

Beginning the Conversation Modern Jewish Families in Their Own Words

LINDA

No chairs or siddurim so that I could mourn my husband, this extraordinary man, in my own synagogue community

When I met him I think I was being tested. How would I react to a man with the map of Ireland on his face, that knew all the Jewish community leaders in the room and clearly had close relationships with each of them? Over the next two years he became my mentor and most trusted friend.

He watched, perplexed, how I could remain single. Eventually he spoke with the rabbis who were most important in my life, asking if they could accept his asking me to marry him. The answers surprised him. When they saw us together, they thought, “*Yes. This is good for both of them.*” Then they thought, “*No. Intermarriage is out of the question.*”

But eventually they did agree: we belong together. They knew there would be no conversions on either side. The result? As my sister often said, we had a marriage other couples could only dream about.

Finally, my punishment came when he was dying. The associate rabbi came to the hospital room to tell me that my congregation – my community since I was an infant, for whom I taught – would do nothing to support me in mourning.

More incredible still was that the senior and associate rabbis had relied on this man as a wise counselor, a problem-solver and a good friend. Yet they would not honor his memory. No chairs or siddurim so that I could mourn my husband, this extraordinary man, in my own synagogue community. I broke the rules and now I was going to pay the price. I was to be abandoned.

While the message from the synagogue *mara d’atra* was, essentially “You don’t matter,” my friends from Hebrew school, USY and Camp Ramah, my loving rabbi emeritus, family and friends made sure that I knew that I did matter, that he mattered. They all came out and ensured that there would be a minyan. I sat shiva. I recited Kaddish. I rarely go to shul.



MISHPACHAH
The Modern Jewish Family