

## **BEING ASKED TO BECOME HAZZAN AT EZRA BESSAROTH**

On the second day of the Shavuot Holiday, in June, 1965, as we were having lunch at my parents' home after synagogue services at the new Sephardic Bikur Holim, I heard a knock at the door. It happened to be the then president of the Ezra Bessaroth, Bob Franco. He greeted the family and asked if he could see me on the outside porch. He indicated that he would like me to try out at the Ezra Bessaroth for Rosh Ashana and Yom Kippur. I was flabbergasted. I tried to beg off, pleading that I wasn't experienced enough, and that I had had no training (which was true). However, Bob was very persuasive and convinced me to give it a try. One month before Rosh Ashana, I was asked to meet with a select group of people in the tiny school office below the social hall at Congregation Ezra Bessaroth. Reverend Behar, the retiring hazzan, and a few others were already gathered in the office. I was asked by Reverend Behar to sing the a particular selection from the Rosh Ashana liturgy, the Nishmat. I sang it for him, exactly as I had sung it and heard it sung for many years at the Bikur Holim. When I finished, Reverend Behar said, "our people

won't go for it". I was shocked, but told him, "I'm sorry, that's the only one I know." "Sing the Kedushah of the Shahrit", the Reverend asked. I did as he asked. Again came the same answer "our people won't go for it". "Reverend", I said, "I can't promise anything, but if you will record those two pieces for me, I'll try to learn them".

As it turned out, having a family and working full time for Boeing, I had no time to learn the two selections, which were difficult enough in their own right. I did perform the Rosh Ashana services. Although everyone at the Ezra Bessaroth who greeted me after services was very nice to me and indicated how much they enjoyed the services, I was not too sure how well accepted I had been. I called Bob Franco after Rosh Ashana and told him that I would not be coming back for Yom Kippur. Bob would hear nothing of it. "First of all, you promised me", he said, "and second, I think you did a nice job on Rosh Ashana; the people loved you". I wasn't any too sure of that, but I gave in and performed the Yom Kippur services. Afterwards, I heard nothing whatsoever from anyone at the Ezra Bessaroth for a few months, thinking that they were going to continue

their search. That is, until the first week of March, 1966. Bob Franco called and told me that I had been hired as hazzan and they wanted me to start immediately. That was the beginning of a long, warm, and caring relationship between me and Congregation Ezra Bessaroth.