



VOLUME 7, NO. 3
SUMMER 2001

THE INCLUSIVE

WELCOMING INTERFAITH FAMILIES INTO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:
WHAT DOES
"JEWISH" LOOK LIKE

EMOTIONAL BLOCKS TO SHARING OUR TRADITIONS

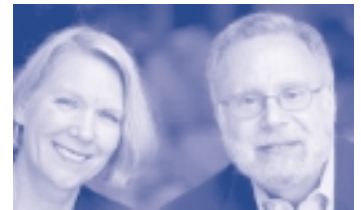
by Dr. Paul Sanders and Dr. Susan Sances

A middle-aged interfaith couple is sitting in our office. Empty nesters, they have been together for seven years. Lately they realize that they experience nagging feelings of isolation from one another around religious holidays and times of loss. Both are highly educated, liberal, caring people, who remain faithful to their lifelong traditions. Kathy is a practicing Catholic, and Jeff is an actively involved, though non-Orthodox, Jew.

Kathy explains that, in most areas, their life together is marked by heartfelt support and mutual respect. When it comes to spiritual matters, however, there is an imbalance and loneliness. They

both agree that Kathy has been open to many aspects of Jeff's holidays, such as the Seders she eagerly anticipates each year. But Jeff seems to have more trouble with Kathy's heritage. For example, several days after the Seder, Kathy couldn't help noticing Jeff's reticence about Easter. It seemed that every aspect of the observance was painful to him, even symbols that overlapped with the seasonal symbols of Passover, even the associated Renaissance music that he usually loves. Jeff uncomfortably acknowledged this, but was puzzled about why he couldn't mirror Kathy's openness.

Even in the most loving of interfaith relationships, we



DR. SUSAN SANCES & DR. PAUL SANDERS

can have trouble truly sharing each other's heritage. Why do we sometimes resist enjoying traditions that mean so much to our partners? A number of internal conflicts typically impede spiritual sharing. These conflicts may not only drain the meaning from holidays and life cycle events, they can seriously impair a couple's capacity for mutual support in the face of crisis, illness, or death. Having children might force the issue, but for couples like Kathy and Jeff who are not

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TRANSFORMING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, ONE STARFISH AT A TIME

By Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky, Executive Director

Perhaps you've heard the story of a child who finds thousands of starfish washed up on a beach and begins throwing them back into the ocean, one at a time. When asked by a skeptical observer, "What does it matter when there are still so many left?" the child simply replies, "It matters to this one," and throws another starfish into the water.

The work that we do at JOI is transformative for each individual life we touch. The greatest challenge of our job—and the greatest joy—is to help each individual really add meaning to his or her life, and then multiply that experience on a

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THE INCLUSIVE

Newsletter of the Jewish
Outreach Institute

The Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI) is an

independent, national organization, engaged in outreach to the unaffiliated with a special emphasis on intermarried families and their children.

JOI plays a pivotal role in helping families incorporate Judaism into the rhythm of their lives. JOI also serves as a national training institution and network for outreach professionals, guiding and supporting innovative outreach programs in communities throughout North America as managing partner of the Jewish Connection Partnership.

Jewish Outreach Institute

President:

Terrence A. Elkes

Chairman:

David G. Sacks

Executive Director:

Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky

Founding Director:

Dr. Egon Mayer

"The Inclusive"

Editor: Paul Golin

Graphic Design: Tabak Design,
TabakD@aol.com

Jewish Outreach Institute

1270 Broadway, Suite 609

New York, NY 10001

212-760-1440

fax: 212-760-1569

www.JOI.org

info@joi.org

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Change is good.

The Jewish Outreach Institute continues to grow and transform, and in putting together this edition of *The Inclusive*, I realized that the theme of "change" is reflected nicely in the pages of this newsletter. In appearance, we've continued tweaking the graphic layout to better please your eyes. But even the content itself is united by a theme of change that seems to thread its way through every piece.

Dr. Olitzky discusses both a personal change as well as the community-wide and professional changes JOI plans to bring about in its work. Nastaran Afari, JOI's Assistant Director, writes about the added grantees to our Jewish Connection Partnership outreach program. Drs. Paul Sanders and Susan Sances offer some insightful suggestions about bettering interfaith relationships by identifying emotional stumbling blocks. And Linda Jum contributes a very personal account of the changes in her life that led to Judaism and her career in outreach.

Perhaps then it is appropriate that we dub this the "Change Issue." It may also come at an appropriate time, as we wind down the Jewish year and prepare for the soul-searching of the High Holiday period, a time when all Jews try to change for the better.

We hope you enjoy these offerings and find the pieces interesting, informative, and useful. And we'd love to hear your feedback. All of us at JOI wish you the very best for the coming New Year,

Paul Golin

Director of Communications

PGolin@JOI.org

PS – We've again included our *Inclusive Professional* supplement for those of you who work in the field of Jewish outreach. If you did not receive it and would like to in the future, please let us know.

SUMMER 2001 JOI NEWS AND NOTICES

JOI WELCOMES... New members to the Board of Directors of the Jewish Outreach Institute: **Jane Gellman** (Milwaukee, WI), **Ted Gillman** (New York, NY), and **Peter Levy** (Greenwich, CT). We thank them for supporting JOI's goals and ideals, and look forward to their leadership in helping JOI achieve even greater success.

JOI THANKS... The **Arthur Blank Foundation** for joining the Jewish Connection Partnership, a project of JOI. As a local partner, the majority of the Blank Foundation grant will be used for innovative outreach in the greater Atlanta area. JOI appreciates the opportunity to deliver its programming to communities throughout the U.S. and Canada, and is eager to begin working with our partners in Atlanta, GA.

JOI CONGRATULATES... Board Member **Morris Offit** on his recent election as Chairman of the Board of the UJA/Federation of New York.

Board Member **Donald Landis** and his wife **Betsy**, who were honored by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College at its annual dinner earlier this year.

RECENT APPEARANCES

On May 17, **Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky**, Executive Director of JOI, addressed interns at Jewish grassroots organization for college students, Lights in Action, promoting outreach as a possible career in the Jewish community.

On August 6-7, JOI facilitated three discussion sessions at the 26th annual conference of the **Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education (CAJE)** at Colorado State University. These sessions were titled, "Outreach Programs that Really Work," "The Jewish Educator's Personal Challenge: Interfaith Marriage in My Own Family" and "Truths from the Children of the Intermarried."

TRANSFORMING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, ONE STARFISH AT A TIME

By Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky, Executive Director
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massive scale, for all who may seek it; to focus on the micro level without losing sight of the macro...and vice versa.

In helping people transform their lives, those of us in outreach must also notice the transformations taking place within our own thoughts and actions. Working with intermarried and unaffiliated Jews *challenges* nearly everything I learned in the classroom, yet *confirms* most everything I've learned on "the street," and this process has caused a transformation within my own heart and mind.

I spent many years in the classroom, first earning my ordination as rabbi, then my doctorate, and later returning to the rabbinical seminary to teach for fifteen years. The more time that passes since my formal schooling, the more I see how theories that looked good in textbooks do not always play out so consistently in the reality of human lives. Too often, the classroom assumes a world that is black and white rather than the many shades of gray we find in life.

I worked outside of academia as well, before coming to the Jewish Outreach Institute. I served a large suburban congregation, helping people make their way through life-cycle events and the sometime difficulties of daily living, and later I worked for one of the most

prestigious private Jewish foundations in North America. While these various positions had their challenges, I found in each institution a group of people eager to participate and study. It did not take a great deal of effort to reach them, because I was working with those who had already found their way to the center of Jewish life. Touching the lives of those on the periphery however, such as



intermarried and unaffiliated Jews, is much more challenging, but also much more rewarding when I really do make a difference in peoples' lives.

None of my prior positions fully prepared me for what I learned in just a few months at JOI, or for the internal changes in attitude I have undergone. For example, I learned that sometimes a Christmas tree *is* just a Christmas tree and nothing more. I learned that people

celebrate holidays because of their family's tradition of celebrating, and not because of any one holiday's implicit theology. I learned that people make decisions about their children based on "what's best for them" rather than what's best for the Jewish community. And I learned that interfaith families have the same needs as "in-faith" families, only *more so*. They are looking for institutions of meaning and communities of welcoming, just like everybody else.

Critics claim that outreach efforts are too costly, that resources should be used elsewhere, but I've learned that in many ways outreach costs *nothing*. After all, it's free to welcome people into our midst. To some of our

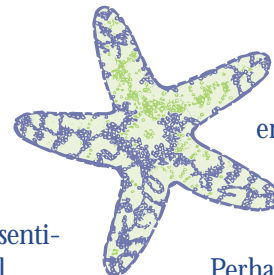
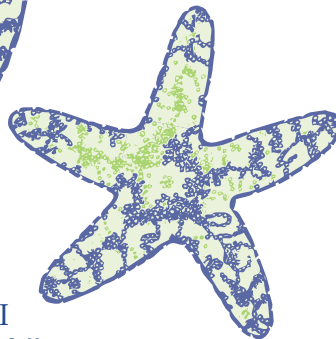


One way we advocate for interfaith families is by advocating for those Jewish outreach professionals who work with them. Each day, outreach professionals mold the shape of the Jewish future. Their work is indispensable to Jewish continuity, yet too many go unappreciated by the very institutions and communities in which they work. If not for them, the folks whose lives we touch on a daily basis would probably not find their way to the Jewish community—and certainly would not be supported and nurtured along the way. The best outreach professionals care about each person, each family, and each child. We recognize that the profession itself is still in a nascent state,

and that we are all learning along the way. But the support of the wider community is needed in order for this growth and learning to continue.

JOI is here to help those interfaith seekers of Judaism transform their lives. As outreach professionals, we must also work on transforming *ourselves*. And together, we must transform the Jewish establishment to think differently as well.

Perhaps having worked so many years within that establishment, I am well placed to change minds, by sharing some of the transformations *I've* undergone while trying to transform the lives of others.



readers, these sentiments are well known and may even seem obvious, yet for the vast majority of the Jewish world, they are not. One of JOI's goals is to help sensitize the community to the needs of those interfaith families who want to choose Judaism.

You have to consider yourself lucky whenever a job brings not just financial sustenance but also the spiritually rewarding feeling that comes with helping others. That's why I feel particularly grateful about my continuing involvement with the Jewish Connection Partnership since its inception over 3 years ago. The Jewish Connection Partnership (JCP) is a grant-giving consortium of philanthropies, dedicated to creating innovative Jewish outreach programs to the unaffiliated and intermarried. The JCP's goals, methods, and "lessons learned" are all quite interesting (I'll elaborate on them below) but it's the difference JCP makes in the lives of so many individuals—on a personal, emotional level—that is the main reason I'm so proud to be a part of this effort.

JCP is about community building. It's about giving a voice to every person, so that Jewish institutions reflect the true diversity of the population; it's about welcoming those who may not know that the Jewish community has a place for them; it's about creating grassroots movements for those who cannot find a sense of belonging within existing institutions; it's about helping people connect to "things Jewish," whether that means "Judaism as a religion" or "the Jewish people" or "Jewish culture and music"; it's about professionalizing the field of Jewish outreach, so that those who do the work are recognized and can grow together; it's about creating a stronger, more viable Jewish community for the next

JOI AND JCP: PERFECT TOGETHER

By *Nastaran Afari*

generation; and it's about honoring each person's unique journey through life.

When the JCP formed in early 1998, the founding philanthropies agreed that the Jewish Outreach Institute—with its vast knowledge base concerning the needs of the intermarried population—would be the perfect managing partner. JOI and JCP now form a symbiotic relationship in which we research, advocate for, and directly serve the intermarried and unaffiliated Jewish population, as well as train outreach professionals who work with them.

The specific goals of the JCP were clarified into three main objectives: to provide seed grants (for up to three years) to innovative outreach programs across North America; to learn from those projects through continued assessment and research; and to disseminate the successful models and methods to the rest of the Jewish community.



In the first three years of grant-making, JCP funded over twenty programs varying in size, target audience, and methodology. Some achieved

great success, others less so, but all of them were valuable learning experiences. Among the wide range of activities funded were: celebrating Jewish holidays in "the marketplace" (such as Sukkah-building at Home Depot); teaching Jewish holiday rituals in the homes of individual interfaith families; combining Jewish learning and Lamaze classes ("Lamazet Tov!") for expectant parents; and celebrating Shabbat at the home of a husband/wife rabbi couple with cooking and singing. Some of the projects were co-sponsored by established Jewish institutions such as local Federations, JCCs and synagogues, while others sprung independently from grassroots and alternative movements. [For a complete list and descriptions of the 1998-2001 JCP Grantees, please visit www.JewishConnectionPartnership.org]

Through studying the results of its grantee programs, the JCP has learned some important lessons about the outreach sequence and what the necessary components are to creating successful programming. This information is being disseminated to Jewish professionals throughout North America, in the hopes of seeing greater outreach to this currently under-served population. The most optimistic news from our research is what the program attendees themselves have to say: that their participation in these outreach activities have positively affected their lives and their feelings towards the Jewish community. It's an exciting confirmation to our hard work, but we also know that the community still has a long way to go in building institutions of meaning for the millions of intermarried and unaffiliated Jews, most of whom sadly still don't realize we're trying to reach them.

The funding foundations in the Jewish Connection Partnership are: Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, Blaustein Philanthropic Group, Samuel Bronfman Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Rita and Harold Divine Foundation, Jewish Community Endowment Fund of San Francisco, Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Awards Committee, and Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation.

Nastaran Afari is currently JOI's Assistant Director. She has been with the organization from the inception of JCP and has seen the growth and development of the project, especially because of her grants administration

The most optimistic news from our research is what the program attendees themselves have to say: that their participation in these outreach activities have **positively affected their lives and their feelings towards the Jewish community.**

JEWISH CONNECTION PARTNERSHIP GRANTEES:

CONTINUING PROJECTS

*San Francisco, CA - Camp Tawonga - **Mosaic, Multi-Racial Jewish Family Camp***

Helping multi-racial and multi-cultural families connect with one another while raising the awareness in mainstream Jewish institutions of the challenges facing this group

*Falls Village, CT - Camp Isabella Freedman - **Jewish Multiracial Network***

Allows Jewish multi-racial families an opportunity to provide mutual support for one another, and to strengthen their Jewish identities and connections to Jewish institutions

*New Orleans, LA - Jewish Family Service of Greater New Orleans and the Jewish Community Center - **Jewish Lamaze Class***

Combines techniques of Lamaze with a Jewish educator or rabbi teaching about Jewish birth rituals and traditions, having a Jewish home, the holidays, and so forth

*Baltimore, MD - The Associated - **J-LINC***

Connecting young adults to the Jewish community through Friday night dinners, a web site, and the sale of greatly discounted membership packages to community institutions

*Rockville, MD - Am Kolel Judaic Resource Center - **Center For Inclusiveness In Jewish Life***

Promoting inclusiveness for interfaith couples, gays and lesbians, and others overlooked by mainstream Judaism, through focus groups, seminars, and Shabbat/Oneg celebrations

*St. Louis, MO - Central Agency for Jewish Education - **Our Jewish Home***

Over the course of a year, gives an introduction to Jewish holiday rituals and principles through home visits to families by a trained educator

*New York, NY - Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services - **Engaging the Engaged***

Providing socio-educational seminars for the interfaith at select large corporations during work-time hours (lunch hour), akin to wellness programs offered by employers

*Suffolk County, NY - Suffolk Association for Jewish Educational Services - **Celebrations in the Marketplace***

Holds events in public, consumer locales that encourage participants to make connections with other families and Jewish institutions, such as Sukkah Building at Home Depot

NEW GRANTEE PROJECTS

*Orlando, FL - Jewish Family Services of Greater Orlando - **Grandparents Connect***

Help grandparents share their Jewish identity with grandchildren through interactive group activities primarily scheduled around Jewish holidays

*Minneapolis, MN - Public Radio International - **Sound & Spirit Outreach Project***

Special radio broadcast and live performance designed to create an inclusive and engaging point of entry into exploration of Jewish tradition and identity

*Jackson, MS - Institute of Southern Jewish Life - **Southern States Jewish Film Festival***

An annual, multi-venue presentation of quality films that highlight the Jewish experience for communities where there has been a scarcity of Jewish cultural opportunities

*Durham, NC - Jewish Family Services of Durham-Chapel Hill - **Re-Claiming Our Jewish Identity***

Small and large events to engage or re-engage unaffiliated Jews and interfaith families with Jewish life and learning

*New York, NY - Hazon-Vision - **Hazon's Jewish Environmental Bike Rides***

Uses Jewish environmentalism to deepen connections with Judaism and provide an accessible gateway to learning while raising money for Jewish environmental causes

*Philadelphia, PA - New Legends - **Jewish Creativity Outreach Project***

Uses music and the arts as a portal to the Jewish community for unaffiliated Jews, through the artistic talent of the Philadelphia community

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raising kids together, the temptation is to simply not address the challenges.

Repeatedly, we have encountered four major internal conflicts about the sharing of traditions: (1) worries about betraying one's own heritage and ancestors, (2) alien feelings around the partner's "strange" practices, (3) worries that the partner will feel strange, hostile, or mocking about one's own rituals, and (4) pessimism about the possibility of fashioning meaningful shared rituals without igniting conflict in the relationship and damaging intimacy. After illustrating each of these resistances to spiritual sharing, we will give an overview of some helpful approaches supported by recent research.

THE MAJOR CONFLICTS

When invited to share our interfaith partner's experience, we often, at some level, feel like traitors to our ancestors. In the case described earlier, Jeff was unable to even bear witness to Kathy's observance without feeling that he had somehow defiled the collective martyrdom of persecuted Jews through the millennia. It didn't matter that Kathy had no intention of imposing her beliefs on Jeff or asking him to say or do anything that compromised his faith. Jeff still felt that his identity was threatened. Unconsciously, he was punishing himself—and Kathy—for any contact with Christian observances. Prior to our sessions, he felt foolish

acknowledging, let alone discussing, this internal dilemma. Instead, he let his otherwise deep involvement with Kathy turn to emotional distance at holidays and life cycle events.

A related problem is the sense of strangeness we feel as we encounter rituals, observances, and ceremonies that our partners hold dear. Even when such experiences are not laced with guilt, our awkwardness can limit closeness to our partners as we put in shallow, token appearances, or avoid the events entirely. Giving in to the strangeness makes us feel like strangers. If only we could risk talking about such uneasiness, we just might become more familiar, relaxed, and engaged with what's happening.

Worries about alienation can also make us reluctant to expose our partners to our own precious traditions. Sometimes we downplay our attachment to certain rituals, or our deep fascination with their significance, because we worry that our partners will be indifferent or repelled (either overtly or secretly). Sharing religious traditions deeply is a process of give and take: giving as well as taking, teaching as well as learning. But teaching requires trust that our partners want to learn, and will honor what is stirring to us. Many of us cannot take such trust for granted; it

must be tested and proved.

Some couples never really try to develop a fabric of shared spiritual traditions because one or both partners worry that the relationship will break in the attempt. In otherwise robust relationships, this is an unrealistic concern. In fact, honest and respectful exploration of the issues described here usually fosters even greater intimacy and trust; and it is crucial to give couples the help they need in that process.



THE RESPONSES

Unfortunately, many interfaith couples don't work very much on the spiritual side of their relationships, which can rob their lives together of considerable vitality and depth. Research by John Gottman, Ph.D. and others have shown that couples tend to deal with continuing, complex differences in one of three ways: (1) avoidance, which leads to greater distance and emotional detachment, (2) gridlock, which produces frustration and negative feeling that undermines the general level of intimacy, and (3) continuing dialogue with the issues. If a couple is able to establish a continuing dialogue with ongoing differences, they are most likely to build an "Emotional Bank Account" of positive feeling that builds strength, resilience, and support when times get tough. The alternatives tend

to lead to more distance, frustration, disappointment, and disengagement.

Sharing individual traditions is a powerful tool for closeness in all relationships. When an interfaith couple works through the emotional blocks to the respectful sharing of their traditions, they are forced to explore the deeper meaning of each person's treasured symbols, experiences, and values. This process allows the couple to create a new culture that did not exist before, a new culture that is an extension, not a negation, of each partner's heritage.

Like Kathy and Jeff, many couples have trouble addressing resistances to spiritual sharing, and hope that it will not matter too much in the total scope of their lives. Sometimes that is true, especially if both partners are content with greater isolation, shallowness, or secularization at holidays and life cycle events. But we would maintain that such couples do not know what they're missing. It is worth noting that Kathy and Jeff were indeed able to listen to one another, explore the conflicts that separated them, and move toward greater connection in their celebrations. One is still Jewish; the other is still Catholic. They're just closer.

Paul Sanders, Ph.D. and Susan Sances, Psy.D. are both clinical psychologists in Chicago, where they practice individual and couples psychotherapy and coaching. They are also an interfaith married couple. Together they have founded Interfaith Holidays, a face-to-face and teleconferencing service committed to helping interfaith couples share their traditions. Their web address is <http://InterfaithHolidays.com>.

I don't like to constantly defend my Jewish identity—to have to “prove it.” I was always surprised whenever people felt the need to tell me I'm Chinese. There are countless hurtful interactions I can relate, when my appearance caused surprise or shock. For the most part, I have been able to use these encounters as a means of informal education. To the question of “looking Jewish” I will usually respond, “What looks Jewish?” Instead of replying with anger or hurt, I try to engage in a discussion. Most of the time it is an effective tool. But I often feel that if my Jewish identity and beliefs were not as strong as they are, I would never have put up with the struggle.

I don't want others to have to feel rejection, or defend themselves, merely because they don't represent the expected stereotype of what a Jew “looks like.” That is one of the reasons I work as the director of the Jewish Multiracial Network, an organization that brings Jewish multiracial families and individuals together to learn about and celebrate their Judaism. This includes families of mixed races, Jewish families that adopt children of another race, and men and women of color who have chosen or been born into Judaism.

I had worked for many years within the corporate world, and enjoyed the challenge, but when the day was over the only difference I had made was in the profit columns of a ledger sheet. It wasn't enough for me, so on my own time I looked elsewhere

WHAT DOES “JEWISH” LOOK LIKE?

By Linda C. Jum

to feel good about what I was doing, through activism and lay leadership. What used to be volunteer work became my career, however, after a life-changing experience.

I was diagnosed with bilateral metastatic breast cancer, and looked at my life through a whole new lens.

I started taking risks. To help my spiritual recovery from a bone marrow transplant, I went on the first Jewishly-sponsored Habitat for Humanity trip, to rebuild black churches burned by arsonists in the South. Having spent the prior year as a cancer patient—feeling that I had lost all other aspects of my identity and had no control over the devastating losses I had personally experienced—I recognized a chance to do something to restore a tremendous loss to a community. In my mind, I approached the trip like a member of the “Federal Witness Protection Program,” wishing to tell people nothing of my past, wanting only to be seen as Linda, and not as a breast cancer statistic. I returned from that trip to



Georgia with a renewed sense of life. I saw it as a beginning, rather than an end.

Now I love what I'm doing. I feel I'm really touching

people and helping. The passion with which I live each day is certainly affected from learning early not to take life for granted. I continue to face serious physical challenges, but rather than slow me down, it has made me even more determined and focused in my work. I realized that there are those of us who will have nothing to represent our lives but the “dash” between their dates of birth and death on a headstone. I wanted my dash to represent more than that, and feel (without sounding too melodramatic) that I'm doing holy work; every time I touch another life I'm adding to the length of my dash.

An emphasis on social justice and volunteerism are just a couple of the beautiful things about Judaism that attracted me to the religion in the first place. I was raised in a Presbyterian home where a big part of our family's social life revolved around the church. But I asked some

very hard questions, very early on—always searching for “things” to make sense—and had trouble accepting some of the religious concepts as they were presented to me. I couldn't understand the existence of a God who judged and punished, and had no explanation for why “bad things happening to good people.” I read a lot, and started on my road to being “Lindish.” (“Lindish” is how I was recently described by my friend's twelve-year-old to her Jewish day school classmates in answer to “What is Linda?”)


I was a spiritual person, I believed in godliness, but I “rejected” organized religion. I started to self-identify as Jewish as early as my teens. I further developed being “Lindish” during high school and college, spending time observing religious holidays from a social/secular position. I lived my life with certain values and continued to read and search. I finally felt at home when exposed to a Reconstructionist community that accepted me first and asked questions later. They were naturally curious as to whether I was Jewish by birth or by choice, but the important thing is that they never assumed that I “couldn't be Jewish,” as so many others had before. This inclusive welcome is something I hope will catch on in the wider Jewish community, because I am living proof that Judaism doesn't have a “look,” just a feeling.

[Editor's Note: To learn more about the Jewish Multiracial Network, visit their website at www.MultiracialJewishNet.org]



PROMOTING JEWISH COMMUNITY AMONG THE INTERMARRIED
VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.JOI.ORG

Jewish Outreach Institute
1270 Broadway, Suite 609
New York, New York 10001



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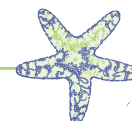
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