

The first house that I remember

My parents moved to the Five Towns in the summer of 1960. My father, Rav Yeshaya Lebor a"h, was starting his new job as the first full time rabbi of the Young Israel of Woodmere. We had purchased a house at 325 Longacre Avenue but it wouldn't be ready for occupancy for a few months and we needed a place to live. (The house on Longacre cost \$23,500. Kind of hard to believe today).

At that time the Hillel School had purchased a property for their new school building on Washington Avenue (between Central Avenue and Broadway. The Hillel School was founded in 1957. In 1978 it merged with the Hebrew Institute of Long Island (HILI) to form the Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway (HAFTR).

The plot which they purchased was huge, almost 4.5 acres! Those who are familiar with the geography know that Washington Avenue is quite a long street but there are only three buildings on it. On one end stands Congregation Beth Sholom and on the other end, the Lawrence Cedarhurst Firehouse. In the middle stands the large and long building of the HAFTR elementary school.

When this land was purchased it was not an empty plot. On it were two massive mansions that were set for demolition in order to build Hillel's new building. Each mansion sat on 2.2 acres! Today things might be different but I don't think there were any other houses of that size in the Five Towns at that time.

Apparently one of the movers and shakers of the Hillel School was a member of our shul and seeing that his new rabbi had a temporary housing problem, he offered one of the mansions to my parents to live in until the mansions were demolished.

When we moved into the house, I was barely five years old, and my memories of that period are not complete but I do remember the house. It was huge. It had two staircases, one in the front of the house and one in the back, apparently intended to be used by 'the help'. The rooms were also humongous. A ballroom size living room and an equally large dining room. While

it is true that everything looks big to a small child, from the perspective of a five-year-old, the backyard was as far as the eye can see.

I have lived in quite few homes since that time, none quite as grand. If asked where I grew up, I can always answer that the first house that I remember was a mansion.