

tion. The lay leaders worried about the Friday night and Saturday morning services. How would past members with their own brand of orthodoxy respond to our evolving egalitarian participatory service? Most importantly, who should read from the *Torah*? We finally told ourselves that, "This is how we do things now in Sault Ste. Marie." On that *Shabbat* morning, our hundred person sanctuary was full. One of the *Torah* readings was done by one of our own students who had recently become a *bat mitzvah*. Women were called for honours as well as men. Some of these women had never stood before the open *Torah*, or even on the *bimah*<sup>4</sup> before. The granddaughter of a former rabbi of the congregation read the *Haftorah*. Faces throughout the congregation shone with a sense of belonging. It was a tribute to the community when, at the dinner following *Shabbat*, one of our members who had been most resistant to the changes in women's status, said to one of the authors, "I want you to be the first to know that I was wrong!"

At this stage in our community's life we still allow for differences in feelings about the role of women in the synagogue. Many women don't feel comfortable participating in services, either because of a lack of education, personal conviction, or both. We have developed a "code" which tells the leaders of the service whether individual women wish to participate. If a woman wears a *kippah* (skull cap) and a *tallit* (prayer shawl) as the men in the congregation do, it is assumed that she is willing and is prepared to participate. Not all women feel comfortable with this "code" but it has allowed any woman who wishes to participate to take her place on the *bimah*.

Many women in the congregation who might wish to participate in services still cannot do so, because we lack continuing adult education resources. Many have never had the opportunity for formal education, or have had education which did not prepare them for participation. This is an issue which still needs to be addressed.

In addition, we are aware that our present *Siddurim* (prayer books) and *Chumash*<sup>5</sup> translations are reflective of the gender exclusion of women which had been practiced over the past 50 years. A new look at these resources and others is in order at this time.

If a small Jewish community is to survive today, it must meet the needs of all its members. Women will need to be vocal and informed about the roles which they wish to undertake but also sensitive to the needs of others in the community who may come from different perspectives. Without this dual vision, change will be fraught with dissension and disruption and Jewish communities can be destroyed in the process.

In our sometimes slow, but generally inclusive and accommodating way, we believe that we have begun a two-fold process. First, we strived to maintain the viability and vibrancy of our small Jewish community by resolving our differences with a minimum of confrontation and adversarial interactions. Second, and perhaps ultimately more important, we are raising a generation of Jewish

women with a strong Jewish identity and the confidence that they, too, can take their places in whatever Jewish communities they choose to live in the future.

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<sup>1</sup>The spring holiday commemorating the exodus from Egypt.

<sup>2</sup>A ritual circumcisor.

<sup>3</sup>Jewish dietary laws.

<sup>4</sup>Platform from which the *Torah* is read.

<sup>5</sup>The Hebrew word for *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

## DEBORAH EIBEL

### Gratitude

Dropouts have to live  
Away from here.  
We depend on good neighbours  
To find them  
At garage sales.  
If dropouts work part time,  
They can afford good china.

At garage sales  
They examine all the cups and saucers,  
And sure enough they find whole sets  
In excellent condition.  
Good neighbours say  
There is so much to be grateful for.

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