

Dovetail

A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families



Your Children and You: Interfaith Couples Take a Variety of Approaches

After planning the wedding, questions about raising children loom the largest in most interfaith couples' discussions, with each other and with their extended families. This issue of **Dovetail** is filled with authors who have insights to share and practical advice to give.

They come, like our readers and members, from a variety of backgrounds and express a variety of perspectives and strategies. Whether you have chosen a single faith for your family's primary religion, or are observing both partners' faiths, or are following a more eclectic, secular style, you will find food for thought and fodder for discussion, as well as some nourishing and tasty nuggets, in the material that follows. You will also find a heartwarming Passover reminiscence from a devoted Jewish husband with a dedicated Catholic wife.

This year, of course, the vagaries of their respective calendars have separated Easter and Passover about as widely as they ever are (see the chart on page 6). For once, those of us who celebrate both can bake yeasty Easter goodies with a clear conscience, and later focus on the seder without worrying about whether the chocolate eggs are pesadich.

That's a particular relief for Christians uncertain about their roles in the Passover celebration and afraid to put a foot (or a tongue) wrong. One of the people who responded to last month's request for input, looking for practical advice, asked whether it is possible to prepare a seder and participate in it, too. I'm not sure whether this is a physical question: is

it possible to do all that work and still have time to eat? or a metaphysical one: is it all right for a non-Jew to take part in the ritual? The answer to the first one would be, it is possible with practice and a certain flexibility when it comes to standards. (I'm referring here to esthetic, not ritual, standards—is it really necessary to make the radishes into little rosettes?) The answer to the second depends on the degree of traditionalism of the Jewish participants. Some consider the seder observance appropriate only for Jews. If you have such in your family, some delicate negotiations may be in order. But most American Jews have no such strictures, and in fact are often surprised to hear that any other Jews do. So participate, enjoy, and learn.

I'll address some of the other questions posed in the questionnaire responses in future issues; rest assured that we appreciate them all. If you haven't returned yours, please feel free to do so at any time, or, of course, to send in your thoughts

In This Issue

Finding Our Road: Paths to Religious Identity	3
Walking Two Paths: Another Way of Making the Journey	5
It's Your Baby's Baptism? Mazeltov!	7
A Different Path: A Bris Milah Through the Eyes of a Gentile	9
When the Path Gets Rocky: Lessons Along the Way	11
An Unusual Celebration	14
Bulletin	15

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your will and trusts.

Dovetail's website:
www.dovetailinstitute.org
Online discussion group:
groups.yahoo.com/group/interfaith.

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without using the questionnaire format by mail, phone or email at DI-IFR@bardstown.com. We are so grateful to those of you who did respond.

We're also grateful beyond measure to those who responded to our fundraising appeal. So far, our year-end mailing and the request for donations in the last issue have resulted in donations totaling about \$8,250. Thank you all so much. Thanks to you, we'll be able to make our April payment to the generous folks who lent us \$5,000 apiece to pay down our high-interest credit debt. The total of our donations for fiscal 2004-2005 comes to \$14,663 so far. This falls short of our average of \$16,590 per year over the past four years. It's true, we still have a couple of months to go before the end of our fiscal year on June 30, but we're not out of the woods yet. And of course, our goal is to better the average of previous years so we can

Dovetail's mission is to provide a channel of communication for interfaith couples, their parents, and their children. No matter what their specific choices regarding faith for their home and children, the more interfaith families can share their ideas, experiences, resources, and support, the more they can make peace in their homes and communities. Jewish and Christian perspectives can dovetail.

Believing that there are no definitive answers to the questions facing interfaith families, Dovetail strives to be open to all ideas and opinions. Editorial content attempts to balance and respect the perspectives of both Jewish and Christian partners in interfaith marriages, as well as the diverse perspectives of parents and children of interfaith couples. Inclusion in Dovetail does not imply endorsement. Dovetail accepts a thoughtful and constructive discussion of all related issues in the Letters to the Editor section, and reserves the right to reply.

do more than simply scrape by once again.

So please keep those donations coming—and remember that we're also looking for help in fundraising, marketing, and clerical work, as well as for a replacement for me. We'll also be needing a new proofreader/copyeditor, since Jennifer Huey is resigning to focus on her young family. If you have even a little time, talent, or money to spare, we still need your help. 

Mary Helene Rosenbaum

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Finding Our Road: Paths to Religious Identity

by Dawn Friedman

My road to Judaism was a complicated one. Raised as a secular Jew by interfaith parents (Southern Baptist mother, Jewish father), I converted as an adult after a long period of searching, studying, and prayer. My 4-year-old son Noah converted with me. His Christian father and I decided that we wanted him to have a Jewish upbringing, one that would still honor his interfaith birthright.

A Balancing Act

It is a tricky balancing act. My husband Brett and I come from a hodgepodge of religious backgrounds. His family tree is full of Lutherans, Christian Scientists, Methodists, Unitarians, and New Age neo-pagans. My own family is firmly agnostic, disdaining any religious affiliation while claiming a cultural one. They have all been tremendously supportive of our decision to raise Noah as a Jew.

Our holidays are eclectic. We celebrate the Jewish holidays, but we have a Christmas tree and Easter baskets, too. These holidays are so important to Brett and to our extended family that they are a part of our family's life as well. Noah has many believers in his life, all of whom believe different things. While Brett and I have agreed that Noah's formal religious schooling will be Jewish, we know that he will be exposed to a variety of faiths.

Perhaps the most telling symbol of our family's decision to remain religious pluralists within our Jewish affiliation is the difficult decision we made about circumcision. Noah is not circumcised; neither will we circumcise future sons, should we be blessed with any.

Originally, the reason for not circumcising was clear: neither Noah nor I were Jewish at the time of his birth. When I was pregnant, I researched the medical controversy around circumcision, and this is when I discovered that I was not Jewish. One inherits one's Judaism maternally, although Reform Judaism makes exceptions for children of Jewish fathers who are raised as Jews. This loophole did not work for me; my religious education was limited to candle-lighting at Hanukkah and having matzoh ball soup at my bubbe's (grandmother's) house. As I read over the heated secular arguments pro and con, I realized that they were, finally, unimportant. My husband I agreed that since we were not Jewish circumcision would have no spiritual meaning, and so we chose not to do it.

The decision not to circumcise future sons was a terribly difficult one. As a Jew, I fully appreciate the importance of circumcision within my faith. Not only is it a symbol of God's covenant with His chosen people, but it is a symbol of the perseverance and pride of the Jewish community. I know that within Judaism there is some discussion going on about circumcision; I do not want to be a part of the debate. I have no desire to bring other Jews around to my way of thinking since I made my decision within the singular context of my family and my beliefs.

I am a child of interfaith parents now creating my own interfaith family. I know very well that one's journey to God is a very personal, individual one. I prayed hard about the issue of circumcision as I was

Dawn Friedman is a freelance writer who lives with her family in Columbus, OH. Her son, Noah, is now 6 and they are in the process of adding to their family through adoption. Her work has appeared in such diverse venues as Brain Child, Midwifery Today, and Bitch: A Feminist Response to Pop Culture. She was also an assistant editor at ePregnancy Magazine and writes a weekly column for Myria.com. You can see clips of her work at www.thiswomanswork.com/work. This article originally appeared on www.InterfaithFamily.com, a member of the Jewz.com Media Network.

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Thank you for your support.

studying for my conversion. I realized that as much as I wanted my children to be Jewish in a way that I could not, to be Jewish from the start, that I was confusing my own path with theirs. My son's legacy, like my own, is one of diversity. I do not feel that I can make the decision to change his body knowing that there is a possibility that it will not have spiritual meaning for him as an adult.

I wanted to be Jewish, and that is why I converted. Judaism is my path. I feel good about that decision for myself and I feel good about orienting my son on that path. We wanted Noah to be educated as a Jew and that is why we converted him. I want him to begin his journey in a place that my husband and I can understand and support. However, where that path will finally lead him is between him and God.

I hope that ultimately Noah chooses to remain a member of my faith and finds a wife who shares his beliefs. Maybe one day I will be the proud bubbe at my grandson's brit milah (covenant of circumcision). However, it is possible that my grandchild will be welcomed into a religion other than my own. In any case, I know that I will be a proud grandmother. I love my son and I trust him. More important, I trust God. He will help my son find his own way. I can only pray that he will find his journey as fulfilling as I have found mine. 

I know very well that one's journey to God is a very personal, individual one.

Walking Two Paths: Another Way of Making the Journey

by Debi Tenner

There was no question that our son would have a bris. As soon as he was old enough (he was a premie so the eighth day requirement was waived) we arranged to have a bris and take him to the mikvah to have him converted. Our adult choice to do this was made to take away my son's choice in the matter; he is and always will be Jewish. The Orthodox rabbi who converted him knew that I was not Jewish and that we wanted Joshua to be Jewish. Both my family and Steve's family attended the bris and celebrated, including the chosen godparents who were a Protestant/Catholic couple (they stood as godparents at the baptism also).

It was a day that would be repeated in spirit thirteen years later at his bar mitzvah where he was surrounded and supported by both his Jewish and Christian extended family. This was part of my plan and my vision, though my vision was broader than this from the very start.

The Protestant church I attend considers baptism a symbol of welcoming the child into the church community. As parents, we promised to teach Joshua (and later my daughter, Sharon) about the Christian church and the congregation made a promise to assist and support the parents. The symbol of the blessing is the water; the minister carried the baby throughout the congregation. Our minister spoke to the congregation about our unique marriage, our choice to teach this child about both religions, and he made a special request that people support us in our journey. We had a wonderful party at our house afterward that included a baby shower I had missed because my son

was born prematurely. Everyone was invited, but of course, there were family members who chose not to attend or celebrate that day. It clearly defined, for example, that my in-laws were only able to commit and support so far, and they would be peaceful and supportive from a distance.

By choosing to do both, we were not just choosing to cover all the bases, as if it was a chance thing that my children might run into again someday. We chose to do both as a conscious symbol to our children that from now on we would observe and respect both religions in our house and family. As adults, even with one of us raised one way and the other raised another, we wished to model respect and sharing and compromise. We wished to open two paths for serious study and consideration, and we offered to walk both paths with them as long as necessary. By choosing to have our children welcomed into two religions, we were preparing to give them as much education and understanding of both religions as possible. Our children know they have two heritages, and we have family stories and pictures to show they were welcomed in both.

One person asked how we envisioned celebrating two religions in one family. The answer is that it took many months of thought, conversation, and yes, some tears and worries to make our vision a reality. We were as honest as we could be with the officiants and with our families. We divided the events into three separate days and we invited everyone we could to support us. Yes, of course, we did consider the future (adolescent age) ceremonies

Debi Tenner is the mother of two and teaches the Sunday School class for older children in the New Haven, Connecticut interfaith group. She currently works in the local public school system and has been a summer camp educator for the Congregational Churches of Connecticut. She is a frequent contributor to, and editor of, Dovetail.

Our children know they have two heritages, and we have family stories and pictures to show they were welcomed in both.

2005 Easter/Passover Dates


Palm Sunday - Mar. 20
Purim - sundown Mar. 24
Easter - Mar. 27
Passover - sundown
April 23 - May 2

**Orthodox Christian
Dates in 2003:**

Lent begins March 14
Holy Week begins April 24
Easter is May 1.

and choices of both our children. We decided that we could not find any guarantees in what they would choose, only in what we would choose to teach and support in our family.

While First Communion is the name of a Catholic sacrament (I am not Catholic), we did have to consider what the meaning of our Protestant baptism would mean for my children in terms of such later possible religious rituals. The answer is yes, we were preparing them for that option someday, in the same way we would prepare them for a bar or bat mitzvah by choosing to complete a conversion at the mikvah. We took the first step into both with faith that God would show us what path these children might take in the future. Preparing your child is a good thing, and the process that we went through to welcome our child into both religions was a valuable and important part of our learning and growth as parents. We looked at the visions, the possibilities, and the hope. We also faced the realities head on, right from the start, long before the children were old enough to know what was going on. We prepared the families around us (and the minister and rabbi as well!) that we were in this for the long run, and we were completely committed to following through in both religions in support of our children's learning and growth—even if we had to do it alone.

My favorite song has a line that helped me back then: "Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run, there's still time to change the road you're on." Knowing that, and knowing how important the two welcoming ceremonies were to both our parents, we felt it was the right thing to do for our children. 

It's Your Baby's Baptism? Mazel tov!

by Amy Bagwell

We went to my best friend's son's baptism/christening on Saturday night. I say baptism/christening because no one, including my best friend, really knows the difference between the two. If a bunch of Christians can't get it right, how can a Jew, I ask you? But that's beside the point. The service was at 5:30 p.m., our usual dinnertime, so we were a bit behind our schedule. We got to the church on time and piled into pews, after a pep talk with Emily, my 3-year-old. She has never been to a church before, and has only been to temple a handful of times. So we reviewed the basics: No talking, sit still, be quiet, do what you're told, no fighting, and so forth. The preacher, minister, pastor, whatever he's called, started in, very informal and relaxed. Sasha, my 1-year-old, picked his first word to melt down, right on the floor of the church. I thought there was no way we were going to make it even to the baptism, which was first on the agenda. There was no appeasing her. Goldfish crackers were thrown on the floor, books were tossed over the pew, and the wailing escalated. So I don't really know what happened. I caught a bit of the baptism during our walking in circles; I think there was some water involved, maybe a candle was lit. What I do know is that Sasha was only interested in stairs, and then in flailing on the floor when she couldn't walk up and down them repeatedly.

I hustled her back to the pew and hissed at my husband, "It's *your* turn," thrusting her unhappy body towards him. I let him walk her around for the next hour while I sat with Emily, who had taken my pep talk to heart. She was sitting demurely, feet crossed at the ankles, absorbing everything. She was smiling angelically.

She never sat like this at temple, and they even have special prayer books for children, books with pictures. What she did have issue with was communion. "Why is everybody standing up? I want to go on the stage too!" She thought everyone was having a little snack, and we, as Jews, were excluded somehow. I tried to explain that they have a different religion than ours, and we don't do that. I did not get into the whole body and blood of Christ thing; I tried to keep it simple. All she saw was crackers and juice. That's about the time she decided she was ready to leave. If she couldn't have a snack too, well, then, forget this whole church thing, I'm outta here. We elected to join Sasha and Daddy in wandering the halls, waiting for everyone else to finish singing and praying (and eating) so we could get out of there and get some dinner. Our first trip to church was less than a success. It's not that I wasn't happy for my friend, that I didn't want to witness an important event in her baby son's life. It's just that my young, scheduled children do not go with the flow, especially for events they don't understand. It wasn't like we had more success at Sasha's baby naming, which took place a few short months ago, when she was (I am ashamed to admit) nine months old.

Emily and Sasha do not go to temple regularly because Friday services start after their bedtime. Our Reform temple does not have Saturday services, and our small Southern congregation does not have a youth rabbi. So we rely on the once a month "young at heart" service, which starts earlier and is aimed at the kiddies. Unfortunately, we still get

Amy K. Bagwell is a former social services worker who now stays at home with her two young children. In between helping with her husband's business and raising her girls, she also finds time to write.

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A Haggadah for Interfaith Families

The Inter-Faith Family Seder Book: How to Celebrate a Jewish Passover Supper with Christian In-Laws and Non-Jewish Friends by Nan Meyer (1998): The title says it all. This is a delightful, easy-to-use haggadah that, while making the prayers, songs, and ritual accessible and comprehensible to the non-Jew, does not fall into the trap of "Christianizing" the seder. It has such practical pointers as suggesting white rather than purple grape juice for the children because purple stains, "and there may not be much time to get their holiday finery cleaned for Easter Sunday." Then there are sensitive interpretations, such as that for the ten plagues visited on the Egyptians: "When people do evil, they defy God's will and bring suffering upon themselves.... [but] we cannot rejoice over their pain." Finally, traditional songs like "Chad Gadya" are paired with a universalist English paraphrase of "Eliyahu ha-Navi" set to the tune of "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" (only the blessings are in Hebrew in this user-friendly ritual). We've taken advantage of the \$10 special price for orders of 10 or more for our family seder. (Review reprinted by permission from Dovetail 7:5.)

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stares from older congregants about our unruly children, who are tired and not interested in religious training when they would rather be in their beds. The baby naming was something I knew would be difficult.

We invited my husband's Baptist family, my best friend, and my Jewish family to attend, and we selected a beautiful Hebrew name for Sasha to honor both my grandmothers, who had passed away during the year. We had a collection of small chewy toys for Sasha and a doodle pad for Emily. But the minute the music started, they both began to decompensate. Luckily, we were first up, and even Emily joined us on the bimah to witness Sasha's naming.

Once we sat down, boredom and fatigue set in. Emily rolled around, took every prayer book out, and then started subtly kicking me in an effort to be removed from the sanctuary, which worked, much to her delight. Sasha too was ready to leave, to enjoy that last nursing before sleep. And my best friend, whose older son is accustomed to sitting still at church on a Sunday morning, was calm, relaxed, and attentive. I am embarrassed to say we did not make it to the oneg after services, because my children were falling apart and I wanted them out of there, pronto.

I am still at a loss as to how to explain these religious events to my older daughter, to help her understand that a baby naming is the Jewish equivalent of a baptism, welcoming the new baby into the spiritual world, introducing the baby to the congregation. I am glad we had another girl; the naming is

much easier to discuss than the details of a bris. More important, I don't know how to make my children feel part of our congregation. I want them to comprehend what it means to be Jewish and to have respect for other religions. I want them to understand that Mommy is not the same religion as Daddy, and why we light Hanukkah candles while the Christmas tree twinkles in the other room. I know these are big concepts for preschoolers; I, a college graduate, cannot wrap my mind around them. Certainly, with time, my ability to instill faith in my daughters will strengthen. I just hope we survive these tough Shabbat services until they understand, relate, and identify with their religion. Then I won't have to explain yet again to Emily why the cat is not Jewish, too. 

A Different Path: A Bris Milah Through the Eyes of a Gentile

by Archibald Fripp

I had the opportunity to observe this ancient and often misunderstood ritual of circumcision performed on my newest grandson. As a Christian, I thought it would be useful to share my reactions.

This ceremony started four millennia in the past. As it says in Genesis:

And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised.

Two thousand years later Luke tells us that the practice was still in use when the first Christians were about to come along. Again I quote, "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child...(Jesus)"

Another two thousand years later, I knew that male circumcision was still part of Jewish custom, but I assumed that it was performed in the private, hygienic confines of the pediatric hospital. Imagine my surprise when my newly Jewish son announced that he wanted my wife and me to attend his son's Bris Milah.

"A what?" I asked.

"The Bris Milah. That's the bringing of the child into the covenant through circumcision," he answered. "It is also the naming ceremony."

"Isn't he circumcised in the hospital?" I squeaked, turning a little pale.

"No, the mohel does it either in our home or in the synagogue," he explained. "It's more than just a ritual genital mutilation, and this mohel is a urologist on his day job."

Because we were asked, and because we were curious, we drove to Massachusetts for the ceremony. And I am glad I went, though initially I could not imagine what would take place.

On the eighth day, as commanded, we gathered in their synagogue with family, friends, rabbis, and the mohel (ritual circumcisor). The mohel was in charge of both the short service and, of course, the action to follow. He patiently explained the heritage, a quick review for the Jews in attendance and a seminar for the gentiles, then he led us in a few prayers and assured us that the baby would be less affected by what was to come than many in the audience.

"Yeah, right," I thought to myself, "Poor little boy, and after it's over we are supposed to eat all of this delicious kosher food while you scream."

The father carried his son wearing our 150-year-old baptismal dress to the table where the Jewish grandfather held him and the latex-gloved mohel went to work. His first procedure was to have the rabbi dip his little finger in the wine and then into the baby's mouth. The baby sucked with vigor. The next step, during which some people disappeared into the hall, was to loosen the foreskin, which for a newborn is not simple. The baby complained and received another dip of wine. With the skin loose, the mohel placed the circumcision shield to protect everything but the skin that

Archibald Fripp, Ph.D., lives in Williamsburg, Va.

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was to be removed. And then in a
flash, it was over. The baby was still
trying for that last drop of the sweet
wine and did not make a sound—
tough kid. The product of the
ceremony sat on the table as a small
tube and was to be buried later. Back
in Dad's arms, the baby was a
contented angel.

As is the custom with many
Ashkenazi Jews (that is, Jews of
central or east European origin), the
little one was named for deceased
relatives. A name was chosen from
each side of the family. The father
explained the name from the
mother's side, and the mother did
likewise for the second given name:
a nice gesture to both sides of the
family. The best man from their
wedding also returned for the bris
and presented a toast to the child.

The baby listened to all of the
speeches and then decided it was
time for some of Mom's milk to top
off the wine. He still showed no
discomfort.

The occasion ended with food,
drink, and good conversation. Those
who had disappeared during the
procedure were now full of ques-
tions about what they had missed,
and those such as myself who had
great misgivings were relieved and
newly educated.

I still do not understand the actual
act of circumcision, except possibly
as a medical hygienic procedure.
However, the more holistic event of
ceremoniously bringing a child into

a fine group of people who will love
him and help nurture him, I do
appreciate.

I believe that the best man's toast
summarizes the occasion:

At your wedding, two score
months past, I challenged you
to seek immortality (by many
paths). Now, the most
important contribution to
your immortality, you hold in
your arms. Child, you are the
blessed of the most blessed.
You come into a family that
holds its children most dear
and into a community
dedicated to nurturing its
youth. Grow, little one. Grow,
thrive, and develop into the
man of whom much is
expected for much was given.
Grow and through you and
yours we will all gain
immortality. ▀

When the Path Gets Rocky: Lessons Along the Way

by Renee Fogarty

My husband and I have been married for almost nine years and we have two beautiful children, ages 6 and 3. My husband is a Reform Jew and I am, according to my in-laws, simply "not-Jewish." In reality, I consider myself spiritually Christian. I was baptized Presbyterian, raised and confirmed Reform Christian, and went to Catholic school in the middle of all of this. In any event, we decided to raise our children in both faiths with a belief in God and knowledge of Jesus. If we lived in a vacuum, everything concerning our microcosm of a life would be fine. However, we live in New Jersey near both sets of grandparents, not in a vacuum.

Our children are very comfortably unselfconscious with the traditions that we have set up in our household, so much so that they really can't tell who is Christian and who is Jewish unless we tell them. My son brags about my matzoh ball soup and my husband absolutely loves to take the kids to see Santa. I make latkes for Hanukkah and my husband sings Christmas carols. We enjoy each other's traditions with respect and love and our children feel nothing but love. However, we do have to leave our cozy nest and join the outside world occasionally.

We have made our share of mistakes. One of them is not realizing that the absolute respect that my husband and I have for each other's religions isn't echoed further than the four walls of our home. We failed to realize that our parents, or our children's grandparents, do not share the same warm fuzzy feeling or agenda of our interfaith family. Animosity has grown over the years. Unfortunately, the efforts to have the families included in our children's religious

lives have made things more uncomfortable.

Our mistakes were grounded on the premise that our parents would be happy with our efforts to include the same religious rites and rituals that we had in our own childhood. Unfortunately, no matter how you slice it, our children will never be raised exactly as we were. Our parents have very strong emotional ties to these religious rites. But in some people's opinions rituals become a false dog-and-pony show instead of a true religious and spiritual family experience. We now agree.

Lesson 1: Don't try to force or even expect grandparents to be respectful.

Our Son Jason

Since the brit milah, or Jewish circumcision, occurs on the eighth day of life, this blessed event normally occurs before a baptism. The mohel we used did interfaith ceremonies as long as there was a chance that the child would be brought up Jewish. Yes, he was going to be brought up with Jewish traditions, so the mohel agreed to do it. My son was born in December, we did not think the blinking Christmas tree in our home would be an appropriate backdrop for this Jewish ceremony, so we used my husband's parents' home. I invited my parents to my in-laws' home for this ceremony with full knowledge that this would be their first bris experience, as it was for me as well. They didn't really want to go because they were uncomfortable with the concept of a public circumcision. However, I told them that they should show respect for my husband's traditions and his family and attend. Under protest, they did. Although my father

Renee Fogarty is a pseudonym for the writer, who is an attorney, an adjunct professor, and a full-time mother. Her name has been changed to protect the feelings of her in-laws.

We failed to realize that our parents, or our children's grandparents, do not share the same warm fuzzy feeling or agenda of our interfaith family.

did get green around the gills and my mother sobbed uncontrollably, we got through it. My parents had experienced and survived this religious ceremony and now they were looking forward to being tendered the same respect for Jason's baptism. We were very, very wrong in that assumption.

When it came time for my son's baptism, we ran into some difficulties. My church rejected my request for my interfaith son to be baptized and I left the congregation. I was referred to a minister who was more open to the idea and have been with that church ever since. The ceremony was no problem. The problem arose when my husband refused to invite his parents to this ceremony—knowing that my parents, out of respect, had attended the bris. Although it was a wonderful ceremony and reception, it was an underground event as far as it concerned my in-laws. The word baptism was not to be uttered 100 feet in any direction when my in-laws were present. I felt disrespected and my parents felt the same. My parents thought I had lied to them in order to get them to go to the bris. I was in a very tight spot.

Lesson 2: Don't involve grandparent's clergy.

Lesson 3: Don't try to disorganize organized religion.

My Daughter Lindsay

After the doctor announced "It's a girl!" my husband and I looked at each other and said, "Good, no bris!" However, little did we know that a bris would probably have gone better. We made contact with my husband's parents' rabbi prior to the birth of our daughter to ascertain if formal

religious school would work for us. During that meeting, we made it clear that the children were interfaith and not to be persuaded to choose one faith over the other. The rabbi asked us to reconsider and we said we were pretty much solid on that decision. After the birth of our daughter, we contacted the rabbi once again in hopes that he would do the baby naming in my husband's parents' temple because we thought it would be a really nice gesture for them. With a series of pleasantries exchanged, the rabbi agreed and set up the date for the baby naming. Things were going too smoothly. The invitations were in the mail when my husband received a call at work from the rabbi informing him that he had reconsidered his offer and would not do the ceremony since these children would be raised interfaith and he couldn't convince us to change our minds. If the invitations hadn't been in the mail, we could have gotten away with an unnoticeable change in plans. Now, how could we handle this emotional situation? The grandparents and the elderly great-grandparents were looking forward to this temple event which was now cancelled because of our refusal to raise our daughter in the Jewish faith. We had been forthright, but the rabbi had a change of "heart."

Needless to say, this event negatively changed our extended family forever. My in-laws threatened to leave the temple that they have worshipped in for over 25 years. They met with the rabbi in an angry exchange of viewpoints. My in-laws blamed us for telling the rabbi "too much" and said if we had kept our mouths shut, we'd be able to have the naming at the temple. They were so enraged that they demanded to know our religious plans for our children right then and there. They were furious, upset, and hurt.

Lesson 4: Don't make religious decisions for children based on what their grandparents want.

So, we sat down and laid it all out on the table, trying to calm my husband's parents down. We mentioned that our son had a baptism and so would our daughter. We discussed religious upbringing, schooling, and the possibility of bar and bat mitzvahs and Christian confirmation. We figured that if we gave them our plan, they would be more respectful and grateful for our efforts to accommodate both traditions. If they knew there were also Christian rituals, maybe they would be more respectful towards them as well. Once again, I had to check the address and realize I wasn't in dreamland.

Lesson 5: Don't confuse religious rituals with dog-and-pony shows.

So, after the rabbi refused to conduct the baby naming, we called the rabbi who had conducted our marriage ceremony and he obliged. We hired a hall, invited both sides of the family, including my Christian parents, and had a nice ceremony—or so we thought. You would think that this baby naming was a funeral judging by the scowls on the faces of the Jewish guests as they sat down to a hot plate of catered food and whispered behind our backs. So, we spent a thousand dollars, got a naming certificate, a lot of fake smiles, and it was done. No signs of sincere appreciation, no warm and fuzzy family moments—clearly a dog-and-pony show. Looking back, we should have had a private ceremony in the rabbi's study and been done with it. We simply wondered why we bothered at all trying to please

people when we should be pleasing ourselves.

Lesson 6: Refer to lesson 1. Don't expect or force grandparents to be respectful.

Now that the cat was out of the bag regarding having a baptism for our daughter, I figured that we should extend an invitation for at least the baptism reception to my in-laws. My husband warned me, but I figured that since they knew our plans and all that we had been through, they might show my parents some respect and attend. I believed this gesture would be reciprocated tenfold. However, I should have listened to my husband. Let us just say, they declined the invitation and our relationship has never been the same since.

Lesson 7: Take control over December's dilemma.

For years, the Jewish side of the family has been making new Hanukkah traditions. As the children get older, there are more hoops to jump through. If we didn't jump through a hoop, we would get a huge guilt trip. If we chose a Christmas event over a Hanukkah, we had to justify it to them. As our children got older, more things were added to the Hanukkah celebrations and conversations with our children would reinforce "Hanukkah" equals "presents." It was really becoming a war zone of brainwashing. This is something that we wanted to avoid. We evidently didn't take Hanukkah as seriously as they would like, so they stepped in to do what they thought was my husband's job. We finally realized that we needed to set limits and yes, we had been neglecting Hanukkah. We were much

older and much wiser than in years before and decided that we needed to have a plan and be firm. We set limits on how our children were to celebrate Hanukkah on our terms and not someone else's house. We made the holiday our own. We started a tradition in which we have control over what our children learn and how they learn it. I hosted a small Hanukkah party with my husband's parents that worked out nicely. We had a great time and the children celebrated Hanukkah in a warm, loving environment instead of in a war zone. I am actually looking forward to celebrating Hanukkah this year—when it falls on the evening of Christmas Day. I'll probably put away the Christmas ham just in time for the beef brisket to be fully cooked.

Revelation

You must set limits and take control over decisions concerning your own children's religious upbringing. Be prepared for the grandparents to be disappointed, but be firm in your resolve to protect your children from too much "influence" from those with their own personal agenda. Grandparents see their traditions go by the wayside in an interfaith home and will take any opportunity to stop that from occurring. However, these loving individuals must realize when they overstep their boundaries and put an undue burden on the interfaith family. They have to realize that they had control over their children growing up and that is where the control should end. It doesn't extend to their grandchildren. If you leave gaps in this control you leave yourself open for "undue influence" from concerned grandparents. Don't allow

your children to be front and center for a dog-and-pony show as it waters down the importance of the spirituality of a tradition. Be firm and take control of your children's lives. It isn't easy, but who are the most important people in all of this? The children! 🐾

An Unusual Celebration

by Fred Cohn as Told to E. D. Mahr

Fred Cohn is an intermarried attorney. E. D. Mahr is a freelance writer with more than 50 short stories, mostly for children and young adults, published or under contract. Her writing has appeared in such publications as Cricket Magazine, Cobblestone's Odyssey, Boys' Quest/Hopscotch, and Homeschooling Today.


Mary and I were married on October 8, 1971. Mary is a Roman Catholic, I am a Jew.

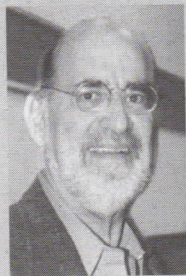
In the spring of 1972 we celebrated our first Passover. Mary worked hard to make everything perfect for the seder meal after her long days of work as a visiting nurse. She worked on the food and house preparations for a week. A seder is not just the special food, but an entire ritual of prayer and recounting of stories—the haggadah, or “order.”

We invited ten people to our home for the seder, none of them Jewish except for an avowed atheist cousin. Though, as a Christian, my wife was aware of the connection between the seder and the Last Supper, and

between the ritual matzoh and the unleavened wafers used for communion, she had never managed a Jewish Passover celebration. Dinner was set for 6:00 p.m. There was only one problem. I'm a criminal defense attorney, and I got stuck in night court. I got home at 11:00 p.m.

The seder, and all the Jewish ritual it entails, had gone ahead without me, with Mary running it, aided by my cousin. That Passover of 1972 began with a seder celebrated in my home by eleven Christians and one atheist Jew.

I love my Mary, and she is a saint. 



Clergy Counseling

Rabbi Allen Secher, a founding board member of Dovetail Institute, is available for counseling interfaith couples and their families in person, on line, or by telephone.

Rabbi Secher is a longtime adviser to the largest interfaith group in the country, and has been an officiant or co-officiant of interfaith life cycle ceremonies for the past 40+ years. His breadth of knowledge, warmth, sympathy, and commitment to exploring the needs of both Christian and Jewish partners make him an indispensable support to couples throughout the country and abroad. For details, call (312) 913-9193 or e-mail sech1@aol.com.

Rabbi Secher's counseling services are independent of the Dovetail Institute and do not necessarily reflect its policies.

A recent note to Rabbi Secher: *You married Carol Traut and me in my parents' backyard in Chatsworth in May of 1973. One of your more memorable comments on that very hot afternoon was about butterflies. Because Carol was not Jewish, we were pleased that you were willing to marry us, and for that we are grateful each and every day of our now-32-year marriage. We moved the following year to Colorado, to complete training and begin our careers as psychiatrists. During the pregnancy with our first child, in 1976, Carol decided to convert to Judaism. Her study with a rabbi friend-of-a-friend led not only to a meaningful conversion, but to a lifelong commitment to Jewish study and absorption. Interestingly, Carol's decision prompted my return to Judaism. We keep a kosher home, enjoy a satisfying synagogue affiliation, continue our education (me through a kollel group and Carol within the Melton curriculum), and have raised two committed Jewish sons. Carol's conversion also strengthened our ties to my Israeli family, whom we visit yearly, and with whom we have celebrated many a simcha.*

I read about your work in a Newsweek article a few years ago, and assumed that many people have been as fortunate as we were to have found you. Your openness to marrying us is a gift for which we are deeply grateful. However, I realize that gratitude is often felt, and rarely expressed. I hope this letter finds you in good health, and enjoying your retirement.

*Best wishes,
David Wahl*

Bulletin Board

Interfaith Support Around the Nation

To be listed as a contact person for a group, or if you are seeking to join or form a group, please send information to:

Dan Josephs
1175 S. Euclid Avenue, Oak Park IL 60304
Tel: (708) 660-9503; Fax: (630) 574-8089
Email: JosephsDA@aol.com

Dan is one of the founders and coordinators of the Chicago Jewish Catholic Couples Group. We look forward to hearing from you.

* Group not sponsored by a religious institution.

California, Sacramento
Interfaith Discussion Group
Dale Kasler & Twila Morris (916) 492-2815

California, San Francisco Bay Area*
Alicia Torre (650) 474-0644

Interfaith Connection, Groups
Helena McMahon, Director (415) 292-1252

Colorado, Denver
Stepping Stones: Jewish identification.
Stacey Delcau (303) 554-5854

Colorado, Denver*
Interfaith Community of Denver
Melissa Yanover (303) 320-3367
info@interfaithcommunity.org

Connecticut, Hamden
Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me.
(203) 288-3877

District of Columbia, Greater Washington
Interfaith Families Project*
Susan Ryder (301) 270-6337,
iffp@verizon.net or www.iffp.net

Jewish Catholic Family Network*
Eve Edwards (703) 893-4447
Brenda Benesch (703) 528-2016
Patrice Thomas (301) 299-6821
Jcfamilynetwork@comcast.net
www.jcfamilynetwork.org

Bethesda Jewish Congregation welcomes interfaith families. Hazzan Sunny Schnitzer (301) 469-8636

Georgia, Atlanta area*
Staci & Aaron Melton forming group.
(404) 636-8160 or asmelton@attbi.net

Illinois, Chicago Metropolitan area*
Jewish Catholic Couples' Dialogue Group
Abbe & Dan Josephs (708) 660-9503
Patty & David Kovacs (773) 275-5689

Indiana, Bloomington
Multifaith couples group. Bill & Diana Harwood, (812) 323-7519,
or wharwood@indiana.edu

Louisiana, New Orleans
Cortney Nathan, Jewish Family Services
(504) 831-8475

Maryland, Baltimore
Jacqui Ashkin, Jewish Family Services
6 Park Center Court, Suite 203
Owings, Mills, MD 21117
(410) 356-8383 ext. 351

Maryland, Rockville
JCC of Greater Washington, DC
Tracey Dorfman, Director
(301) 881-0100, ext. 6762

Massachusetts, Boston*
Adina Davidson & Joel Nitzberg
(617) 776-3235

Michigan, Ann Arbor*
Jewbilation: Jewish Roots with Interfaith
Wings, Lauren Zinn (734) 996-3524
www.jewbilation.org

Minnesota, Minneapolis*
Joan Cleary and Jerry Helfand (651) 698-7987

Minnesota, Minneapolis
Jewish FCS of Minneapolis, Barbara Rudnick

Missouri, St. Louis area*
Joanne & Larry Eisenman (314) 918-7992

New Jersey, Bergen Co.*
Lani Martin (201) 891-1818

New Jersey, Hasbrouk Heights
Temple Beth Elohim: Welcomes non-Jews
R. Fredic S. Dworkin (201) 744-3304

New Jersey, West Orange
Jewish Community Center
Lynne Wolfe (973) 736-3200 ext. 233

New Mexico, Albuquerque
Archdiocese of Santa Fe Ecumenical Office
Fr. Michael Damkovich or Heddy Long
Family Life Office

New York, Albany Area
Marie or Rob Dropkin (518) 439-3732
Meets at Trinity UMC

New York, Long Island
Long Island Havurah for Humanistic Judaism
Leonard Cherlin (516) 889-8337

Please note: Dovetail does not interview or investigate groups listed here.

New York, Long Island/Suffolk County*
Eileen Horowitz (516) 345-0095

New York, New York City
Temple of Universal Judaism
www.tuj.org, (212) 535-0187

New York, NY Greater Metropolitan area*
InterfaithCommunity, Inc.
Manhattan, Westchester, Orange/Rockland.
Sheila Gordon (212) 870-2544
info@interfaithcommunity.org
www.interfaithcommunity.org

New York, Rochester
Interfaith Connection, JCC
Michele Ruda Leve, C.S.W.
(585) 461-2000 ext. 232

Ohio, Cincinnati*
Christine M. Segal (513) 793-2866

Ohio, Columbus
Gateways: The Jewish Interfaith Connection
Carol Folkerth (614) 231-2731

Ohio, Dayton
Jewish Interfaith Network: Interfaith group
Tonda Learner (937) 853-0372

Pennsylvania, Philadelphia area
Jewish Converts & Interfaith Network
Lena Romanoff, Dir. (610) 664-8112

Faithways, JFCS of Greater Philadelphia
R. Rayzel Raphael (215) 540-3737

Tennessee, Memphis*
Jan and David Kaplan (901) 767-4267

Texas, Houston
Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me.
5601 Braeswood, Houston, TX 77096
(713) 729-3200, Rabbi Eve Ben-Ora x3257 or
Barabara Shepard x3197

Virginia, Northern Virginia area
Cong. Beth Emeth, Judi Cloutier, Outreach
Coordinator, (703) 860-4515 ext. 142

Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Interfaith Connection, JCC of Milwaukee
Prina Goldfarb (414) 964-4444

Interfaith couples in the following cities would like to meet or talk with other interfaith couples: Orlando, FL, DesMoines, IA, Indianapolis, IN, W. Bloomfield area, MI, Lincoln, NE, Cleveland, OH, Oklahoma City, OK, Elkins Park, PA, Madison, WI
To network, please contact us at DI-IFR@Bardstown.com or 800-530-1596.

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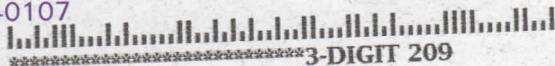
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