

Louise Frankel Stoll Interview May 2016



Title of Column: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

As a member of the Board, it became apparent early on that I did not know many of our Temple members. Our friend and neighbor, Judy Hershberg, had been doing interviews of OZ members for their Newsletter for quite some time, and I spoke with her about the process of interviewing. She shared some of her techniques and interviews, which I found fascinating, and was convinced that this would be an important contribution to our Temple as well. I brought the idea to our Board and there was

agreement that we should also do this. When I approached Louise with the idea of interviewing her, she was 'on board' immediately. She also said, "I often wonder about the people sitting next to me in the classes that I take at Temple." *So I wasn't the only one!* Louise has had a well-documented public life which was helpful to me in formulating the initial questions. I sent her a series of questions, based on my research of her life, and she responded to some in writing (which will be italicized) and others were answered in a face to face discussion over coffee and chocolate matzo in our home. It was such a pleasant and friendly discussion and I hope that you will enjoy it as much as we did! *Jan Zatzman Orlansky*

What is your full name? *Louise Frankel Stoll*

Where were you born? *In the Lower East Side of New York City and lived in Brooklyn for my first 2 years.*

Where did you grow up? At the age of 2, Louise's family moved to Trenton NJ where her Dad, Abraham Frankel, helped build fighter planes for the war effort. They moved to Jersey Homesteads, a WPA project, which housed workers and was 98% Jewish. It was in this politically radical milieu that Louise lived until she was 8, along with her younger sister and brother. The family then moved to Los Angeles because a relative had promise of work for her Dad. The family (Louise's parents, grandparents and two uncles) bought a very large home in Los Angeles which

housed about 9 relatives and a boarder, usually a refugee. The idea was that they would all work, in some capacity, in a kosher diner which her grandparents bought and was close to the big house. In reality, it was only Louise's grandfather (cashier) grandmother (cook) and her father (counter man) who worked at the diner. On the side, Louise's father was a bookie.

Where were you educated? Louise went to North Hollywood High School. Incidentally, when Louise was only 13 years old, her father had said he wanted her to go to the University of Chicago. In her Junior year of High School, she took an entrance test for the University of Chicago and got in, shaving off her Senior year of high school and her first year of college. While in her second year of college she married a lawyer and later gave birth to her first child, Miriam. After completing her Master's degree in Philosophy from the University of Chicago, Louise, Miriam and her husband moved to Detroit where her husband clerked for a Federal judge. While in Detroit, Louise and her husband participated in the early Civil Rights Movement activities.

What are some of your favorite memories from your childhood? *Going to the library with my Dad and going to the kosher diner that my grandparents owned and getting free food there. My Grandma lived to be 103.5 and lived alone until she was 101 and then moved to a Jewish retirement home. Another memory is of her Dad coming to*

her school every noon hour to bring her a sandwich from the deli. He would throw it over the fence for Louise to catch. *It was much better than anything I could get in the cafeteria!*

Who was the biggest influence on you growing up?

My father. He was a self-educated man of high intellect and he would take Louise to the library every Friday and they worked their way through the classics together, often having discussions about the books she had read. When Louise was around 14, her Mom, Ruth Flexo Frankel, went back to college to get a teaching degree and taught elementary school until she retired. Louise's Dad died at 56 which was a great tragedy in her life. Before he died, the family (Louise, first husband, daughter Miriam and Louise's parents) travelled to Europe and Israel together. Her parents stayed on and lived on a kibbutz for a year, while Louise, husband and Miriam moved to Nairobi, Kenya for a year, where Louise taught high school and her husband taught Law at the University of East Africa.

What are your memories from your time in Kenya?

While living in Nairobi, in 1964, married to my first husband who had a one year teaching contract at the Law School at the University of East Africa, I taught English at a local high school for boys. The primary tribal group around Nairobi was Kikuyu - fairly short people with soft brown skin. In my class were three young men who were anomalies - extremely tall and very dark skinned. They

were of the Dinka tribe, and were refugees from Southern Sudan where war raged between North and South Sudan - the North being primarily Moslem, the South having been converted to a great extent by Catholic priests.

The three Dinka boys had walked from the Southern Sudan to Nairobi to escape the civil war in their country, and found refuge with an American Catholic priest - a man named Jo-Ed Miller - who ran a kind of community and relief center on the edge of Nairobi. The Sudanese young men approached me one day after class and said they wanted to introduce me to "their leader" - the person who had led the way out of the war torn S.Sudan to Nairobi. He had gotten them enrolled in the school, then continued south alone to Tanzania, to a residential Catholic secondary school from which he was now graduating, and coming to visit.

This "leader", John Garang, also known as Mabior, turned out to be an extraordinary and brilliant young man. He desperately wanted to go to college in America. We mobilized all our young American friends, arranged for a scholarship at Grinnel College in Iowa (he wanted to become an agricultural expert), sent him to America, and arranged for a relative of ours to meet him at the airport in NYC and drive him to Iowa. He excelled in school, organized the farmers in the region to raise money for small tractors and modern farm equipment to be sent to Southern Sudan. John Garang, with the aid of the US Govern-

ment, which became interested in him, went on to earn a Ph.D. in political science, returned to Sudan and eventually became the first president of the newly independent Southern Sudan, He was killed in a plane crash in the Sudan a month after being elected. Sabotage was suspected.

One of the other "boys", Lako Tongun, who we also brought to America after we had returned, and helped through college, ended up with a Ph.D. in political Science, married an African American girl, became a college professor in Pasedena, California, and raised a family. He visited me here in Vermont a year ago.

After Nairobi, Louise, Miriam and husband toured Africa down to South Africa and up the West side of Africa. They met people in Nairobi who had lived in S.Africa and arranged for the people in S.Africa to pick them up at train station to a house where there was a party. All the window shades were down, lights dim. This was an Illegal gathering, because at the time large groups of dissidents were not allowed to gather, but they wanted to hear about their good friends in Nairobi. Little did Louise and family know that hiding in the basement was **Bram Fischer**, who was a leader of dissidents, a lawyer. They found out much later that he had been found and was arrested.

Did you return to California immediately on your return from Africa? After her husband's clerkship was

completed they returned to California and moved to Berkeley, where they had family, and there would be more professional opportunities for Louise and her husband.

What happened in those early years at Berkeley?

Louise continued graduate school at UC Berkeley and obtained a Ph.D. in Public Finance and Policy. Her dissertation was about the impact of federal funds in schools.

Louise had two more children and later became active in school politics and was asked to run for the school board. It was at a political house party that she met this “*devastatingly handsome man*”, Marc Monheimer! It was there that she told him that she was considering a run for the school Board, which was the same seat he was running for. He told her that he welcomed the competition. She ended up not running because she became pregnant. Six years later, while separated from her first husband, a friendship blossomed between Marc and Louise. They later worked on the School Board together for 5 years.

Does the Israel Action Network, which monitors media coverage of Israel, still exist today? What was/is your involvement with this organization?

Marc and Louise were married (December 22, 1978) and living in Berkeley. One day news came out that a left wing radical Berkeley group wanted to make a sister city arrangement with a Palestinian refugee camp (Jabalia). This was considered an anti-Israel move and Louise did not agree and wrote a ballot measure (a description of

what you are voting on) that said, in essence, that it would be bad for Berkeley because it was against Israel. The sister city measure was defeated and Louise was asked to lead the political campaign to make sure it was defeated. The local Jewish community expressed their gratitude to Louise by giving her an honorary membership on the Board. Louise later started the Israel Action Network along with 3-4 others. The “Network”, for four years, distributed informative information and articles about Israel to a mailing list of 500 people all over the USA, including Vermont.

You have a very strong allegiance to the State of Israel. Who or what influenced you?

Louise’s grandmother, originally from Poland, knew that some of her relatives had been killed in the Holocaust. She later found out that several had survived. As soon as Palestine had been established, her grandmother went to Israel to see if she could track down these relatives. Louise was 8 years old at the time and remembers that there was always support for the State of Israel in their home.

Your professional resume is quite impressive, would you care to summarize those accomplishments that were most important to you?

Louise worked at O’Brien-Kreitzberg engineering company as an executive whose main task was to take the language of engineers and translate it into understandable English. She spoke on behalf of the company speaking to

engineers and also managed the construction of large public works projects: buildings, airports, wharfs, highways (transportation) during her time there. One day an intern from Stanford business school who worked with Louise wanted her to meet his fiancé. After a friendly conversation she said to Louise “You know, I want to be just like you. You have a great job, a family and a good marriage, how do you do it all?” Louise said, “You *can* do it all, but not at the same time. Get married first, have your children and when your children are in school, go back to work.”

Fast forward 8 years. Louise get’s a call from the fiancé (Martha Johnson), now married, calling because of the good advice Louise had given her. She worked for a head hunting firm and her job was to recruit names for sub-cabinet posts for the new Clinton administration. Marc was willing to help Louise get her resume together and 3-4 weeks later Martha called to say Louise’s resume was circulated to 3 different departments. After a mere 2 weeks, Louise got a call to come meet Federico Peña and a week later got another call to spend time with Peña, who had been confirmed as Secretary of Transportation. Louise Frankel Stoll was confirmed by the Senate on August 5, 1993 as *Assistant Secretary of Transportation* under the Clinton administration. Her proud family joined her at the confirmation hearing where she said the confirmation committee gave her *soft ball questions* and she was confirmed easily.

Louise was one of the few women in the Clinton administration whose husbands accompanied them to Washington. Louise and Marc were in DC for 10 years (full term and part of the second term). After which, Louise went back to the private sector, commuting from DC to Dames & Moore, an established LA engineering company with a specialty in management construction. She would travel to LA once a month for a week.

When she left the government, she got a call from the United Jewish Communities which is the parent group of all the Federations in the US, and was asked to interview and became the number 2 person in this national organization.

Marc would come up on the train every weekend from DC to NYC. Marc worked for the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, a government agency that assists American businessmen who want to establish businesses overseas, and he traveled the world. Later, in Vermont, he served on the Boards of the UVM Hospital, and COTS.

While in Washington DC Louise began working on an idea she had for a child aviation restraint.

Are you still actively involved in the safety seat business (CARES or Child Aviation Restraint System) that you patented? Here is the story. One time when her daughter was visiting with her child, carrying heavy safety

paraphernalia, Louise thought there had to be an easier way to keep children safe on airplanes. This incident prompted Louise to create a restraint system that she patented, and weighs less than a pound. Louise ran this business from her home for 5 years before selling the rights and patent to the company that produced them, AMSAFE Aviation, located in Phoenix. This is the company that makes all the seatbelt and pilot restraints in airplanes worldwide.

Tell us about ‘the handshake’ between Arafat and Yitzchak Rabin in Washington DC. There was a kind of isometric back and forth with Clinton in the middle trying to push Arafat and Rabin together while they were pulling apart resisting coming closer for a handshake. Finally they came together for ‘the handshake’ and Louise, as part of the Clinton administration, was sitting 10 feet away from this historic moment in the Rose Garden.

Did you meet President Clinton? *Yes, I was in meetings with him a few times.*

What was your impression of him? *He was humorous, comfortable and ran a good meeting. He picked up on the core of what was going on and was a good synthesizer of the points being made.*

Family means a great deal to you. Can you tell us about some family traditions that you have?



Well we take an annual family vacation with all the kids and grandkids. We started this custom when Marc and I married. Marc's kids from his first marriage were already in college, but this was a way to bring together our new family. As they grew up and married, all of their spouses and children (9) as well came on vacation with us. It's a big clan now. The kids insisted, after Marc died, that I continue this custom, and with everyone so spread out, it is a good thing to do. This July 2016 we are all going to Costa Rica, There are four college-age grandchildren now and five others ranging in age from 8 - 16. My grandchildren all call me "Savta" There was already a Bubie (my mother) and a "grandma" from their other parent's side, and I like the sound of "Savta" - grandma in Hebrew. Marc was called "Saba" .

Is there anything that you would like to share with us that we have not covered?

She said that if Marc were to have the last word, he would say she was a “sexy broad”! Their story together is a stunning love story with respect and support for each other, and a beautiful legacy for their children and grandchildren.



Marc Monheimer

Thank you Louise Stoll for sharing, so candidly, your interesting and productive life. My hope is that this conversation will continue between you and other members of our congregation.