



Jerry Abramson

JERRY ABRAMSON grew up in an observant Kentucky Jewish family: they attended shul every week, celebrated the Jewish holidays, and kept a kosher household. The Abramson's family-owned grocery in Taylorsville, Kentucky, Abramson's Market, was a focal point in their day-to-day lives. As a child, Abramson often worked there alongside his father. Yet it was important to Abramson and his parents that as a young man he socialize with other Jews as well.

"You know, from the grocery store to the high school, uh, to the Jewish Community Center, all of that was part of my, you know, DNA... it gave me a basis and an appreciation and a better understanding, and taught me to be a listener rather than a talker on lots and lots of issues... it held me in good stead."

While attending Indiana University, where he studied business economics and public policy, Abramson joined a Jewish fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau. As an undergraduate student, Abramson campaigned for Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 presidential race; Abramson's son Sidney Robert is named after Kennedy. Abramson went on to get his law degree from Georgetown University. Abramson's law studies were interrupted by two years on an Army base in California as part of his conscripted service during the Vietnam War. Abramson remembers his time in Army training as one in which he met people from diverse backgrounds and learned a great deal from his peers.

Abramson served as the first Jewish mayor of Louisville from 1986 – 1999. He married his wife Madeline during this term in 1989. Madeline converted to Judaism when she married Abramson because they knew that they wanted to raise any future children in a Jewish home. After the city of Louisville and Jefferson County merged, Abramson was elected the first mayor of Louisville Metro from 2002 – 2010.

"I had a love affair with my hometown and I wanted to do whatever I could to make it better."

He then served as the Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky under Governor Steve Beshear from 2011 until 2014, but resigned from that post in order to join President Barack Obama's administration. As a Deputy Assistant to the President and White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Abramson was the liaison between the federal government and local governments around the country.

At the end of President Obama's second term in 2017, Abramson turned down offers to teach at Harvard University, Boston University, and Indiana University, knowing that he preferred to go home to Louisville. Since his return, Abramson has lectured at Bellarmine University, teaching courses in leadership and civics.

"I think it has to do with a mindset of Louisvillians feeling good about themselves, creating an energy, and seeing the glass half full..."