PORTRAIT | JEWISH JOURNEYS | JUDAICA | TEEN TALK | JEWISH THOUGHT

NAME: Scott D. Reich

OCCUPATION: Attorney and author of The Power of Citizenship: Why John F. Kennedy Matters to a New Generation

JEWISH AFFILIATIONS: Trustee, Temple Sinai of Roslyn in Roslyn Heights, New York; Founder and Chairman, Sinai in the City; Trustee, URJ North American Board; Member, URJ Oversight Committee; participated in European Maccabi Games as member of Team USA's soccer team

FAVORITE TEACHINGS: Proverbs 22:6— "Train up a child in the way he should go. Even when he's old he will not depart from it." This quintessentially Jewish saying highlights the way we Jews pass our values and traditions *l'dor vador*, from generation to generation.

My parents taught my three younger siblings and me the importance of giving back to the community. We had a *tzedakah* box in our kitchen, and all of us kids were encouraged to donate a portion of our allowances to it. Our weekly allowances were equivalent to our grade in school, and when my youngest brother entered second grade, he started putting in his entire \$2 allowance. Because my parents had us contribute in reverse age order, his generosity inspired all of us to similarly donate

our entire allowances, fulfilling our parents' mantra to "be as generous as you can be" and teaching us about the power of working together to help others.

Each time the box got full, we sat down as a family and discussed what causes we wanted to support with the funds. Sometimes we donated the money to our temple, where my dad was president: other times we donated to a charity my mom founded to help childhood cancer survivors: still other times we donated to a local hospital or soup kitchen.



My parents also stressed the sense of obligation we should feel to give of our time to help others. My dad helped start an annual Mitzvah Day program at our temple, and we became regular participants; we stuffed envelopes for my mom's charity mailings. At my parents' encouragement, I sat in on the charity board meetings, observing the commitment people were making to a cause they believed in.

Because my parents worked to ensure that Jewish values would be defining forces throughout our lives, when I have children I hope to pass

the same values on to them, *I'dor vador*.

My most influential non-Jewish teaching is President John F. Kennedy's famous appeal, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country," which ties in richly with the ethical pillars of our faith. As I see it, the hallmark of Judaism is our obligation to help one another and improve our



SINAI IN THE CITY VOLUNTEERS POSE AFTER CLEANING UP MANHATTAN'S SHERMAN CREEK PARK IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE SANDY, NOVEMBER 2012. I AM THIRD FROM THE RIGHT.

community. All of us, no matter our age, background, or station in life, have the ability to contribute and make a difference. We need to emphasize this notion of giving back, fostering a culture in which we do not ask, "What are we getting?" but instead, "What are we giving?"

I've done my best to embrace this spirit. In addition to my Jewish involvements, I'm on the board of an educational organization that helps children on the autism spectrum, and I do a lot of *pro bono* work in my law practice, particularly helping people who have been persecuted in other nations gain asylum in the U.S. In one instance, my colleagues and I represented a community of Jews who fled Yemen after their rabbi was murdered, some of their family members were abducted and pressured to convert to Islam, and

their children were banned from public school. We won the case, and today this Jewish community lives peacefully in Monsey, NY.

HOW TO ENGAGE 20s AND 30s: My generation looks at faith differently than the way our parents and grandparents did at our age. Today, young Jewish adults are less inclined to join synagogues, attend Shabbat services, and participate in more traditional aspects of institutional Jewish life. That doesn't mean 20s and 30s care less about being Jewish—it simply means that our generation's views on Jewish life are different. The Reform Movement needs to "meet us where we are." Often this means offering Jewish activities in alternative. non-synagogue venues.

That's been my aim with "Sinai in the City," the young adults group I founded, which engag-

es Jewish 20s and 30s who grew up at my synagogue and now live or work in Manhattan. While we do offer occasional Shabbat services, our more popular events include service projects, such as when we cleaned up Sherman Creek Park in New York City after Hurricane Sandy, and the annual toy drive we host in conjunction with our Chanukah parties.

It is difficult to engage Millennials in traditional contexts, such as serving on temple boards or committees, which require ongoing time commitment. Their involvement tends to be more fluid, so a better approach is asking them to participate in clearly-defined tasks that might interest them, e.g., "Can you join us on Mitzvah Day this Sunday from 12 to 5?" People will then feel more inclined to participate, and occasional volunteering may lead to more involvement down the road. \square