

Jamie Flagal, President

I have served on the board since 2011 in various capacities including secretary, vice-president, and as president in 2014 and 2015. For the past 19 years I have worked as an environmental lawyer with the Province, the focus of my practice being on the development and implementation of legislation and policies that protect Ontario's water resources. I am like so many others in this community – years ago I too was a shul-less Jew in search of a shul where I felt like I belonged and where I didn't have to hide any part of myself.

I grew up attending Conservative shuls. In 1992 I came out to my family, which happened to be right around the High Holy Days. That Yom Kippur, the rabbi at our shul decided to give a sermon on why Conservative Judaism can embrace the fight for women's rights, but would never in a million years recognize the struggle for same-sex couple recognition which was just beginning around that time. Basically he was saying to me – Jamie, you will never be a full member of this community.

The experience alienated me from Judaism for several years. I refused to return to that shul and for years didn't attend shul even on High Holy Days. I wasn't sure I'd be able to find a congregation where I could integrate my Jewish and gay identities seamlessly.

I started attending Shir Libeynu around 2000. At first, I came to High Holy Day services alone, my family still returning to the same Conservative synagogue out of habit. However, after I told them how much I enjoyed the services, by the third year they started to attend with me - and they, like me, felt immediately at home. My parents in particular fell in love in with the congregation and joined as members.

In February of this year my mother passed away – and the Shir Libeynu community was a touchstone throughout this difficult time. It made me realize how fortunate I was to be a shul-less Jew no more. The fact that I could phone Rabbi Goldberg throughout those difficult weeks for spiritual and ritual guidance was invaluable. Knowing I had a community to lean on and draw strength from allowed me to be strong for the rest of my family. My hope is that we remain a strong and vibrant community so that we can continue providing this vital support to each other for both simchas we come to celebrate and those times where we are tested.

I want to thank my fellow board members and all of those who came before us for their hard work and deep commitment to ensure our shul continues to grow and thrive. I particularly want to thank Harriet for her sage advice throughout this year, her unwavering dedication to our shul,

her tireless hours of work that enabled us to launch a new amazing website in the Spring and her role as communications coordinator and Shabbat coordinator. She may have stepped down from the board last year but she continues to do so much for our community behind the scenes. I also want to thank Jonathan, Marilyn and Eden for all their hard work on the b'nei mitzvah program, which was a smashing success this year. And finally, I want to thank our extremely hard-working administrator, Natalie, the first point of contact for those making inquiries about our shul. Natalie knows our community very well, she knows how to keep us organized and make our lives far easier. As folks know, if you have a question about the shul – just ask Natalie!

Laurie Goodman

Laurie has been coming to services at Shir Libeynu ever since its first service at the Cecil Community Centre. Finding a place for himself, his co-parent and their children where they could feel accepted and welcomed was no easy task. Shir Libeynu fit the bill perfectly. It was a place that not only celebrated diversity, but embraced it, and created a space for spiritual connection as well. Shir Libeynu took Laurie back to his shul-going days and reminded him of his enjoyment of the High Holy Day services as well as other Jewish-themed events

Laurie is one of the owners of Mark Lash Designs, which designs, manufactures and imports fine jewelry. Laurie has also worked on many boards for fundraising, including the 519 Church Street Community Centre, Pogo, the Herbie Fund and Mount Sinai, to mention a few. Laurie is most proud of his greatest accomplishments: his son, Ben, and his daughter, Andi.

Laurie's flair for decorating and food presentation has made many of our events things of beauty. In his third year on the board, Laurie helped to organize the Shir Libeynu Pride Shabbat reception and coordinated all our High Holy Day kiddushes. Laurie often hosts meetings at his home, and he plans to focus on special- events coordinating, including our bnei mitzvah simchas, in the coming year. He will also work on fundraising initiatives for the community.

Eden Nameri

My two kids grew up at Shir Libeynu, so I am delighted we have so much to offer to our latest crop of young congregants. Last year, we launched our official b'nei mitzvah program educational program, which emphasizes the community aspect of the bar/bat mitzvah experience. The program continues this year, led by teacher Lorin Schwartz, under the guidance of Jonathan Silin. We have also increasingly enriched the Jewish learning experiences of our junior congregants, from pre-school to pre-bar/bat mitzvah age. Our Shabbat and High Holy Day kids'

programming in 2014 provided consistent engaging educational activities that reflected Jewish themes and holidays. The credit goes to our educational coordinator, Rebecca Sheridan. For older kids this year, activities included volunteering with our children's program and Kiddush preparation, volunteer opportunities at the MNjcc Purim carnival and a youth-oriented Yom Kippur storytelling session. I look forward to working with Rebecca to develop broader and deeper educational activities for our youngest congregants.

I have been on the board since before it was an official entity. As my long tenure starts to wind down, my goal is to make sure the board can harness the energy and talents of our members so that this is the engine that drives our community. This year, I have personally experienced the generosity of our congregation. I hope we grow in a way that ensures that all members of Shir Libeynu can have the experience of both accessing and providing support. Our communications director and Shabbat coordinator, Harriet Eisenkraft, and our administrator, Natalie Wallach, have been instrumental in making that a reality, as exemplified by our nascent Chesed Committee, chaired by Dorothy Rusoff and Bonnie Smith.

In addition to being a board member, I work as a legal writer at Carswell, a Thomson Reuters business – it's a good way to put to use the LL.B. I earned from Osgoode Hall Law School. I am also a storyteller and have had the pleasure of telling tales at shul, schools, Jewish community events and 1001 Friday Nights. Among other changes this year, I took up dragon boating.

My deep thanks to our whole congregation and to our board – especially our wonderful president, Jamie Flagal – to Harriet and Natalie, to Rabbi Aviva Goldberg and Chazzan Daniela Gesundheit for providing me with such extraordinary support during a challenging year.

Brian Smith

Brian writes "I became involved with Shir Libeynu four years ago for two reasons: my daughter Gena's glowing endorsement and my disillusionment with the synagogue I was then attending. I look forward to helping Shir Libeynu continue in its leading role as an inclusive modern Jewish community concerned with social justice and free from political, religious and social rigidity."

Brian was born in Montreal but grew up in Toronto. He went to McGill and then to Chicago, where he attained his MBA. As a board member at Montreal's Temple Beth Shalom Emmanuel, he co-led the religious school and then taught Hebrew school at a synagogue back in Toronto. He has been a volunteer with the One Family organization as well as at Mt. Sinai Hospital's CAT-scan unit. Brian works in real estate. Brian is married to Bonnie: they are the parents of three

grown children and have three grandchildren. Brian is currently a BA student at York University in the Jewish studies program.

Brian is serving his second three-year term on the board. He has been our liaison with and is on the board of the Downtown Jewish Community School. He was very active with the Heart to Heart (from Hashomir Haaratz) camp and Toronto visit by Jewish and Arab youth from Israel that occurred in the summer. Shir Libeynu has been supporting this initiative for many years and, with the involvement of Brian and other members, will continue to do so. Brian also helped out with kiddish preparation at our monthly Shabbat services in his early years on the board.

j wallace skelton

I chose Shir Libeynu because of the warm welcome we received when we first showed up. I was looking for a shul that would welcome two queer and trans Jews along with our small children, and Shir Libeynu really is that place of welcome for us, and I want to make sure we can be so for others.

Outside of shul I do work creating more understanding and celebration for diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sexes. There's more that two might be a brief introduction to all that. I write, I advocate, I draft policy, and facilitate trainings. I'm interested in social justice, making our synagogue accessible to people of all income levels and advancing our programs for learning, for children, youth and adults. I'm currently on parental leave from the Gender-Based Violence Prevention office at the Toronto District School Board. I'm a grad student at OISE. If you are looking for more about me, you can read my blog here: <http://ishai-wallace.livejournal.com> see my professional website here: <http://www.juxtaposeconsulting.com> find me on Facebook here: www.facebook.com/wallacejc or say hi at kiddush!