

Monthly Profile: This month we feature Tammy Serebrin. Thanks Tammy for sharing your story with us! Read other profiles at: <https://templemanuelakeland.com/member-profiles/>

I was born on October 13, 1946 in Virginia Municipal Hospital in Virginia, Minnesota 2 weeks early. That is probably the last time I was ever early as many people I know (and love) can attest to. I am not proud of that. My parents named me Tamara Margo. (Tamara after my mother's mother and Margo after my father's mother (Margola). I was raised 5 miles away in Eveleth, Minnesota, then population about 7200 people, and which is located 100 miles from the Canadian border. My parents, Helen and Alfred Goldberg were both immigrants from Lithuania. My dad came to this country along with his cousin in 1919 at age 18. They were sponsored by their uncle who owned a department store in Eveleth.

My father left behind his parents and siblings, most of whom he never saw again. My mom came to the U.S. when she was around 10 years old with her family around the same time as my dad and located in Hibbing, Minnesota where they already had relatives living. The area of the towns I have mentioned along with several others was called the Mesabi Iron Range because of the vibrant open pit iron ore mining that took place in the area. It was a great place for immigrants from many countries to come to in the early 1900s because of the jobs that the mines provided and the opportunity for people who wished to own businesses.



LEFT: Tammy
about age 2



RIGHT: Tammy
and Grandpa
Charles davening

My dad went to work for his uncle in his department store The Golden Rule. There were many Jewish businesses that established in the first decades of the 1900s along Eveleth's small main street as was the case in the other small iron ore mining towns along the Iron Range. There was even a kosher butcher into the 1950s. The Jewish community in Eveleth and the surrounding towns was very close knit and we knew and socialized with many of the Jewish families from Eveleth and the surrounding towns. My mother was a school teacher for about 10 years before she and my dad got married and she had to quit teaching when they did. It was a rule, for a number of interesting reasons, that women could not continue to teach when they got married.

My parents married in 1942 and had my sister, Elaine in 1944. My sister is an accomplished pianist and piano teacher and lives in Highland Park, Illinois. I came along two years later. I only knew one grandparent, my mom's dad, Grandpa Charles, as my father's parents never came to this country and my mom's mom passed away before I was born. (I was named after her as were 3 of my cousins.) My Grandpa Charles lived with us for several years. I didn't have a lot of relatives in the area because my dad's siblings were still in Lithuania and some eventually emigrated to Israel, and my mom's siblings who were older than her lived in other parts of the U.S. so all of the Jewish families in Eveleth were like relatives to us as we were a close knit community.

We lived in a melting pot because there were so many other first generation Americans of different nationalities who lived in our town from places like Italy, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Finland, Poland etc. The town and area was very heavily populated with Catholics with 3 Catholic churches in just our small town alone. Many different languages were spoken (even by the time I was born) because the people from the "old country" often spoke their native languages amongst themselves, but learning English was widely encouraged. My dad, who as I said was 18 when he moved here and had graduated from high school in Lithuania, went to first grade through twelfth in one year just to learn the language. I picture my 6 foot tall handsome dad sitting in a first grade desk and still smile when I think of it.

My childhood was what I call a "white picket fence" life with loving parents, a dad who worked very hard at The Golden Rule, which he and his cousin eventually took over from their uncle. He worked hard and provided well for us while being active in the local Lions Club, synagogue and B'nai B'rith and occasionally found time to fish and golf in the summer and participate in the sport of curling in the winter. My mom was a "balaboosta" (Yiddish for perfect wife and mother) in every sense of the word. She was a great cook and homemaker and was a PTA mom, Girl Scout leader, volunteer at our synagogue and was a lifetime member of Hadassah. She made sure we had dance lessons, piano lessons, and that we went to whatever cultural events came through our little community. Education was above all the most important. We had great schools in our little town because they were supported by the mining companies and I felt I got a great education (although I was not always the A student my mom thought I should be because I found socializing much more fun). It was no small incident when I was suspended from school for a day for skipping study hall and leaving the school one day in high school and my mom had to go and talk to the principal.

I went to one of the two elementary schools in our town, and everyone went to the same Junior High and High School. I occasionally worked in my dad's department store during the holiday season and summers. I was a member of the Girl Scouts from the age of six through high school and 4H. My favorite extracurricular activities in high school were theatre and being the editor of my high school year book. The classes I enjoyed the most were theatre, journalism and English. Higher math and science were not my favorite subjects. I took Higher Algebra because I thought the teacher was cute but quit after 6 weeks and took typing instead. One of the best decisions I could have made! (The typing teacher wasn't so cute).

Our town was very sports oriented and everyone attended the high school football, basketball and hockey games. My town boasts being the birthplace and home of many Olympic and professional hockey players and the U.S. Hockey Hall of Fame is located there.

Judaism was an important part of our life even though the community was very small. It wasn't unusual that I had only one other Jewish person in my class (who is still a close girlfriend to this day) all the way through school until a Jewish boy moved to Eveleth. He was my "boyfriend" until he moved away. Our small synagogue was run mostly by lay people but we "imported" student rabbis for the High Holidays. One of my favorite memories was going to a pond in town with one of the student rabbis to throw our sins away for Tashlich. I went to Sunday school and Hebrew school with the kids from my town and the town next to us. (The story goes that my mom, who was the Hebrew School teacher kicked me out of class because I was disruptive!).

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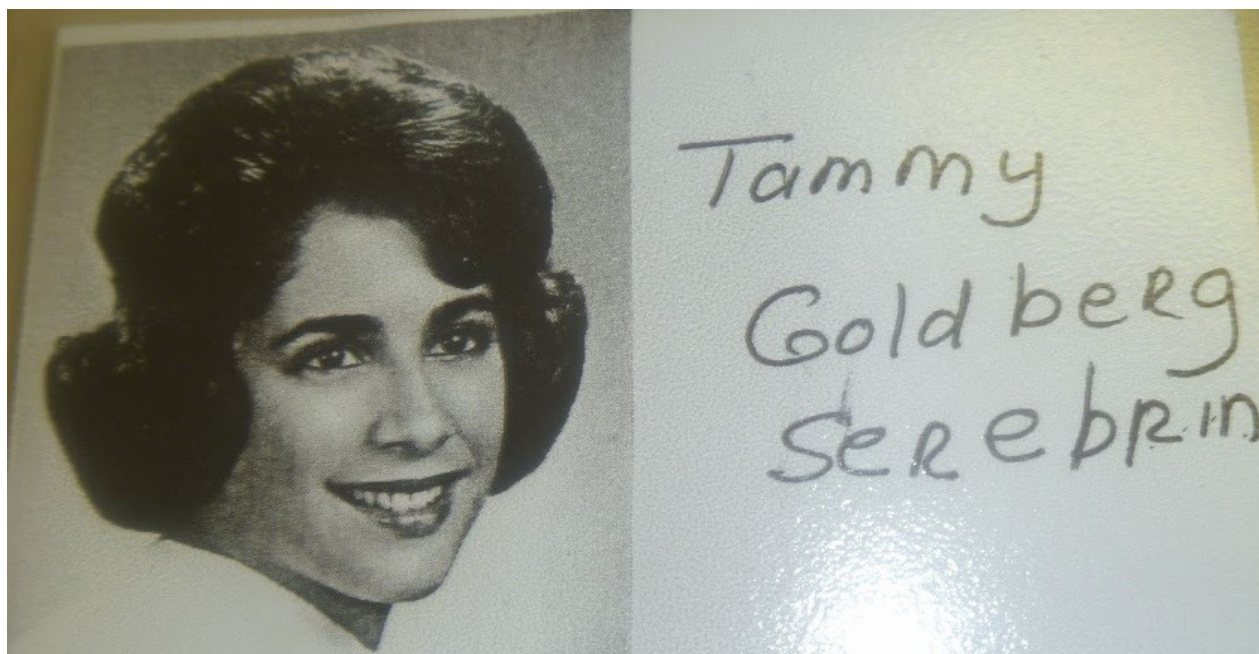
We always had big Seders at our house, of course observed the High Holidays, celebrated Chanukah and other Jewish holidays. My mom kept kosher for many years which was no small chore because after the kosher butcher died there was no kosher butcher in town so the food had to be imported from Duluth, 60 miles away, on the Greyhound bus. Even though it was such a small town and synagogue and none of the help my dad had in his store was Jewish, he closed the store for 2 days of Rosh Hashanah and for Yom Kippur and it would be unheard of for my sister and me and any other Jewish children to go to school on those days.

I also belonged to B'nai B'rith Youth (BBYO) as a teenager. I spent many weekends with BBYO friends in Duluth (which had a much larger Jewish population) and went to Minneapolis for yearly conventions. For three weeks for many summers I attended Herzl Camp a Jewish Camp in Webster, Wisconsin.

Interesting note: My parents were friends with the Zimmerman family of Hibbing Minnesota near my hometown. The Zimmermans had two sons, David and Bobby. My parents were at Bobby's Bar Mitzvah and Mr. and Mrs. Zimmerman attended Ira's and my wedding. Bobby Zimmerman is now known to the world as singer, songwriter, author, Bob Dylan, regarded by some as the greatest songwriter of all time.

My appreciation for Judaism and the need to be involved and active was definitely instilled in me by my parents through their actions and beliefs. I know my dad closed the store during the High Holidays because it was the right thing to do and to also tell the outside world it was important for us to observe our holidays properly. Also, the way my parents participated in and helped maintain our synagogue and the Jewish organizations we had there was a huge influence on how I have been involved in Judaism and Jewish organizations as an adult.

I graduated from Eveleth Senior High School in 1964. I went to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis where I was on the "5 year plan", meaning I couldn't figure out what I wanted to major in so it took me awhile. My mom wanted me to become a teacher, but I had no interest in that. I thought I would maybe major in speech pathology but realized after one semester of classes for that I remembered I did not care for math and science which was a major part of the curriculum. I finally ended up majoring in what was then called Radio and TV Broadcasting with a minor in Journalism. (Today that would be called Communications). I graduated in 1969 and went to work for an advertising agency and then a TV station in Minneapolis.



My junior year of college I was fixed up with a guy who had met my Jewish friend, Susan, with whom I grew up in Eveleth. This guy asked Susan if she had any friends she could fix him up with and so sometime in 1966 or 1967 I was introduced to a fellow University of Minnesota student (who was in the College of Business) from Minneapolis, Ira Serebrin. He came to pick me up at my dorm but before going down to meet him I sent a couple of my girl friends down to the lobby to see what he looked like and report back to me. I guess they thought he looked OK because we went on a date. I guess I thought he looked OK because 5 years later I married him and this year September 5 we will have been married 50 years.



Tammy at her wedding with her parents and sister Elaine 9/5/73

Ira graduated from college a year before me and went to work for Sperry Rand company for a year as a cost accountant in order to earn money to go to law school which he knew for a long time was his goal. That year he picked me up for a New Year's Eve date and proclaimed that this was the last winter he was ever going to spend in Minnesota and proceeded to apply for law schools only in warm weather climates. He was accepted to Florida State University's fifth law school class. He left for school in September 1970 and when he came home to Minneapolis, where I still was, for spring break in March 1971 he proposed to me and we were married in September 1971. I remember calling my parents very late at night to tell them I was engaged and I think they were happy for me, but not happy that I woke them up in the middle of the night to tell them!

When I moved to Tallahassee with Ira after we got married I went to work for a TV station in Tallahassee. I really hated leaving Minneapolis because I had friends there and Ira had lots of aunts, uncles and cousins I really liked who lived in Minneapolis, but Floridians we became. When he graduated law school in March of 1973 he was offered two jobs, one in Tallahassee and one at the State Attorney's Office in Bartow. I had no idea where or what kind of town Lakeland was but I knew it was further south than Tallahassee and Ira said if we were going to live in Florida we should live in Florida and not practically in Georgia.

He accepted the job in Bartow but first he had to pass the Bar Exam. We moved to Lakeland in May 1973 and rented a furnished apartment on Lime Street. He studied for the July Bar Exam and I looked for jobs ending up working at the Daily Highlander newspaper in Lake Wales. That fall before the High Holidays I called the synagogue to find out about joining and the first person I talked to on the phone when I called was Gerry Rabin, which was a lovely introduction to Temple Emanuel. Of course we joined and have been active members ever since.

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Ira passed the Bar Exam on the first try and continued to work for the State Attorney's office for several years eventually opening up his own law practice in 1975 in the Marble Arcade Building in downtown Lakeland. I quit my job at the newspaper and became his secretary. In December 1976 I found out I was pregnant and gave birth to our first child, Benjamin Charles Serebrin, in July 1977. Not long after that both my parents and Ira's parents retired and moved to Lakeland so Benjamin had two sets of grandparents to spoil him. Five years later in August 1982 our second son Jonathan Scott Serebrin was born. They have brought us much joy and each of them has blessed us with special daughters-in-law (Rachel and Debbie) and grandchildren – Miriam age 9, Zachary age 5 – Rachel's and Ben's who live in Sunnyvale, California and Ellie age 6 and Hannah age 4 – Jon and Debbie's who live in Atlanta, Georgia. Ben, who graduated from Rice University and Stanford University, is a Computer Engineer with Amazon and Jon, who graduated from the University of Miami, is a Manager in Marketing at Home Depot Corporate Headquarters. Both of my boys had their Bar Mitzvahs at Temple Emanuel.



Ben and Rachel with Tammy and Ira at Jon and Debbie's wedding January 2011

My volunteer work has included being very active at Temple Emanuel (Board and Executive Board Member for many years), Polk County Chapter of Hadassah serving as co-President, Pied Piper Players/Lakeland Community Theatre since 1988, very active volunteer at all of my kids' schools, Lime Street Elementary, Carlton Palmore Elementary, Southwest Junior High, Lawton Chiles Middle School and Lakeland High School, Silver Garland Judge for the Ledger, member of Polk County Arts Alliance. I also for many years was a member of the statewide Florida Theatre Conference where I chaired the event when it was held in Lakeland for a number of years.

When Ben went off to Rice University in 1995 and Jon was in middle school I got a job at Pied Piper Players (now Lakeland Community Theatre), where I had been volunteering for 7 years, as Executive Director and truly enjoyed that as my favorite, most unusual and interesting job where I met many interesting and talented people and where my whole family became involved since my volunteer days there.



I established a yearly trip to New York City for people, as a fundraiser which I organized and helped lead for over 15 years. This afforded me the opportunity to see many, many theatrical events and see and tour many places in New York City which I cherished. I retired from that job in 2009 after 14 years. I spent my time after that still volunteering some at the theatre, continuing to be active at Temple Emanuel, freelancing by writing articles for various local magazines and writing the preview articles for the Ledger about all of the Polk County community theatre productions.

Jon, Ben, land Mom with long time co-worker and friend Paul Hughes, on a New York trip

My retirement was not to be permanent because in 2015 my husband's secretary of 33 years decided to retire and there was a job opening at the Law Office of Ira A. Serebrin. Thinking Ira would retire in a few years after that I volunteered to step in. Well, a few years have turned into five and here I sit at my desk in his office typing this biography and it doesn't look like he is retiring any time very soon. It has been somewhat of a blessing because with COVID this past year our travels particularly to see our children and grandchildren have been curtailed, which is something I/we did often. So I continue to work in our office, volunteer at Temple Emanuel and spend a lot of time on Zoom activities and face timing with our children and grandchildren.



Zachary, Ellie, Hannah and Miriam 2019

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Who has been the biggest influence in your life and why? That is hard because different people have had different influences on me throughout my life. My parents, especially my mother has been a major influence, even though I often have not followed her good advice, especially growing up. However, I am forever grateful that my parents moved to Lakeland. They influenced me so much on how to be a grandparent. My dad was a lovely man who people would describe as a gentleman, who I always went to first as a kid if I thought I was in trouble because he was calmer than my mom. Unfortunately he passed away in 1988 so my kids didn't get to know him as well as they knew my mom. My mom was a special woman who I try to emulate and who still has influence over me long after her passing. She was smart, witty, interesting, energetic, and adored my children who adored her right back. My kids each had the privilege and pleasure of being taken on a trip to Israel by her and I think that helped solidify their connection to Judaism. Another influencer in my life was Paul Hughes, my coworker and friend for 29 years. He was a giant of a man with great talent and we had a great friendship. He also adored my mother. My friends growing up were always an influence in my life and I still connect with many of them to this day. The wonderful friends I have made and kept through Temple Emanuel and through my Lakeland Community theatre days will always have a lasting impact on my life, as well.

What is one thing people would be surprised to learn about me? I already said I was suspended from school (for a day) and my mother kicked me out of Hebrew school class for being rowdy. It is no secret that I have lost and gained oodles of pounds in my lifetime. I guess people might be surprised to know that I used to be afraid to fly and did not travel out of this country until I was 50 because the thought of flying over the ocean petrified me, but thanks to my mom I did... and thanks to my many trips to New York and several trips to other countries and to fly to visit my kids wherever they were has pretty much cured me of that fear. Also, those who knew me before I was 36 knew I was a smoker... but I quit when I was pregnant with Jonathan.

What is your proudest moment? I think right now is my proudest moment seeing my sons in productive jobs they enjoy and being able to provide well for their families and seeing what wonderful husbands and parents they are.... And that they both care about Ira and me and reach out to help us with things as best they can from a distance... Also being a grandparent is the best thing on earth!

Looking back what is the best advice you would give your younger self? What are the most important lessons you have learned in life? I would tell my younger self to take better care of myself physically and to be more adventurous. My mom always used to tell me take care of your own back yard first, when I was out there helping other people and volunteering too much sometimes to the detriment of taking care of myself and I suppose that would have been a good idea... I am 74 years old... maybe it is not too late!



Tammy and Ira in 2014