



MISHPACHAH II

Lessons From Our Sisters

Conversation Pieces

Margareta

I Am the Face of Judaism Today

I was adopted from Mexico as an infant by a single German Jewish woman. I was converted and raised as a Conservative Jew, going to synagogue and Jewish summer camp.

My mother passed away when I was ten, and my sister and I went to live with my grandparents, one of whom was a Holocaust survivor. Things were far different there. My grandfather, who escaped Germany before the war, maintained a commitment to Jewish observance. My grandmother, on the other hand, who survived the war, hidden in a trunk, had lost all religious faith. But because I felt so connected to her, I became obsessed with the Holocaust, even adopting many of her survivor traits such as being ready to run if things should get bad for Jews. Even today, I am ready to flee at a moment's notice.

My grandfather attended to our Jewish education in a German Jewish synagogue where my sister and I were the only people of color. We felt isolated, and although I became bat mitzvah, I was never sure of what it meant to be an adopted Mexican Jew.

In my early teens, we went to stay with relatives in Israel who lived on a *moshav*. Our summers there were transformative. We learned that Jews could work the land, be strong and not live in the shadow of the Holocaust. The enduring formation of my Jewish identity is a result of that bond – a bond that can never be broken.

In high school I joined the Jewish Cultural Awareness Club, where I met Jews from all over, with different levels of observance and I began to seek a stronger religious identity (to which, ironically, my grandparents were opposed!).

And then the other shoe dropped. I married, started a family and my son had a bris. In our neighborhood the most affordable Jewish preschool was one run by Chabad. After reviewing our application the rabbi told me I wasn't Jewish. But I *am* Jewish. I've been a Jew *all my life*. I have family in Israel. No, he said, an Orthodox rabbi did not convert you, your conversion is invalid. I felt like my breath had been taken out of me. Not since the death of my mother had I felt such pain.

So, my husband and I attended the conversion classes he recommended. We learned a great deal, including that we didn't want to be Orthodox. We just to be the kind of Jew I had been all my life.

We found a wonderfully supportive Conservative shul that welcomed us with open arms. Because of that inviting community, my non-Jewish husband decided to convert. We went to Israel so he could go to the *mikveh*. His experience in Israel, like mine, was transformative. Fittingly, he picked the Hebrew name, Yisrael.

As our family grew, we moved again, but always to a synagogue to be our family and community. When our children experienced some anti-Semitic behavior, our new family stood behind us, supporting and protecting us. All of our children are involved in synagogue life.

Since my husband and I do not have family who can provide Jewish influences, we appreciate all the more our “adopted” Jewish family. But no longer are we the token diverse family. Our shul is a rainbow of skin colors and nationalities. This is our community – one that is accepting and all encompassing.

For my children to see such diversity and acceptance is something I only could have dreamed of as a child.

I am a Mexican Jew – and proud that I am the Jew I am today.