



Michael Eselun is an oncology chaplain in Los Angeles who is also a gifted storyteller. He wove together anecdotes about the ways in which our encounters with strangers need

not always seem frightening, and can, in fact, be unexpectedly transformative.

His message brought me back to a time when a story – a series of them actually – did exactly that for me. I was in my last year of college, working on my senior thesis about the role of storytelling in shaping Jewish tradition. Someone gave me a cassette tape (yes, I went to college that long ago) that was part of a series called “Audio Explorations of Jewish Culture.” The title was “Stories Make The World.” The creators were part of a San Francisco based ensemble called A Travelling Jewish Theater (ATJT).

The new, innovative interpretations of traditional tales and the reflections on the overall significance of



the bounty of our lives is overwhelming. From exquisite nature right outside our doors to endless musical, artistic and culinary offerings

in the Bay Area, to the gorgeous multi-cultural world that we find ourselves in, it is dizzying to understand our luck that we get to live here at this time. We practice our faith in joy and freedom and we are passing down a love of Judaism to our children in ways that many of us didn't get to experience as children. We are blessed.

At the same time, the world is more divisive than ever, and people are turning less and less to synagogue affiliation for comfort and connection. The Bay Area is one of the least affiliated and least engaged Jewish communities in the entire country. There are plenty of Jews living among us, but most of them have not discovered that belonging to a synagogue really does