

A RABBI, A MINISTER AND A PRIEST WALK INTO A BAR

THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF RABBI JAMES RUDIN

James (Jim) Rudin and his wife, Marcia Kaplan Rudin, moved from New York City to Sanibel Island 18 years ago. After living at Punta Rassa Condos for the past four years, they joined us at Cypress Cove in July 2021.

Rabbi Jim was born in Pittsburgh, but his family moved to Alexandria, Virginia when his father, a dentist, was called to active military duty in 1941. Following World War II, the family settled permanently in Alexandria.

Jim graduated from George Washington University with academic distinction where he was a member of several honor societies, an elected student government officer, and a member of the track and wrestling teams. His wrestling weight back then was an amazing 127 pounds!

In 1960 he received his rabbinical ordination from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, where he was student body president during his senior year.

MILITARY SERVICE

For the next two years, Jim served as a U.S. Air Force Chaplain in Japan and Korea, where he was the only Jewish chaplain south of Tokyo and Seoul. Itazuke on Japan's southern island of Kyushu was Jim's home Air Force base, but each month he also served the Jewish personnel at Iwakuni Marine Corps Air Facility, the U.S. Naval base at Sasebo in Japan, Osan and Kunsan Air Bases in Korea, and the U.S. Public Health Service Atomic Bomb Casualty Commissions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

During Jim's years at Itazuke Air Force base, he worked closely with five Christian chaplains in a building whose worship space was utilized for Jewish, Catholic and Protestant religious services. His two closest Christian chaplain colleagues were a Southern Baptist minister and a Roman Catholic priest. "I spent a lot of hours providing accurate information about Jews and Judaism to my fellow chaplains. At the same time, I learned about the similarities and differences among the various Christian denominations and communities." Those experiences sparked his interest in interreligious relations.

INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS CAREER

Upon returning to civilian life, Jim served as a rabbi in Reform synagogues in Kansas City, Missouri and Champaign, Illinois. While in the "Land of Lincoln," he was a University of Illinois graduate student in American History.

In 1968, he joined the senior staff of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), America's oldest human rights organization. As the AJC's Interreligious Affairs Director, Rabbi Rudin became a "Jewish Ambassador" to Christians in the vital effort of combatting antisemitism and building strong, constructive human bridges of mutual respect, knowledge, and understanding among the world's religious communities.

During his AJC tenure, he met Pope John II twelve times (at the Vatican, in the U.S., and in Israel) and Pope



Shaking hands with Pope John II.

Benedict XVI twice (in Washington DC and in Israel). Rabbi Rudin likes to say that during his AJC career of 32 years, he spent more time in churches, basilicas, cathedrals, monasteries, Christian colleges, universities, seminaries, retreat centers and Islamic mosques than he spent inside his family's synagogue in Manhattan. As part of his work, he made 43 round-trip trans-Atlantic flights to the Vatican and



Meeting Pope Benedict XVI, with Sarah Bloomfield, Director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

other places in Europe, and to Jordan, Lebanon and Israel. He especially enjoyed leading interreligious missions to Israel, where Christians, both lay and clergy, could "walk in the steps of Jesus the Jew," but also witness the modern dynamism and excitement of visiting the world's only Jewish state. Closer to home, Jim was the co-founder of the Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies at Saint Leo University located near Tampa.

Jim numbered among his professional personal friends "more Cardinals than are on either a football or baseball team." Three of his closest associates were Cardinal John O'Connor of New York, Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, and Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago. His Protestant partners included the leaders of the National and World Councils of Churches, "main

line" Protestant denominations, African-American churches, and Evangelical congregations, including those of Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. He also had close personal relationships with Eastern Orthodox Christians and Muslim imams in America.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Though much of his career was spent in other countries, Rabbi Rudin has a strong history of working for human rights at home. In 1964 he participated with Christian clergy in a week-long voting rights campaign drive in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and another one in 1984 in Georgia. He was arrested in New York City in front of the Soviet Consulate for protesting for the freedom of Soviet Jews. During his career, Rabbi Jim met Presidents Harry Truman, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush. He was a member of the commission that pressed for the establishment of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday as a federal holiday. Evergreen, the nondenominational chapel at Camp David, was dedicated in 1991. Jim was the only Jewish member of the committee that built, with private funds, that chapel. As the planning for the facility progressed, Jim "...expressed my conviction that the chapel should contain no permanently



With President Bush at the dedication of Evergreen Chapel.

displayed symbols or representations of any particular faith. ... (B)ecause leaders from other nations, many of them not Christians, are frequently guests at Camp David, it was imperative their unique religious sensibilities be respected. ... I reminded my chapel committee colleagues that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, an Orthodox Jew, and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, a devout Muslim, had hammered out a peace agreement between their two countries at Camp David."

SHARING HIS KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Rudin has written, co-authored or co-edited 17 books, including two that he wrote with Marcia. In 2016, Jim was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Biography for his book, *Pillar of Fire: A Biography of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise*. His subject was the most prominent American rabbi during the first half of the 20th Century, who was a close confidant of

U.S. Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. His latest book, an autobiography titled *The People in the Room: Rabbis, Nuns, Pastors, Popes and Presidents*, is scheduled for publication in 2022.

Jim is a columnist for Religion News Service and Reform Judaism.org; his commentaries have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Christianity Today*, *National Catholic Reporter*, and many other publications. In addition, he has appeared on major media in the U.S. and Europe.

PERSONAL LIFE

Jim is an avid crossword puzzle devotee and a Washington Nationals baseball team fan. His sense of humor is witty and dry, and his vast store of knowledge serves him well at Tuesday Night Trivia.

Marcia and Jim married in 1969, and they are the parents of two adult daughters: Eve, a rabbi in Larchmont, New York, and Jennifer, the animation entertainment agent with International Creative Management (ICM). The Rudins have one granddaughter, 21-year-old Emma Mollie.



The Rudins celebrated their 50th anniversary in 2019.

Not to be outdone by Jim's renown, Marcia has a national reputation herself. She grew up in Champaign, Illinois. Her father, eminent sociologist Max Kaplan, was a professor at the University of Illinois. Marcia graduated from Boston University with Phi Beta Kappa honors and received her Master's degree in Philosophy and Religion at Columbia University. Since the mid-1970s, a few years before Jonestown, Marcia has been a prominent leader in the global counter-cult movement (and therein lies another story!). She is also a published novelist and playwright, with many staged productions in the U.S. In 1980, Jim and Marcia published the first book for general audiences on the cult problem: *Prison or Paradise? The New Religious Cults*. When you see Jim and Marcia around our campus, be sure to say "hello". In return, you will enjoy their warm smiles and interesting conversation.

—Marsha Addis