

**CELEBRATING OUR STORIES**  
**Jewish Life in Ann Arbor**

**Happy Feigelson and Ruth Siegel**  
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**9:55-17:11**

*Happy:* I thought a lot, and I've thought for a long time, about things that I really love about Ann Arbor. I find myself saying over and over, "I love Ann Arbor." I'm thinking I should have one of those stickers—like you know they have, I love New York. I love Ann Arbor. Among the things I really love about this, and particularly in the Jewish world—I love the whole general place, but particularly in the Jewish world—is that we have so many opportunities now for learning and for being involved in things, many more than we had when I first moved here. I imagine that's the same for you, right? There's organizations, there's—

*Ruth:* Yes. When you compare where we were before, on Hill Street, to where we are now, where we built our own synagogue here, and then even bought the building next door, which is where we are now.

*Happy:* We're in that building next door, that's right.

*Ruth:* We were crunched in there. It was adequate, but then it turned out that more and more people were coming to town, and we needed to expand. It turned out that—maybe you remember this, I'm not sure—our congregation had a Conservative rabbi, the one who helped me convert. He was part of the Conservative movement.

*Happy:* This is Rabbi White you're talking about?

*Ruth:* Yes. He wanted to make—he wanted to be sure that our temple was part of the Conservative movement. I don't know if we had signed up for that yet. I'm not sure. Anyway, there were a number of people, I would say more than maybe one-third of our congregation, did not want to do that. They wanted something else. They decided to split off, and they formed their own congregation, which is now Reform.

*Happy:* That's Temple Beth Emeth.

*Ruth:* Yes. We stayed with the Conservative movement then. As we moved here, we are still a Conservative congregation, but much,

much larger. As you said, the many, many more opportunities. You have such a choice of almost every day of the week, as to what you would want to do to enrich your experience. It's really, and it's wonderful for the children, too, of course. There are a lotta different things they can do now that they could never do at that smaller place where we were.

*Happy:* One of the things that I've come to especially appreciate is my own comfort level in a lot of different Jewish venues in the city. It struck me several years ago that I love being at Beth Israel. That's probably my most comfortable place physically, and also knowing the services and knowing a lotta people. Ten years ago now, I began to sign with the Temple Beth Emeth choir. That's the Reform choir. I had heard them sing. You've heard them, right, perform?

*Ruth:* Yes.

*Happy:* I had heard them sing, and seen them several years ago. When I watched them, I thought they're all having such a great time. I would really love to sing with that group. I went up to Annie Rose, the director, the cantor, and I said, "Annie, what would it take to sing with your group?" She said, "Just come." I said, "What, no audition, no nothing?" She said, "No, just come." So, I did, and it has been just fantastic. I marvel at the fact that I can be comfortable here, and very comfortable there. There's wonderful people. It's an 80-member choir. I also like to learn things, more things about being Jewish, so I study with a group—I've been doing this for many years—with Esther Goldstein. She is the rabbi's wife of the Chabad organization, congregation. That's been great. Then I also realized there's other buildings in Ann Arbor, a Jewish building, I was thinking. So the JCC, the Jewish Community Center, there's a lotta stuff going on there. I go there for exercise. I'm always amazed at the programs they have. I thought I really like being here, too.

I thought that's wonderful, to have spaces where I feel comfortable. It's not only one place. I think that's quite different than it would be, if I were living in another city. It's hard to belong to two or three congregations. I didn't mention that the Orthodox Minyan, which meets at Hillel, that's also special in our family. My kids liked going there, and my husband prefers davening there, so he goes there for that. I come to Beth Israel. There used to be this saying that the family that prays together, stays together. Do you remember that expression? I say, in our

case, the family that doesn't pray together, stays together. I joke about it.

*Ruth:* But they also, over at Hillel, they have a—what do you call it—is it creative, or the cultural school, the cultural school—

*Happy:* They used to meet there, yeah, and now they're at the JCC.

*Ruth:* - cultural group, and then there are maybe one or two other ones that meet there, who do not have a separate building. Their groups probably are small enough so that they don't need maybe a big building, like we need. So we have, I would say, almost the gamut of religious experience here. Whatever you wanna join, you join.

*Happy:* Right, it's really nice. One of the questions that I came across, as I was looking through some questions and thinking about them, was: what does it mean to be a Jew in Ann Arbor? I don't know where I stumbled—maybe I made that up. I don't know. What does it mean to be Jewish in Ann Arbor? My answer was: lucky, I just feel really lucky to be Jewish in Ann Arbor. It's a very accepting place. We have so many different kinds of people. Have you had any thoughts like that, about being Jewish in Ann Arbor?

*Ruth:* I think that, if you're, I would say, have traveled enough and have seen lots and lots of places, I think that Ann Arbor could suit you, whether you were one religion or another. I think that most people are very, very tolerant of someone else's religion. In fact, sometimes they even wanna know about it, and they ask you about it. I've even had a friend of mine say, "Ruth, this has been a bad day for me. Say a Jewish prayer for me."

*Happy:* Oh, that's nice.

*Ruth:* I said, "Okay, I'll try."

*Happy:* Yeah, yeah.

*Ruth:* She's not Jewish. So yes, I think Ann Arbor has so much going for it, so much activity, so many different kinds of things to do and listen to, and activities to be part of, that it's almost too many things.