Profiles in Leadership: Marcie Bachrach

By Julia Olson
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Marcie Bachrach grew up firmly rooted in local Jewish institutions. "I grew up in the JCC," she shared when I asked her about her background here in Cincinnati. "I think we had a pretty typical middle class, Jewish upbringing. My parents were both hardworking." Involvement in Jewish organizations seems to have been the norm as she was growing up. "My mom volunteered with a few different organizations. She was involved in Pioneer Women, which was the predecessor of NA'AMAT, which is associated with Habonim. So, I grew up involved in that. I went to their kibbutz style overnight camp."

It was after this that Marcie began her work with BBYO, once she began high school. "I had a lot of leadership opportunities there and served on the regional board a couple of years. Maybe that was a little foreshadowing of who I was going to become as an adult."

Marcie was also active in her synagogue, where she was an assistant in the classroom and learned how to be a teacher. "Later I was a teacher there when I was in college." Bachrach taught Sunday School at Wise Temple, working primarily with fifth graders. She sipped from a bright pink coffee mug and smiled as she reflected on her time in the classroom "I actually really loved those fifth graders. They're an interesting age group. They were just budding with new intellectual questioning and those first sparks of sophisticated thinking."

After her studies at the University of Cincinnati, Marcie decided to travel abroad for a year. "Honestly, that was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I always support young people when they want to do that kind of travel. I backpacked through Europe, then spent six months in Israel, then traveled to Australia and India. I did serious travel for that year." While on this adventure, a job offer came through. Though she was halfway around the world when she heard about it, the job was right here in Cincinnati. "While I was still in Israel, a friend of mine told me about a position that was available at the JCC. I sat at Kibbutz Sdot Yam in Caesarea Israel, and I handwrote out a resume because I had no access to a typewriter. In my cover letter, I explained why it was all handwritten. That was probably four months before I was back in the States. Then I came home, and I got that job. It took a lot of chutzpah to even have the gumption to send that in. I mean, I knew I was taking a risk, but I was living on a kibbutz and that was how I could make it happen."

That chutzpah that made things like the JCC job happen for Marcie was something that would never leave her. She worked at the J for about ten years, fulfilling a number of different positions. She started as a youth coordinator, doing youth and family programming. She also worked as the director of Camp Livingston. She worked as the day camp director and also facilitated Jewish enrichment for the staff. Her work there is a great example of the longevity of the impact that Cincinnati Jewish institutions have on the community. Marcie began our interview stating that she grew up at the J and here she was, years later, putting energy back into that community and fostering that sense of connectedness for the next generation.

After her work at the J, Marcie took some time off to be a full-time mom. After that, she states, is "when I started my professional volunteer career." She began her volunteer work at the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati. She began as a member of the Planning and Allocations Council and eventually was asked to be the vice president. "Planning and Allocations, for many people in our community, is a great entryway into both volunteerism and learning about our community. The Jewish Federation funds many organizations and programs in our community and Planning and Allocations is that funding arm." Volunteers working on this committee look at grant requests, visit sites to see how the various programs work. "As the Vice President of Planning and Allocations, I was blown away, because I had never thought that I knew a lot about our community, and I did, but I learned how much more there was to learn and had exposure to the incredible breadth of amazing things that we are doing in our community." I asked about the grant process. What goes into this type of decision? "It wasn't just distributing money but looking critically at the programming and helping organizations, either giving ideas about how to use other resources or how to collaborate with other groups. It was a very collaborative approach."

After her work on that committee, Marcie then worked with Cincinnati Hillel. She had joined the board and was then asked to be...