

It's the mid to late 1990s. My friends and I are sitting up in that balcony not so patiently waiting for the program to finish so we can run down and get our food. And then, it happens. With only a page or two left in the program, with the end so close I can taste the honey, someone gets up to the mic and goes off book. And I mean WAY off book! "Why are they talking for so long when there's food downstairs?"

Sorry 9 year old me, I'm that someone this year. I am giving the Rosh Hashone Dvar.

How on earth did this happen? How did I go from being the baby sleeping in the car seat under the table at Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Commemoration planning meetings to standing in front of you now to share my thoughts and ideas of the past year and my visions of the future?

As with many things, I blame my parents. They made sure both my brother and I had a front row seat to what it meant to be a part of a community. Every 2nd Thursday of the month, people came to our house to speak Yiddish, and my brother and I were there, setting up the chairs. Every 4th Thursday of the month, we were schlepping across the river to 1762 Beacon Street where we'd set up chairs for Yiddish Sing. And what were we doing on Saturday afternoons before

and after chorus rehearsal? Yup, arranging the chairs. Most community work seems to be setting up and putting away chairs.

But while we were setting up chairs, we were growing up, and being raised in this community. I have so many extra grandparents and aunts and uncles in this room and watching at home who had a hand in me standing here today. You made this community a home, a place to feel loved and protected so that I could leave the nest and fly. After Shule and TASC, came years of exploration to see what else is out there. I traveled, I grew and I had a ball.

I came back to Boston with a plan to only be here a year and then off to somewhere new. That one year has turned into many more, and again, I somewhat blame my parents but really it's the fault of all you extra aunts and uncles that raised me in this community. "Come be a shule teacher", "come join the Yiddish Committee", "come help lead the singing at the High Holidays". Suddenly I wasn't being brought to BWC events, I was LEADING them, shaping them, and building the community myself. I had friends and peers in the other shule teachers, in the Shule parents, in the gragger shpil, and in Svive, the young adult Yiddish community. Times like these, when I am leading the community in song, half the room is watching and kvelling over the little girl they remember, and the other half sees me as this leader in the community. Meanwhile, I see

neither, I just love when people sing together, so I am taking the role that feels right for me right now.

Today is Rosh Hashone, and we are thinking about the year that passed and the year to come. In many ways, our community is the same, a cycle of roles that we take on, make our own, and then pass along to others as we take up new roles. There are new sets of kids sitting waiting for me to finish speaking so we can get outside for the Kiddish. And my generation, specifically of kids who grew up in the shule and the Workers Circle, are coming into our own in positions our parents once held. We are on staff, we are on the board, we are leading the community in song, and most beautifully, we are doing this work alongside our parents and community members who helped raise us in this community. I was raised on stories of the “old timers” in the 1980s who opened the doors and invited the “young people” in to reinvigorate Boston Workers Circle. More and more often these days, those stories come with a laugh that those “young people” are now the “old timers”.

Through this cycle we grow as a multigenerational community based in love and respect. I have been a part of so many discussions, from the Ritual Committee to the Yiddish Committee to Shule spaces to the Chorus about the words we sing and say in our programming. Women in our community who have spent their

lives working for the word woman and sister to appear in spaces that were once reserved for men and brothers are watching those lines transform into comrades and siblings. I see the outrage and fear that their work is being taken for granted or even being run over. But I see it differently. Because of their work, I grew up in a culture where women were included in all languages at the ArbeterRing.

Because of their work, I, as a woman, feel centered enough in the space women take up in our language and our community, that I can comfortably and confidently fight for expansive language that includes our whole community. And I am sure that over the next 30 years, I will have very similar discussions with someone who is in Circle Playtime today about changes they want to make to the things that I hold dear.

While so much in our community is held together with this circle constantly moving forward, there are other parts that we are creating from broken chains. For many of us, the dominant language of our ancestors is not a language we use in our everyday lives. For me, that language is Yiddish, and though I was lucky enough to grow up speaking Yiddish, we often like to joke that I can't speak Yiddish fluently, I can speak "my" version of Yiddish fluently. This is because for many the cycle of Yiddish was cut- by the holocaust, by assimilation, and by a movement that said Hebrew is the only language of the Jewish people. But here in Boston and around the world, an amazing group of people said no, Yiddish is

my cultural language, my inheritance, and I am going to reclaim it. They studied and created strong enough spaces that today, the Yiddish speaking yugnt feel comfortable and confident enough to create content that matches our own lives. (check out mean girls as it was meant to be seen, in Yiddish). But my generation is coming to it differently. For a lot of reasons, we can't invite friends to our house for a weekly Yiddish group the way my folks could when they were my age. We are actively working and adapting to carve out our own connections to Yiddish and yiddishkeit with each other. But it takes a lot of commitment and work.

Our community is what we make of it. Karen and Wayne hosting folks in their backyard for the Holidays turns into 600+ people, pre-pandemic, cramming into this church. Parents of young kids wanting a Jewish cultural education for their children get together and create a shule, many of them teaching in it themselves, since it was either teach a class, or don't have a class. Today, the shule is so established that it is expected that there will be highly trained educators who are experts in the classroom and curriculum. And the place to learn Yiddish in the Boston area is with Boston Workers Circle. Boston Workers Circle is established and known as the place where being Jewish and being progressive are the same thing, rooted in the radical yiddishkeit. But none of these things happen without that same community commitment and involvement that created them in the first place.

It isn't just about making sure these spaces still exist just because they always have or because I like them. It's about how I, as a human being, keep moving forward. How do I keep hope alive as the world edges closer and closer to fascism, to climate disaster, to social and economic catastrophes? By drawing strength from my community. Try not to have hope, after hearing a giml class discussion of what the phrase social justice means, I dare you. It was not easy to decide to give up my Sundays and teach a 6th day of the week or spend the afternoons and evenings after work at Hi Ho band rehearsal. But the hard work towards common goals creates strong bonds that help keep me going. As the Workers Circle Anthem says, "di heymishe flamen... hobn undz glutik tsuzamen in ring fun an ordn geshmidt," "the home fires forged us intensely together into a circle of community."

Become involved. Find your path, your place, and your passion in this beautiful community. You can start small- sign up to help with the chairs before and after events. The bonds formed by working together last a lifetime. Together we can build a better and more beautiful world, a shenere un a besere velt.