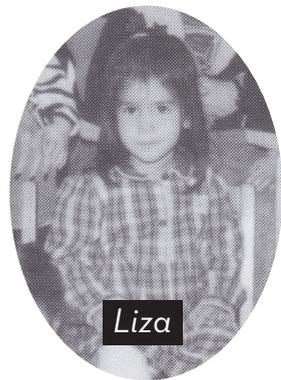
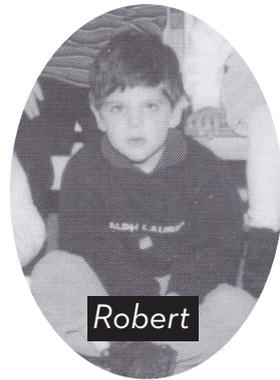


# Telling Our Story

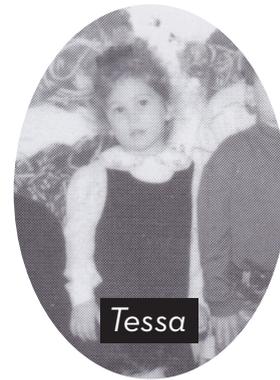
## Enduring Friendship



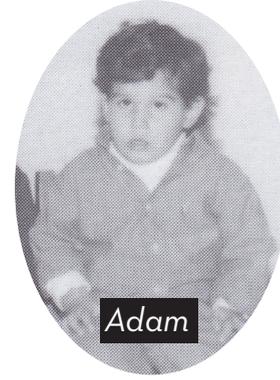
Liza



Robert



Tessa



Adam

Circa 1997, from The Leonard & Syril Rubin Nursery School Yearbook

**I**N OUR FAST-PACED, SOCIAL-MEDIA DRIVEN LIVES, a quick text may now take the place of a meaningful conversation and we can “friend” and “unfriend” people with a click of a button on Facebook. But deep down, we all know how important friendship really is. Our friends help define us. They become our emotional partners through all our ups and downs and share in our ongoing journey through life. And if we are lucky enough to find a few close friends in early childhood, these seminal relationships can often lead to our most significant lifelong bonds.

This is exactly what happened to a group of local kids, who attended the Leonard and Syril Rubin Nursery School at the JCC as preschoolers, became great friends, remained close all through childhood and adolescence, and went on to maintain special bonds as young students in college. They are so close, in fact, that they are all spending a semester abroad at Tel Aviv University, and are there right now, sharing an incredible experience in Israel together.



Israel, 2016: Liza, Robert, Tessa and Adam

“Bonds like the ones we built don’t just happen. They develop over time in caring environments with loving parents and teachers like the ones my friends and I had as kids at the JCC. We celebrated all the Jewish holidays together, dressed up for Purim, and sang together every Friday for Shabbat,” says Tessa Rubach. “We loved our school and the JCC and our experiences there really brought us together. The fact that we were Jewish became an important part of our friendship.

It gave us connecting identities and taught us the importance of sharing common values and interests. So, in a way, I’m not entirely surprised that we wound up in Israel together, continuing to build our friendship with new and meaningful memories.”

“Getting to study and travel in Israel is amazing in itself, but sharing the experience with friends I’ve known all my life makes it even better,” adds Liza Kollender. “We’re meeting new people and making new friends and growing in amazing personal ways. But there is something really special about sharing this with such close longtime friends. It’s like we’re kids again, ready to open up and share everything we’re learning and feeling.”

JCC nursery school friends joining Tessa and Liza at Tel Aviv University are Robert Zeller, Adam Spivack, Gabrielle Abramo, Stacy Schindler, Alec Rogers, Jillian Weintraub and Corey Satnick. For all nine friends, the JCC nursery was the place that provided their first social experiences and many life-shaping memories.



Liza, Robert, Tessa

“Some of my favorite memories are of us swimming together in the indoor pool and making laminated placemats with all of our favorite family photos,” shares Liza. “My mom still has mine to this day!”

roots of our friendship began. I remember Ms. Terry’s class and group singalong where I always tried to squeeze in next to the girls I had a crush on. I’m not sharing any names, though, because some are here on the trip with me (LOL!)”

When the group started public school, Liza, Tessa, Robert and Adam carpooled together and their ties grew deeper. Their families became close as well. They began celebrating holidays together, went to each other’s homes for Shabbat dinners and even vacationed together. Their parents formed their own close ties to the JCC and each other, getting involved as volunteers, contributors, program participants and ultimately lay leaders.

I also have great memories of our parents joining us in class to share in activities and sing Shabbat songs in the playroom. When we got a little older, Tess and I took ballet and drama classes together at the J and I remember how we’d stand together backstage before our shows, trembling with stage fright and excitement at the same time. They were really special times that we still joke about.”

Robert has some special memories as well. “I started nursery school with the others when I was around two and Adam and I have been friends ever since, attending the same schools until we graduated high school. I’ve also stayed close with many in our group, and it is unbelievable to see how far we’ve all come since our early JCC days, where the



“Our shared JCC connection was a big factor in how our closeness progressed,” Liza explains. “We didn’t just become best friends - we became one big family. We all have so many memories that keep us close. A bunch of us went to the Neil Klatskin Day Camp and shared incredible summers together.”

And later, a few of us worked at the camp, one of my happiest JCC experiences. We loved sharing in a program we attended as kids ourselves and loved bonding with all the little kids. But what was really amazing was running into our own preschool teachers, who ran up and hugged us and made such a big deal about how fast we were growing up! They treated us like family and we thought of them as ours.”

In high school, many in this group participated in JCC teen leadership and Jewish philanthropy programs, where they learned the importance of giving back, as well as how to take initiative and voice their opinions. They were entering a new phase of friendship as young, inspired leaders, looking to live the Jewish values they embraced as children.

“The JCC was definitely the place where my friends and I connected with our Jewish roots,” says Adam Spivack. “As a kid, I dressed up for Purim and ran up and down the halls of the JCC shaking my grogger with all my close friends. I don’t think it’s an accident - though it is amazing - that 15 years later we are all in Israel together, studying Ulpan, nearly 6,000 miles from home.”

Liza couldn’t agree more. “Everyone we meet here can’t believe that we’ve known each other our whole lives and it makes us realize that we really have a rare and special history. And for us, it all leads back to the JCC! I’m so excited to be spending five months in Israel together. Whether we are hanging by the pool, the beach, going to class or traveling together, I know we will return home closer than ever and I will always be grateful to the JCC for giving us the gift of lasting friendship.”

Robert, who played on the JCC Maccabi Basketball team in 8th grade and came home with a Bronze, like his friends, is having an incredible experience in Israel. “It’s my first trip and it’s a life-changing experience for me - everything I expected and so much more. Being here makes me so proud to be Jewish and is giving me a whole new perspective on our religion and our practices. It is so great to be sharing this experience with



Tessa, Robert, Liza

my childhood friends. We’ve had great times and great memories - and now, here we are in Israel, making new ones!”

These friends are lucky but as they have learned, it was not luck that brought them together. It was the love of caring parents and the experiences they gained at the Leonard and Syril Rubin Nursery School - a warm, child-friendly environment that brings children together at a very young age to share in a rich learning experience, where they can discover friendships and a love of their shared Jewish heritage that can carry them into adulthood.

“We believe it is important to provide a learning environment that offers a solid education, as well as a connection - an opportunity to inspire lifelong friendships and a love of Judaism,” says Sarah Koffler, Interim Director of the Leonard and Syril Rubin Nursery School. “And that’s what our school at the JCC looks to achieve. Our program integrates strong academic engagement and learning with Jewish values, traditions and culture that create opportunities for children to grow and discover common interests and identities. Friendship really is a key component of Jewish learning and that is something I believe we foster with real success, and it makes us so proud. There’s nothing more rewarding for us as educators than to discover that students who met here have maintained enduring friendships and bonds with their Jewish heritage - like this group who is taking their friendship to new heights in Israel together.”