



President's Address - Acceptance Speech
October 27, 2018

When I was 10 years old I was told that I was celebrating Shabbat incorrectly. I did not understand – my family lit candles, sang Kiddush, and said the *motzi*. We ate a meal together, often with my grandparents. My father and I went to Shabbat evening services, and we sat together as we prayed.

At the time, I was one of a few girls in my religious school class at a Conservative synagogue. On Sundays we would be asked, “Who went to Shabbat services?” and I would proudly raise my hand and earn a star on the class chart. Yet, one Sunday I was challenged by my male classmates who had not seen me in attendance. When I explained that I went every Friday night I was told that attending Shabbat services only counted if one went on a Saturday morning. I was taunted and told that my stars did not count. Needless to say, it didn’t take long before my parents granted me permission to leave religious school. I remember my father telling the rabbi that he would not let him or anyone else bully me into doing things their way.

After Jim and I were married, we decided to join Temple Beth Shalom in Needham, Massachusetts. The community attracted me for two main reasons – first, because the sisterhood welcomed me with open arms, and second, there seemed to be opportunities in the Reform community for women to take on leadership roles. I was exposed to the bigger picture of what could be through Women of Reform Judaism, or WRJ, and the rest, as they say, is history.



This weekend we have been celebrating ten years together as a district. Our theme, “Ten Years Together – Growing Our Community,” reflects the efforts by our women, who first envisioned, and then built, an effective and well-run district, driven by common goals and love for Women of Reform Judaism.

Since we have completed ten years together I decided it might be fun to explore the significance of the number ten. I first turned to examples from our Jewish traditions:

- We are summoned to put holiness into action, through the **Ten Commandments**.
- It took **ten plagues** in Egypt to finally convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave.
- In the Torah portion Vayeira, which we read this morning, Abraham bargained with God. God agreed not to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if they could find **ten righteous individuals** living there.
- Holiness is reflected in community, whenever **ten adults** gather to constitute a *minyan*.
- Jews observe **Ten Days of Reflection** beginning on Rosh HaShanah and ending on Yom Kippur.

The concept of ten certainly is not limited to our Jewish tradition:

- Pythagoras and his followers believed that numbers were the basis of the entire universe, and that **ten was the most perfect number** expressing the whole of human knowledge.
- For those of us who have welcomed babies into our lives, we admire the miracle of their beings by counting their **ten fingers and ten toes**, which, many theorize, is probably why we count in a base ten system.
- The **metric system** is based on the **number 10**. The United States is one of three countries in the world that does *not* use the metric system. Our sensible sisters living in the Northern most part of the district do. And speaking of Canada...
- Canada has **ten Provinces**
- A collection, set, or series of ten items is called a **decade** which also includes a period of ten years.

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How does a group grow a community? Since growing is the operative word in this part of our weekend's theme, I asked Jim, who is a third generation gardener, what goes into the growing process from his point of view. He said, growing a garden takes **work, attention, dedication, caring, and nurturing**.

Soil, a garden's base, is an organic, living thing. Suitable soil is actually created, using compost and other nutrients, for whatever one is planning to plant. The women who came before us created the base for our community. I would like to thank and acknowledge our past district presidents, our past WRJ president, and our WRJ leaders for providing the foundation for our community.

Plants need to be chosen and placed carefully. Does each seedling need sun or shade? How much water is needed for each kind? What position in the garden will maximize growth potential? Over the last decade our dedicated women have provided their skills and talents to make sure each aspect of our district was relevant, whether planning area events, kallahs, or conventions, restructuring our governance model, or making sure our policies and procedures were sound and up to date. I would like to thank our alumnae and outgoing board for helping our district prosper.

To make sure that each plant maximizes its potential to produce flowers and fruit for the future, many gardeners will plant several varieties of pollinator plants around the area, strategically placed to provide habitat for bees, birds, and butterflies. I want to thank the women who have made commitments to serve on our district board for the next biennial period, and potentially beyond, to ensure our future.

Returning to Jim's words about growing – that it takes **work, attention, dedication, caring, and nurturing** – I think many of us in WRJ will find these words familiar since they are included in, or alluded to, in the WRJ mission statement:

WRJ strengthens the voice of women worldwide and empowers them to create caring communities, nurture congregations, cultivate personal and spiritual growth, and advocate for and promote progressive Jewish values.

Over the next two years we hope to continue our outreach to women, to continue to connect women in ways that have proven successful, and to try some new and more spontaneous efforts. We hope to grow, expand and improve our efforts with social advocacy and action within the district, and to raise awareness among our women of philanthropic opportunities through WRJ. We hope to nurture our communications department, to teach new skills to women who have agreed to tackle this ever-changing area in our fast-paced world. And we will endeavor to achieve balance, and to continue to enjoy each other's company as we do so.

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At this point I would like to thank everyone for all their support.

I am grateful to my parents, Ruth and Sidney Novak, who raised me to look for the positives in life and to always try to do the right thing.

I want to thank my husband and my children, Jim, David, and Danya Mavor, who have accepted and supported my volunteer life.

David, thank you for sharing your inquisitive nature, and for teaching me to look for the “why” of things.

Danya, thank you for sharing your way of seeing things in this world, and for sharing your artwork with us by designing the brand for our convention.

Jim – I am extremely grateful to you for being my backup for all these years, for providing us with delicious meals, and for making sure the household still stood when I returned from WRJ conferences.

Thank you to my friends from my other home, the Temple Beth Shalom community, who have come out in support this weekend.

And, to the sisters of my heart, who more than make up for my lack of biological siblings, I think this quote from Jane Fonda helps to express my gratitude to all of you:

I have my friends, therefore I am... they make me stronger, they make me smarter, they make me braver, they tap me on the shoulder when I might be in need of course correcting.

As I take on the role of district president I realize where my strength and support come from – I am as strong as the women I am blessed to be surrounded with.

Shavuah tov!

Our banquet dinner will be held in Grand North ballroom, please join me!

– Trina Novak
President, WRJ Northeast District