During these High Holidays, I, like most of you, think back to all of the choices I have made over the last year, some good, some not so good and start to ponder the choices that I will have to make in the year ahead. So, when Jen asked me to speak to you tonight, I thought what better topic to discuss than Choices.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “I am who I am today, because of the choices I made yesterday.”

That quote truly sums up my Jewish life. For most of you, your Jewish life did not begin with a choice, it began with your birth. Mine is the result of choices I made. Beginning with the choice I made in 1985, but let me start at the beginning. I was born a Christian. I was raised in a non-religious home, we went to church on Christmas and Easter, and sometimes on Mothers Day, but that was really the extent of my religious upbringing. In January of 1985, I was beginning my second semester of my freshman year at Syracuse University and I decided to pledge a fraternity. Many of my friends from my dorm decided to pledge Sigma Alpha Mu, so, I joined them. I had no idea that Sigma Alpha Mu or Sammy was a Jewish fraternity. Honestly, I was even sure what that meant. I just knew my friends were joining so I wanted to join as well. I soon found out that Sammy was founded by 8 Jewish students and historically was a fraternity made up of Jews. In 1985, while the majority of Sigma Alpha Mu at Syracuse was Jewish there were plenty of non-Jews. So, I joined Sammy. It was in Sammy that I had my first exposure to Judaism. From Matzah to latkahs to fasting, I experienced it all for the first time at Sammy. I distinctly remember going to the kitchen in the fraternity house one night to get a snack and seeing a box of what looked like very large crackers. I spread some butter on one and just like that I had eaten my first matzah.

I also met my wife through the fraternity. I can imagine my now in-laws faces when Julie calls them to tell them she is dating the President of Sammy and by the way he is not Jewish. So if I had not made the CHOICE to join Sammy I would not be here today. However, there are other choices that led to today as well.

A few years after college, Julie and I were discussing if we get married what would we raise our children. I remember telling her that it was important to me that they be raised with a religious upbringing. So since I did not really practice Christianity, we should raise them Jewish. Another choice. A year later Julie and I were married by a Rabbi under a huppah.

Fast forward to 2002 and it is then that we had to make another choice. It was time for my son to start Hebrew school, so we needed to join a Temple. I also decided that I wanted to begin the process of converting to Judaism. We looked at several Synagogues in the area. However, after speaking with Iris and meeting with Rabbi Mosbacher it became clear that Beth Haverim was the place for us. Soon after joining I began working with Rabbi Mosbacher on my conversion and nine years ago, I officially became Jewish.

Over the next few years I would watch as my children became bat and bar mitzvahed. It was during my daughters bat mitzvah preparation that I made another choice. A little over two years ago, I started studying to become an adult bnei mitzvah. Last November, the journey that began when I chose Sigma Alpha Mu Fraternity in 1985 culminated with my Bar Mitzvah.

Last year, as I looked back on the 10 years that we have been members here, I realized that Beth Haverim Shir Shalom had given me so much, my conversion, my children’s bnei mitzvahs, my bar mitzvah and I thought that I had not done enough to be involved in all that the Temple has to offer. So, as my oldest child was preparing to start college and my youngest was preparing for High School, I made another CHOICE. I joined the Board of Trustees at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom. I joined because I thought it would be a great way to give back to a place that has done so much for me. Instead, I have received more than I could have imagined.

Beth Haverim Shir Shalom has so much to offer. From life long learning events to playing mah jong to planting a garden to provide food for those in need to building a sukkah to Tikkun Olam (teekoon ohlum), through our Social Action Committee, you can find it all at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom. As you contemplate the CHOICES you will be making in the year ahead, consider becoming involved in just ONE thing here at BHSS. Prepare or deliver ONE meal for those congregants who are ill or sitting shiva, attend ONE Life Long Learning Event, attend ONE Brotherhood or Sisterhood meeting, get involved in ONE of the Michelle Mitzvah Groups many Social Action Projects.

Tomorrow when you leave Temple thinking about your CHOICES remember:

One...One tree can start a forest,One smile can begin a friendship,One hand can lift a soul,One word can frame the goal,One candle can wipe out darkness,One laugh can conquer gloom,One hope can raise our spirits,And...ONE CHOICE to be involved in something at Beth Haverim Shir Shalom, can change your life. It certainly has changed mine.

G’mar hatimah tovah