

## The Chatanim

Firstly, we want to thank the Honorary Officers for selecting us to our new roles for the day. It feels particularly special as the first to perform them on Rabbi Kurzer's watch and the last to do so from within the European Union - maybe.

It is traditional in Pinner for the chatanim to entertain everyone on Simchat Torah evening. A comedy sketch could be the order of the day. A song and dance routine might be expected. Perhaps a mini operetta, one where we encourage you to join in with a chorus. Whilst sticklers for tradition in many ways, we can put your mind at rest. We won't be singing.

***Or, worse still, dancing.***

Instead, we're going to tell you a story; well, two stories.

**Graham.**

It was Shabbat Ki Tetze, mid-September, and we had been told that we would be chatanim. I was sitting in shul desperately looking for inspiration for what to say this evening. As I've said, we're sticklers for tradition, and also creatures of habit. Whilst none of us has our own seats in shul, mine is three rows back, four seats in. Anne tells me that things are different on the other side of the mechitza, whereas we men are less flexible. It doesn't matter to us if friends or family are sitting elsewhere, or even right by us, we don't sit with them. We sit where we always do. Come what may. Whoever is there. Three rows back, four seats in in my case. So, there I was sitting, when someone I don't immediately recognise comes into shul and sits three rows back, in the first seat. Two empty seats between us.

### **Graham.**

Is he a local? Should I recognise him? Should I talk to him? He's three seats away, so really no need. It's probably a bit intrusive. I thought about it for a bit. No, he definitely didn't look familiar. I decided it probably wasn't a breach of the unwritten Pinner shul-goers protocol just to wish him Shabbat shalom, though it meant stepping across two empty seats to do so. As I was doing so, I was mindful of the visit to Pinner by the secret shul-goer last year as reported in the JC. She found us to be a very friendly community, a view she largely formed by the warm welcome and attention she received from Penny Grossman. Inspired by the by-line that every community needs a Penny, I thought I'd not only wish him "Shabbat Shalom" but back it up with "are you visiting?". When he returned my "Shabbat shalom", I heard an accent that didn't sound local.

### **Graham.**

The visitor explained that he was over from Israel staying in Jonathan Richmond's apartment. Did I know him? I explained that I didn't. Further conversation indicated that he meant Jonathan Charlton. The surname connoting quite a different part of London. We exchanged further pleasantries; about Pinner, the shul, the Charlton family. I then realised I had breached the unwritten Pinner shul-goers protocol as I was now sitting three rows back but only two seats in. He asked my name and then he said something to me that no-one had ever said to me before.

### **Graham.**

He said - "I know an Erdunast". This happened to my son Paul when a speaker said it to him in a similar fashion nearly 15 years ago when he was at his

school's Jewish Society. That event led to us meeting four cousins of whom I was previously unaware, three in Israel and one in Australia. In my nearly 60 years on the planet, no-one had said it to me. Since the Shoah, there are not many of us Erdunasts about.

Nati, for that was his name, told me that he had known Shlomo Erdunast since they were about ten years old, Shlomo had become a well-known national hero during the Yom Kippur War and they were still good friends. I explained that I remembered Shlomo's parents from the 1970s although I didn't clearly remember Shlomo; I somehow even remembered the name of the street in B'nei Beraq where they had lived.

The service hadn't yet progressed as far as Ein Kamocha, but I had travelled back four decades and sideways two seats.

So why am I telling you all this? What did this experience teach or give me?

**Graham.**

I learned, firstly, you don't have to do something very different, go too far out of your comfort zone, for good things to happen.

I am probably preaching to the converted looking round this room; but I'd urge you to get one more bit involved in things you are close to, in particular in this lovely community; join the Kiddush rota, the security rota, come along occasionally to a midweek minyan. But most of all, be a Penny and look out for and greet people you don't think you know.

Secondly, whether I end up meeting Shlomo or not, that initial Shabbat Shalom led to me hearing the phrase "I know an Erdunast" for the very first time.

Thirdly, the shul didn't look or feel that different from three rows back, two seats in.

And, fourthly and most importantly of all, having started Shabbat Ki Tetze wondering what I would talk about tonight, I have cobbled a speech out of it!

**We would like to thank you, Hilary and Anne, for your unstinting support. Whatever it is that we may have done that has led to this honour, it is largely down to you. Where we have gotten anything wrong, caused offence or upset to others, it's only because we didn't listen to you. Finally, thank you for being central to organising this year's Simchat Torah celebrations.**

***THANK YOU ALL FOR INDULGING US.***

But tonight is not just about us. There is at least one birthday boy in the house. Do join me in wishing David Silverstone a very happy birthday, and a happy birthday to anyone else celebrating today.

Thank you again.