

Making My Own Seder

As a family law attorney, I see lots of families shift and change, with former spouses ending up alone for holidays post-divorce. It's not always easy, and many express their worries to me during the divorce process: *How will I get through a holiday without my kids? Where will I go for seder? Will anybody invite me?*

In some cases, newly single adults don't miss a beat, finding invitations and places to go for the big holidays. They get through it with ease, thanks to the support of kind friends and open homes.

Not everyone is so lucky, though. While we live in what we consider to be a tight, supportive community, I have to say it's

not always like that, at least not for everyone.

I grew up in Cleveland in a similarly tight-knit Jewish community, where I knew everyone, had family and had no shortage of places to celebrate simchahs and holidays. I moved to Philadelphia after law school and then came to Michigan when I got engaged to the man I spent more than two decades with.

When you're young and single, you have a community with college classmates. You find friends at the local Hillel. Co-workers invite you home for seder. When I lived in



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Philadelphia, where my mother was living at the time, I dove into synagogue life, became a United Synagogue Youth adviser and found myself in the thick of community.

Always Home

Even now, Cleveland welcomes me home with open arms. I still have family and friends there from childhood, and it's easy to go back and sink into familiar

seats and scenes, always welcome, always at home.

Detroit is like that. When I moved here, I was amazed at how many people had

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their longtime friends living nearby, celebrating family milestones and lifecycle events together. It's hard to be an outsider.

Back then, so many decades ago, when I interviewed for jobs, potential employers asked me why I would stay. I didn't have family ties or lifelong friends; what would keep me here? Luckily, I landed a job at the Jewish Federation and that became my Jewish family in Detroit, along with my early synagogue membership.

At some point along the way, though, things changed. I'd attend services and sit alone. People stayed in their circles, and I was on the outside. And it became even more glaring when I divorced. Even my synagogue community has kept their dis-

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tance. People who used to be friends may not be anymore, through no one's fault, really. When you end a marriage, you change, and sometimes that means friendships change, too.

In the past two years, I've gone from being married to being single, my daughters have left for college and adulthood, and my two sisters, both of whom live in different states, lost their husbands, suddenly, far before their time. It's been tough.

Last fall, we couldn't be together for the High Holidays because of an upcoming bat mitzvah celebration. So my sisters and I were each alone in our home states. Surprisingly, none of us, each in our own community, were being invited to join other families or friends.

It surprised me, as someone who has always been involved in and fond of my Jewish community, to have to ask to spend a holiday meal at friends' houses. I did, and they said, *of course*, and all was well. It is just sometimes uncomfortable having to ask.

Spring Into Community

So this spring, with another holiday upon us to observe and celebrate with community, I decided to host two of my own seders, inviting different people each night so not only would I not celebrate alone, but I also would do my best to make sure no one else would either.

It's important to me to have a sense of community. And if it means I have to make a new com-

munity in this stage of my life, so be it. A dear friend shared a story of how, when she divorced, people stopped inviting her for Shabbat meals. So she decided to make new friends and invite them for Shabbat. At first, it hurt. But eventually, she shifted into her new life, embracing the new person she was becoming and accepting that some friendships last a lifetime, and some only last a while.

I hope people in our community recognize that there are all different kinds of Jews living here in Detroit. It's easy to be friends when life goes easily by. But it's when things get tough, when we change, when we make hard decisions that we need our community the most. Even if you don't know what to say, it's better to simply sit together and be there, showing your unspoken support.

Inclusive Feeling

This Passover, I took a chance and asked individuals if they had any place to go. If they didn't, I invited them to my seder table. I am creating my own community.

In theory, minyan is our daily ritual to create community, but with diminishing numbers of attendance, we all know that's not holding us together. It's time for a new ritual for day-to-day life that creates community and makes everybody feel included.

I love the story of Abraham's tent being open on all four sides, all the time — not just during crises. It's a

lesson to be open to welcoming the stranger, to making sure everyone has a place to be. For we were all strangers in a foreign land, which we remember at this time of year. It doesn't take much to be that stranger among your own people yet again. □

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