

## **President's Address - Ina Horn - Installation Shabbat 5-7-21, 7:30pm**

Shabbat Shalom! I'm honored to stand before you this evening, albeit virtually.

When I was nominated to become president of AEMT, this is not how I pictured my installation. I imagined my family, friends, and members of the congregation here with me in the sanctuary and I looked forward to addressing all of you in person while seeing your faces, full of encouragement, looking back at me. Like, for so many others, meaningful events in our lives have been altered due to the pandemic. So, we accept, adjust, and move forward.

I look at this evening as my opportunity to tell you a little about myself and how I got here. The first time I ever stood on this bima was 37 years ago when, after studying with Rabbi Miller, I became a Jew by choice. I grew up in Roselle Park, New Jersey in a very loving Italian Catholic family and I had an extremely happy childhood. Growing up, I along with my brother and sister, received a good religious education, just not in the Jewish religion. We attended church every Sunday and I went to Catholic school for 12 years. In college, I majored in Quantitative Methods and upon graduation began a career as a strategic planning analyst for an international New York City based company.

My conversion story started out like many others; non-Jewish girl starts dating Jewish boy. Anshe Emeth was the Temple where Joe Weitzen and generations of his family belonged. When Joe and I talked about getting married and our future, we agreed to raise a Jewish family. I began to study with Rabbi Miller and would come to Anshe Emeth several times a week for religious studies, Hebrew class, and of course Shabbat services every Friday night. I went to the mikvah, in fact Ann Thayer-Cohen served as a witness, and on the day of my conversion, I knew I was as Jewish as if I had been Jewish from the day I was born.

As I took on my new religious identity, my devout Catholic parents, Charles and Marian, were very supportive. They gave me what they always gave me, acceptance, and unconditional love. Rabbi Miller and my parents had a special relationship. He never made them feel that they were outsiders, and my parents always knew I was in good hands. I miss these two special people every day and I know how proud they would have been to have witnessed this day.

Joe and I started our life together here in the Anshe Emeth community. We went on to have two wonderful children, Justin and Merin. I credit my mother-in-law, Paula Weitzen, and her mother Blanche Nathan, both long time members of the Temple, for teaching me how to be a good Jewish mother. Judaism became my way of life and Joe and I started our own family traditions. I enjoyed hosting Shabbat dinners and holiday celebrations. I knew that I had made it when my mother-in-law told me that **my** potato latkes were “the best she’s ever eaten!” Through the years, my connection to Judaism and Anshe Emeth grew stronger. I felt that I had found my way home, a place that was already deeply familiar to me.

I began to embrace my Jewish identity in many ways. In my early married life, I became active in the Middlesex County section of National Council of Jewish Women and through the years held various leadership positions there. I met some of my dearest friends through this organization and together we participated in community service and social action events. I gave up my New York City job to spend more time with my two young children, and became a teacher at a local Jewish pre-school, where I taught for over 20 years. One of my proudest accomplishments was enriching the lives of so many young children by bringing Jewish values and lessons to life in the classroom.

Life doesn’t always turn out the way you think it will, surely the pandemic has taught us that, but I learned that lesson a long time ago. When my marriage with Joe ended, my life took a detour but my love for Judaism did not. You might be surprised at how many people asked me if I would remain Jewish after my marriage ended. Truth is, Anshe Emeth remained a spiritual rock in my life.

As fate would have it, as one door closed another door opened. One day I received a call from my dear friend, Sara Levine, who said she wanted me to meet a fellow Anshe Emeth Board of Trustees member; his name was Gerry Horn. Sara introduced us in the hallway of the Temple religious school while waiting to pick up our children, and we soon started dating. Eventually, we were married here in the sanctuary by Rabbi Miller, and I became stepmother to Gerry’s two children, Dana and Josh. Sadly, Dana and Josh’s mother, Robin, passed away a short time after Gerry and I married, and our family went through a challenging period.

Gerry and I worked hard to blend our families, with four children ranging in age from 8 to 18, and through the trials and tribulations of doing so, Anshe Emeth remained a source of strength in our lives. In reality, Anshe Emeth has been with us through good times and in difficult times, including all of our life cycle events - baby namings, bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals.

Gerry and I have been happily married now for 25 years. Our kids formed close sibling relationships with one another and have grown into caring and responsible adults. Looking back over the years, some of my fondest memories are of our holiday tables filled with family and friends. Everyone was welcome including members from my non-Jewish family, my ex-husband, and former in-laws. You see, titles such as “ex”, “step” and the like were not important and quickly fell away. We opened our home and included all. That is what being Jewish meant to me.

Like for many of you, Rabbi Bennett Miller has played a pivotal role in my Jewish journey. In addition to what he taught me about Judaism, he also taught me many life lessons. I feel so fortunate to have had him as not only my Rabbi but also as a trusted friend and mentor. His wisdom and guidance have gotten me through some tough times in my life, but he’s also been with me through life’s most wonderful celebrations including officiating at the marriages of Justin and Leigh and Merin and Dave and more recently the bris of my grandson, Benjamin. He has had a personal relationship in the lives of five generations of my family. Of particular significance, and following in my footsteps, was when my daughter-in-law, Leigh, studied with Rabbi Miller for **her** conversion. I genuinely believe his impact on my life will stay with me forever and I thank him for starting me on this path nearly 40 years ago.

I’ve known Rabbi Bazeley since he came to Anshe Emeth nine years ago as Assistant Rabbi. When Rabbi Miller decided to take emeritus status, I was fortunate, along with David Levine, to co-chair the search committee that resulted in Rabbi Bazeley becoming our Senior Rabbi. Through the years, I’ve come to know him as an innovative, creative, and caring man who has a wonderful way of connecting and engaging with the congregation. His spiritual leadership, especially during the challenges of the pandemic, has kept Anshe Emeth strong and a place of meaning and purpose. Rabbi Bazeley, I am certain

that you will continue to inspire us, lead us, and guide us with your wisdom and vision for many years to come. I look forward to working with you even more closely as well as deepening our friendship during my term as President.

Though I have only known Rabbi Maya Glasser a short time, I feel fortunate to have worked with her on the Religious School Committee, to have learned from her sermons, and to have listened to her beautiful singing voice during her time at Anshe Emeth. Thank you, Rabbi Glasser for the valuable contributions you have made to our congregation, and best of luck in your new position in Jacksonville, FL.

I first met Cantor Mark Stanton when he came in for an interview and, to my house for dinner, a few days before the pandemic shut down everything. Cantor, I am happy....to finally stand on the bima with you in person this evening. Thank you for the amazing job you have been doing of connecting with the congregation and beautifully leading us in prayer.

Since I joined the Board of Trustees in 2012, I have witnessed the tremendous commitment and dedication that our Executive Director, Heather Kibel has for Anshe Emeth. She plays a critical role in helping the Temple manage the mounting challenges that all synagogues face while allowing Temple leadership to focus on their core functions. Thank you, Heather, for all you do. With you as our Executive Director, I know that Anshe Emeth continues to be in excellent and caring hands.

Without question, it has been a difficult time to be in a leadership position. David Levine, our outgoing President rose to the challenge during his term over the past two years. David, you have left big shoes for me to fill, and I mean that both literally and figuratively. Thank you for your guidance and support on my journey to reach this memorable day. Your friendship means the world to me, and I know that I will always be able to turn to you as well as to all of our past presidents for advice and counsel.

I am fortunate to have the talents of Allison Warzala and Dave Snyder as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Presidents. I congratulate them, the Officers, and the rest of the Board and I look forward to what the future brings as we work as a team together.

The Temple building holds rich family history for me. It's hard to have been away from here for the past 15 months. As I arrived today and made my way up to the sanctuary, I made it a point to pass by the various tributes that grace the walls of the building. From the beautiful mosaic holding treasured family keepsakes, the memorial plaques on walls and pews, and even the stained-glass window here in the sanctuary with my children's great grandfather and great uncle's names on it, they are all very dear to my heart and even though they are voiceless, they speak to me all the time and are a source of comfort, especially during this precarious time.

This Temple shines when the pews are filled with people, when the choir is singing and when you need to circle the building to find a place to park. And while we have all been quarantining in our own homes over the past year or so, we all know that this is also our home. Although we had to keep our distance, the pandemic helped to bring us closer together. This can be seen with our streaming Shabbat services, creative educational programs and most importantly with our virtual onegs and social gatherings.

Certainly, the pandemic will have a lasting effect on our Temple community going forward. We are dreaming of this year's High Holy Day services and know that no matter how different they may look, the essence of the Days of Awe will surely be captured. There are so many unknowns, but I am confident that the decisions made by our clergy, professional staff and lay leaders will continue to make Anshe Emeth flourish.

I would not be here today if it were not for the endless and loving support of my husband Gerry. I also thank my wonderful children, Dana, Josh, Melissa, Justin, Leigh, Merin and Dave and my grandchildren, Melanie, Hazel, Benjamin, and Mia who continue to inspire me. I love you all! I also thank **you**, the congregants, and supporters of Anshe Emeth; you are the essence of this synagogue!

As the new president of Anshe Emeth, I am committed to helping to ensure our Temple's continued fiscal health and transparency, articulating our commitment to promote inclusivity, updating our technology without sacrificing our warm and welcoming atmosphere, and to a safe re-opening while observing public health and safety practices.

I am deeply grateful to be part of our congregation and am proud to be the first Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple president who is a convert. I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me and as I begin my term as President, I am filled with energy and enthusiasm and look forward to the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.

Thank you for listening to me tonight and I hope that one day, I will have the opportunity to hear your stories.

Shabbat Shalom!