

Member Profile: Heidi Pechter Sichelman

My Family

I was born in 1977 in Miami, Florida. Although I don't remember much up until I was about 8 or 9, my parents tell me I thoroughly enjoyed being the center of their world until 1980 when my sister Faith was born. My mom likes to point out that one day she found me trying to grab my sister by her neck and pull her out of the crib. After that, she put a lock high up on the outside of Faith's nursery. While



I don't remember having feelings of "new baby envy" everything worked out because we are very close today, now that we are both mothers. Our parents, Marc and Phyllis Pechter are two exemplary parents. They have instilled family values in us, taught us that hard work and perseverance will lead to good outcomes, and that kindness goes a long way. Marc is the only child of Karl and Betty Pechter. Phyllis is one of two daughters born to Joe and Belle Yantz.

I have the best memories of my maternal grandparents Belle (1918-1996) and Joe Yantz young adults, and even throughout parenthood. Joe had to fend for himself after the age of nine because his mother died when he was 18

With Parents 1980

months old. He wanted to become a pilot in the Air Force, but an injury to his eye with a baseball bat stopped that dream. Instead, he served in the Army in WWII and spent most of his time fighting in Italy. He never spoke of the horrors he saw. However, he was the most tender and loving grandfather to us. He played with us with just about anything - dolls, blocks, and board games. When there was "nothing to play with" he found cardboard, twigs, leaves, and scraps of paper to be inventive. Like most girls, Faith and I loved to play "beauty parlor." We would style his hair (the few strands he had left) while our grandmother was "dolling" herself up to take us swimming in their Miami Garden's condo pool.

Belle was a strong, independent saleswoman with a bottomless heart. Everyone who met her loved her. She had the ability to win people over with her sincerity. She met Joe in Brooklyn where she was raised. They were married in 1940 in the Rabbi's study. In 1947 they welcomed baby girl Phyllis (my mother). Then they left Brooklyn and headed for Miami to live with family. It was not an easy beginning. They had no jobs, but being **Maternal Grandparents Belle and Joe Yantz** near family was top priority. Eventually, they were able to get their feet off the ground. Joe opened a gift shop in the Sahara Motel on Miami Beach. Belle went door to door selling home improvements. Ultimately, a friend encouraged her to go to real estate school. Belle's mother Fannie came to live with them to help with the children (Roberta was born in 1954) and home life. My mother had the best of both worlds being raised by her loving parents in addition to her grandmother who was the quintessential "balabusta." Fannie would cook Shabbat dinners and observe Sabbath.



While my mother was being raised in Miami, my father was attending "the school of hard knocks" (as he calls it) in Brooklyn. His parents (Betty and Karl) had a volatile marriage, which led to their divorce in the early 70's. They had little time for Marc so he found his way into trouble at various schools. Meeting Phyllis in 1969 at the University of Miami was the best thing that ever happened to him. She set him on the right path. They were married in 1970 by a Rabbi in Miami. With her support and encouragement he was able to graduate from The University of San Diego with a degree in accounting.



A story about my life would be incomplete without mentioning the famous company that my great great-grandparents Anne and Moses Pechter started in New York in 1888. Although it is now under new ownership, Pechter's Baking Company remained in our family for more than a century. Anyone who was born in the Northeast in the 50's or earlier would know of "Pechter's Jewish

Rye Bread." The business thrived during the Great Depression when bread was a main staple in peoples' homes. Pechter's had a monopoly on the bread market in the North East. Even as late as 2011, a classmate of mine spotted a Pechter's bread truck on the streets of Manhattan.

Some of you reading this may have dined in Flakowitz Restaurant in Boynton Beach, Florida. That was owned by my grandfather Karl Pechter. He died in 2017, but he



was greeting guests up until one week before he went to the hospital. The recipes of Pechter's bread had been passed down from generations above. He was a baker as well as a

businessman.
With Grandpa Karl



Growing Up

I had a pretty ideal childhood. I always felt loved and cared for. My parents worked hard to provide for us. On the weekends, we participated in temple functions, spent time with our grandparents, went to restaurants, and explored much of the art, history, sporting events, and water activities that South Florida had to offer. They always planned a fun summer vacation for us whether it be a road trip up the eastern sea board of the U.S. or something more educational like trips to the Nation's capital, the Liberty Bell, and the Statue of Liberty.

Our mom was a high school Spanish teacher for most of her career. Prior to 30 years in the Broward County School District, she was a stockbroker and also dabbled in real estate. Our father worked long hours as a realtor selling homes in his early career. It wasn't long before my grandmother Belle and my father opened up a real estate office together and she took him under her wing. Together, they nailed it in North Miami Beach. They were a great team and word spread quickly. "List and sell with Marc and Belle."

In 1988, our family moved from North Miami Beach to Weston, Florida. Life was a total adjustment at first. For starters, North Miami Beach had a larger percentage of Jews than average. Weston had barely any. It was a newly built master planned community with one strip shopping center. That is where we went for Publix and Eckerd drug store, along with the one dentist in town, the one salon, and the one Little Caesar's pizza parlor. The town was bare.

Our parents continued working hard. Faith and I made friends. We'd make up dances together to Paula Abdul and Debbie Gibson, jump on our big back yard trampoline, and sing aloud to music. Little by little Weston grew into a city of its own. We established roots there.

Heidi and Faith 1986



Our parents enforced extra-curricular activities and lessons. Of course we never understood why this was so as children. Now that I am a parent, I see the importance (for our children's sake as well as my own!). While Faith advanced in her ice skating endeavors, I excelled as a piano player.

Heidi at the piano 1983

My teacher would tell my mom how I had gifted abilities. She asked my mom to consider sending me to a music college like Juilliard. That was not the path I chose.

In addition to piano lessons, Faith and I had riding lessons. In 1990, our parents bought us a quarter horse. She came with the name "Little Bit" and we kept her at the stables in our new neighborhood in Weston, FL. We rode Western style. After about 3 years, the novelty wore off. My father likes to joke that we turned into full-fledged teenagers with different wants and needs. When we asked for cars, he said it's either a car or a horse. Guess what we chose...?

Sister Faith & family



Education

I was always a responsible and attentive student winning awards in high school for “most outstanding student” or “student of the year” and such. In 1995, I graduated in the top 3% of my class. Western High was (and still is) a public high school in Davie, Florida. Most of my peers would say I was smart and hard working, always putting school before fun. Some would come to me for help with math or chemistry problems. Math and science were my strongest subjects until college. There, I became interested in learning about how science, technology, and medicine evolved over the years throughout the world. In 1999, I graduated cum laude from the world-renowned University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA. I received a B.A. in the History and Sociology of Science but had also fulfilled all of the required courses to be considered pre-med. I had given a lot of thought to attending medical school, but I decided to pursue dentistry instead. My parents had some friends who were physicians and some who were dentists. I had noticed both types of professionals had comfortable lifestyles, but the dentists were usually not dealing with life or death situations. That aspect of dentistry along with the involvement of perceptual ability and fine motor skills appealed to me.



Perhaps one of the most rewarding days of my life was when I walked across the stage earning my D.M.D. degree from Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston, MA. It was a long and rigorous 4 years of studying, lab work, and clinical rotations. It is one of my proudest accomplishments.

Earning Doctorate in Dental Medicine 2003

I have always felt fulfilled working with population groups who have low access to care. I spent a summer in Boulder, CO taking care of the children’s oral health needs of migrant farm workers. In Tampa, I completed a residency with the Hillsborough Dental Research Clinic. I treated medically indigent people who mostly had little chance left to save their teeth. In Lakeland, I volunteered with LVIM in the dental clinic in addition to working as a paid dentist with the Polk County Health department before our daughter was born in 2014.

In addition to public health, I’ve held various jobs as a general dentist in private practice. Before meeting Monte in 2004, I was working in Westchase (West of Tampa). Afterwards, I joined Dental Health Group and split my time between offices in Downtown Tampa and Valrico. Monte and I moved to Lakeland in 2007. Shortly afterwards, I joined a practice in Auburndale. There, I had a phenomenal experience getting to work alongside Dr. Dwight Pate, an incredibly talented clinician who has a sharp eye for detail. I truly admire him.

On Jan 20th, 2007 I married the love of my life Monte Sichelman. We met at a dinner party through the Young Adult Division of the Jewish Federation in Tampa. At the time, I had been living on Harbor Island in Tampa for just over a year. I was active in the Jewish Community as well as a member of Schaarai Zedek Synagogue. I was a 25 year old dentist. I felt successful in one aspect of my life, but was looking to fill a void that I knew I could only do once I met the right person. Monte came along in August 2004. We married 2.5 years later at the Aventura Turnberry Jewish Center with Rabbi Norman Lipson officiating. Our marriage was announced in the New York Times, link below.



<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/fashion/weddings/21Pechter.html>



We are blessed with a boy (Jay Parker, born May 22, 2009) and a girl (Brooke Sichelman, born March 10, 2014). They attend Lakeland Montessori as well as Temple Emanuel Sunday School. Jay is a fan of the NBA and pinball arcades. Brooke loves dressing up in princess gowns and playing with dolls. They light up our lives and make our family complete.

I am not practicing as a dentist now because I would rather focus on raising our children. When I am not volunteering for a school committee, planning events, or driving the kids to lessons, I try to find time for hobbies of my own. I like to exercise, cook, and socialize with friends. I hope to join a tennis league in the near future. I also enjoy reading historical fiction, non-fiction, and journals/magazines about nutrition and overall well-being. The last good book I read was *An Invisible Thread*. Currently, on my nightstand is *How to Stop Time*. I did a lot of traveling in my late teens and twenties. If there is one place I could go back to again, it would be the Scandinavian Countries. I remember feeling like I did not have enough time while there to enjoy its beauty.

On Being Jewish

Growing up, my family was always in touch with our heritage.

In North Miami Beach we were members of Temple Sinai with Rabbi Ralph Kingsley. We spent all of the Jewish holidays with my grandparents Belle and Joe—either at our home or my cousin's home. I can remember racing to find the *Afikomen*, opening the lanai screen door for Elijah (since meals took place on the lanai), and helping my mom in the kitchen. Today, some of my family's favorite meals are ones that I learned to make when preparing for Jewish holidays. I have been told my matzah ball soup is worthy of an award. Occasionally, my mom would make Shabbat dinner and we would attend services.



When we moved to Weston in 1988, my parents joined Temple B'nai Aviv. At the time, the temple was just getting off the ground. There were a handful of families and no facility. Services were taking place in the cafeteria at a local elementary school. The Jewish families of Weston were close knit and determined to establish a Synagogue for generations to come. In 1990, I was the very first Bat Mitzvah of Temple B'nai Aviv. My mom had devoted her time as a board member and a

Bat Mitzvah 1990 shown above

Sunday school teacher during the embryonic stages of Temple B'nai Aviv. Today, this Synagogue thrives.

I have been a member of Temple Emanuel since 2007. Through the Synagogue I have made connections, meaningful friendships, and community acquaintances. I served on the Board for two years mostly in the capacity of welcoming new members. Although I am no longer on the board, I still play an integral role in the annual fundraiser, making phone calls for the ritual committee, reaching out to community members with interest in joining, assisting with Sunday School events, and wherever else I am needed.

Beginning with our son's bris in 2009 and our daughter's baby naming in 2015, our children have begun their journey into Judaism. They, too, are forming friendships here that will hopefully last for their lifetime. From Tot Shabbats, to Chanukah parties, Sukkot celebrations, and Megillah readings, our children are participating in traditions that their ancestors were a part of generations ago.



Reflections

Brooke and Jay 2018

My parents have had the biggest influence on my life. They have helped shape the person I've become beginning from very early on. I've learned by example to "treat others the way you'd like to be treated" from my mother. From my father, I have developed a strong sense of determination. It was probably that sense of determination that led me to my proudest moment - becoming a doctor of dental medicine. I know my parents have always wanted "what's best for me" just as I do for my children. With their guidance and role modeling, I have been able to accomplish personal and professional achievements.

With Mom at Tahoe 1993

Even at 40 years old, my parents still have a strong influence on my life. They are frequently visiting Lakeland from Weston, Florida and are contributing in many ways to Temple Emanuel. The same is true of Monte's parents. They are also supportive of Temple Emanuel and can be seen frequently at events when they are visiting from Tarpon Springs.

Things that I would tell my younger self

1) Don't Sweat the Small Stuff - the older I get the better I am about following this

piece of advice.

2) Don't be afraid of failure - There is something to be said for being an overachiever or a perfectionist. However, one way we learn is by making mistakes and then avoiding those same mistakes in future situations. I made a couple of "path of least resistance" choices in my life simply because I was afraid of the unknown.

3) It's not what you say; it's how you say it.

Looking back

When looking back on my life, I am sorry that I never pursued piano past 15 years of age. At the time, I was spread thin between school work, student government, school yearbook, math club, National Honor Society, and the list goes on. I was no longer able to juggle an additional interest and it took a back seat. The last piece I remember attempting to play was a concerto by Haydn. Perhaps, in time I will be able to re-learn what I once knew so well for 10 years.

Two things you don't know about me

1) We have a long-haired black and tan miniature dachshund. She has been a part of our family for 11 years. Monte picked her out from Lynn's Fish and Pet (no longer in business) in 2007. I was extremely skeptical. Dixie sure has proved me wrong. We've been blessed with lots of wet kisses, warm cuddles, and requests for belly rubs. She is so special to us.

2) I am a Pi Beta Phi sister.