twins attended on alternate days, which the teacher didn't care about. She taught every other grade, who taught the grade below them, from 1-8.

Debbie, the youngest of 3 children, was born on a farm in Flemington, New Jersey just 3 months ahead of a 100-year flood of the Raritan River that would drown 10,000 chickens and obliterate their way of life. The history of the farm as told through stories, was an ever-present backdrop throughout her life. They stayed in the ten-room farmhouse built in 1842 of stone with laths, for another year. The farmhouse is on the National Registry.

Following the flood, her father took a job as a science teacher and moved the family into an abandoned house on the grounds of the high school. Her mother was raised by immigrant parents who never learned to read or write English. She later became an insurance broker. They now live near San Francisco and, Baruch Hashem, will celebrate their 76th wedding anniversary.

Debbie's father read in the newspaper about a Jewish Singles Group, of which Steve served as President. She called a seemingly random number. At the end of a long conversation with Steve about the organization's events, he asked for her name, and then began to talk to her about her father. Apparently, several towns away, her father had been Steve's high school homeroom and science teacher.

Steve is a CPA and recently retired as a sole proprietor in 2021. Steve served on the Temple Emanuel Board as Treasurer for eight years. Steve co-founded and served 21 years as Treasurer of the Central Florida Ice Hockey Officials Association Inc. The association currently has over 120 active on-ice officials at six rinks in the Tampa Bay area. By 2018, more than 600 referees had been part of the organization. He is a level 3 tenured certified official and certified as an instructor for the USA Ice Hockey Officiating Program. Steve was Coordinator of Training and Seminars for the State of Florida from 2006-2017.

Melanie and Jeffrey were both ice hockey officials, and Jeffrey attained level 4, the highest level of officiating in USA Hockey, and was chosen to be an on-ice official during the USA Women's Olympic Training Camp in Wesley Chapel the year that they won the Olympic Gold Medal. Steve and Jeffrey were invited to attend the USA Ice Hockey Officiating Instructors Camp at the Lake Placid Olympic Training Center where they became certified instructors, Steve in 2004 and Jeffrey in 2009. Melanie and Steve were the first father-daughter ice hockey officials in the area.

Steve was past president of the Sertoma Club of Lakeland Inc and was honored as District Sertoman of the Year, and Steve's CPA firm was chosen as Small Business of the month in April 2004. Steve was the accountant for the Lakeland Warriors Professional Ice Hockey Team and for the Sunshine Hockey League. He was supervisor of off-ice officials in Lakeland for the WHA2 professional Ice Hockey League. Steve was the on-ice referee for the first USA Ice Hockey game ever played at the Ice Sports Forum (now TGH Ice Arena) in Brandon, the training facility of the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Debbie's profession was an analytical chemist, starting out in the Chemical Physics Department of Allied Chemical Corp. research headquarters, in Morristown, N.J. until Melanie was born in 1981. After moving to Lakeland, she worked in the lab at Florida Institute of Phosphate Research (FIPR) on a research grant until Jeffrey was born. Two years later, she returned to the lab at International Environmental Services in Plant City, attached to an oil refinery International Petroleum Corp, both based in the U.K.

Circumstances ultimately led to a shift in her focus to computers, and Steve asked her to manage his CPA practice. Working alongside her husband, providing tech support for the firm and clients, travelling his journey with him, was an unanticipated dream come true. She witnessed unforgettable moments, Steve's impeccable handwriting and enjoyed conversations with ice hockey refs for issuing paychecks and direct deposits. Their stories were eye opening, especially the Canadians.

Debbie and Steve led the rabbi search committee bringing Rabbi Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and his wife Leah to Temple Emanuel. Melanie and Jeffrey celebrated their b'nai mitzvot at Temple Emanuel.

Every event that follows occurred through the hard work and support of Temple Members.

Dr. Sandy Yosha and Debbie co-chaired Israel Expo 2000 at Lake Mirror, an interactive event that showcased Israel's diverse culture and history with 500 volunteers (community service hours) attracted over 10,000 visitors from around the state of Florida, according to the City of Lakeland. 5 Billboards including on highways, a 2-page centerfold in the Ledger and national sponsors. Notably, Yvonne McGill of New Beginnings oversaw the construction of accurate walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem. United Synagogue awarded Temple Emanuel the Solomon Schachter Gold Award for the highest education event for Israel for Expo 2000's pilot project.

Debbie headed up the Lakeland Chapter of ARMDI (American Red Magen David for Israel) obtained the parts list from Ford Motor Company E-350. Each part compiled as a line item for a price to be sold for donation, which was used toward the purchase of an ambulance in Israel. Temple Emanuel partnered with a synagogue in South Florida to raise funds to purchase the ambulance. This allowed anyone wishing to participate in the fundraiser to buy a steering wheel, brakes, etc. with a dedication, rather than just ask for donations. This allowed children in Sunday School to buy a spark plug and still feel part of the fundraiser.

In November 2004, after a months-long application process, received clearance and boarded a plane to Israel, was picked up by army transport with orders not to disclose her location. There she volunteered at the only army base designated for maintenance of Israeli tanks. She lived in the barracks with the soldiers and was assigned to the armory to receive training and rebuilt the sight and trigger mechanisms for M-16 machine guns. On her days off she backpacked through Israel, unaccompanied.

Another event, Shalom Troops 2005, held at Lakeland Linder Airport, was in response to the 12/22/2004 terrorist attack on Mosul in Iraq, which was the first insurgent infiltration inside an American base. All five branches of the military participated along with local veteran groups and co-sponsored by Magen David Adom, resulting in sending over 700 lbs. of supplies airlifted to Afghanistan by the military.

As a Sunday School teacher, she organized an interactive re-enactment of 24 hours in the life of Jewish immigrants in a tenement in New York's Lower East Side.

Debbie was a Sunday School teacher at Temple Emanuel, and Advisor for Kadima. Debbie and Betsy Chalal were co-presidents of Polk County Chapter of Hadassah.

Debbie is the webmaster for the International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC), 25 years of Anglo-Yiddish publication (derbay.org) and FYG (Fishl's Yiddish Group – ilovefyg.org) a weekly international Yiddish Zoom Group for presentations. Over 500 people have registered from 14 countries. She produces weekly episodes of the gathering and creates interpretive cover art depicting aspect(s) of the presentations, after video-editing and photo-restoration of historic photographs. Her world grew vastly larger working on this project, and personal while working post-production with individuals in the preparation of the final videos, and sometimes before for the restoration work.

Melanie was in charge of the annual synagogue fundraiser at Ramat Shalom synagogue. Melanie is married to Benjamin, a trial attorney and partner in a law firm in South Florida. Their daughter, Lyla, is in the national honor society, has danced for 9 years, and this year became an assistant dance instructor. She competes in ballet, jazz, tap, lyrical, hip-hop, musical theatre and contemporary dance. She enjoys kayaking, paddle boarding and primitive camping.

Jeff attained Eagle Scout with Gold Palm distinction and chose to build a playground for Temple Emanuel as his Eagle Scout Project which was dedicated to the memory of Ralph Laub.

Jeff is Controller of a corporation in Pinellas County. Jeff is married to Beth, who is a project manager for a commercial electrical contracting company which does industrial projects including Raymond James Stadium, Amalie Arena and Lakeland Regional Health. Jeff and Beth completed Jewish Leadership Institute and Jeff served as Treasurer and President of the Tampa Bay Jewish Federation. Beth is active in her alumni, sorority, and Junior Women's League. They participate in local environmental restoration projects, have an RV and enjoy camping with their puppy, Lucy, a Bernese Mountain dog and Poodle mix, biking, gardening and entertaining. Jeff enjoys scuba diving, fishing, golf, making homemade craft beer, creating hot sauces from varieties of home-grown peppers.



Editor's Note: Thank you to Debbie and Steve for sharing your story! Great to read and learn more about your interesting lives! Who wants to be next? Contact irmacole26@gmail.com so we can learn about your interesting story in our upcoming High Holiday issue!