**INSPIRATIONAL SPEECH**

**FOR**

**SHERRY FRANK**

Hello everyone! I want to thank you, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for that warm introduction and I want to acknowledge \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to share the story of my journey with you. My tale starts in Dix Hills Long Island where I began my life with my family... we were sort of " Jew.... **ish**," got along in a perfectly fine manner.... or so I thought..... and through circumstances, destiny, and and some clearly "beshert" encounters, I found myself becoming "Jew-**WISH**"...... and here I am tonight, before all of you to proudly embrace that I am **JEWISH**. Journeys can comprise of clocking thousands of miles and going places, but sometimes, simultaneously, the most meaningful journeys occur within one's own being and soul. Because of my involvement with the Jewish Women's Renaissance Project, I have traveled endless miles, mostly from within, to find and honor who I am and acknowledge my purpose in life as a proud and grateful Jewish woman, wife, mother, and friend. (**Do you want to add**).... and **Balabusta**... let's not forget that!! (**Wait for the laugh .... Or we can add this at the end**).

Growing up in Dix Hills was lovely. I was raised in a "secular" Jewish family... we "dipped our toes" in the Jewish experience.... you know... synagogue on the high holy days, Hebrew School three days a week ... where I was taught an ancient language I honestly didn't understand and had difficulty embracing, leading up to my Bat Mitzvah, which was definitely the more fun part.... but looking back on the experience now, I can see that back then I was clueless... we celebrated Hanukkah as we opened our gifts on Christmas Day... by the fireplace... I married a "nice Jewish guy" and we established a very non-observant Jewish home, raising three beautiful daughters... all was going along nicely, until my father-in-law passed away.... and something changed. And while he was alive and would suggest that we go to Israel... I'm not gonna lie... the rest of us would have preferred to go to Rocking Horse Dude Ranch....

But then strange things began to happen... strange but wonderful things... we all knew that Judaism was so important to Grandpa Jude, my husband Steve's father, and in the back of my mind, I remembered my Grandpa Billy (**was it your Grandpa or your father that read to you? Please clarify and I will adjust this**) used to come and read portions of the Jewish Bible to my sister and me when we were kids as we got ready to go to sleep. ... that image stayed with me... my father passed away in 2008 and Steve's father passed a short time after.... and.... nothing was the same after that.

Steve works at a large bank and someone mentioned to him that he needed to say Kaddish. He was told that there was a place within his office where that was possible to be done, and in the process met a man named Mitch Barnett... he offered to teach Steve "a little bit about Torah... and gratitude... and so the journey began.... in a very organic, timely, welcomed way...

Steve discovered a new path and an enthusiasm for a world that truly was his... and our legacy... but up to then, it was a legacy denied... or at least ignored up to that point. He would come home with a new eagerness to learn... and to share what he learned with me..and whether it was lessons about the five levels of pleasure... with material possessions ranking at the lowest, to finding a connection through Shabbos dinners, Purim parties, and other activities sponsored by this warm, inviting, **Haimish** group of people, our journey began to take us to a place more familiar that we had ever imagined.... we were on our way **HOME**.

About two years later I met a woman named Claire Ginsberg and she had recently returned from Israel. She told me the trip was sort of a "Birthright for Moms" sponsored by the JWRP and a woman named Julie Farkas. I began to study with Julie and I began to LEARN from Julie. I noticed that my sense of gratitude... for even the simplest gifts in life... no longer eluded me and for that I am eternally grateful... through Julie we learned that Mitch Barnett had a twin brother, Simcha, who guided men through their paths to discovery. It was suggested that Mitch attend a Shabbaton... which let to him taking one of the men's trips to Israel... and I went on the women's trip two weeks later. I can't even begin to express how inspired we were and are and how welcoming everyone has been... as we began to learn... to reclaim... and to embrace new friends on our path... this is true gratitude.

And through our new found dedication... from lighting candles to Monday night Parsha classes and everything in between, we noticed an evolution in our daughters as well...while we were firmly and happily ensconced in a lovely yet secular neighborhood, we saw that our kids were on their own journeys influenced by ours... our twenty-two year old daughter, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, made her first trip to Israel. Our middle daughter, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, started "getting it" before we did and has been working with Rabbi Simcha on her participation.... our youngest, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, has declared that she wants to go to a full time Jewish school.... others around us have also rediscovered their faith, and all of this is happening thanks to the dedication and outreach of some incredibly generous people.

I can say, with no small measure of gratitude, that this process of reclamation of our Judaism has been life changing. Was it Grandpa Jude watching over us and giving us a little nudge towards our destiny? Possibly... but one thing I know for certain, and it cannot be over-emphasized in the times in which we live, is that now, more than ever, we must stand firm and proud... and together. (**Do you want to quote Daniel Pearl or is it too maudlin? I think it's very powerful**) In the words of Daniel Pearl, "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish." I want to express my most sincere gratitude to all of the members of this community for encouraging and embracing us... and others.... to live in the light of our true, meaningful birthright. Thank you.