So two years I sat right here where you are right now and Serge asked all the members of the congregation who have volunteered at our homeless shelter to stand up and be recognized.

Within seconds, people in front of me stood, people behind me stood, people next to me stood. I was amazed and yet I remained seats. These were people with full lives. People with children, people with careers, people who served on boards and yet each one of them had committed to either prepare a home cooked meal or spend a night at the shelter.

I vowed at that very moment that the next time Serge asked the congregation this question, I too would stand. Really, I had no excuse. We live directly across the street from the synagogue and we are talking about one night. For the overnight volunteers it's 12 hours at the most. 7pm to 7am. That's it. Surely, everyone can do that at least once and I'll let you in on a little secret-- there's FREE WIFI so when the guys finish dinner and settle in by 9pm you'll have plenty of time to catch up and binge watch all those shows you keep meaning to or finally catch up on all your emails.

When the time came to sign up for the shelter, I'll admit I went overboard. I decided I would do one overnight every month for the entire season and I did. The following year I did the same thing and yes, I work and have a family. It's actually become a family affair. My now 7 year old Madison has joined me since she was 5 to help set up the beds and serve dinner and the guys love having a kid around. Madison brings her lunchbox and eats alongside the guys. They play chess with her, hide and seek and we even our own makeshift version of baseball using a spatula as the bat and a packaged fortune cookie as the ball. At bedtime my husband Jeff comes by to say hi to the guys and bring Madison home.

Last year on Valentine’s Day when everyone else was out with their sweetheart, the 3 of us served dinner and stayed overnight. Madison even made valentines for all the guys and put Hershey kisses on their pillows.

The 3 questions I get most often are: Why do you do it? What brings you back? And how do you find the time?

The reason I do it is simple- it needs to be done. For over 30 years members of our congregation have raised their hand and offered to work at the shelter so why not me and yes, why not YOU.

What makes me return each month-- it's the guys themselves. It's sitting down at a dinner table and breaking bread with men who for the most part go through life feeling invisible. It's seeing their guards come down and their eyes light up and engage in conversation.

How do I find the time? Like anything else, it involves a little planning. But there's not much I'd be doing between the evening and morning hours that I can't get done at the shelter and I'm home packing Madison's lunch before she's even awake the next day and ready to drop her off at school.

Yes, I'm tired that next morning but knowing the difference I make is worth it.

There are 460 family units in this community so if 1 member of each family unit said YES to one night of cooking or staying overnight we would be able to provide dinners and overnight volunteers for one full season and half of the following season. So, as we begin the New Year please look at your calendar and pick ONE day to ensure we can continue the provide this service to the community. Overnight volunteers are critical because without two volunteers each night we cannot open leaving the men to sleep in metal chairs at the main shelter hub. So, pick a night, you can even recruit a friend to do it with you, grab your significant other, bring your kids and help us help them. Thank you.