

Keara Stein (formerly Cummings)

Dear Temple B'nai Israel,

I am so honored that Dusty asked me to write something to you all. I think of my time at B'nai Israel often, drawing upon my experiences almost every weekend as I serve my congregation in Los Angeles. Your love for Judaism inspired me, and your enthusiasm for creating a Jewish life in Amarillo against the odds encourages me every day.

Since my time with you in Amarillo I have grown in my rabbinate and my life has gone through some changes. I found a passion for pastoral care during my internship at UCLA Medical Center and I am now working on my thesis about the concept of BikkurHolim, visiting the sick. I married Jason last June and we are about to celebrate our first wedding anniversary. Every pesach since our time with you, Jason has led our group in an engaging singing of Chad Gadya- although he still says that the Amarillo group acted out the animals the best!

As I prepare to enter my last year of rabbinical school, I think often of how far I have come since my time learning with you in Amarillo. The skills I learned during my internship at B'nai Israel will serve me well throughout my rabbinate. I am grateful for my time with you and think of you all fondly. I hope you are continuing to learn, teach, and love Judaism.

B'shalom,
Keara

Justus Baird

Opening Joke from my first sermon at Amarillo, September 12, 2003

Some of you know that it's not easy being a Jew in Texas. Some of you also know that traditionally, Jews need a minyan, or a group of 10 people, in order to pray. This is of course just a set up for a joke about Jews in Texas, which goes like this. A Jewish business man is traveling through cowboy country and one evening he decides to check out the local saloon. Not wanting to stick out or be noticed, he puts on some boots and a western shirt, hoping that no one will notice he is Jewish. After about an hour at the bar, trying hard to fit in with all the cowboys, a long tall Texan with a big hat and spurs on his boots barges in the saloon door and says "Ah hears there's a Jew in here!" The business man shrinks into his seat, thinking frantically about how to escape. "Ah says I hear there's a Jew in here. Where is he??" The man decides this is his moment of truth and he stands up and declares to the tall Texan: "I am a Jew!" The Texan looks at him squarely and says, "Well, what the hell are you hidin' for? Ah needs you for a minyan!"

Gratitude for My Time in Amarillo

You, B'nai Israel, were my first congregation as a student rabbi. You were patient with me, you embraced me, and you allowed me to learn and grow with you. I learned about radical Jewish pluralism - where all the Jews in the community come together in one place. I learned about the history of the Jews of Texas. You even allowed me to practice officiating

at weddings and b'nei mitzvahs on you. For all these things, I will forever be grateful.

Personal Update

Since being ordained in 2007, I joined the staff of Auburn Seminary in New York City, where I am now Dean of the seminary. Our mission is to equip religious leaders, of all faiths, to engage in social justice work. I'm still a long tall Texan at heart, but a lot balder than I was a decade ago. My wife Julie - who is the rabbi of Princeton University - and I have three kids, twin 5 year old sons and a 1 year old daughter. If you ever visit Princeton or NYC, let me know.

Aimee Irshay

My Dear B'nai Israel Community-

Although it has been a few years since we have seen each other, you have never been far from my mind. In all of my rabbinic endeavors, I constantly draw upon things I learned with all of you in Amarillo and am eternally grateful. Thank you so much for your support in helping to shape the rabbi I am about to become.

Starting this July, I will begin serving Temple Isaiah in Los Angeles, CA as the Director of Educational Engagement. While I am thrilled to take the position, I am most excited that I will finally have an office to call my own- and there is only ONE thing I require to go up on the wall- the quilt that you all so lovingly presented to me in April 2010. The quilt is the physical representation of all of the wonderful classes, services, conversations, and meals we shared together. I cannot wait for people to start commenting on it so that I may tell everyone what a wonderful Jewish community that Amarillo has!

I am also excited to announce that I became engaged in February to a wonderful man (who I incidentally met in high school and reconnected with a few years ago) and we will be married in October.

I hope you are all doing well and I trust that Dusty has taken great care of you!

With love,
Aimee

Laura Schwartz-Harari

Dear B'nai Israel family,

Y'all occupy a very special place in my heart, and will always do so! One of the first things I noticed about your community was the special and long-standing relationships you maintained with your former clergy and student rabbis.

After spending two years working with you, I understood why. Your warmth and passion as a community are something special! You are passionate about prayer and singing, you are passionate about Jewish learning, and, though your passion sometimes leads you to

“butt heads”, it is all *l’shemshamayim* (for the sake of heaven). Your devotion to training future rabbis is admirable, as is your devotion to maintaining a vibrant Jewish presence in Amarillo. You extend a hand to those of other faith traditions, and together work to better the lot of all who are in need.

Your presence at my installation as Rabbi in Waco was so meaningful! The richness of my experience in Amarillo definitely contributed to my desire to devote my rabbinate to serving a small Jewish community.

May you continue from strength to strength!

Fondly,
Laura Schwartz Harari

Dan Medwin

It’s hard to imagine that 6 years ago, when I was blessed to serve as the student rabbi of B’nai Israel, my life was very different from where I am today. Today, I am married, the father of two wonderful children, and a full time Rabbi creating apps, ebooks, and helping other rabbis use technology.

In many ways, I look back on my time in Amarillo, and see myself as child-like, uncertain, and eager to learn. Even though I served as your spiritual leader, I grew more from your guidance, love, and even your hardships, than I can ever convey or perhaps ever fully appreciate myself.

I hope you are aware of the impact you have had on my life and rabbinate, and the impact you continue to make on the rabbinic students who come to serve this community. In fact, you should also know that you have an impact on the American Jewish community, as a whole. Because, wherever your student rabbis may find themselves in the future, I know that a piece of you is always with them. That is certainly the case with me.