Temple Beth El Minyannaires

Portland, Maine

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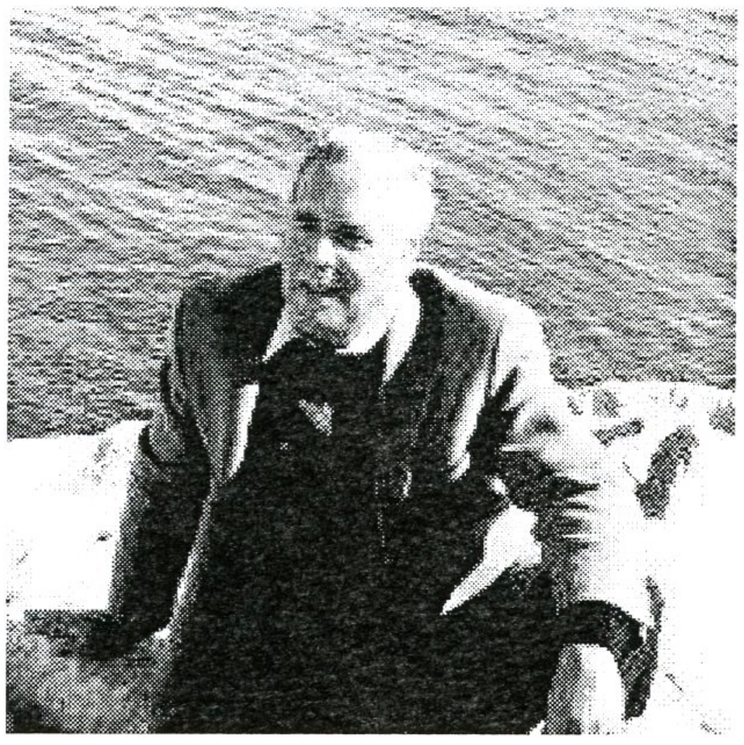


1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**
   I was brought up in Hartsdale, New York, which did not have a synagogue, and so my parents sent me to an Orthodox Hebrew School at the Hebrew Institute of White Plains. I started in the 3rd or 4th grade, and went three times a week. I'd have to catch the bus in front of my regular school—for a dime—it would take me into White Plains, and I would walk the rest of the way. I also went to Sunday School in Scarsdale because my mother's sister's husband belonged to that temple. Despite all this Hebrew education, my parents were not really observant, and we had minimal observance in our home—our mezuzah was something I picked up from Hebrew School, and we went to my aunt's or uncle's house for Seders. My father hated religion in general, referring to it as nothing but a business. When I was in the 7th grade, nine months before my Bar Mitzvah, my father died and, due to lack of money and my after-school newspaper delivery job, I had to drop out of Hebrew School. They were very good to let me be Bar Mitzvahed anyway, even though I had not completed Hebrew School.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**
   My involvement has mostly been with been with Jewish secular organizations, like the Jewish Labor Committee, which was established in 1933 to protect Jewish and non-Jewish workers in Europe. They saw the writing on the wall pretty early. I have been asked to speak at union meetings about Israel or to help mobilize support for anti-Israel issues. The other organization I'm involved with is Meretz USA, a left-leaning Zionist organization. I became a pro-Zionist when it wasn't fashionable, and have voted several times in Zionist elections.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**
   I started attending minyans at Shaarey Tphiloh on a regular basis shortly after I moved to Maine in 1970. Then I fell away from it for a long time. Recently I started attending on a more regular basis about the time that my mother passed away. I came to say Kaddish, but I also felt a certain amount of guilt. I keep hearing my mother say, "Agh, you don't go to shul and I spent all that money for it", and she doesn't go at all except for the High Holidays! To help make a minyan allowing other people to commemorate their loved ones is a mitzvah—not charity, but an obligation. People supported me in my grief, and I felt that it was important for me to do the same. It made me feel like I was making use of the education that I did not quite complete.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

A lot depends on my schedule. I go on Sundays because I am available, and when I can, I go to Etz Chaim on Saturdays. I would love to go on weekdays, but I have to go to work.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

As a kid, I thought of him as the old man with a white beard who was married to Mother Nature. As an adult, I can't even begin to imagine—I think there are some things beyond comprehension. There's no beginning, there's no end. I have to stop thinking about these things—it will make me crazy. There are some things you just can't define. It's a matter of faith; you either have to believe in G-d's existence or not.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

They may be, but I'm a person who believes that good works will provide an answer. I believe it is important to be a decent person and to treat people well, and that is what you're answerable for. Good works will produce good results.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I think it's possible that when we die, we don't die all at once. Part of our memory may still function, like a dream which seems to last for a long time, even though it takes place only in a second. That split second can be an eternity. We may experience our afterlife, which also has a lot to do with how we lived our lives—we may be tormented or we may be at peace.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

I have a hard time talking about things like that. I prefer other people to make that decision. Since you ask for this interview, though, there was a time I was willing to tackle issues that were unpopular. One example is that I was a sponsor of a bill in 1979, when I was a legislator, to end discrimination against gays and lesbians. As a legislator, I brought people who were active in civil rights and human rights to the State House to try to advance their causes. I also have helped support some of the existing theaters in the area, both by my assistance and by performing. I wrote a one-man play about labor history called "Jimmy Higgins". I did the show in Wisconsin where the Governor had gotten rid of collective bargaining for teachers and public employees. People were very upset about that, and there were protests every day. I performed my play for an audience of union members in the Union Hall. A huge crowd attended, and they were cheering during the play and extremely appreciative.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I like to think I have empathy for people. I really bristle at injustice.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I had a very troubled childhood, both at school and at home. My parents did not get along very well, and my father committed suicide when I was in the 7th grade. Even though that was 56 years ago, it still has an effect on how I feel about a lot of things now. Being an only child, I had a lot of time to think about these things. On a lighter note, I used to write a lot of articles for the West End News, that many people read. I do a lot of painting of miniature figures—and put them on the shelf where they gather dust. Currently I am directing a play at Acorn Studios called "The Wandering Beggar" or "The Adventures of Simple Shmerel" from the book by Soloman Simon. It's funny to direct a Jewish-themed play with a non-Jewish cast—I have to help them with a Yiddish dialect.

Tom Berman

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was raised in a kosher home in Portland, and I attended Portland Hebrew Day School at Shaarey Tphiloh. I had a late start in the Hebrew Day School—most people started in the first grade, while I didn't jump in until the fourth grade, but even then I got plenty of practice. I was over at the shul almost every day.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I go to services, and we do some at-home rituals.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan ?**

   My daughter teaches in the Temple Beth El Hebrew School, and I maintain the computers around here. It's hard to work on the computers when people are using them, so Sundays are a good day to do that work. And since the Sunday morning minyan meets while Hebrew School is in session, it seemed reasonable to start attending. One Sunday Phil wasn't here and we didn't have a Hebrew reader, so I decided to get up and lead. After that I started coming every Sunday. Then Steve Blattner, who donates used computers to the Temple, enticed me to come on Wednesday mornings. He said that he'd give me his donations then, so I started coming then, too. I got into the habit, I guess.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   My weather service retirees breakfast meets on Wednesdays, so I come to minyan, work here for a little while, and then go to the breakfast. Coming to minyan on Sundays and Wednesdays works for me.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   G-d is with us everywhere, all the time.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

   I've seen instances where I think they have been answered, especially with the Mi Shebeirach.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

That's interesting. Souls depart, and remain with those that they influenced during their lives. I'm sure there's more, but I hope not to find out too soon.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

Being able to help out around Beth El doing things that I enjoy. I seem to spend a lot of time here as a volunteer. I started when I was bringing the kids to junior congregation. Ellie Miller was leading that service, and she eventually convinced me to join the Hebrew School Committee, which she chaired. I eventually became Chair of that committee when she became President. It was during her presidency that we first computerized operations at the Temple. In 2011, I was honored to be nominated for the New England Area USCJ Tzedek Award.

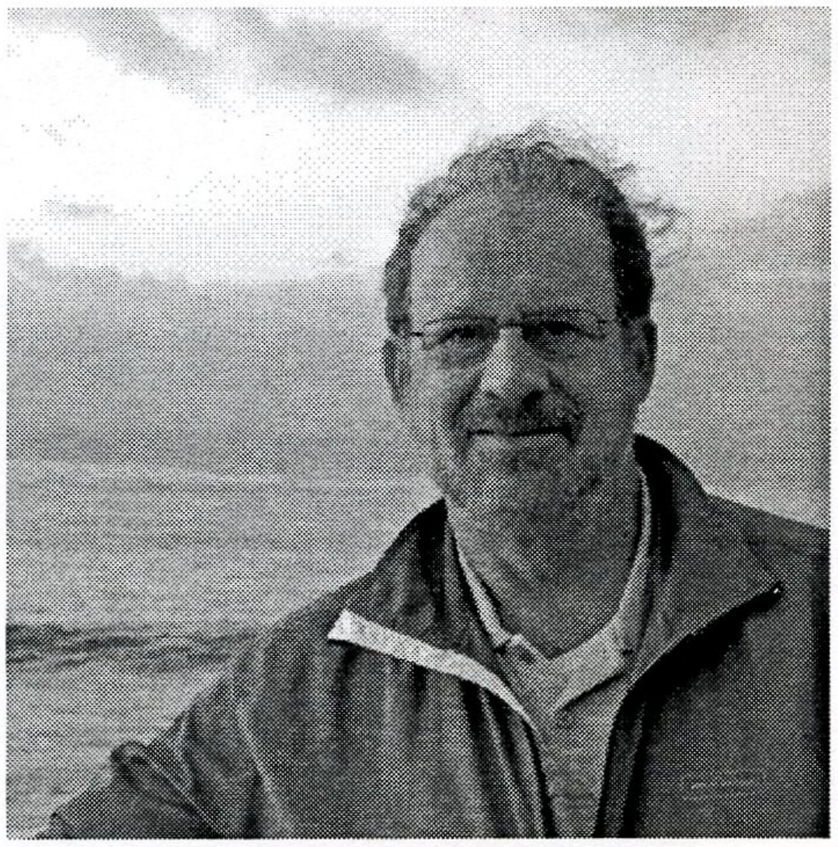
9. **What is one of your best personal qualities?**

I help people out when they need it, computerwise or otherwise.

10. **What is something your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I was a meteorologist with the National Weather Service for 35 years, working around the clock, and they also allowed me to take courses and earn a degree in computer science. I was fortunate to participate in their changeover from teletypes to several generations of computer systems. Maintaining and troubleshooting their computer systems was almost as much fun as forecasting the weather! Retirement has freed me up for my volunteer activities at Beth El and my involvement in amateur radio activities. Now, when there's severe weather around, the National Weather Service will call me to help find reports of damage via their ham radio station.

Stephen Blattner



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was born in Chicago, but spent my childhood in Europe, Massachusetts, and finally Westchester County, New York. My maternal grandmother worked very actively for Jewish charities. I was brought up Reform, and minyan was not part of my tradition. I was Bar Mitzvahed and Confirmed, and went to Hebrew School through high school.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   When I was in college, I went through a period when I wasn't doing much that was Jewish. But when I was in medical school, my roommate kept kosher, so I had to learn. Then I met Fran, whose family was Conservative and kept a kosher home. When we got married we decided to keep a kosher home, partially because it was important to her family, but even more because we expected to have kids in a non-urban area and we believed that keeping kosher would be an important way to keep them connected, even if they didn't have a Jewish community around them. We brought up our kids in the Jewish tradition, starting at Temple Beth El, then moving to Bet Ha'am for a few years, and then we came back to Beth El. We went to Israel for the first time in 2000, and since then my daughter has made aliyah, and we have been back many times. I now have family and friends in Israel, and I feel like we have some community there.

3. **Assuming you started attending minyan while saying Kaddish, why do you continue to come?**

   I think it's a combination of supporting the community by preserving a minyan for others, and also it's a time of reflection for me. I think a lot about all the people I say Kaddish for. It's a quiet, reflective, spiritual, and ethical time for me.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I had to make a series of choices when I was saying Kaddish, and for each of the three I did something different. The most recent was my mother's death in 2010, and I decided to say Kaddish for a year, when I came as often as I could. Since I wanted to keep coming, I decided to do what I can manage—two to three times a week. I usually come Tuesday or Wednesday, but Friday and Sunday are pretty stable.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

Not in body or form, but in a formless, timeless, spiritual way.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I don't know. The only things I ever pray for are people's health and safety, and I pray for peace. I pray for the world to move in a good direction and for people to go through whatever they need to in the best way they can. I don't have any expectation, but I guess prayers are answered. I think it's important to contribute my wish and my hope for these things.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I think people around you may be sad, may celebrate your life, may remember you for some period of time. I do believe in the concept that your life continues both in memory and in whatever you leave behind that you have done. So I think that's what happens. I'd like to think there's a soul that goes on, but maybe that's what the memory is, or maybe it's something else—I really have no idea.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

Raising two kids to be self sustaining, confident, conscionable. I've had other tangible achievements, but nothing comes close to that. The first big professional achievement I had was founding a program for kids in Maine who have cancer, The Maine Children's Cancer Program. Whatever I do professionally now brings creativity and passion—I'm very invested in my work, and that's something you leave behind.

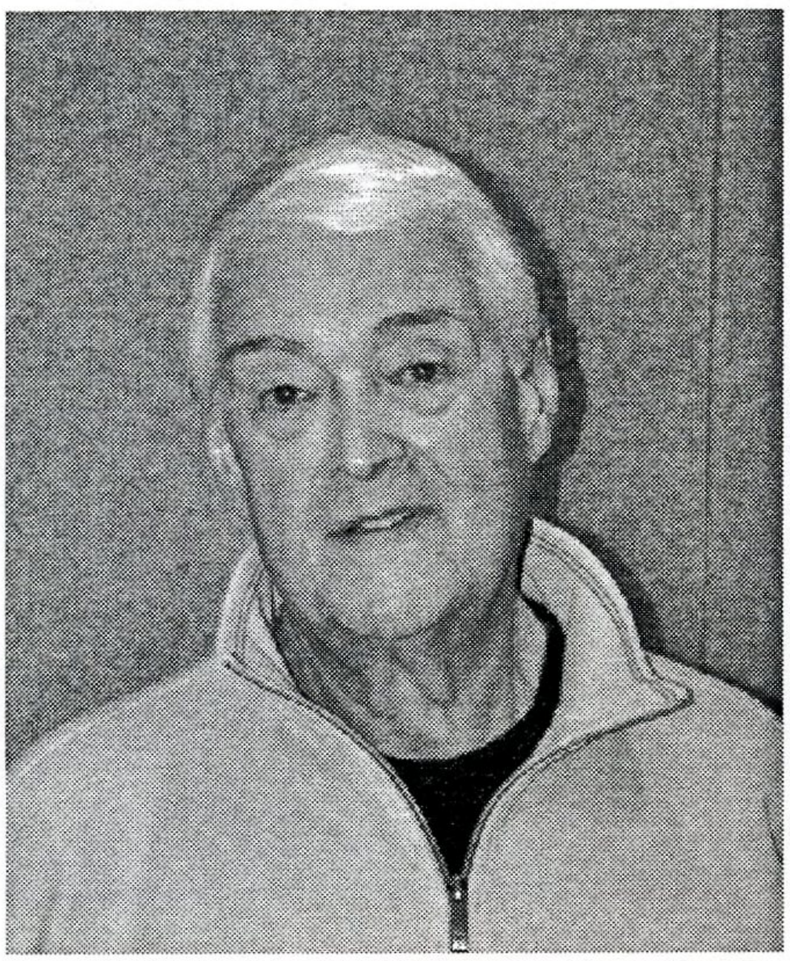
9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

Compassion and empathy. Also, generosity, but that's all part of the same thing.

10. **What don't your fellow minyannaires know about you?**

I like to cook. I do all the cooking at home - it relaxes me and it's my creative outlet. I rarely use recipes and when I do, it's just to start me off. My fantasy is to open a small restaurant. In another lifetime, I'm sure! I do just about anything, fewer desserts and more meats, vegetables, rices, and creative mixtures of the three. I have boxes full of Middle Eastern spices I bring back from Israel when I go, and use them freely. Also salads, some breads. I love wines, have a few hundred in my cellars, so putting it all together is another diversion. I enjoy cooking for groups, and I've done everything from small intimate dinners at home to cooking for the hungry hordes at Hebrew High School at TBE when my kids were there.

Jerry Carp



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   We lived in Biddeford and my family was very non-religious. We belonged to an Orthodox shul, because it was the only synagogue in Biddeford. The shul didn't have a full-time rabbi to teach me at that time, so I studied for my bar mitzvah at Etz Chaim in Portland. That's why I still have an attachment to Etz Chaim.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   My wife, Mary, is observant and, although I am not, because of Mary I am observant now, too. We never had seders when I was growing up, but now we have seders. I still go to Temple only twice a year, except for my morning minyans. I am not a religious person.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started attending minyan when my brother-in-law died in 1972. I went with my nephews. I didn't go regularly after that, but I come now because I enjoy the service. It's a social experience also, because David and I go out for breakfast after.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I come on Mondays only because that's my day off from work.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   I don't think about it. I don't disbelieve and I don't actually believe. I say the prayers—why? I don't know. Because I'm there, I guess. We've said the same prayers since I was a kid. I don't need the book to say them because I know them. It's just part of my upbringing. That's also probably partly why I enjoy coming to minyan.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

   I hope so, because I pray for everyone who's sick—for friends and people I know. Unfortunately there's a long list now. I do it just in case, but because I do it, it makes me wonder if I actually do believe.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

   Nothing. You're gone, and hopefully you leave good memories.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

   Bringing up three children. None of them practices the religion, although they all went to Hebrew School. You wonder, is it something we did? Work isn't exactly an achievement, but I worked at my travel business for 38 years. I was never sued. I always believed that if there is a problem, get to it right away. Don't cover up.

9. **What is one of your best personal qualities?**

   Honesty. Sometimes to a point that's not very nice—I usually say what's on my mind.

10. **What is something your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

    Most of them don't know anything about me, except David, because I grew up with him. I was in the army for two years, a typist stationed in Fort Knox, Kentucky. I was in the supermarket business before I went into the travel business. I was a meat cutter—I jokingly say that I was a frustrated moyel. So when I sold my travel business in 1989, there was only one other thing I knew—the food business. I'm a cook at the deli department at the Falmouth Shaw's; we're one of the few Shaw's that offer that kind of prepared food.

Darrell Cooper

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in Bangor as an Orthodox Jew. Out of respect for my paternal grandmother, we made sure the house was kosher, and we observed the major holidays. Growing up in Bangor, the Jewish Community Center was the focal social and educational center, and I had both the privilege and the inconvenience of living across the street from the JCC. My Hebrew School teacher, to whom I'm eternally indebted, took an interest in me, since I lived so close by. He used to give me private lessons in the summer, much to my displeasure. In retrospect, even though I begrudgingly crossed the street for these lessons, it has served me well in later life.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I've been relatively observant in that I observe the main Jewish holidays. I make an effort to make sure my grandchildren are aware of their heritage and, of course, I come to morning minyan. I'm active in Etz Chaim, and have been right from the beginning, and also the Jewish Funeral Home.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started attending minyan in February of 1999 to say Kaddish for my mother and to respect her memory, and I never left. Phil did the Hebrew part for many years, and then encouraged me to start. I did offer to read the Torah since I knew the melody. I continue to come for both spiritual and social reasons. The morning minyan introduced me to Portland's Jewish society. Until I came to morning minyan, there very few Jews in Portland that Judy and I knew.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I make an effort to come on Mondays and Thursdays, to help make a minyan so that the Torah can be read. I come on Fridays to have breakfast with David Lewis.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   I accept the fact that there is G-d and that He is an overpowering presence in my life.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

   In some cases, yes, and in some cases, no. It's all based on G-d's judgment. He is the Judge.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

   I know what happens. I know that there is an afterlife. I don't think it's a physical presence, but rather a spiritual presence. I have encountered too many experiences that I have found unusual to not believe in an afterlife. From an experience that Judy and I had with a psychic, we were able to communicate with our dead relatives. I have had many incidents at the Funeral Home that I don't believe are coincidental. For example, we had a service for an electrical engineer who was known as a prankster, and four light bulbs burned out that day. I could go on and on.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

   G-d puts everyone on this earth with a specific mission, and the accomplishment of that mission can come at any time in your life. I firmly believe that my mission is to protect the dead before burial. The dead need a protector, because they no longer can make any choices—someone has to do it for them. I'm not sure that's a tangible achievement, but it certainly is a spiritual achievement, and it means a lot to me.

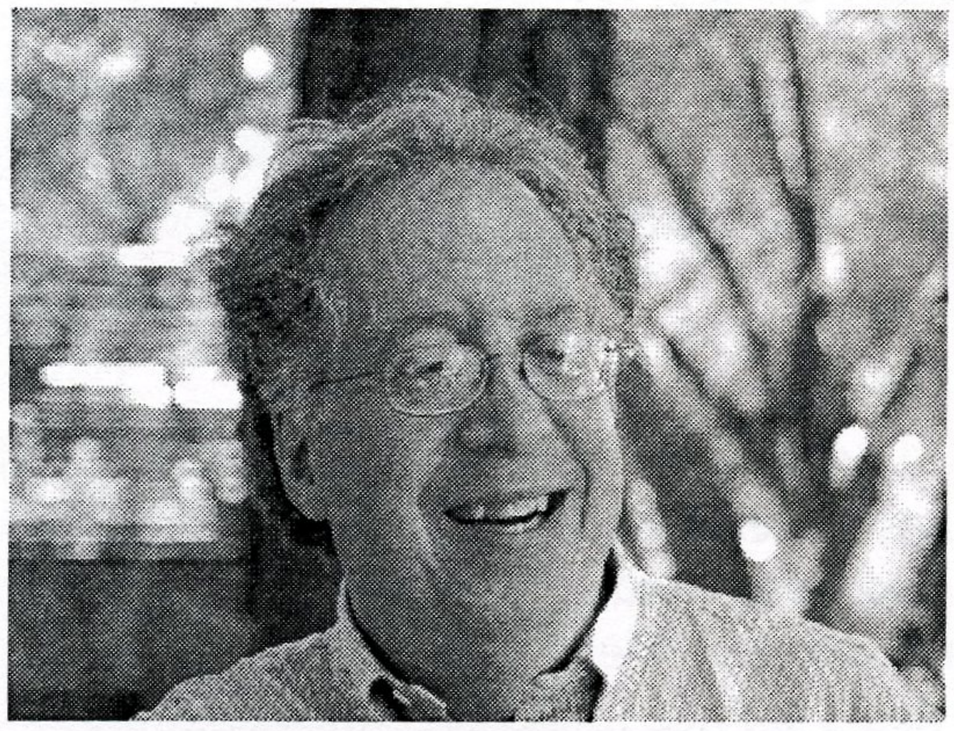
9. **What is one of your best personal qualities?**

   Compassion.

10. **What is something your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

    Maybe I want to leave it that way [said with a grin]. I picture myself as a Renaissance man. I try to recreate myself every few years. My first job was running a wholesale egg business, and I am a licensed Maine egg candler. I've gone from working on Wall Street to real estate development to competitive intelligence to energy auditing. Who knows what's next?

Steve Gleit



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in a Conservative home in Huntington, New York, on Long Island. We were kosher style in the house—we didn't have any treif, but we didn't buy kosher products either. Outside the house we ate everything. The biggest conundrum was why did G-d make Chinese food so good, since it was not kosher. We ate it with abandon and relish.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   Basically I got away from it until I had children, but then both of my children were B'nai Mitzvahed. They went to a Reform religious school—basically Sunday School. My son not only was Bar Mitzvahed, but also confirmed. My first wife was not born Jewish, but she did a Reform conversion prior to the birth of my daughter, which included a mikvah, and was recognized by Conservatives. I wanted my kids to be able to say they were truly Jewish. We celebrated the Jewish holidays, but never any Christian holidays. I was very happy that we never did the Chanukah Bush thing and that my children never asked why are we missing out on all the Christmas presents. Judaism for my kids at this point is going to seders at their friends in California, and saying some Yiddish words. I don't go to lots of services, but I like minyan and I also go to services with Rabbi Wilansky.

3. **Why did you start attending Temple Beth El minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I became very good friends with Matt Goldfarb. I like him a lot, and it is a good way to see him on a regular basis and have breakfast and chew the fat. When I heard that he was leading the Wednesday minyan, I wanted to come. I enjoy the Wednesday regulars, too. I enjoy meeting all the Temple Beth El minyannaires—they are very nice people and have treated me very nicely. The Temple Beth El community has made our transition from New York to Portland very, very easy. We love Portland.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I only go to Temple Beth El on Wednesdays. I usually go to Wilansky's minyan on Monday or Thursday. I try to go only two days a week, although sometimes I go three days, if I am asked by Rabbi Wilansky. He tries to have services on Rosh Chodesh, and sometimes he will call me for that. I read all the notes in Wilansky's prayer book and, being a lawyer, I approach this as an academic education.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

Definitely as one who exists, often exists in direct communication. I believe that someone who has been a righteous person may intervene on my behalf. I believe that G-d is full of mercy.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

Definitely. I don't think they necessarily have to be in the context of a service, though. I think you may pray to G-d anytime. Formalized services are not the only time that G-d listens.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I believe you go to Heaven. I never verbalized this until I heard a Chabbad rabbi say at an unveiling that even though someone passes on, it doesn't mean you stop communicating with that person. It's just a different form of communication. I had always believed that, because I had been talking to my father on a regular basis, so it always was hard for me to think of him as being dead. I told my children that Grandpa was always working hard on our behalf.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

Raising two children into adulthood. Recognizing that the most important part of being a parent is letting your child know that he or she is never alone. I have communicated that to my children, and they always have appreciated that. Another achievement was coaching high school varsity soccer at my son's high school for eight years, as part of a more general soccer coaching career that lasted 15 years. I was able to find in my second marriage a woman with whom I have a wonderful relationship and a lot of fun. I'm glad I found her before I am dead.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

Being very optimistic and extremely positive. I have a lot of hope that lifts all of my family and friends. I always work to try to solve problems, and I hope it's infectious.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I have had a 30+ year career doing Chinese immigration law from a small office in New York's Chinatown, which I still run, even though I now live in Portland. I am an expert cook of kosher Chinese food, and all the sauces I use are OU (Orthodox kosher) sauces. Last year I donated a Chinese dinner to the National Council of Jewish Woman auction, and someone paid $150 for it. I made Chinese spiced chicken wings with honey ginger sauce, beef with onions, soy ginger flounder fillets, sautéed bok choy, chicken soup with won ton (kreplach), and the best dish was eggplant with garlic sauce.

Matt Goldfarb

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   My father came from Lynn, Massachusetts, and my mother came from Philadelphia. My father was a motion picture projectionist and, in the summer of 1930, he came to Portland Maine with his new bride, my mother, to be a summer vacation substitute at the Capital Theater, which later became the Fine Arts Theater. I was born in Portland, and my older sister Vivienne and I were both raised here. I was the irritating little brother. We kept a strictly kosher home. I went to the Portland Hebrew School five days a week—Monday through Thursday and Sunday. I would leave the house at 8:00 in the morning and not arrive home until quarter of seven at night. We lived on Codman Street, and I was the last person to be dropped off—a long day for an 11 year old. My parents had joined the new Temple Beth El in 1950 and, in 1951, I was the third child ever to be Bar Mitzvahed there. Some of the traditional Orthodox songs and melodies were introduced to the congregation at my Bar Mitzvah.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I have been active 30 years in temple life, and served for many of those years in leadership roles, including the presidency in 1971-72. We attended Friday night services, and always brought our children with us. We also celebrated all the festivals and holidays, both at home and at the temple.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started many years ago because I felt it was necessary to support those who were saying Kaddish. I can't tell you how many years I have been coming—I think it has been probably 20 years, but I don't remember. I kind of follow the example set by Sumner Bernstein.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I come once a week, whether I need it or not (said with a wink). I have been the Wednesday English Reader probably for ten years. It's one of these things that becomes a part of you, and even though I can't remember when it began, I kind of know how it's going to end!

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

I'm still looking. G-d is a mystery to me, and I'm still trying to figure it out. Usually around the High Holidays I try to read from our Jewish sages like Will Herberg and Martin Buber to get better insight. Jews' concepts about G-d have changed in Biblical scripture. In Genesis we read of an anthropomorphic god, "the voice of G-d walked through the Garden of Eden, searching out Adam and Eve." But when we get to Isaiah, we read of G-d as an exalted god. We have these different views, so to try to understand the mystical nature of G-d as portrayed in some portions of our Bible, and reconcile that with our everyday lives, is a great challenge.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

Yeah, I do, in some mysterious way.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I don't know. I don't dwell on it. That's one of the mysteries. The concept of "she'ol" (some dark place where supposedly we go) has no meaning for me. I don't think about playing a harp up in heaven, either.

8. **What are major personal achievements of yours?**

Retirement! To have raised two wonderful children whose faith is the faith of our forefathers and is alive and well. My greatest achievement is that I have made a good marriage with a wonderful woman. The practice of law has been a sustaining force in my life, and as a sole practitioner, I did it my way.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

Being a good friend, and spending time reading and learning more about the world in which we live.

10. **What is something your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I probably have known Frannie and David the longest—David was ahead of me in high school—so in some respects most of who I am is pretty well known to them. I know the lyrics to Schubert's Impromptu #6, because I learned it in grammar school. On our senior class trip to Washington, I appear twice in the class picture. You achieve that by starting on the left side and running like hell to the right side while the picture is being taken by the panoramic camera. It had been talked about before, but no one had ever done it. It was an impulse thing for me, and I had the moxie to do it. I want my fellow minyannaires to know that I will be here to support the minyan as long as I can.

Fran Jacobson

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in a loving, very Orthodox family. I was one of four girls, so it was my Dad and his five women. There only were seven years between the oldest girl and the youngest, and I'm number three. We kept a kosher home, and my grandfather was a mashgiach —the person who sat outside the kitchen doors at Temple and Jewish Community Center events to make sure everything was kosher. We belonged to Newbury Street Synagogue and on the High Holidays we used to walk from our home on Caleb Street to services, a long walk. When Newbury Street closed, we joined Shaarey Tphiloh on Noyes Street.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   After Arthur and I got married in 1962 at Shaarey Tphiloh Synagogue, we joined Temple Beth El and have been members ever since. Both of my boys, Stephen and Marc, were Bar Mitzvahed at Temple Beth El. I belong to all the Jewish organizations; I became a life member of Sisterhood, Cedars (used to be Jewish Home for the Aged), and Hadassah. I still am very involved at the temple and with Federation.

3. **You started attending minyan while saying Kaddish for your son, Stephen, but why do you continue to come?**

   It's odd that this interview is taking place on the 28th anniversary of my son's funeral. When I first started coming to say Kaddish for Stephen, everyone was so welcoming and so wonderful. I was overwhelmed by the warmth of everyone, and I felt that if they could do that for me, I could do that for other people. There are many of our deceased members of the temple who do not have someone to say Kaddish for them on their Yahrzeits, so a member of the morning minyan will recite it in their memory. This is just another of the thoughtful and caring things the morning minyan does, and that is important to me. I have been coming since 1983. It's just something that I do.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I come three days a week—Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. I walk in the morning and then I come here. It's just my routine.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   I don't know how to answer that. I've always been told that G-d doesn't give you any more than you can handle, but I'm not sure I believe that.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

   I guess in some cases, yes, and in some cases, no. I don't know how to answer that either, to be perfectly honest. I don't believe that death can be averted through prayer, because I believe that when people are born, they are given a number, and when that number is called, that's it.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

   This isn't something I think about now. I do believe that there is a heaven. Stephen was a wonderful baseball player, and after he died, I was hoping he would find a baseball team to play with in heaven. Then whenever someone else died, I was hoping they would look for him and take care of him there.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

   Being a good person, being a good mother, wife, being a caring person. I have a lot of older people I look after and care for at this stage of my life.

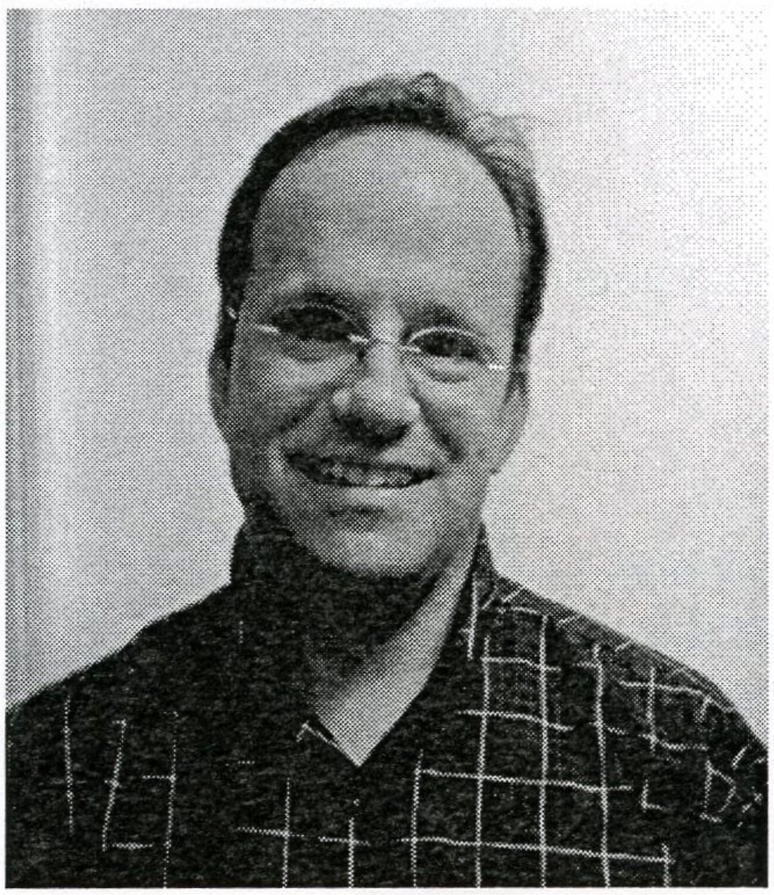
9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

   Being a sensitive, caring person. Being there for others when they need me.

10. **What is something your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

    I hate to iron. When I was a kid my Mom used to make all us girls do the ironing, but I used to stick mine in a drawer. I also don't like to cook, but I like to clean. I always will be there for the morning minyannaires, because they have been there for me and are like family to me.

Robert Levine



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in Waterville, where my father was born in 1906, in a small Conservative congregation of about 50 families. When a family would sit shiva, it was a struggle to get a minyan, and the family would call around to try and get ten men. I remember going with my Dad, and learning that going was a true mitzvah, even if I didn't really know the person who had passed away. I understood that I was part of a Jewish community, and saying Kaddish was an age old tradition. When I was 12, I went to Camp Ramah in Western Massachusetts, on the suggestion of Ellie Miller who was my Hebrew School teacher. It was my first time away from home, and I was extremely homesick for the first week, but then my counselor let me call home, and I was fine for the rest of the summer. I had a great summer and took Hebrew lessons every day. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to compete with kids from larger communities, but I did great. I made lots of friends, and camp was a turning point in my life.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I don't view myself as a religious person, and I'm not into doctrinaire adherence to religious principals, but I feel connected to the Jewish community. I'm proud of my religion as a celebration of my ancestry.

3. **Why do you come to minyan?**

   As a law student, I started coming to morning minyan here at Beth El, and I reconnected to the Jewish community. I met a lot of good friends, many of whom now have passed away, and I felt embraced by this Jewish community. Today, minyan is a daily part of my routine, no different from eating breakfast, except that it's nourishment for the soul.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I come three to five days a week. It's part of my routine and it's very addictive—the prayers, the joviality, the early morning team. I like the phrase "Reborn with the day we hail thee, Oh G-d, who renewest continually the work of creation". I think that's a really important way to start the day. The sooner you get up and celebrate life, the better.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

I perceive G-d as a higher power that is within all of us. It is up to us to find the way to achieve G-d's goodness through our good works.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I think there is such a thing as karma, and I think that the more good thoughts you put out in the world, the more they come back to you. Just the act of praying has an impact on the soul. I ran into a woman the other day who is my age, and just got a new heart. I told her that even though she is not Jewish, she is on our prayer list at the Temple, and she was very touched that strangers were praying for her well-being. I told her "it does a heart good".

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

From dust to dust. Although I do feel renewed by memories of my parents, and feel a connection to their departed souls. I like the quote by Clarence Darrow, who did not believe in the existence of G-d. "We are all as sailors; shipwrecked and floating to our mutual doom, and the most we can do is to offer each other a hand." I think that is a good existential view of life.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

Being a parent, and building a life with my wife and family. Aside from that, when I was in law school, I took a semester off because of my poor grades. I went to Utah to work at a ski slope, and then went to Israel to live and work on a kibbutz. When I returned to law school, my class, including my wife, had already graduated. This time I did much better and, as a result, got both the experience in a legal aid clinic and the confidence of another year of law school. I then hung up my own shingle, started taking court appointed cases, and built a practice. I would say it took about 15 years to build a successful practice, but I've been very proud of my ability to help people and to make a good living in the process.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I am compassionate. I think I owe that in large part both to my father and to my older brother. My father grew up without a father, didn't marry until he was 51, and didn't have children until he was in his late 50's. He didn't have a role model as a father, but he was a wonderful father—so kindhearted and compassionate. My older brother became mentally ill when he was 13 or 14, the year I went away to summer camp and, as a result, he really never has gained traction in life. He never went to high school or college or got married or had children. He now lives in a group home in Biddeford and, whenever I see him, which is about once a week, I am reminded how lucky I am. First of all, just to be alive, because if my father had waited any longer it would have been too late for him to have me, and secondly, not to have been afflicted with mental illness or disease.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I love to exercise. I exercise daily before morning minyan, seven days a week, 365 days a year. I swim, I jump rope, I occasionally run, and I use the elliptical trainer. I started rigorous exercise in college and ran the Boston Marathon in 1983 in 3 hours and 30 minutes. That was a significant achievement for me. Although I ran cross country in high school, I was never one of the better runners, and I was never able to get into varsity. But I learned discipline and how to push myself to my physical limits, how to hone my endurance and concentration. I use those lessons now to prepare myself for daily challenges.

Elizabeth Levinsky

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in an Orthodox home in Saco, Maine. My parents both were immigrants from Russia, so I am first generation. My mother had an essence about her that was very spiritual; if I inherited that I would be very happy. I never went to Hebrew School because girls did not usually go, and my brother, who was seven years older than me, made so much noise about going that he scared me away from it. I don't remember ever going to a Bar Mitzvah, but I remember every so often having Orange Crush soda, so thinking back, that must have been at a Bar Mitzvah. In my Shul, Etz Chaim in Biddeford, the men sat in one room and the women sat in another room—we only could look in through the windows. It was on Bacon Street, and we always thought that was quite funny.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I live my life as a Jew, but I don't follow every commandment or detail; for example, I don't keep kosher. I guess I pick and choose. I love the fact that I'm Jewish, I believe in G-d, and I like to pray. I tried to instill the Jewish way of living in my children and grandchildren. I was hoping they would inherit the feeling that I have, but I don't know if it worked.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started to attend minyan during the week of mourning after my parents died. I started to go on a regular basis when my son was sick, and I needed to go. Then I found I liked it. I like being part of the minyan, and I like helping provide a minyan for others who need to go. I enjoy it.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I used to come every day. Now I come once a week on Sundays, because I find it hard to get up and get going for the early weekday services.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   I really perceive G-d as a friend. I believe that He exists, and it's very comforting to me to feel that way.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I do. I believe in the power of prayer, and I get a lot out of praying. Prayers aren't always answered the way you want them to be, but they're always answered.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I think that as soon as you die, your soul leaves your body. The soul never dies. After I die, I believe that I'm going to be up with my family, hovering around. I also believe in symbolism—I think sometimes when the sun comes out at a certain time and in a certain place, it's a symbol. I had a good friend, Eileen, who loved butterflies. When my son was sick, I was sitting out in front of a supermarket crying, and a butterfly came and landed on my windshield. Eileen had recently died, and it felt like she came to me to say "Don't worry, your son will be fine", which he was. When Eileen's husband died, there was a beautiful military funeral, and we were at the cemetery when a butterfly came out of nowhere, and stayed flying around us. I said "Oh my G-d, that's Eileen". Her daughter came and stood beside me and said, "I know, that's my mother who came here to be with us".

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

I guess my biggest personal achievement is how much I love my family. I'm good at loving people. I used to be a good dancer, too.

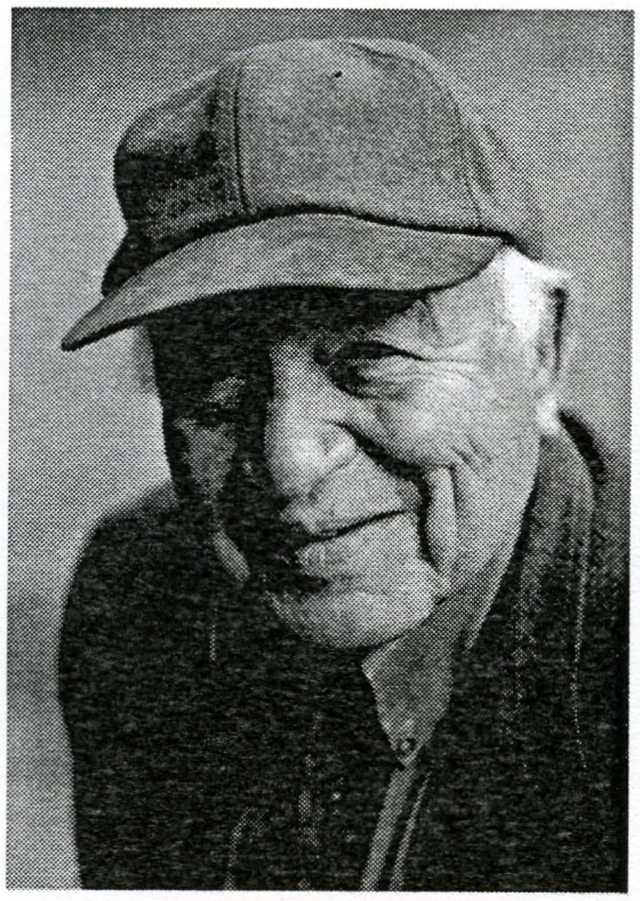
9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I have an open mind, and I try to keep growing and evolving.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I played field hockey in college at the University of Maine, and basketball, too. The folks at the University thought I was a really good athlete. Last year the basketball team at UMO sent me an invitation to come play basketball with them. It must have Homecoming. It was very funny, and I saved the letter. Phil and I have been attending OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) for many years, and 99% of the courses I take, I love. I just finished two courses. One was "Psychology and the News", and the other was about the history of Black soldiers who served in the military. These soldiers fought two wars, the military war and the war of prejudice.

Phil Levinsky



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in a lovely kosher Jewish home. I was the first child of Jacob and Romanow Levinsky. My mother immigrated from Lithuania when she was ten years old. She always kept the Shabbos and always baked challah. She lit the candles on Friday night, and when she said the prayers, tears would come to her eyes. We belonged to the Etz Chaim Synagogue on Congress Street, and on the High Holidays we closed the family store and all went to services together. My father shared his seat with me at the synagogue.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I was brought up in a home where my parents said Kaddish, so saying Kaddish for my father really got me into attending services. When we went to Florida, I became a member of a Synagogue Temple Shalom on 11th Street in Pompano. I was amazed to see men there in their 70's and 80's repeating their Bar Mitzvahs. That interested me, so I talked to my wife about my doing it. I contacted Cuddy Cohen and Carl Lerman, who shared my Bar Mitzvah with me when we were 13, and asked them if they would like to repeat it together. At first they thought I was crazy, but at last they agreed and we were Bar Mitzvahed again in October, 1989, on the 50th anniversary of our first one**. Cantor Messerschmidt** trained us, and our Torah portion was Noah.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I lost my father in 1982, and I said Kaddish for the year. I already had gone once or twice a week before, because I enjoyed the service. I had my favorites I sat next to because they had wonderful voices. One was Mike Weisman. I continue to come because it's a habit. I feel it's a very important part of living, because you have to do every day what you want to do, as long as you live.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

I go to minyan seven days a week, because it's my habit and I just go every day. On Saturdays I go to my old shul, Etz Chaim. I love being there, and sometimes I feel like my father is sitting there with me.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

I thank G-d when something good happens, and when something bad happens, I say "Oh My G-d". What do people do who don't believe in G-d?

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I believe that prayers are nourishing. A lot of good things have happened in my life, and I believe there must have been some divine guidance for that.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I think you're in a deep sleep.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

I had a very, very active social life, and I married a magnificent woman—a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother. I always thought I would marry a dark haired woman, but I ended up marrying a phys. ed. major with curly red hair. It's amazing what we accomplished in our business—we had 361 people working at Levinsky's, and wherever I go, people know me.

9. **What is one of your best personal qualities?**

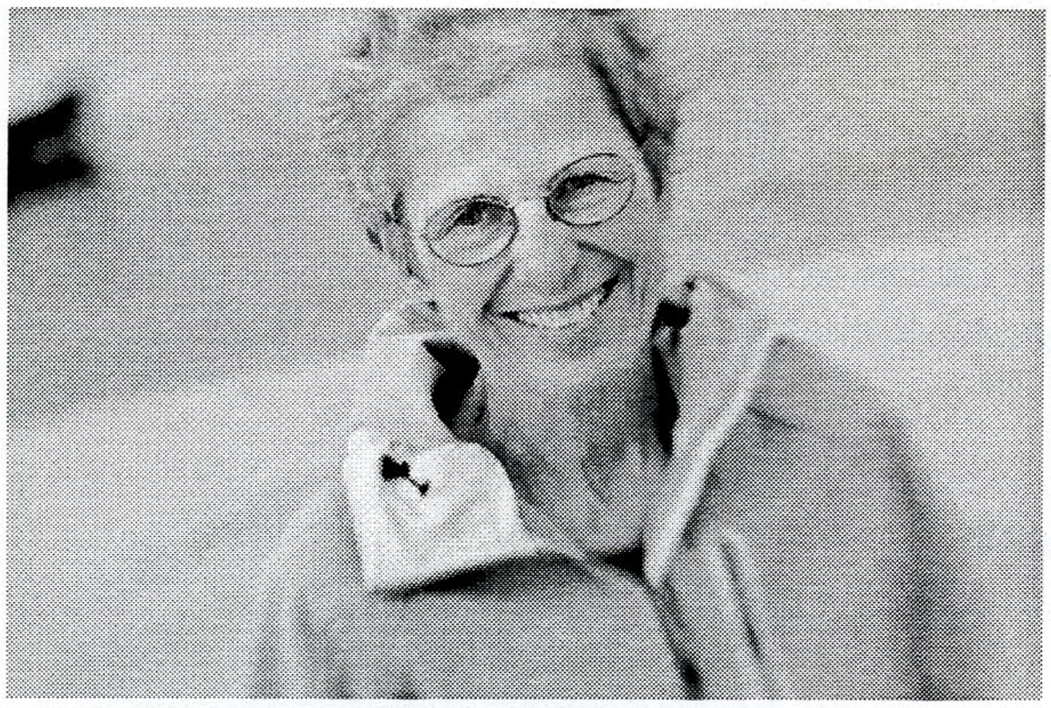
Entertainment—people thank me for that.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I love to garden. I have a good-sized garden behind my house in the summer, and I grow lots of vegetables that I like to share. I also love to play tennis. I am very interested in the Jewish community in Portland—present, but especially past—and I know many facts and stories about all the people I knew and loved. I look forward to coming to minyan every day. Everyone here is like a family to me. Having a habit like this gets me out of the house to be with people I really care about.

Editor's note: I called Phil at his home the other day to ask a question. He said to me, "How have you been since I saw you in Temple this morning?" I replied, "My day has been fine. How is your day going?" Here is his reply, a true life lesson for us all: "Wonderful, just wonderful! First of all I came home after services, and made myself a piece of toast with peanut butter and jelly on it. It was so delicious. Then my wife wanted lamb for a stew, so I went to Pat's Meat Market to buy it, but it was $8.00 a pound. I wasn't going to pay that much money, so I went to Hannaford. Well, at Hannaford it was $10.00 a pound, so I went back to Pat's. But on the way out of Hannaford, I discovered that they were selling sweet potatoes for 49 cents a pound! Those sweet potatoes are just fantastic and a terrific buy. I'm so lucky I was there and saw that. What a great day I've had."

Carla Marcus



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was raised in Auburn, Maine, in a Conservative Jewish home. I went to Hebrew School three days a week, but I was bored and don't think I learned anything except the word "imi" (**אמא**, which means "my mother"). We did not keep kosher or the Sabbath, although we did have meat and milk dishes and flatware and a traditional Shabbos dinner with prayers every Friday night, followed by temple. My sisters and I were expected to say prayers every day, and our family observed all holidays. My rabbi was Orthodox (even though the synagogue was Conservative), so a Bat Mitzvah, or even a confirmation, was not an option for me. When I was in college, I fell in love with a Catholic boy, but broke up with him because he was not Jewish.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I raised my children to be Jewish, and they (and their children) are, but both my girls and I married Gentiles, so I dropped the ball somewhere. When they were growing up, our Jewish observance included prayers on Friday nights, temple on the High Holidays and the occasional Sabbath, and traditional celebration of other holidays. Attending morning minyan is now part of my life, and since I am the Tuesday Reader, I am trying to do it better by learning to read a little Hebrew. I am a member of four synagogues (!), but the most important part of my Jewishness is my profound and absolute Jewish identification.

3. **Why did you you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started attending minyan to say Kaddish for my mother. She had a deep faith, and I wanted and needed to honor her properly after her death. Partly I continued to attend for David, who works so hard for the minyan, as well others, like Phil and Darrell, who have given so much of themselves to me. I also strongly believe that our community needs to have a daily minyan, and that every Jew in Greater Portland has a responsibility to help make that happen, me included. It's just the right thing to do. When I was working in Portland, it was easy to come every day before work, but now that I am retired, I really, really hate getting up at 5:30.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   When I was saying Kaddish for my parents, I went six days a week—wherever I was, all over the country. I planned my all business and pleasure trips based on the availability of morning minyans. It was very cool to go to many different synagogues and see what their minyans were like. Despite the many differences, I was amazed to find how welcomed and included I was at

each one. Some of them had breakfasts and/ or discussion groups after services, and I really liked that. After finishing a year of Kaddish for both my Mom and then for my Dad, I went to minyan every day on the way to work—five days a week, and sometimes on Sundays—because I could and thought I should. But now that I've retired, I've made a deal with myself, and attend two days a week.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

I view G-d as synonymous with love, good, generosity, righteousness, caring, responsibility, honesty—life as it should be lived. I don't think of G-d in a traditional sense, but I do feel that everyone and everything in the world is connected by something deep and important. I have a bad habit of using the word "G-d" as a colloquial slang word meaning "wow". Like "G-d, was that chocolate cake good!" or "G-d, what a shame you broke your leg". I should stop saying that, because I expect it insults people who believe in G-d in a traditional way.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

Yes, but by one's own efforts and actions. Praying is an opportunity for reflection, consideration, and intention—and I believe that those behaviors can create outcomes.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I believe that when you die, you're dead. I was willing to consider that I might hear from my folks after they died but, of course, I didn't.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

Even though almost everyone has mentioned being a parent, I will, too, because I raised both my girls as a single parent. Although that was tough and demanding, it actually was extraordinarily wonderful, and we developed a connection and closeness that might have been diluted in a conventional family. Founding the Sugarloaf Safety Patrol and WinterKids, both achieving national scope, were significant accomplishments. I also am grateful that I became a good white-water kayaker and instructor and a ski patroller, since those skills did not come naturally or easily to me.

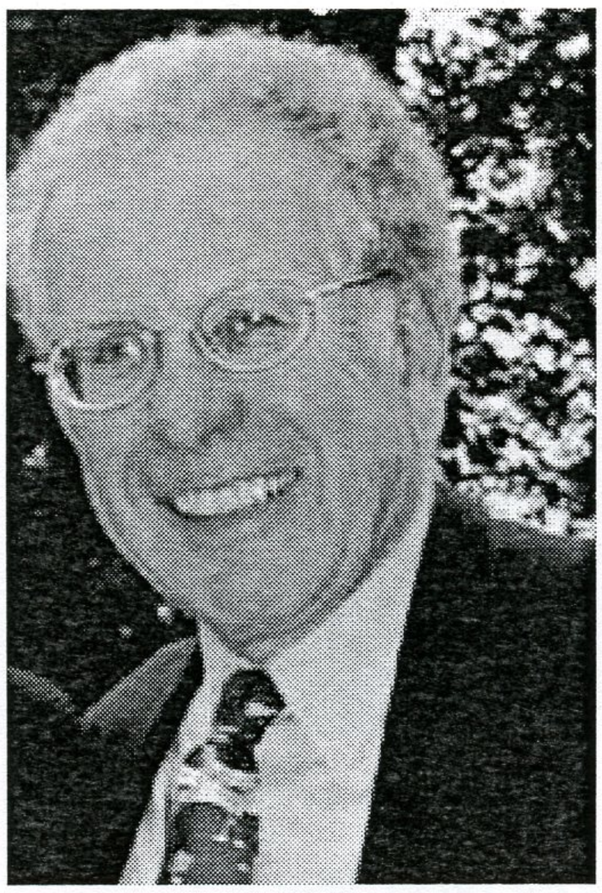
9. **What is one of your best personal qualities?**

Grit. I'll do what it takes.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I enjoy picnics in my folks' beautiful cemetery in Auburn. I have rock climbed and white-water kayaked all over the United States and Canada. I travel alone in places that are challenging and scary for me. I was just inducted into the State of Maine Ski Hall of Fame. My husband, Larry, and I lived in different states for the first 20 years of our marriage. We like to do things some people may think are strange; for example, climbing remote mountains with no trails or lifts in the winter, and then trying to make our way down on skis. We recently slept outside in our tent during a big snowstorm, thinking it would be fun and cozy. Well it was, until 1:30 in the morning, when an avalanche hit us, crushing our tent and pinning me inside the collapsed tent. Luckily, Larry was able to dig me out. On a more day-to-day note, I don't know anything that's going on, since I don't read newspapers or magazines or watch television, so I need my fellow minyannaires to keep me informed!

Ivan Most



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in Greenfield, Massachusetts, which is small town of 18,000 people in Western Massachusetts, very close to the Vermont border. Greenfield's population is overwhelmingly Polish Catholic with some Protestants, but it also had a very small Jewish community. My Dad was a merchant who had a second-hand store, and my mother's family was in the scrap business. My maternal grandfather was one of the founders and also the Gabbai of our shul, which was Conservative leaning toward Orthodox, and was only three doors down from my house. I was brought up to be part of this small community of Jews, where the ethnic carried more emphasis than the religious. Even so, I went to a lot of minyans because, with my grandfather being the Gabbai and the shul being only three doors away, we were called upon when needed. My older brother Stuart, my twin brother Arnold, and I were all Bar Mitzvahed by a traveling rabbi and a volunteer cantor, who was one of the town's physicians. We kept a kosher home, which was a struggle because the closest kosher butcher was in Springfield, 40 miles away.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   When Sue and I got married, we were kind of a marriage of opposites. Sue grew up in one of the largest Reform congregations in the country, Temple Israel in Boston, whereas I grew up in almost a shtetl. In preparation for our marriage, she came to Greenfield for three weekends of almost basic training and, to her credit, ended up learning from my mother how to keep a kosher house. She did a great job learning to cook Jewish food, because I gained 20 pounds in the first 6 months we were married! One of the first things we did after we got married was to join the temple in Schenectady, New York. Judaism was central to our home and the friends we made. We have many non-Jewish friends, but being Jewish colors everything we do.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   In 1991 Sue and I lost three of our parents in three months. I started going to minyan then to say Kaddish, and I found a community of people who were extremely supportive. Frankly, that was one the things that pulled me through that period, and I felt it was my obligation to offer that to others.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

I come on Thursday mornings, as long as I am not away. I come because the Torah is read that day, and one day a week is all I can commit to.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

That's an interesting question. I recently had a conversation with a Mormon and he was talking about the hierarchy of the church. He asked if we had a Jewish hierarchy, and I said "No, we don't. If I want to talk with G-d, I talk to him directly", and I used the example of Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof". I perceive G-d not as a being but as a concept. Even though the Torah says we are created in G-d's image, I interpret that to refer to our intellect. I think we are the only beings on the earth who are endowed with the capability of understanding the universe. I think G-d presents a master plan for the universe that we do not understand, but we have the capacity to uncover bits and pieces of the mystery.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

That's a tough one, but the answer is no. I feel better after I say a prayer, but I don't expect an answer. I think we pray to give vent to our inner feelings and needs, but it's up to us to make it happen. I don't believe G-d is a puppeteer—that if you make the right kind of prayer, he'll pull the right strings. I did pray, though, when I was 12 years old when I had a risky heart operation. I prayed very hard.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

Nothing. I don't have a concept of life after death. I think we are kept alive by the memories we leave. Your accomplishments while you are living is what people will remember after you are gone. Saying Kaddish also keeps those people alive.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

My family—that would be number one. Number two is some of the things I have done in my professional life. I feel very good about having been in at the beginning of the Masters in Public Health at University of New England, which may lead to a School of Public Health. I also helped start the engineering program at University of Southern Maine, and I owned my own engineering practice for many years. I currently lead discussions for graduate students, and I love teaching—I love seeing their smiles and faces light up when they get it. I'll never retire from teaching. But when I look back, I have a wonderful wife, three wonderful children, six wonderful grandchildren, and a wonderful relationship with my children-in-law—that dwarfs any of my other accomplishments.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I act on what I believe in. I'm able to have a loving relationship with my family. I'm loyal.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I play a lot of tennis and bike a lot, although not as much as Steve Shapiro. My son and I take long bike rides together, but he does 30-40 miles and I stop half-way through. I also like to fly fish. I make something my grandchildren like, called Grampy's chicken. That's chicken cooked on the grill, and basted internally by a cone of beer or wine. That's my only fame to claim when it comes to cooking.

Sylvia Most

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in Cape Elizabeth in a kosher home, and we were conservative in the Rabbi Sky vein. (When I was young and involved in United Synagogue Youth, we would go to other temples and I would see other kids who knew more prayers, davened more, and had a different education than we received.) My grandparents on my father's side kept a kosher home. On my mother's side, they didn't keep kosher, but they ate in a Jewishy kind of way—cold cuts and pickles from the deli.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   When I was in my 20's, I was very involved in the Conservative congregation—I have been a member of Temple Beth El since 1970, when my parents moved to the area, and have stayed a member. For several years I was the Assistant Advisor for the USY and, when I was in college at the University of Vermont, I was the President of Hillel for two years. In my early 30's, I married Alan Cardinal, who isn't Jewish, and we have raised his two boys in our home. We have always observed the Sabbath on Friday nights, the High Holidays, Passover, and Chanukah in our home, but we've also celebrated Christmas and Easter together. We have been committed to emphasizing the similarities between our religions, rather than the differences, and that's how we've raised our kids. It has been my goal to raise boys who are familiar with and respect Judaism. Now, not only am I a member of Temple Beth El, but of Temple Bet Ha'am as well, and I attend Shabbat services there. On the High Holidays I attend services with my parents at Temple Beth El, and also we travel to Massachusetts to spend the second day of Rosh Hashanah with my sister and her family.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started because of an appeal from the Rabbi for people to attend the minyan, and Dad had already been going on Thursdays, so I decided to join him. It quickly became a nice father-daughter activity. I continue to come because of the special people I see who have been close family friends, because it's a mitzvah I can accomplish, and because I enjoy having this special time with my Dad.

4. **How often do you come to minyan, and how did you make that choice?**

   My goal is to be there at least one or two Thursdays a month. That's a goal I can achieve. Some years I have been able to come much more often, some years not so much. Right now, due to my work schedule, I am in a not so much period, but I attend whenever I can.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   That's a big question. I don't perceive G-d as a big guy in the sky, but I do perceive G-d as a goal for how best to live your life. If you act in a G-d-like way to the best of your ability, you'll have the best chance to treat people well and live a good life. I think about that in Temple a lot.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

   I think prayers help us find answers.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

   What I always say is that I want to be reincarnated as my dog. That doesn't make any sense, though, because I won't be there to make a home for my dog, and I know it's risky because I don't want to be a junk yard dog. Seriously, I think that the spirit of the person who passes away lives on in the people he or she has touched. So we can live on in a big way with someone with whom we were close, or in a small way with someone we've just briefly encountered. I think that people live on in this intangible way, but the other way we live on is through our names. In the Jewish tradition of naming a baby after someone who has passed, that person lives on as we send his or her spirit forward in the new young person.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

   I would say sky diving, driving cross-country with my dog for 6 months when I turned 30, being married for 14 years, and being the best step-mom I could be are accomplishments. Professionally, earning my MBA, passing my doctoral exams, and the professional kudos I have received have all been personal accomplishments. I have tried to live life to the fullest at every stage of my life.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

   Loyalty, honesty, I try to be a good friend, I am industrious, and I have lots of interests. I am a good daughter, and I try to smile a lot.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

    I do stained glass for a hobby. I read lots of different books when I can, and I am studying to get my teaching certificate to teach high school math. I like cross country skiing and snowshoeing, and my husband and I go winter back-packing in the White Mountains, and stay in the Appalachian Mountain Club huts. We have a cabin cruiser in the water all summer long in Casco Bay, and I have an adorable dog named Beau.

Eleanor Potter

1. **Tell me about your life as a child and young adult.**

   I was raised in Jackman, Maine, where my father was a pharmacist and my mother was a school teacher. I lived in the country, and my life was wonderful. My father originally was from Portland, but he didn't like the sea, so my parents moved to Jackman, which is where my mother was from. When I graduated from high school, I came to Portland to work, because my grandmother and my aunt were here. I worked for IBM for 47 years. I started out as a secretary, but in the old days, I was the only one in the office and I did everything. I also was going to night school at the University of Maine, and one day my friend said "I want you to meet someone". I left the class at the break to meet him, and never went back. I married my husband, Newel, in 1963—right here in this temple. Newell's father was one of the founders of Temple Beth El.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I live a Jewish life every day. My husband and I observed all the holidays, and we were always here at the temple for all occasions. I now come to minyan every morning.

3. **Why did you start coming to minyan?**

   After Newell died, Matt Goldfarb and I were trying to think of some way to honor Newell. We came up with the Eternal Light, and after that I started coming to minyan.

4. **How often do you come to minyan, and how did you make that choice?**

   I come five days a week. I feel like I am with friends, and praying is the perfect way to start a day. I've liked to pray since I was a child. I was brought up to do all the right things.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   I know there is a G-d—I've always known that. I know He is there, looking after everyone. I know He hears us when we pray. Every day I see G-d more often, and I think my prayers help me see him.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

   Yes, I do. I've seen prayers answered. I've seen miracles happen because of prayer, and I think G-d was behind them.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

   I don't really understand what happens after dying, but I think we're all going to be together in a better world.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

   I think my personal achievement is that I have had a wonderful life. I had a wonderful husband, we had all kinds of hobbies, we traveled together, we had wonderful friends, and we worked seven days a week together at Warren Furniture.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

   I'm courageous, determined, and independent. I try to always do the right thing—if I have a question, I always ask myself "What is the right thing to do?".

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

    My days at this time of my life can be lonely, and I am very grateful that my fellow minyannaires are so kind and welcoming to me. As far as hobbies go, I have collected antiques for many years. I have a collection of art glass antiques, including a lot of Art Nouveau and Tiffany Glass. Newell and I used to travel every year for the month of November. We traveled in the Orient to Hong Kong and Thailand, in South America to Buenos Aires in Argentina and Machu Picchu in Peru, to London and Paris. We had very interesting vacations, and we went everywhere. Now I'm very happy with the State of Maine. This is the first interview I have had since I was hired for my job in 1942!

Pat Davidson Reef

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I was brought up in the Conservative movement at Temple Beth El. In my home, my Jewish heritage was considered very important, and a respect for it was a priority. However, we did not follow rituals. I did go to Sunday School, and learned my Jewish history in English, but I learned no Hebrew.

2. **How has that changed for you?**

   What changed my life was the birth of my daughter. When I was pregnant, I started reading about being Jewish because I wanted to give her a good background in Judaism. What brought me back to the Temple was the death of my father, when I started attending minyan.

3. **Why did you want to say Kaddish for your father, and why do you continue to come minyan?**

   I wanted to honor my father, David Davidson, at his death. Saying Kaddish is a wonderful and sacred custom, an affirmation of life and, by saying it, I actually gave myself life during a terrible loss. I stayed, in part, because the group was so welcoming and prayed with me in community, and that gave me strength I did not know I had. I was a single woman, and I didn't feel alone after my father's death. I was following the tradition of centuries, and G-d was with me in the wonderful generosity I found in the early morning Brotherhood community. That brought me back to minyan, and I remain. When I first came to minyan to say Kaddish, I could not say it in Hebrew, and that bothered me, so I hired a tutor to teach me. Once I learned that prayer, I wanted to learn other prayers, so I kept on with the tutor, and that became continuing education for me. As I studied Hebrew, each little letter of the Hebrew alphabet became my friend, so whenever I am studying Hebrew at home, I feel surrounded by friends, and not alone.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I come to minyan every morning, and I made that choice because it gives me a spiritual moment in a community to start the day. In addition, after the mourning period I felt I was helping create a minyan so that others could say the prayer. My studies eventually led me to have an adult Bat Mitzvah.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

I perceive G-d as a universal spiritual force who is always with me, who always protects and takes care of me. However, I realize it is my responsibility to be accountable for my actions here on earth.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

Yes, I do. I think the importance of prayers is that you are heard by G-d. Not all prayers can achieve what you would like, but in prayers, you are united with G-d.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I think your soul goes to heaven, and that in some ways it unites in its wisdom with those whom you have loved on earth.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

I have two major achievements. I love teaching and, although I am retired, I teach a course on classic films one morning a week at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. I also write about the arts for the Lewiston Sun Journal. I love writing.

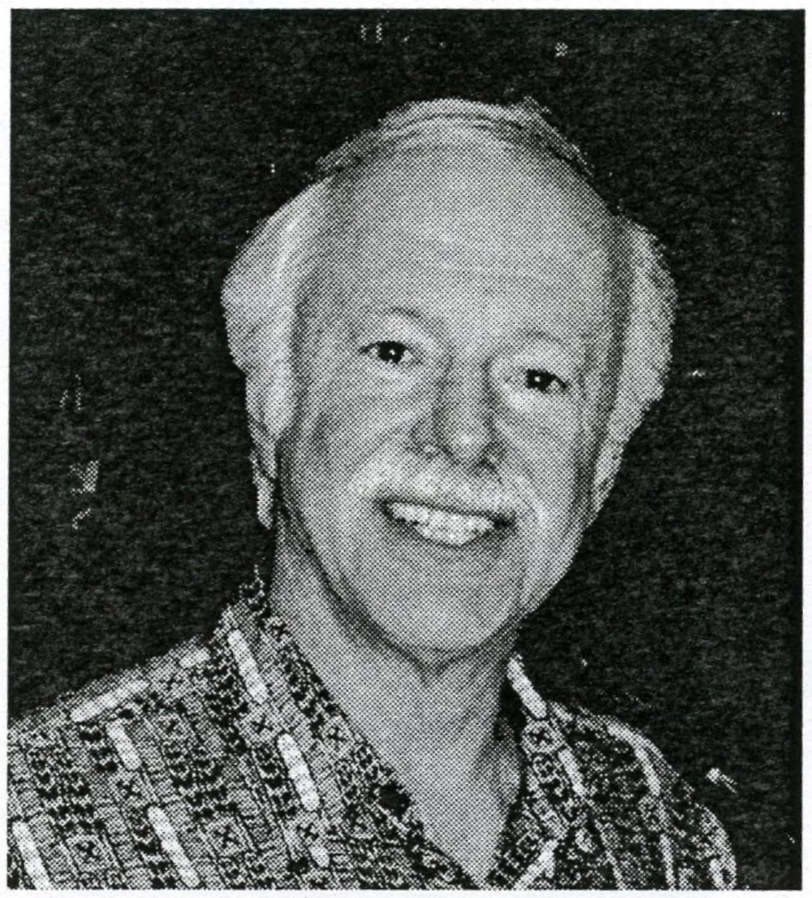
9. **What is one of your best personal qualities?**

Kindness.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I am on the Temple Beth El Yad L'Yad committee, and visit the sick at Cedars, Maine Medical Center, and New England Rehab. I taught English literature, art history and humanities at Catherine McAuley High School for many years. I love children's books, and I taught "What's New in Children's Literature" for eight years for teacher recertification. When I retired, I donated some of my books to the children's library at Holy Cross School in South Portland, because I tutored reading there. I saw they had a need, and now I volunteer in their children's library once a week. I love writing and, in the 1980's, wrote two children's books: "Dahlov Ipcar, Artist" and "Bernard Langlais, Sculptor". They are out of print now, but were fun to write. I currently write reviews on art museum exhibits for the Lewiston Sun Journal. I am a veteran Weight Watcher.

Ed Schultz



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   Traditionally. I was brought up in Portland. My mother, also from Portland, was raised in a very Orthodox household. My father immigrated to this country from Poland (today Lithuania) when he was 12, and he tried to become "Yankified" as quickly as possible. Aside from going to High Holiday services at Etz Chaim, he was not traditional. I went to Etz Chaim with my father on the High Holidays, but I went to Hebrew School and was Bar Mitzvahed at Temple Beth El.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   Let's just say I became somewhat untraditional, although no matter where in the world I was on the High Holidays, ranging from Vietnam to Israel to Turkey, I always made sure I found a synagogue or services to go to. Aside from the High Holidays, I didn't go to services, and since I was raised in a kosher home, I became a vegetarian rather than eat treif, but other than that I didn't do much. When I had kids, though, I felt it was important that they be aware of the Jewish tradition and, although my wife was not very traditional, we did our best to make sure that our kids knew what being Jewish was all about. When they were born, we were living in California across the street from a Reform temple, so they went to Sunday School there. We moved to Portland a year before they were B'nai Mitzvahed, so they went to Hebrew School and had their training at Temple Beth El. Two other things are important to me as a Jewish adult. One is that before I left for my army service in Vietnam, my uncle gave me a Hebrew prayer book that he had with him in World War II and that his father-in-law had used in World War I. When my uncle gave it to me, he told me that he expected me to return it to him in person when I came back, and I did. Having it gave me a lot of confidence, given the fact that its owners had survived two World Wars already. The second thing is that when my sister went to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., she was looking at all the photos on the walls in the Tower of Life, and one of the pictures looking back at her was our father. It was a duplicate of the only picture we had of him as a child. All of the pictures in that tower were from one shtetl in Poland, which was wiped out during the war (my father had left prior to that). In 1997, I was able to visit that shtetl with my sister, and it was an extremely emotional experience. I can't even begin to describe it here.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

I started because my father died in 1991, and I went to say Kaddish for Shloshim. I was recruited one of those days to read the English part of the service, and essentially I have been going ever since. I continue to attend because I know how important it is to be able to say Kaddish for a relative and to have a minyan to do that.

4. **How often do you come to minyan, and how did you make that choice?**

I come once a week. I chose Sunday to be the day because, at the time, it fit my schedule, and now I am the Sunday English reader. For the past year I also have gone one day a week to Rabbi Wilansky's minyan, so he could say Kaddish for his mother.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

As imperceptible. I'm only human, after all.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

Yes, sometimes. Perhaps not as expected or as wished for, but in some way.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I'll let you know when I get there. Harry Houdini (who was the son of a rabbi, and whose real name was Erik Weisz) said the same thing, and people are still waiting. It's hard for me to grasp the concept, but anything is possible. Most of my beliefs revolve around Jewish tradition, rather than strong belief. To many people, performing tradition equates with belief, but in reality, I think they are two different things.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

First, marrying a wonderful woman and creating two wonderful children, who are twins. Also, surviving combat in Vietnam, and hitchhiking around the world. After I got out of the army, I figured I had earned a vacation, so I gave myself a year to hitchhike around the world. That year was one of the most memorable experiences of my life, and I think had even more meaning having just come from Vietnam. The war was not over, so I couldn't hitchhike through some countries which were still fighting, and had to fly over those. When I flew over Vietnam, I recognized some landmarks on the ground.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I usually don't even think in terms of what's good about me, but I'm reliable, I'm a good listener, and I'm easy to get along with—I don't make waves.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I love to ski, climb mountains, and travel. I ski locally at Mt. Abram and Sunday River and also out West. I've climbed all the 4,000 footers in New England, all the 5,000 footers in New England, and the three highest mountains east of the Mississippi River—Mount Mitchell and Mount Craig, both in North Carolina, and Clingman's Dome in Tennessee. People who climb a lot of mountains are called "Peak Baggers", and I like to consider myself also a "Country Bagger", having been in over 80 countries. I was a co-host of a live call-in radio show in San Francisco for Iranian listeners. I did the English part and my co-host did the Farsi part. Closer to home, I think I'm one of the few people who can remember and knew every one of Temple Beth El's rabbis.

Peggy Shapiro

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   We were a reform Jewish family in West Orange, New Jersey. I grew up in a very warm, large, family full of aunts, uncles, and cousins, and we celebrated holidays together, both in the temple and at home. My grandfather was one of the founders of our temple, Temple Shaarey Tphiloh in East Orange, New Jersey. I went to Sunday School, and was confirmed. At that time boys had a Bar Mitzvah, but only if they wanted to, and not all did. My brother, who was four years older than me, was the first boy to have Bar Mitzvah in that temple. I was active in the Jersey Federated Temple Youth Group.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   It was important for me to live near a Jewish community and to be a part of a Jewish community. We were lucky enough to come to Portland, Maine, and what a good move it was. This has been a wonderful place for us to have lived our adult life, and we have been part of Temple Beth El for at least 46 years. When our children began Hebrew School is when we consistently began to light candles for Shabbat. I served on the temple Board for many, many years, and on the adult education committee. I've appreciated having the adult education programs, and think they add a lot to our community and to my life. I am a life member of Sisterhood, Hadassah, and National Council of Jewish Women. I'm also on Yad L'Yad, Hand to Hand, the Temple Beth El group that does caring things for others.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started to come to minyan in 1995. I was on the temple Board, and at the meetings Phil Levinsky would tell us about the need for people to come to minyan. I worked part-time, but was available on Thursdays or Fridays, so Phil said, "Come Thursday. That's when we read the Torah". The minyan became important to me as a supportive community within our temple family, and I continue to attend because it is a part of my life.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

Even though I am retired, minyan continues to be a part of my life and I see no reason to change. I'm glad that minyan has a beautiful gender-neutral prayer book that took a long time to create. Steve and I were active from the beginning of this project, working with Rabbi Sky and Rabbi Braun to adapt our old book to this wonderful new one.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

My sense of G-d is as a connection to people and our community, and compassion for others. I really appreciate that our religion emphasizes our actions and how we behave toward others.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I don't think about that much. I don't think of prayers as being answered on a personal level, unless in the act of praying the person who is praying changes. But even though I don't believe in prayers being answered, I am emotionally touched by prayers. I think of our minyan prayer for those who are sick, and hope that all that energy brings support and healing. I am touched by our prayers of remembering, as well as celebrating happy events among friends.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I don't think of an afterlife. Basically I think that the person who died lives on in our memories, our hopes, and our dreams.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

I try to live my life by following my ideals and values. I think of myself as being very fortunate to be in a long marriage, to see my children grow up as wonderful adults and parents, and to have worked at a job where I was able to help other people.

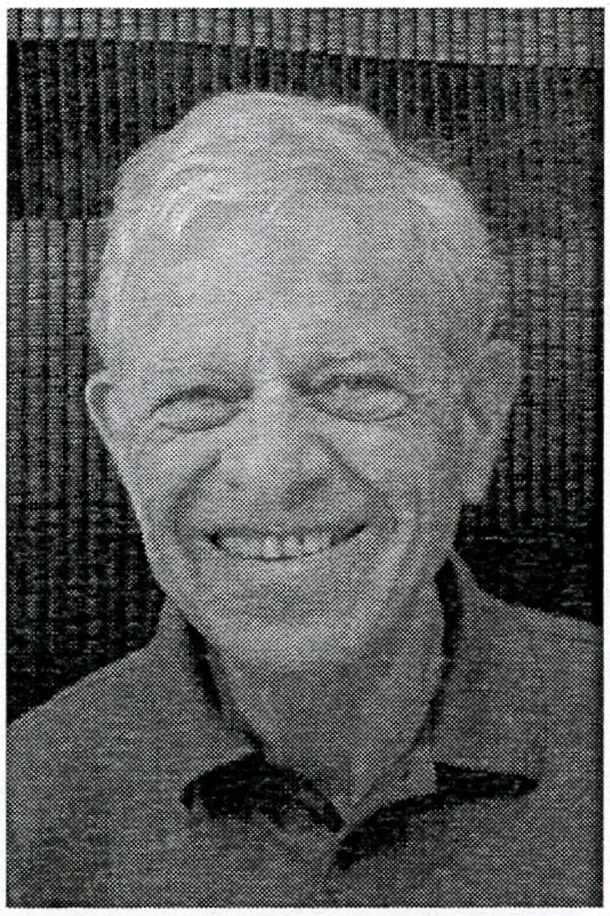
9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I'm outgoing, I'm warm, I'm friendly, and I'm sensitive to the needs of others.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I climbed Mt. Katahdin twice, and I love to travel. When I was a child, my family spent summers at the Jersey Shore, and now Steve and I rent a beach house in Maine so our children and grandchildren can spend a week at the Maine shore. In my retirement, one of the things I like is taking classes at Olli (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), a great resource for our community.

Steve Shapiro



1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   I grew up in Glens Falls, NY, a relatively small town with a relatively small Jewish population. My family had belonged to a Conservative synagogue, but then we became more associated with a Reform congregation. For a long time we did maintain a kosher home, and then we gradually started using other silverware. We had a separate set of old silverware for those non-kosher occasions. My father, who came from a very religious family, died when he was very young. His mother lived with us for a few more years, so I think we were very careful about observance when she was still with us. My mother's family was from an even smaller town nearby. Her father lived many years, and would come to our congregation for the High Holidays and other special events. I had a Conservative Bar Mitzvah. My mother had very little real Hebrew/ Jewish education—besides the cooking part.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   We have belonged to Temple Beth El since shortly after we moved here, and are relatively tuned into what goes on in the Portland Jewish community. I have been on the Temple Board and active with Temple committees— the Social Action Committee and the Hebrew School Committee in the past, the Adult Education Committee more recently, and the Yad L'Yad group currently. Although we don't attend services for holidays other than the High Holidays, we light candles on Shabbat and say prayers at home.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I was aware of Peggy's participation for many years, but was unable to attend because of my work schedule. When I retired, I started coming with her. I continue to go because she is going, although I do enjoy it. You get a sense of the seasons through the sequence of the readings throughout the year, and it helps me keep in touch with what's going on at the Temple and in the Temple community.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

I am the Thursday reader, and come every Thursday that I am able to, even though I am very uncomfortable when asked to do the Hebrew reading. Coming to minyan is a personal commitment. A minyan is a nice thing for a congregation to be able to offer, and it doesn't happen unless you can count on people to attend. I can't imagine doing it without committed people like David and Phil. It seems to be hard to encourage more people to participate, and I am concerned about the future of the minyan.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

I'm really an agnostic, although I do admire the efforts Jews have made over the years to understand the world and record what's going on. I think there is a sort of acknowledgement of how things flow in the world and how to deal with other people. So I value the background that the Jewish religion has brought to life. I consider this man's noble attempt to understand the creation of the universe and to devise a way to act based on that belief.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I don't think there's an Answerer, but I think it may help us deal with things better.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I think we remember people. As for the person who dies, I don't think much happens.

8. **What are some major personal achievements of yours?**

It's hard to answer that question. I think about leading a life that I have been pretty satisfied with, having a family and friends, contributing some technical ideas in my job, continuing to enjoy learning, and being of some service to others in retirement. I worked for the paper company, and I developed products and ways to test products that were important at the time.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

Empathy, inquisitiveness/ curiosity, friendliness.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I'm very interested in bicycling. I commuted for years by bicycle, and try to bicycle now for utilitarian purposes, like doing errands and getting around town. I do some road riding just for fun. I'm very active as a volunteer for the AARP program that prepares taxes for people. It's supposed to be for the low-income elderly, but it's not just that. I'm also a docent at the Portland Museum of Art.

Susan Trusiani

1. **How were you brought up as a Jewish child?**

   Even though we were not Orthodox, I belonged to an Orthodox synagogue in Schenectady, NY. We were a close family; I had two brothers and loads of aunts, uncles, and cousins. My parents and I were all born in Brooklyn, so I had very strong ties to Brooklyn, and still do. I was president of Delta Psi Sorority in high school, a Jewish sorority, and I was very active in B'nai Brith Girls.

2. **How have you lived your life as a Jewish adult?**

   I have a very strong Jewish identity, and I am a strong Zionist. Along with serving on other boards, I was past president of Hadassah, treasurer for seven years, and I'm still active. I belong to most of the Jewish women's organizations, and in earlier years I was active in the Temple. I am not religious, but I am spiritually connected to the past. Most of what I do and believe comes from a strong connection to the people who came before me.

3. **Why did you start attending minyan, and why do you continue to come?**

   I started because Pat Reef asked me to attend minyan once a week so that other people could say Kaddish. And being able to say Kaddish for my own family members is a nice by-product. It's a mitzvah to come.

4. **How often do you come to minyan—how did you make that choice?**

   I come once a week, although every once in a while I'll come twice if there is a particular reason.

5. **How do you perceive G-d?**

   I ask myself that all week during the High Holidays. I believe there is a G-d. Different religions all have their own beliefs and practices, and who is to say who is right and who is wrong? So I think all the rituals and symbols just connect you more to your own people than to G-d. I guess it boils down to the Golden Rule—be the best person you can be. That's my motto.

6. **Do you think prayers may be answered?**

I think that everything is decided already, so I think prayers are for the inner soul and spirit. People with deep faith may take great comfort in prayer.

7. **What do you think happens after dying?**

I really don't know. I guess I feel that you're buried, and your body becomes part of the earth, and maybe your soul becomes part of the universe.

8. **What is a major personal achievement of yours?**

Raising my family and keeping them close. I have managed to make and keep a lot of friends. I've kept every friend I've ever made, including ex-husbands and the ex-husband of my child. You have to work at it, but I think that's an achievement.

9. **What are some of your best personal qualities?**

I am very tolerant, and I try to look at all sides of an issue. I value friendship. I am good natured, kind, caring, and nurturing.

10. **What are some things your fellow minyannaires don't know about you?**

I used to teach ballroom and Latin American dancing. I like to cook, and I entertain a lot. My father has lived with us for 3 ½ years. I still have a close relationship with my ex-husband and his family, and we do a lot of holidays together—Thanksgiving, Passover, and Rosh Hashanah. My husband and I are juggling a huge family—6 children, 12 grandchildren, 5 children-in-law, and we are always busy with family.