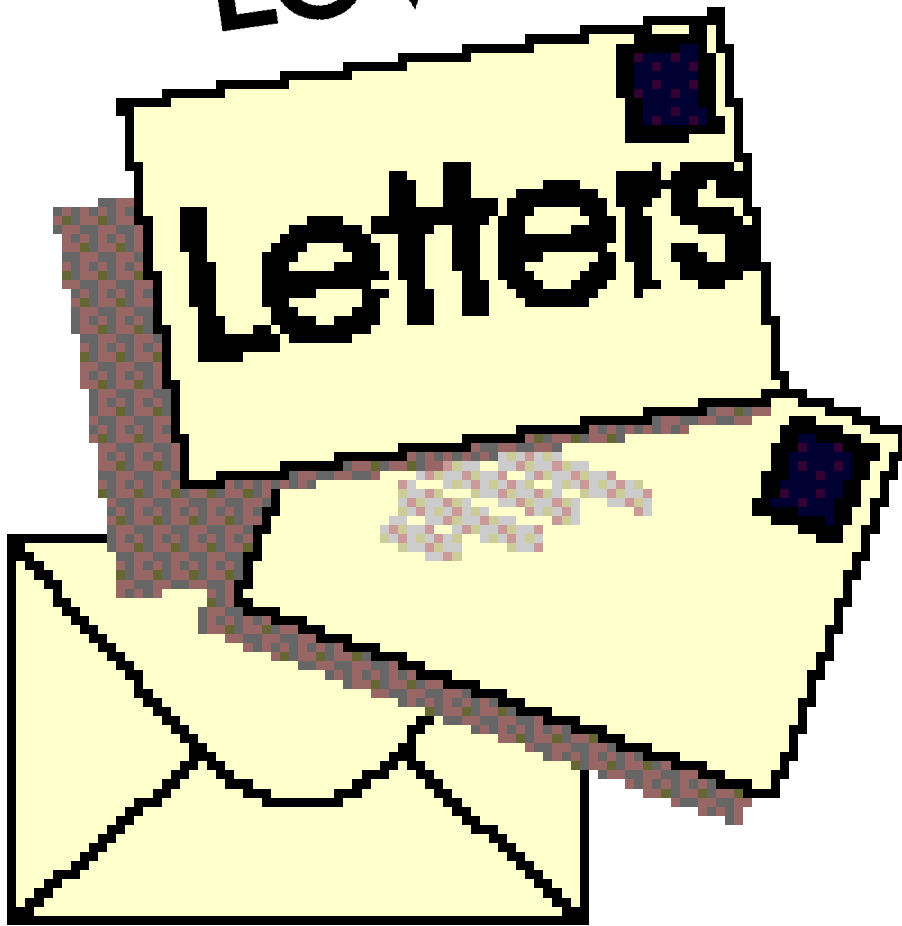


Torah Fund Love



By Lois Silverman

Women's League for Conservative Judaism
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This script is performed radio style at podiums. Two people—preferably a man and woman—can do all the parts, or a different two people can perform each pair of characters. The last group of dialogue, not being letters but a person to person dialogue, can be performed away from the podiums informally, sitting on the edge of the stage. A short pause should be used between letters; a longer pause should be used between sections.

TIME: 20-25 mins.

TORAH FUND LOVE LETTERS

by Lois Silverman

May, 1913

Dear Solomon,

I know it's been only 24 hours since you left for your trip to Baltimore to visit your colleagues there, but I miss you. I know, I hear you saying, "Mathilde, what is it with you? You speak like a newly married woman instead of the middle-aged matron you are!" I know I am not newly married, but every minute you're away I feel something is missing from the space I occupy.

Please remember to use that umbrella I put in your suitcase. And please button your sweater!

Love, Mathilde

May, 1913

Dear Mathilde,

You know me too well, and you know yourself better. I would have told you that you speak like a newly married woman; but my dear, you have it wrong—you forget that to me you will always be the beautiful, intelligent young woman I married what seems like just yesterday. I too miss you when I have time to stop working and think about it.

I have been meeting with rabbis, cantors and students here in Baltimore trying to convince these gentlemen that our school in New York City is as good as any in the world to train rabbis and cantors for congregations in North America. Sometimes I want to give up, but then I remember that you will always be there to encourage me with your down-to-earth arguments and just the right turn of phrase to help me win over any stubborn group.

Yes, I am using my umbrella (even though the sun is shining!) and I am buttoning my sweater as it hangs in the closet (since it is over 70 degrees outside).

Love, Solomon

May, 1913

Dear Solomon,

We all miss you. Our students missed you last *Shabbat* greatly. After dinner, they had to rely on my listening and asking pointed questions instead of you—their chancellor (what a strange English word!) But I did my best to carry on and there were no objections to my being there as there may have been just a few short years ago. If I were not so sure of the sincerity of those around our table last Shabbos, I would have said that I was there because of politeness.

Only one incident marred this evening, my dear. It was when a young man mentioned that some female students wished to receive degrees and become rabbis at the school. There was a short exchange and then a young man asked me what I thought. I replied that I knew at least one lady of whom they were speaking very well. She came from a long line of rabbis and was learned in her own right and observant of all the mitzvot she was required to perform and many that she was not. Further I stated that I did not believe that there was truly any biblical precedent against women leading congregations; but that all such prohibitions were much later in origin and were based upon customs, traditions, and a bit of ignorance.

The debate continued for another two hours. We were all exhausted when the last guest left.

Did I do wrong expressing my opinions like this?

Love, Mathilde

May, 1913

My darling wife.

Of all women, you are the one who could argue any point with any one and win. You are right in most of what you said to these student. What you don't realize or perhaps realize too well is that ignorance will win out over reason every time. That is why we have to educate our fellow Jews. When in our adopted

country women are still not given the right to vote and often even to own their own property, how can we expect to change things in our very closed part of that country. This is a battle we would be unable to win at the present time, but in the future—maybe at least 1/2 a century hence—we will see proud, intelligent women leading congregations as clergy and as lay leaders.

Do not give up your ideals. Keep working for them and I too will keep working to see a better future for all of our fellow Jews no matter what their sex.

Love, Solomon

June, 1913

Dear Solomon,

With you being away, I have had more time on my hands than usual. I feel so useless. You go about campaigning for your cause and your school even when you are not well. and I am here with just my few aches and pains—which seem like nothing—puttering in the kitchen or with a translation of some German text and wondering what am I doing to help you. I cannot stand to be no help to you or your work. There must be something I can do to help you.

Love, Mathilde

June, 1913

Dear Mathilde,

It is still warm in Baltimore. We've been adding to the temperature outside with our long heated debates inside.

I cannot tell you to stop worrying about my health—you are my loving wife!—nor about helping me in my work—you are my helpmate! Rather I say, find others who feel as you, as I am seeking those who think as we do. Have them join with you, my love, to work for some ideal—something practical and achievable—which will strengthen the ties between you and them; learn together; do together; then you will have achieved much.

I must go back to work. Today I need the umbrella and sweater.

Love, Solomon

June, 1913

Dear Solomon,

You are my strength, my dear husband. I have taken your advice and I feel less at odds with myself. Yesterday a few of us women have gotten together. We are a very informal group, but we will have a purpose. We all love Judaism and want to insure its future. So we will work to support the students in the rabbinical school as best we can, and I know that our best will be superb!

We are just a few and not organized as of yet, but we will be many someday with a great organization of our own.

Love always, Mathilde

Brooklyn, NY Oct. 1942

Dear Sol,

Do you know how much I miss you? I can't believe I haven't seen you in five months. I know that it is no pleasure being in Uncle Sam's Army, but remember that we are here waiting for you—me and my ever growing stomach.

Your last letter really upset me. You sounded so depressed. I know that you'll come back changed; I know that death, the sights, the sounds, and the smells must have been awful. Please remember I love you and so will our child!

Love, Matty

Somewhere in Europe, Nov., 1942

Dear Matty,

Don't worry. I'm not as depressed anymore. The guys were great to me although I am the only Jew in the squad. But, hey, you knew that. Sometimes I feel that I'm not only fighting for the US, but I'm fighting for Judaism as well.

After the war, life will be better for us all including little peanut yet unborn.

And I'm not depressed anymore, but now you seem to be. Why?

Love, Solly

Brooklyn, NY Dec., 1942

Dear Solly,

I'm so glad you sound so much more happy. As for me, I'm getting as fat as a house. Peanut, as you call our yet to be born child, is going to be a strong, single-minded person. This child is kicking me day and night. And yes, I guess I'm depressed about being so lonely without you or my family.

But I should be better now. A woman from downstairs, Edna, asked me to come with her to a meeting of a women's group yesterday. It meets at the synagogue and is called Sisterhood. And boy, what a great name! They are like one great big family. They all made a big fuss about me and another woman there who looks like she was about to give birth to a whale. These ladies do all sorts of things. They even learn Torah in Hebrew.

Another thing. They are starting a drive to raise money for the Seminary and scholarships there. They call it Torah Fund. It's not a fund to buy or repair Torahs, but to help strengthen Judaism. I think they said this fund has been around since 1934, (I found out that there are many more Sisterhoods around the continent who are linked together as National Women's League). Imagine, now these women hope to raise about \$10,000 from all over the country. Anyway, they are asking each of us to donate whatever we can—they hope to give special recognition to those who give \$6.11. 611 is supposed to be the numeral equivalent of "Torah" in gematria.

I know it is a large sum, but I have saved it from the salary I got from the factory before I got too big to work. I know I saved at least that by not going to the movies for months (I haven't been able sit comfortably for long enough to see a movie in six months) and not having to buy clothes (I've been wearing the same maternity outfit for six months). My parents are giving us a crib and baby clothes; your parents are giving us the diapers and are paying for the doctor and hospital—so we don't have to worry about that.

Well, I'm going to do it—no matter what you think.

Remember this is 1942!

Love, Matty

Brooklyn, NY March 20, 1943

Dear Solly,

I know you can't write. I can only imagine how hard it is for you. But I'm writing with the best news. You are a father of a 6 lb. 8 oz. boy. Robert Haim—Revuen Chaim after my grandfather who died in the first World War. He has your eyes and mouth!

The *bris* was held at the hospital, and we had the rabbi from the synagogue there besides the mohel. He is a wonderful man; he graduated from JTS a few years ago. He and his wife have been great to me and organized a nosh after the *bris* with the Sisterhood ladies doing the cooking.

My mother just went home with Dad—two weeks is enough for Dad with a new baby around. Your mother is coming back tomorrow to help out. We'll be taking the baby to his first check up at the doctor.

I pray that you are home before Robert is much bigger.

Love, Matty

Somewhere in Europe April 20, 1943

Dear Matty,

It's been a while since I could write. It's been brutal here—I can't say where since they'll cross out the name of the place if I wrote it anyway. I can't say I've seen much action, but as bad as the fighting is, the waiting is worse.

Now that our son has been born, I don't know how to write down on paper the smile that I have on my face; I'm beaming with pride all the time that I'm not teary-eyed that I can't be with you and the little one.

Robert is a great name But Robert is too big a name for such a little guy; he'll be Little Bobby to me.

It seems so right that you gave to Torah Fund. It is just a small way of repaying the kindness of the rabbi, his wife, and the ladies of the Sisterhood. With what I hear is going on in Europe, I also think it's a way of saying to those beauts (if I use the word I want to use the censors would blacken it out) that we Jews will survive and become stronger. Someday, God willing, we'll do more.

Love, Solly

Brooklyn, NY May 6, 1944

Dear Solly,

I can't believe I haven't seen you in so long. I know that any day you'll be discharged from Uncle Sam's Army and then we can go on with out lives.

Little Bobby is growing big and keeping me busy all the time.

I'm still working for the Sisterhood and even learning how to read Hebrew. They supply a baby sitter for me and the rest of the other mothers so that we can be part of the group. And boy, do I need to see an adult after spending so much time with Little Bobby.

I was asked to contribute a bit more this year for Torah Fund. I felt funny saying I couldn't increase my pledge, but I know it will be a struggle just managing the \$6.11.

Your mother and father are fine. My mom and dad send their love.

Better go and mail this while Robert Haim is not fussing.

Love, Matty

Somewhere in Europe Feb. 10, 1945

Dear Matty,

I miss you, and Little Bobby, and my mom and dad, and your mom and dad. Things are going better our here (still can't say where!) The waiting now seems much better than the fighting—I guess that's what happens when you become an old, hardened soldier.

This Shabbos I met a rabbi who heard about you! Yes, my dear wife, you are famous for all the special things you have done for Sisterhood, Women's League and Torah Fund! Well, maybe not famous all over America, but he said that he came to speak on behalf of the Seminary for your Sisterhood and you were the m.c. Should I be jealous? Don't worry, I still love you and I am very proud of all you do.

Better go. I have an early wake-up tomorrow.

Love, Solly

Brooklyn April 23, 1945

Dear Solly,

It's over. You'll be home soon. I put money away in the Torah Fund *pushka* I got from Sisterhood as a way to say "thank you."

I'm so excited!

Love, Matty

Near Chicago April, 1950

Dear Matty,

How are you, Little Bobby and Linda? I miss you so, and I'm sorry I'll be missing another Shabbos. This job has only one benefit—the salary. If it wasn't for that, I'd stop selling on the road and be home

with you both all the time.

I have been invited to attend services at one of my customer's synagogues. It has over 500 families. Imagine finding such a large community of Jews in the styx! After services I'm going to have dinner at the synagogue—it's sponsored by its Sisterhood. I guess that is about as close to home as it gets.

By the way, the rabbi is a graduate of the Seminary and so is the Cantor. Put a dollar in the Torah Fund Torah Fund *pushka* for me.

Love, Solly

Fair Lawn, NJ May 12, 1950

Dear Solly,

I hope this letter reaches you at your hotel before Shabbos. I need your advice.

The Sisterhood has again offered to make me a vice president. I don't know if I should take it or think up another excuse why I can't do it. My job would be to help raise funds for the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Well, I'm going to do it—no matter what you think.

Remember this is 1950!

Love, Matty

Pittsburgh, Dec. 10, 1953

Dear Matty,

I'm in another hotel for another Shabbos. Miss you all.

How is Linda's cold? Is Bobby liking Hebrew School any better? Did he get sent out of the classroom again?

Rabbi Klein says hello. You met him last year at the Women's League Convention. He's the one who gave the talk on "Why Sisterhood."

Better post this before I go to synagogue. Kiss the kids.

Love, Solly

Fair Lawn, NJ Dec 17, 1953

Dear Solly,

All is so-so here at home. Linda's cold is really an allergy. And Bobby got a new Hebrew teacher. He's a graduate of the Seminary and seems to know what he's doing; Bobby even comes home from Hebrew school smiling and talking about what he's learning.

Also, don't worry, but I'm worried about my mom and dad. I don't think it's anything, but I've called my friend, Adele, from the Sisterhood back home. She said she'd look in for me and let me know how bad it really is.

Love, Matty

Omaha Dec. 30, 1955

Dear Matty,

I thought this promotion was going to allow me to be home more. I don't like the idea that you are doing all the work for Little Bobby's *Bar mitzvah* while you are doing all the work for that new Sisterhood project of yours. I hope you are getting enough rest.

And Bobby told me you were going to become advisor to a youth group—USY. (All these initials are driving me crazy. FCC, NBC, CBS, ABC, etc., etc. It was bad enough in the 30's! They've got to stop using them—soon will be talking only in initials)

Tell Bobby that the Cantor will get him through the *haftorah* and I'll help him with the *brachot*.

Love, Solly

Jan. 10, 1956

Dear Solomon S. Shacter,

What do you mean YOU'LL help him with the *brachot*? Haven't I been studying Hebrew for more than ten years? Don't you think I could get up there and lead services myself if they'd allow me?

Well, I'm going to be chair of the Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall campaign AND I'll help Robert Shacter prepare for his *bar mitzvah*—no matter what you think.

Remember this is 1956!

Love, Mathilde S. Shacter

Salt Lake City January 14, 1956

Dear Mathilde,

You may tell my wife Matty that I know it is 1956. And that it was an oversight on the part of an over anxious father speaking when I wrote about helping with the preparation for our son's *bar mitzvah*. No slight was intended.

Also tell her that I am very proud of her in taking on the chairmanship of the new Sisterhood's Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall campaign. Please ask her who will chairing the Torah Fund committee?

Further I think she will make a very good advisor to the USY, the FCC, or even the CIA.

And when is Linda starting to learn for her *bat mitzvah*?

Love, Solomon S.

Fair Lawn Feb. 20, 1956

Dear husband,

Both children are learning well. The *bar mitzvah* boy has mastered *haftorah*, *maftir*, and *brachot*.

The Resident Hall campaign is going well as is Torah Fund. Sisterhood has raised our quota for the building of a residence hall for women studying at the seminary. And with the way things are going, our daughter may be one of the first to live there.

The future *bat mitzvah* girl is doing very well. She has ALREADY mastered the Hebrew alphabet and her *bat mitzvah* is over 6 years away.

Your wife. Matty

San Francisco February 25, 1956

Dear Matty,

Will call Saturday night. Too busy to even think about the upcoming *bat mitzvah*. So glad you are handling it all including the religious aspect—you are really keeping the *mitzvah* in *bat mitzvah*!

How's the new combined Torah Fund/Residence Hall campaign going? Did the program go well?

Better go—talk to you after *Shabbat*

Love, Solly

Fair Lawn May 6, 1956

Dear Solly,

Wish they had phones in the car or that we could carry them around with us while we were away from home. That way I'd be able to ask your advice on things. Maybe someday!

They want me to be Branch Torah Fund/Residence Hall chairwoman. At least the *bat mitzvah* is over. By the way, the Cantor said Linda is a natural and too bad the Seminary isn't ordaining women rabbis or cantors.

Maybe some day.

Love, Matty

London May 10, 1963

Dear Matty,

Sorry I missed your call. Being overseas can be a nuisance.

And why aren't you jumping at the chance to be Branch TF/RH chairwoman!

After all this is 1963! Why shouldn't you do it!

Love, Solly

New York March 12, 1975

Dear Matt & Sally,

I know you are too young to read this letter, but I'm sure Bobby or Cheryl will read it to you. You can tell them for me that it's ok for you to call your parents by their first names since all the kids are doing it now including us students at JTS.

I hope your parents are fine! You must be growing big! Whose bigger Matt or Sally? Sorry I asked—being twins you're going to get all sorts of questions growing up. Any way, I've been too busy hitting my head against the wall to write them.

You see I've gone about as far as I can appealing the decision of the faculty here—I can't be ordained. They will allow me to continue my studies though. I'll get a Ph.D. in Religious studies and then teach.

One good development, the Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall—mom's baby—will open by 1976 so I'll be able to live there for at least one year.

Writing these words I forget how much I miss them. You would have loved your grandparents. They worked hard all their lives. It was ironic that when your grandpa Solly retired and he and your grandma Matty started to do things together they should be killed together in that car crash.

On a happier note, I'll be coming to see you soon with gifts.

Hugs,

Aunt Linda

Fair Lawn Sept, 1979

Dear Little Sister,

Matt and Sally are fine. Cheryl is busy with doing her Sisterhood thing.

Hope your new job at the University of Judaism is going well. We're all very proud of you. You're a big professor now! Mom and Dad would have been proud of you!

And someday you'll be a great rabbi when they finally make it official by ordaining you.

Love, Your big brother Bobby

Los Angeles Oct., 1988

Dear Matt and Sally,

Hope you too are studying your Hebrew school work. Never hurts to be tops in your class!

Glad you've decided to go to Camp Ramah next summer. Your grandmother would be so proud—I know your mom is. All their work for Torah Fund helps the Camps, too. Also helps the Jewish Museum in New York City and so much more. Do I sound like a commercial? Hey, I'm a Benefactor myself now!

Tell your mom to keep up the good work for Sisterhood—like she wouldn't, right?!?. The TF/RH campaign is doing a lot here in LA to help give us a REAL campus. We're small, but we, like you two, are growing everyday.

Since they opened the MSRH in '76 and Goldsmith Hall in '78, we in LA felt slighted. But WL is building a residence hall here, too. It'll be dedicated in 1989 in time for your *b'nai mitzvah*!

Give my love to your parents and tell your mom to keep working for TF since I can see the difference it makes.

Love, Aunt Linda

Fair Lawn Oct., 1989

Dear Linda—my sister the rabbi

Glad you got home safely. After you hung up last night, I remembered that I never told you that. I guess the excitement of your being ordained got to me. It was so long in coming and so well desired.

The twins were even more excited by the whole day than I was. At the ceremony, Matt told me he wanted to be a rabbi; you know Sally always wanted to be like her Aunt Linda.

Cheryl has mixed feelings about the occupations her almost 14 year olds want to pursue. Her contact with the people at the Seminary and UJ has given her an understanding of the difficulties preparing for such a career including the cost of the education and the so public life of a Jewish leader. She knows we've put money away for the twins education since before they were born; also there's the money from Mom and Dad, but she doesn't think that will be enough.

Well, enough of this negative talk that is only spoiling your big day.

Speak to you soon

Love, Bobby

To: Matt@uj.edu

From: Sally@jtsa.edu

Date: Sept 1 02

I just arrived here at JTS. Can't believe I finally got here. Dad drives like someone who drove a truck—or is that just how they teach us to drive in NJ? "Get out of my way. I'm coming through!"

Hope you're getting settled in. How are the palm trees out your room window? Or do they have them at University of Judaism?

Love, Sally

To: Sally@jtsa.edu

From: Matt@uj.edu

Date: Sept 1 02

You are always the clown. I can imagine what kind of cantor you're going to make. Just so long as we don't have to be on the same *bimah* together.

Mom drove very well, by the way. I have no complains about her, but those LA drivers!!! To use the old Irish phrase—*Oy gevalt!*

The room is fine. I know that classes start Monday. I'll have to do make-up work in Hebrew, but that's OK.

In five years I'll be your Rabbi Matty, but I'm in the dark of what happens tomorrow.

Love, Matty

To: Matt@uj.edu

From: Sally@jtsa.edu

Date: Sept 1 02

OK, you dumb brother of mine. Relax. You'll do well on that exam. Just remember that "i" comes before "e" except after "c."

Love, Sally

To: Sally@jtsa.edu
From: Matt@uj.edu
Date: Sept 1 02

Funny! English I kind of know, it's the Aramaic that is throwing me.

I've started teaching a class in a religious high school. I love it except—were we as antsy? We certainly weren't as knowledgeable as they are.

Love, Matt

To: Matt@uj.edu
From: Sally@jtsa.edu
Date: Feb 1 03

Dear Matt

I have asked to have a plaque put on a corral in the Seminary Library. Just joking! I'm never out of there. It's not only when I have to do work, but I just love the books.

By the way, I did find the plaque from Mom's Sisterhood on one of the book stacks. I went to look for a book and there it was just in my face saying "we're with you so you got to do well." More people telling me I have to do well!

Maybe when the weather gets better I'll go outside and sit in the quad. Only then I know I'll hear the voices of the Sisterhood ladies who had the quad redone telling me the same thing—"we're with you so you got to do well." Maybe one of them can take my Talmud exam next week!

Love, Sally

To: Sally@jtsa.edu
From: Matt@uj.edu
Date: April 30 03

Coming East. Have a conference at JTSA. They're putting us up at Goldsmith. Make no plans for Monday night after your classes.

Love, Matt

To: Matt@uj.edu
From: Sally@jtsa.edu
Date: April 30 03

OK, big shot

I knew you were coming in. I have the honor of davening for the conference in the Women's League's Egalitarian Synagogue. You better be there or I'll tell Mom and Dad—who will be there, if you please!

You haven't seen me in action since we were undergraduates. And you haven't seen the Women's League's Synagogue. It is a spiritual oasis in the noisey city. The light streams through the stained glass windows onto the whole room. It changes as if our voices in prayer somehow control it. Our spirits soar in prayer and the light—even on an overcast day—enfolds us in a glow. It almost makes you want to study more Kabbala!

Your conference will be held in the new Women's League Educational Pavilion in the Krispke Tower Center. Women's League has really done it again. The meeting rooms are great. Even the hall ways are wonderful. There's great original art throughout—works I'd love to have in my room.

[INSERT CURRENT OR UPDATED MATERIAL ON WL PROJECTS HERE]

Don't forget to go to the computer center.

See you Monday morning for services.

Sally

Sally: Well, how'd I do leading the service?

Matty: Good.

Sally: Don't be too enthusiastic, brother of mine.

Matty: OK, you were great, fantastic.

Sally: Not wonderful!

Matty: You *davened* like no one has ever *davened* before—except me!

Sally: (Hits brother in arm) So what do you want to do now?

Matty: No more touring. I've seen the tower, the library, the Melton Institute, the Ramah Office...

Sally: The Women's League Synagogue

Matty: Did the quad, too!

Sally: Vegging in the quad isn't an activity!

Matty: It is after all the work and *shelpping* around.

Sally: Did you see the plaques?

Matty: I saw the whole family's legacy.

Sally: Be nice, they go all the way back to Grandma Matty.

Matty: I am being nice. Legacy doesn't mean a bad thing. Would we be here without the gifts from all the family and Sisterhood ladies? I know it's a big deal. But I have a problem.

Sally: And what could that be?

Matty: How are we going to top them?

Sally: That's the point, stupid! "You aren't obliged to finish the task, neither are you free to neglect it." You just got to do your best.

Matty: I guess!

Sally: We have great examples to follow and...

Matty: We only have to do our best!

Sally: Love yah, Matty!

Matty: Love yah, too, Sally!