

BS"D

Summer 1982

Dear Mom and Dad,

Remember I told you that I was going to start working part-time in a town called Caldwell, in northern New Jersey?

You may remember that after I started Cantorial School at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York last spring, I got a call from a rabbi named Alan Silverstein. His congregation, "Agudath Israel", was looking for a student to come out for two Shabbatot a month, plus holidays.

Well, I just spent my first Shabbes out there. Golly, what a nice bunch of people!

And in particular, I want to tell you about their head Gabbai, whose name is Nat Taubenfeld. You've got to come out here sometime and meet him. There's no one in Iowa City quite like him. He's -- well -- kind of overwhelming.

I had met with him during the summer, to record congregational melodies. After all, I want to start out singing the melodies they know best! And everyone said that Nat was the guy to meet with.

He's got this ENORMOUS voice, and such an exuberant passion when he davens! You can feel the heavens shaking. I bet that even when he's as old as Grampa, he'll still be singing that strongly...

Nat is about your age -- early fifties, I guess -- and while he was born in Poland, he and his family managed to survive the Holocaust years. He's been in Caldwell since his twenties, I think, but he still speaks with a pretty heavy "Galitzianer" accent. He jokes about it, but I think it's amazing that he knows Polish, Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish and English all quite well -- it makes it easy for him to talk with visitors up at the Reader's Table when we're reading Torah.

He and his wife, Bea, have been pillars in the Caldwell Jewish community for a long time -- I heard she was born there, or nearby. (Did you know there's a West Caldwell, and a North Caldwell, but not a South or East one?) They're so nice -- they invited me for Shabbes lunch, and it was great! They really made me feel at home. They probably do that for lots of other people, too...

They have five children, who have all been at Camp Ramah in Canada for many years. (I'll have to tell them about the real Ramah -- you know, in Wisconsin.) Most of their children are already out of high school, but their youngest, David, is still a teenager. He seems to be at the shul a lot, and like his parents, he has a LOT of energy...

Anyway, when you next come out to the East Coast, I hope you can meet Nat and Bea. I'm so glad they're part of that Caldwell shul -- it'll make these next two years really lovely, before I get my ordination and go off somewhere else.

Love, Joel