

Muriel H. Beissinger
President: 1989-1992

As Rodeph Shalom's first woman president, Muriel Beissinger served from 1989 to 1992 at a time when a female synagogue president was a rarity and after serving as vice president and the only woman on the synagogue's Board of Trustees.



A stay-at-home mom to three children, Beissinger was president of the Cheltenham School Board and the RS Sisterhood, taking leadership roles, but never thinking of herself as a feminist. As her son Mark describes her, "Her religiosity was not deeply based in a sense of ethnicity, but rather in what she saw as the universal message of Judaism, its sense of justice, and its moral principles."

Beissinger was born in Atlantic City, attended Temple University, and married Walter Beissinger, a refugee from Nazi Germany who escaped after Kristalnacht. Shortly after her tenure at Rodeph Shalom, she moved to Jacksonville, Florida where she lived until her passing in 2002. At her memorial service at RS, Mark spoke of "her sense of righteousness and strong belief in herself...She saw the world not in grays, but in blacks and whites, bringing to each situation her strong sense of morality and sense of fairness and justice...She saw herself not just as a Jew, but most assertedly as a Reform Jew, and she was very adamant about this." Her daughter Susan described her mother's strong relationships with the clergy and "respected other leaders and congregants even when they strongly disagreed."

During her term, Beissinger's challenges came from working with a male-dominated Board and a difficult rabbinic transition. Her most lasting legacy was her pioneer activism to support the institutions that meant the most to her.

Written by Michael Hauptman