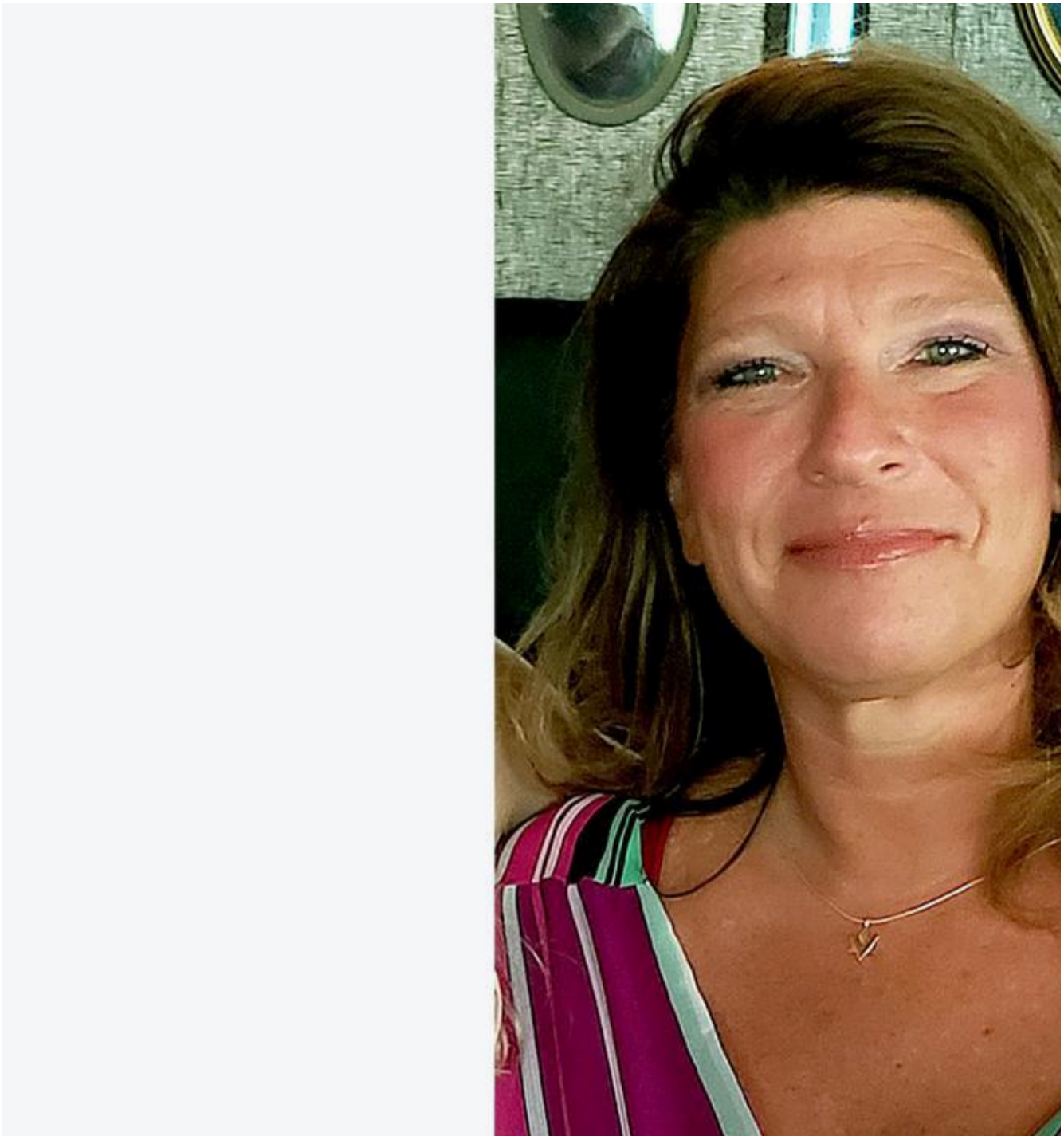


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Local View Column: How should I feel about synagogue fire?

Written By: Joli R. Shablott | Sep 19th 2019 - 2pm.



My father attended Adas Israel Congregation synagogue in his later years because it was the only Orthodox Shul left in Duluth. He grew up attending Tifereth Israel, which then transitioned into Temple Israel. I grew up attending Temple Israel and have the memories of a rich religious history that included the people as well as artifacts gathered from the “old country” and added to the “new country.” There is so much history in Duluth with the Jewish community.

I no longer live in Duluth, but I stay connected by reading the News Tribune and other local news coverage.

I will not forget the feeling I had when I saw the pictures of Adas Israel in flames on Sept. 9. It felt like my gut had been kicked; a wave of nausea hit me. I had just been to Adas Israel in 2017 and saw the beautiful Bima, the now-lost stained glass windows, and all the history of the families who shared it for over 100 years.

How do I as a Jewish person not immediately go to the possibility that the destruction was the result of a hate crime of anti-Semitism? It was the first thing that came to my mind.

But then you read and watch the unveiling of the investigation and hear of the community's outpouring of support, and then you learn there is an arrest and then further research goes into the findings, and it is ruled out as a hate crime of anti-Semitism.

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According to police, it reportedly involved a man who dealt with mental illness and was homeless for much of his adult life. He apparently was trying to stay warm in a shed out back and did not know what to do when he saw the smoke and flames. Within seven minutes, this beautiful building was up in flames and then lost.

The man was charged with a felony count of starting a negligent fire resulting in more than \$2,500 in damage and a gross misdemeanor count of starting a negligent fire resulting in great bodily harm.

How should I feel now? It apparently wasn't a hate crime of anti-Semitism but an incident involving a man with his own demons of mental illness and homelessness that resulted in the destruction of an historical site and accusations of negligence. Maybe something good can come out of this tragedy and the social ills of mental illness and homelessness can be addressed by looking deeper at a community that needs access and affordability to more mental health professionals along with affordable housing so a human is not homeless.

How do I feel? Sad.

Joli R. Shablott lives in Minneapolis.