

**EXCERPT OF
PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF SOFIA A NON-JEWISH MOTHER, RAISED CATHOLIC, A
JEWISH ALLY, STUDYING TALMUD**

I belong to a Temple and live a Jewish life, but I wouldn't say I'm a Jew. I'm married to a Jew, and I'm raising Jewish kids. I was raised Catholic and I'm practicing Judaism, but I don't identify as a Jew. I am a non-Jewish person raising Jewish children and pretty much living a Jewish life.

Dave's family would have preferred him to marry a Jewish woman, and my family would have preferred me to marry someone Catholic. It wasn't a huge hurdle, but it was a hurdle. Eventually my parents grew to love him, and his parents are very, very good to me. We have overcome that.

When I got serious about my husband, one of my colleagues invited me to learn about Judaism with her. My husband spoke Spanish; he had traveled through Latin America, so I felt he knew about my culture, I should learn about his. That's how I got involved and gained a lot of respect for Judaism. I took a basic Judaism course, and came to respect the inquisitive, argumentative style of learning, which is very different from the Catholic. It was very much blind faith. You know, *don't ask*— that was not very fulfilling for me. I wanted to know “when did this happen and why?” Then I started doing Talmudic study. I loved the fact that on the sidelines of the text would be all these Rabbis' different interpretations.

When I met my husband, he told me that he was Jewish and his heritage was important to him. He'd like his kids raised Jewish, but he meant it in the way that he was raised Jewish: to sort of celebrate Passover and Rosh Hashanah. I didn't really know that much about Judaism, but it was ok because I wasn't that close to my Catholic faith. It sounded easy. It wasn't until actual things started to come into place that we had a lot of issues.

A Baptism for Catholics is huge. The whole family comes together to get to know the baby. When my daughter was born, I said ‘we need to plan the Baptism.’ My husband said ‘there isn't going to be a Baptism, that's not Jewish. He said,...’we are going to have a Baby Naming”. My mom in law planned it, she had deli trays. It was very small. It wasn't a lot of family, family didn't come in. It was mostly my friends from graduate school and a few others. I remember going upstairs when that party was going on and crying. It meant nothing to me. It felt dead. There was no clergy there.

That was the beginning. Then he wasn't amenable to us going to Temple, he didn't think that should happen. Now he loves it.. His family wasn't religious and never belonged to a Temple. His parents were really thrilled when I insisted we at least enroll our children into the Temple's religious school. They really supported my decision.

I love the Temple and I've come to love Shabbat. When we meet at Temple sometimes, it is a hectic day, finishing up the work week. Often times my husband and the kids

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will get there ahead of me and save room for me. As soon as you walk in, it is so nice: the week is over, my family is waiting for me, and we sing these beautiful songs. I never felt that in church; it was a different dynamic, it wasn't marking the end of the week. It was more like a chore. You go and sit through services because you are supposed to. We didn't talk about why that was important, why it was a beautiful family time, nothing like that. It was more that you just had to be there. I love the fact that the Temple does the opposite.

Being involved in the Jewish community has really pointed out how important community is. What brings us together is Judaism; but it is much more than that. We've known these families because we attend services, we have the same aged kids, and we look at these kids, preparing for bar and bat mitzvahs, they were two when they met, then three. It's very comforting and connected.

It is important for a youngster to select and be conscious of why you are learning what you are learning. I'm watching it unfold with my daughter. She has gone, since preschool, and now she is in Hebrew school. She tells me 'you know Mom, before I just liked going because I had friends there and it was fun. But now that I'm preparing for my bat mitzvah, I love coming. It has so much more meaning. I'm going to be coming for many years after my bat mitzvah.' That means we did a good job. We have always told them that it's not about checking a box, 'I'm doing my bat mitzvah, I've finished this.' I want to go through that journey with her as a mom. I'm really pleased, that she is feeling the spirituality.

A couple of years ago I felt really sad because we didn't go to California and I didn't have any Christmas. I don't mind not having Christmas in my home because I can go to my mom's or to Latin America with my cousins. But when we didn't go anywhere, there was nothing, I was very sad. I said to my family 'for the longest time, I gave up myself, my traditions, because we didn't want to confuse you. You are Jewish. Now there's no confusion whatsoever. I'm a member of this family too, and I don't feel like I'm being honored on the one day a year that's important to me, Christmas.

Then, I put my foot down, and said 'Either we go to LA, or we have Christmas here.' He was very upset because I never put my foot down. "Well why? Why not in the past?" I replied 'I've sacrificed a lot for your guys' beliefs. I've loved it but my needs are changing. I feel a bigger need to have a piece of what I remember, my memories.

My children have no identity problems. They feel 100% Jewish. They so identify as Jews. You know how around Christmas, everything is Christmas-y, since my daughter could walk, she would say, 'where's the menorah? Not everybody's Christian. I'm a Jew. This is not about me.' She will embarrass all kinds of people! They don't know what to say. They ask her, 'What is Santa going to bring you sweetheart?' They see their Latin American mom holding her, and she looks right at them. 'I celebrate Chanukah. I don't believe in Santa. I'm Jewish' with such pride.