

My 50th Anniversary as a Rabbi
Part Two: "Some of My Classmates"

As I've mentioned before, there were thirty-six of us in the Class of '72 who were ordained at the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College, and that number is important in the Jewish tradition. Each Hebrew letter represents a number. *Lamed*=30 and *vav*=6, together forming the number of ordainees in our class.

You may have heard of the *lamed-vavniks*. It is said that each generation has 36 righteous Jews, each one not realizing s/he is counted as one of them. These 36 are said to sustain the world because of their righteousness. Now I'm not saying those in our class are this generation's *lamed-vavniks* because, as those of generations before us, we have never been informed, but...

Of course the class of '72 was a bit more special than most in that Sally Priesand was ordained as the first woman rabbi. Ours was probably the first class whose members felt they might as well just go home what with the television cameras, reporters and the like, who were waiting outside the Isaac Mayer Wise Temple so they could interview Sally! All kidding aside, I can assure you that we were very proud to be a part of this momentous occasion, and we continue to be so glad to recognize our classmate as truly a role model for the women who followed, now in the hundreds! Truth be told, Sally has been a role model for the men as well.

One of the earliest conventions of the CCAR following our ordination was held at Grossinger's resort. We had brought David, our first-born, along with us. Sally was walking down the path and we asked her to please hold him because we wanted to take a photograph. She did and we told her, "*Well, now we've got the cover for his Bar Mitzvah invitation!*" Of course that was not to be the case.

There were a number of those who began their rabbinic studies who never were ordained. In fact, there were a few who never made it past the first year; in fact, not even past the preliminary summer program preceding the first year! One of them simply never went to class, and one not even his dorm room (we questioned whether he even got dressed each morning)...and they passed the psychological exam we all had to take in order to be accepted into the rabbinic program??!!! Go figure.

The oldest graduate to be ordained until that time was in my class. He had been an officer in the US Army and was in his late fifties when accepted into the program. Unfortunately he died after a few years serving an historical congregation in the South. Another classmate had once addressed Beth Emeth at

a Shabbat evening service. He had served as a chaplain in the US Navy and spoke about his experiences. He contracted a terminal disease which sadly took his life, a source of sadness for all of us because he truly was a *mensch*.

A classmate who was the type who would give you the shirt off his back not looking first to see if he had another one, was also a Navy chaplain upon ordination. During Operation Desert Storm he computerized the chaplaincy service integrating all those who were serving around the globe, an Herculean task indeed! And then there was the classmate who disappeared after ordination. Someone by chance found him working in a record store.

One rabbi from the Class of '72 officiated at the funeral of Gilda Ratner. Another whose father had been an attorney but then became a rabbi, started off as a rabbi and then became an attorney. Yet another founded a congregation for the deaf and became a leading spokesperson for the hearing-impaired communities of Jews around the country. A good friend of mine, the Reform rabbi in Little Rock, was a sounding board for Bill Clinton and wrote a book about their relationship.

Of course I couldn't mention everyone – I'm not even sure what became of more than a handful of them – but you can get an idea that we represented a cross-section of the Jewish community, and were honored to serve in whatever capacity we could. I know I was/am!