

NORTHWEST SIDE



Congregation Knesses Israel
1500 N. Maplewood
1890's

KNESSES ISRAEL, THE MAPLEWOOD AVENUE SHUL

My first shul experience was attending The Maplewood Avenue Shul (B'nai Yaacov) with my bubbe Jenny Schachman, on the Northwest Side. I loved being there. I used to walk up and down the stairs of the women's section pretending I was a queen, and the sanctuary was my castle. I remember attending a wedding when I was about four years old. There were two young men behind me and Bubbe and making a big fuss over me. I thought they were so handsome! My grandmother even took me to her ladies' auxiliary meetings. Everyone spoke to me in Yiddish. Although I understood bubbe's Litakasha Yiddish perfectly, I was lost among the competing accents in the room, and Galitsianer really threw me for a loop. I remember feeling very frustrated. Our chazzan was Cantor Siegel; he compensated with volume and passion what he lacked in talent. His wailing nearly scared me to death!

My baby sister Monica was even more devoted to Bubbe than I. She insisted on attending Shabbat services with her. If Bubbe dared leave for Shul without waking Monica, she would throw a tantrum when she woke up, and my mother would have to take her to Shul. Amongst all these bubbes was this small child davening, crying and shuckeling with the best of them. To this day my sister and I attend Shabbat services regularly at our respective synagogues. I think it is because of the relationship with our grandmother that we have had an ongoing love affair with Judaism.

Joyce Brand Joseph, age 59, 2005