



December 1, 2019

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

One day last month when I arrived at morning minyan, I found a woman reading a book, sitting on the stairs leading to the Ferkauf Chapel. Susan Diamond explained to me that she had come to be part of a workshop at the Summit Schools and had arrived earlier than expected. We invited the woman to sit on a chair outside the chapel, where she proceeded to continue reading the book, but now in a more comfortable position.

When I went inside the chapel I found, that with me, we were only nine people. After a couple of minutes, it was time to say kaddish. We were still only nine.

I went outside and approached the woman and politely asked her "Are you by any chance, Jewish?"

"I am 50% Jewish," she replied, and then, perhaps guessing my next question, she proceeded: "my mother was Jewish."

I smiled and told her: "so you are 100% Jewish! Would you join us at minyan? We are nine and we need one more person."

The woman, whose name was Anne Marie, completed the minyan and even after an additional person arrived, she stayed until the end of services. I thanked her for joining us and she thanked me for including her.

There are many stories like this one – bashert stories – in which what we call "a Jew by birth" comes in touch with his or her Judaism in a totally new fashion, unexperienced until that moment.

I don't know too much about Anne Marie. I hope the positive experience in which she "was counted" will prompt her to further explore her Jewish roots.

Stories like this one touch me deeply. I went to Jewish Day Schools and being actively Jewish was always a big part of me, but the truth being told, both Anne Marie and I are 100% equal citizens of the Jewish people; the birthright belongs equally to both of us.

Anne Marie's story on that Sunday morning became our story as well. We were able to say kaddish because of her. With her presence we were a complete unit. Without her, we were lacking.

Anne Marie's story also made me think of my own birthright, a treasure that belongs to me, an inheritance just waiting for me to claim it. Each of us, no matter how learned we think we are, have still a big inheritance to claim: shelves filled with Jewish books, songs, experiences, history, geography, Jewish tastes and sounds.

Anne Marie claimed her birthright by making the move from the outside of the chapel to the inside. Our birthright is waiting for each of us. How will your next move look?

Make one and share your experience with me.

Rabbi Manes Kogan