

As appeared in the pages of

Yated Ne'eman

The Adopted Princess

THE STORY
OF ALIZA BULOW,
A JEW BY CHOICE

When I was invited to attend the AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals) convention last February, I was anticipating a Shabbos of *chizuk* and inspiration.

Little did I realize just how precious and meaningful that Shabbos would turn out to be. For while there, I met Aliza Bulow from Denver, who has become a dear friend.

Aliza, a brilliant woman in her late forties, is modest and unassuming, yet her sweet and warm personality belies the powerhouse within. A righteous convert who joined the Jew-

ish faith at age sixteen, Aliza is a respected Torah teacher. She is currently the Director of the North American Women's Program for *Ner L'Elef*, a worldwide *kiruv* training organization.

At the AJOP convention, Aliza's powerful address, "*The Incredible Journey of the Soul*," based on the *Sefer Derech Hashem* by the *Ramchal*, 'blew me away' with its profundity. I was very impressed, both by the lecture, and by the lecturer. Throughout the Shabbos, I had the opportunity to speak with Aliza several times, and on Sunday we exchanged phone numbers. I

wrote myself a note "Interview Aliza for the Pesach paper."

At that time, Pesach seemed very far away. But time has a way of creeping up on us, catching us unawares. Before I knew it, my Pesach deadline for interviews was fast approaching. I tried reaching Aliza, but she was traveling for work, visiting several communities where *Ner L'elef* couples were doing *kiruv*.

Aliza and I finally set up a lengthy phone interview, (actually, two lengthy interviews,) during which I heard her story. Actually, this interview is only

half the story I want to write about. The other half, which is actually her daughter Elisheva's incredible saga, will be published on another occasion.

What makes Aliza's story so remarkable is its absolute normalcy. There were no miraculous visions, tormented years of being alienated from the whole world, or wasted years backpacking in India. This grounded, vibrant mother of six children, ranging in age from 26-19, (three of them married,) exudes a sense of serenity and purpose, an unflappable good cheer that is infectious.

ALIZA'S STORY

I was born Alisa Beach in 1964, in Madison, Wisconsin, a small college town where my parents were enrolled in graduate school. In a strange twist of fate, (today I call it *hashgocha*,) they actually served as dorm parents in a secular Jewish girls dorm! This was back in the early sixties, when dorms had curfews, and the girls couldn't come and go as they pleased. My parents both enforced the rules and served as advisors to the college girls.

My father, Mark, and my mother, Oralee, were both raised Protestant, lightly affiliated with the Church. Yet their religious faith was only cultural; what really moved them was the nascent Civil Rights Movement.

Picture this: We were a white, Anglo-Saxon, middle class family, with the requisite two children: Alisa, (that's me,) and Shana, fourteen months younger. My parents were intellectuals, who strongly believed in the inherent dignity of every human being regardless of their skin color. It was this passion for equality and the recognition of human dignity that drove them to accomplish what they did.

Their life's mission, in essence, was to bring about change in the way blacks were treated in society. They were true activists, trying to change the mindset and opinions of private citizens, and government. After leaving Wisconsin my parents moved to Rochester, NY, where my father was a professor at the University of Rochester. During this time they traveled to various communities, in order to attend rallies for civil rights. They even had the honor of meeting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at a rally in Washington, DC in 1968, shortly before he was assassinated.

The powerful rally transformed my parents, who made the decision to dedicate their lives to ending segregation. While my father was a college professor, my mother was a full time homemaker and community builder. She would volunteer at various inner-city schools, in order to take the pulse of what was going on, to see whether the school integrated blacks and whites. If the school didn't have a good mix of students, or they weren't being treated fairly, she worked hard to change the situation.

The fact that they were white, and had two little girls, the perfect, all-American family, meant that my parents could carry out their great experiment. They would contact realtors, pretending to be a family looking to buy a house, and would take note of how they were treated, which homes they were shown, etc.

Next, a black couple would contact the same realtor, and take notes of their experience. If the realtor would treat the black couple differently, showing them homes of varying price ranges or steering them away from white neighborhoods, my parents would raise the alarm. They would contact civil rights lawyers and provide the evidence necessary for effective legal action.

We were friendly with black families, including them in our social lives. I remember painting my nails red when I was a little girl. We were visiting our Black neighbors, when the woman of the house told me, "Little girls shouldn't wear red nail polish. Little girls wear pink." And she sat me down and repainted my nails.

If our parents' activities would have impacted our lives only during the weekends it wouldn't have been as great a challenge for me. As it happened, our schooling was also dictated by their values. That meant I attended an inner-city public school in an integrated neighborhood; after all, we had to live by our credo. Unfortunately, as a brainy white kid in a largely black school, (and my father was a college professor!) with a too-extensive vocabulary, I was a perfect target to be bullied.

I suffered a lot during my years in that inner-city school. I had a tremendous thirst for knowledge, a desire to learn and grow, but these were not valued by many of the students in the school I attended. I wasn't challenged properly, and languished through grade school. In hindsight, I now realize, my schooling was a 'social experiment.' I was a *korbon* to my parents' cause.

Years later, when I learned what it means to be an *Ivri*, to be standing alone against the rest of the world, I realized why I needed to go through that challenging experience.

Ironically, my sister Shana was privileged: she attended an experimental integrated school for gifted children, where she flourished. Today she lives in Mexico, referees professional soccer, and speaks Spanish fluently.

When I was ten years old and Shana was nine, my father was denied tenure at the University of Rochester. My parents decided to take a year to travel across the country and research race relations. They received a grant from the Ford Foundation to do a field study of interracial neighborhoods, to pinpoint the problems and issues that needed to be dealt with. During that year we visited many cities, and lived for extended periods of time in Baltimore, Cleveland, Corona, California and Portland. My sister and I attended school in each city, partnering

with my parents, observing the local culture and reporting on any social inequalities we would find. My parents gave us special on the job training and made sure we felt that it was a family endeavor.

“When the year - and the grant - had come to an end, we returned to Rochester to start anew. Despite their social activism and joint enthusiasm for various causes, my parents, were going through some marriage difficulties. When I was eleven they made the decision to get divorced, remaining on good terms with each other for the sake of their two daughters.

I am very grateful to them that the divorce was friendly, without any rancor. My parents never bad-mouthed each other, never made us feel guilty or asked us to take sides in any arguments. In fact, even their custody agreement was unusual: instead of making us move from one home to another, my parents simply shared ownership of the house. My father would live with us for a while; and then my mother would move into the home and my father would move out.

A year later, both my father and my mother moved to Portland, Oregon. After my father remarried a wonderful Catholic woman with four children of her own, we would alternate between both homes, spending two months with my father and his new family, followed by a month with my mother. It was during the time they divorced, when I was ten years old, that I stopped believing in Christianity, and became a self-proclaimed atheist.

My parents were okay with my decision, and simply left me at home when they went to Church with my sister. But I wasn't happy - I decided I also had a right to a religion, to a life of meaning and faith. And so I began my search, which would last for the next four years.

I searched for books on spirituality and religion, going to the public library to get books on Buddhism, meditation, and other faiths. Yet I instinctively knew these weren't the 'real thing.'

After middle school I enrolled in a performing arts public high school, where I finally felt challenged and fulfilled. One of my favorite activities was going to the school library to check out books on religion. One day in 1978, when I was fourteen years old, I found the classic book “*To be a Jew*,” written by Chaim Halevi Donin. In retrospect, I didn't just find it. Hashem planted it in the library for me to find. For that was the book that brought me home.

I found the book so intriguing, that I read it

from cover to cover, and then read it again. I also found the well-known book “*This is my G-d*,” by Herman Wouk. (At that point, there were very few works on Judaism; ArtScroll Publications was only a few years old.) As I turned the pages, I felt like I slid into home plate. I was reading these books and learning about the Jewish faith for the first time. Somewhere deep inside my soul I realized I had found the truth.

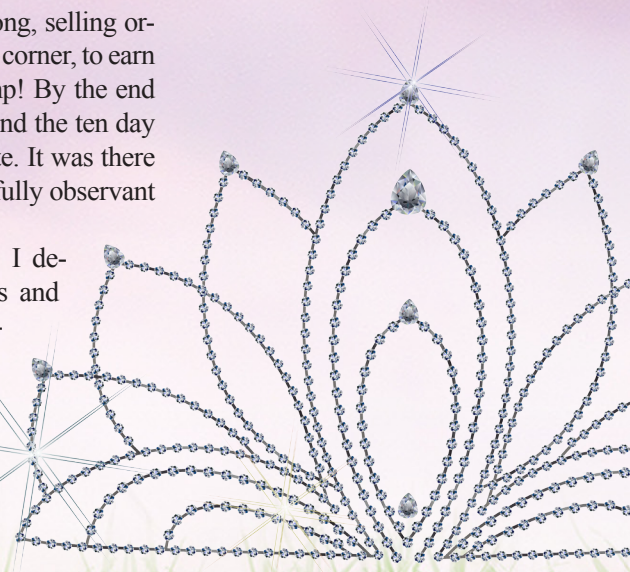
I still didn't know much about Judaism, but the more I learned, the more I loved it. I had learned the verse of *shema*, “*Hear O Israel*,” and that the Jews were required to place this verse on their doorpost. (I had never seen a *mezuzah* before.) So I took a black permanent marker, and wrote the *Shema*, literally, on the doorpost of my room! My father and his wife were amused by my search, but respected my right to choose my own religion. They were both very tolerant and accommodating, though they didn't think my newfound infatuation would last.

To their intense surprise, my interest in all things Jewish only got stronger. A school friend introduced me to Bernice Lynch, a nice Jewish lady who belonged to the Conservative congregation in Portland, which had a thriving teen and youth program. She and I quickly became friends, and soon I became active in the congregation, led by Rabbi Joshua Stampfer, who became my guide. I attended services on Friday nights, and any of the Rabbi's lectures that fit into my school schedule.

When I heard the congregation hosted a summer camp program, I was determined to attend. The only problem was finding the money to pay for it! I knew that I couldn't ask my parents for the money. I had to earn it myself.

I got a job at a sidewalk concession stand. I worked in the heat all summer long, selling orange juice and cookies on a street corner, to earn the money to go to summer camp! By the end of the summer, I was able to attend the ten day camp session in Washington State. It was there that I had my first exposure to a fully observant Shabbos and a kosher kitchen.

When I returned from camp, I decided to begin keeping Shabbos and *kashrus*. This was no simple decision, involving a lot of planning and hard work. Fortunately, there was no tension at home. My father and his new wife, (and my mother when I stayed with her) were very



The Adopted
Princess will
always be
grateful to
her Father for
letting her live
in His Palace.

- Aliza Bulow

understanding, letting me do my own thing. In fact, one of the interesting transitions I had to undergo when I became a Jewish woman was internalizing the fact that the kitchen belongs to the mother. When I was growing up, the kitchen belonged to everyone.

Granted, my observance of *Shabbat* was far from ideal, (I used my free student bus pass and took the bus, but I tried not to write or watch TV) yet to me, it felt very special, even sacred. Likewise, I didn't know much about keeping kosher, but I was determined not to eat non-kosher meat. I continued to learn as much as I could, though I lived far from any observant Jews. There was a High Holiday- only Orthodox Sephardic congregation in Portland, and a small Ashkenazi partly *shomer shabbos* congregation, but both were on the other side of town, too far away.

The more I learned, the more my personality changed. I had been a stubborn child, outspoken and brash, determined to do things my way. Slowly I changed into a thoughtful, introspective teen. When I turned 16, I was finally converted by Rabbi Stampfer; it felt like it took so long for him to agree that I was ready.

The following summer, I decided to make myself a 'bat mitzvah' party, and learned how to 'lein' from the Torah. (Remember, this was a Conservative congregation!) I also discovered that there were schools called yeshivos out there that taught Jewish classes full time. I actually heard about one such yeshiva in New York, Yeshiva University, but was disappointed to learn that it was only for men. I had no idea that Stern College, a branch for women, existed. Since my parents were civil rights activists, I actually considered suing them for gender-based discrimination. I wanted to attend a yeshiva!

In the meantime, someone told me about a program in Israel, a farm-based high school program near Ashdod. Since I would be working on the farm/kibbutz, the cost of the program was minimal. All I needed was a ticket, but I'd saved the money by working during the summer. I did the research, and enrolled myself in the school.

Since it was in Israel, I assumed it was a religious program. It didn't dawn on me that a Jewish school in Israel might not be Torah observant! As usual, my parents were okay with my choices. My mother had also gone to Greece during her high school years. She always thought I'd go to Africa to do civil right work there, but Israel was okay with her, too.

IN THE HOLY LAND

A few weeks before I was about to leave, my Rabbi went to Israel, and did me the favor of checking out the high school for me. When he returned, he told me emphatically that this program was completely unsuitable! It was not only irreligious, but antagonistic to religion.

Now I had a problem. I was all packed up and ready, and my ticket was already booked, but I had nowhere to go. My rabbi helped me clarify my goals and offered to help me get into a religious *kibbutz* or woman's yeshiva. I was so excited to hear there was such a thing as a woman's yeshiva. I jumped at the chance. Someone told him about a women's yeshiva. He made the call for me and I was accepted.

Everything was great until two weeks before the year started, when they learned that I'd never been in a Jewish day school.

"Our school is for girls with a Hebrew school background," they said. "We're sorry, but we don't think you'll be able to succeed there."

I was devastated, but I wasn't about to back down. I had come so far, there was no way I could stop. "Isn't there any program for me?" I pleaded. "I really want to come to Israel and learn Torah."

In the face of my desperation, the woman on the phone considered for a moment. "Actually, we do have a program for beginners," she said. "Our college program has a beginner's track. Are you interested?"

Was I? Though I was only sixteen, I was going on thirty, (or so I felt,) and so this program was perfect for me. There was only one problem: I had a suitcase full of denim overalls, which I'd packed for the farming program. I knew that I needed dresses and skirts for a women's yeshiva, though I still had no idea about the rest of the dress code. Since I knew how to sew, and had no money to buy more stuff, I decided to alter the clothes I already had.

I simply took the crumpled pairs of overalls out of my suitcase, cut them at the knees, put a layer of lace on the bottom to lengthen them, made a few seams, and there was my brand new wardrobe! Needless to say, I quickly realized how inappropriate my choice of clothes was as soon as I arrived...

Before I left, my Rabbi took me aside and explained that, "Not everyone will appreciate the fact that you had a Conservative conversion."

On the spot I made a decision not to talk about my background at all. It was no one's business that I grew up in a Protestant home

and converted. I was simply a young girl who wanted to learn more about my religion. I had never heard of the term *baalas teshuvah*, until a girl going to seminary on my plane mentioned the word.

“*Baalas teshuvah*? What’s that?” I asked.

After an exhausting flight I arrived in Eretz Yisroel, and was immediately smitten by the beautiful country. It pulled at my *neshomoh*, making me giddy with joy.

Clutching my suitcase and dragging my trunk, I arrived at Brovenders, (now known as ‘*Midreshet Lindenbaum*’) and introduced myself as Alisa Beach from Oregon. My newfound friends had also come that day, and were busy welcoming each other, playing Jewish Geography. Do you know so-and-so? Are you related to the Kleins?

When I gave them my name, all I got was blank stares. Alisa Beach? From Portland? I was a thirteenth generation American, yet there was no one I could possibly be related to, no one who had a similar name! I learned to deflect intrusive questions, to answer vaguely about my past. For the first few months, I didn’t divulge my true background to a soul.

In any case, there was barely any time to speak. The learning was so intense and the workload so challenging, I was totally unprepared. I’d always been a straight A student, to whom good marks came seemingly without effort. But in Brovenders, I quickly learned I knew almost nothing at all. In order to master the material - remember, this was a beginner’s seminary - I needed to study with my *chavrusos* for hours. I thrived on the challenge, becoming close to my friends and role models.

I ended up staying at Brovenders for two whole years, coming home in the summers at my mother’s insistence. I had no idea how I would pay for the airfare or my schooling, but Hashem was looking out for me. The first year, when I arrived, I discovered that I qualified for a youth *aliyah* scholarship, since I was under 18. Thus, my tuition bill was cut in half, and I had enough money to pay for the second year of school. All I needed was money for the plane ride, to return to Eretz Yisroel.

When I arrived home after my first year, I called a friend, who mentioned that she was going to be working in the JCC summer camp. This was on a Thursday, and the camp was starting on Monday. “All the jobs were already given out,” she told me. “But if you still want to work there, maybe you can show up and see if they need a counselor at the last moment.”

Although I didn’t think that would work, what did I have to lose? I arrived at the JCC camp on Monday, and waited around until it became obvious that more kids registered than they’d expected. As it turned out, the head staff was thrilled to have another counselor. I was hired on the spot, for a salary for \$750 for the summer, very generous compensation in those days. Best of all, it was the exact amount I needed to pay for my flight back to Eretz Yisroel!

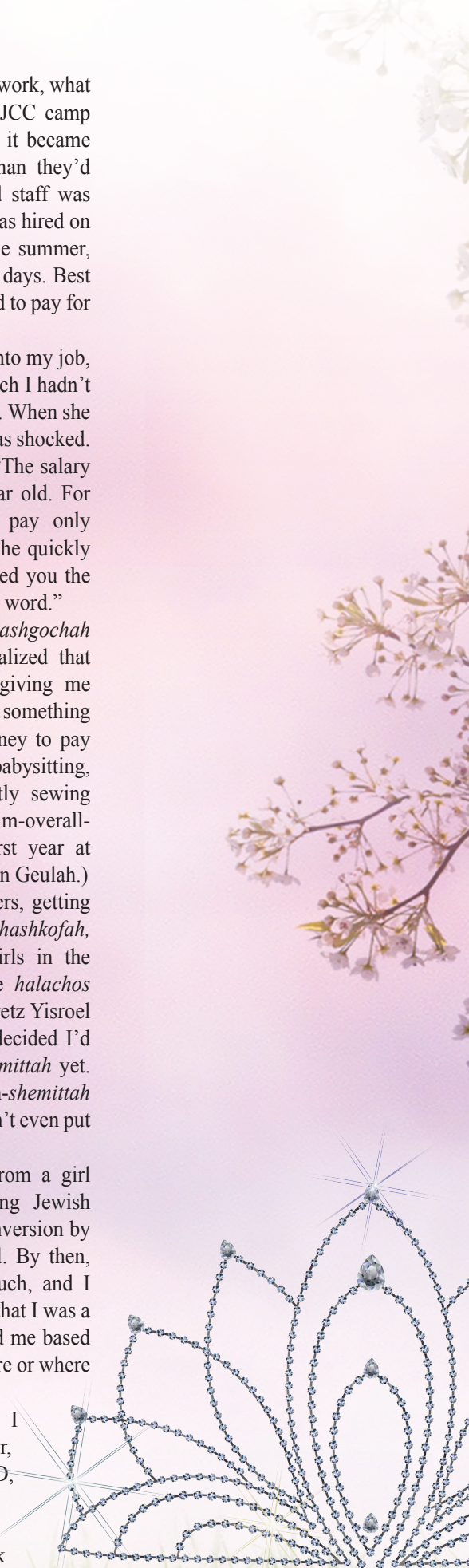
A week later, after I’d acclimated into my job, I was asked to fill out paperwork, which I hadn’t had a chance to fill out when I applied. When she saw my age, seventeen, the director was shocked. “I thought you’re twenty,” she said. “The salary we promised you is for a twenty year old. For seventeen year old counselors we pay only \$350.” Sensing my disappointment, she quickly added, “But since we already promised you the higher salary, we’re going to keep our word.”

To me that story epitomized the *hashgochah protis* I saw on a daily basis. I realized that Hashem was looking out for me, giving me special attention. Whenever I needed something important, somehow I found the money to pay for it. I lived on a very tight budget, babysitting, saving up pocket money, and mostly sewing my own clothes. (I updated my denim-overall-turned-skirt wardrobe during my first year at Brovenders, by shopping at the sales in Geulah.)

I spent two full years at Brovenders, getting a solid background in education and *hashkofah*, making lifelong friendships with girls in the dorm, and slowly undertaking more *halachos* and *mitzvos*. The first year I was in Eretz Yisroel happened to be a *shemittah* year; I decided I’d take things slowly, and not keep *shemittah* yet. But when I bought a falafel at a non-*shemittah* place, I found I couldn’t eat it. I couldn’t even put it in my mouth!

During this time I transformed from a girl searching for meaning into a young Jewish woman. I underwent an Orthodox conversion by a respected *bais din* in Eretz Yisroel. By then, my background didn’t matter so much, and I wasn’t so determined to hide the fact that I was a convert. I found that people respected me based on who I was, not who my parents were or where I came from.

After two years at Brovenders, I came home for the second summer, getting my driver’s license, my GED, (since I’d left high school and finished my schooling in Israel,) and buying a sewing machine. Then I was back



to Eretz Yisroel, where I attended Hebrew University, taking preparatory nursing courses, with the goal of becoming a nurse-midwife. Once I finished these courses I hit a snag: there was no way I could be accepted to nursing school if I hadn't "served the country."

There were two choices available for observant girls who wanted to fulfill their army duties: *sheirut leumi* or *nachal chareidi*. To me, the first was a poor substitute; if I was going to be part of the army, I wanted to be doing the real thing. And so I joined *nachal chareidi* in the 1980's, part of a group of *frum* Jewish girls whose job was to set up settlements. (Which, sadly, were later dismantled by the same '*nachal chareidi*' soldiers, under orders of the government.)

Nowadays, when I tell the people I work with that I was in the army, it's interesting to watch their reactions. "You served in the army?" They look at me and can't believe that I once owned an Uzi! It's definitely a conversation starter...

I served with a group of Bnei Akiva type, *frum* soldiers. We underwent two months of basic training, learning how to shoot an M-16, a Galil and an Uzi, among other things. We needed to know how to defend ourselves in case we were attacked during the settlement building. Though I was trained in using guns, I tried to get out of firing my gun as much as I could. I didn't want to get it dirty, because guns are very hard to clean.

During my army experience I became relatively fluent in Hebrew, and learned a thing or two about the 'great divide' in Israeli politics. When I was discharged at the age of 20, I planned to finally enter nursing school, but Hashem had other plans.

At the time, I shared an apartment with a girl who'd become a close friend. Another girl, who was getting married shortly, wanted to join us for a few weeks, and we agreed. I'd recently begun getting my 'feet wet' in the *shidduch* scene, but was finding it very challenging.

I wanted a non-English-speaking Israeli *ben-Torah* who wanted to live in Eretz Yisroel. I never wanted to leave the land I loved so much. Instead, I was introduced to my *bashert*, in another fascinating twist and turn of *hashgochah*.

FROM ALISA BEACH TO ALIZA BULOW

One day, our new roommate had a visitor. Her brother, Ephraim Bulow, who was a law student visiting Eretz Yisroel, stopped by. Ephraim was

also in *shidduchim*, but he had a whole different list of qualities: he wanted a traditional European girl from a solid Jewish family, who was looking for a professional.

Hashem is the ultimate matchmaker, they say. My roommate, (today my sister-in-law,) introduced us, and the rest, as they say, is history. We were engaged a short time later, and got married in 1985, in New York. My parents and extended family attending our wedding and they were very happy for me, though they had a hard time coming to terms with the fact that this 'Jewish thing' was for real.

Ephraim finished his studies and took the bar exam, becoming a lawyer, while I attended Hunter college. My dreams of becoming a midwife were shelved for the time being, as I focused on setting up my new home and making dinner for my husband. Today, in my teaching and work for *Ner L'elef*, I feel that I'm a midwife, albeit on a different plane, as I help women 'give birth' to their Jewish self.

Although I was in school and keeping house, I really hadn't changed. I was still every bit the activist, wanting to make a difference in the world. I was very active on campus, especially in the Soviet Jewry movement.

Right after our wedding, we went to Russia for a three week visit, to support and give encouragement to the Refuseniks. This was before Glasnost, when the Jewish population was still trapped, as in Mordechai ben David's famous song, "Behind the Iron curtain." The trip was dangerous and scary; the KGB presence was felt everywhere. It's hard to describe the terror and anxiety under which the Russian people lived. They never knew when the next knock on their door would come. They couldn't do anything—go to the store and buy a loaf of bread, without being followed.

Just to give you an example of how pervasive the tension was, on our flight home, as soon as the pilot announced that we'd exited Russian airspace, everyone burst into spontaneous applause! When I returned home, it was with enhanced appreciation for America, a *medinah shel chesed*, where I realized how many liberties we were taking for granted.

The next few years were hectic, as I gave birth to our six beautiful children, within the span of seven and a half years. At the time, we lived in an apartment building in Long Island, which was inhabited mainly by senior citizens. They became my advisors and close friends. We would go to the communal laundry room and fold laundry

together, and the little old ladies cooed over my children.

There was one theme that came up, over and over again, as they played with my toddlers and held my children. Most of these women expressed their regret at only having one or two children, and kept on saying, "I wish I would have had more..."

This was such a *chizuk* during those hectic years. Whenever I wondered if I'd ever stop changing diapers and waking up in the middle of the night for feedings, I thought about the blessings I knew I'd be able to count. In retrospect, those years flew by so quickly, and my children grew up seemingly overnight. Well, maybe over a week or so...

After several years we moved into a private home in Long Beach, and became attached to the nearby *Sh'or Yeshuv* community in Far Rockaway. Rebbetzin Tehila Yaeger became my Rebbetzin, role model, and second sister all in one. We spent summers in the *Sh'or Yeshuv* bungalow colony, and slowly began moving into the *chareidi* world. I was a full-time mother, raising our children while my husband worked long hours as a lawyer. Yet I continued to learn with local women, went to parenting classes, and enjoyed raising my children in a Torah-oriented community.

As my children grew older, I volunteered in their schools, and also began to give *shiurim*. It began when Rebbetzin Yaeger came to Long Beach to give a women's *shiur* once a week. I volunteered to be the Rebbetzin's driver, as I wanted to spend time with her on a steady basis. To me, driving the Rebbetzin was '*shimush talmidei chachomim*,' at its best. When that *shiur* stopped because commuting became too difficult for the Rebbetzin, the local women wanted a replacement *shiur*, and asked me to step in. At first I said 'no way,' but then they kept asking, so I agreed to give it a try. I began with a *parsha shiur*, which was very well received.

One rainy day, only two women showed up at my *shiur*; one was a *giyores*, and the other was a woman who was learning about the Jewish faith. Since we were the only ones present, they felt comfortable asking *hashkofah* questions that had been bothering them.

"Do you really believe in *techias hameisim*, the resurrection of the dead?" And "how do you know that Moshiach will come?" As we spoke, and I tried to answer their questions, I realized that there were probably a lot of other women who had these questions. And so I completely

revamped my *shiur*, focusing on basic *ikrei emunah*, the fundamentals of our faith, based on the sefer "*Derech Hashem*" by the Ramchal, who also wrote the "*Mesilas Yesharim*."

A few years later, I began working with Partners in Torah as the telephone mentor's mentor, guiding *chavrusos* and helping them choose appropriate *seforim* to learn together. This was up my alley, as I'd already read most of the English books available (this was before the current explosion of Jewish books. I cannot make the same claim today). I also regularly attended the annual AJOP conventions in Baltimore, where I met so many new friends and role models.

And then, eleven years ago, when our children entered their teens, we began to seriously consider the prospect of moving.


A DOWNGRADE— AND AN UPGRADE

I had been noticing, with some discomfort, the abundance of materialism and 'rat race' of the average American teen living on Long Island. To some degree, this attitude had seeped into the Jewish community as well. I didn't want my children joining the race to keep up with the Jewish Joneses, to spend their free time at the mall or going to Florida with their friends, or even attending lavish *bar mitzvahs* and weddings. I felt like many people around us were alive - but not flourishing.

Most importantly, the New York lifestyle was very difficult to maintain, which meant that my husband was working very long hours as a lawyer, and we rarely saw him during the week. It was time for a downgrade - in our standard of living, which would also be an upgrade - in our quality of life.

I'd always wanted to raise our family in Eretz Yisroel, but for various reasons, that wasn't an option for us. And so we began researching out-of-town communities that were warm, welcoming, and had more humble materialistic standards. The West Coast was out - it had its own challenges, and we didn't want to move to the South. We needed a community that was large enough to give us choices as far as schools and work, but small enough where we could make a difference. We basically narrowed it down to two choices: Milwaukee and Denver, both of which were led by a Rabbi Twerski at the time, (they were uncle and nephew.)

I made a pilot trip to Denver with some of my children, and was very impressed.



Then I returned home, and made another trip with my husband, where we finalized our plans. Though my husband had a stable income in a prestigious Manhattan firm, he was just as committed to our move, feeling strongly that I was his ‘Sarah,’ and he should listen to my voice.

It took a few months to arrange the move, to sell our home in Long Beach and say goodbye to our dear friends there. It was especially hard to leave my students and those we helped grow in their *Yiddishkeit*. One young couple actually moved with us! Yet we made the move eleven years ago, and have never looked back. Most of our children were very excited about the move, though one gave us a hard time for a little while.

My husband still works as a lawyer, though his salary is about half of what it used to be. As I tell people, “We chose to purchase a husband and father for our children.”

Yes, our standard of living might be lower, but our quality of life is so much greater! We live in a Torah oriented community, right across the street from the *Rosh Kotel*, and most of our neighbors are in *chinuch*. The *gashmiyus* standards are not to compare - we felt like we moved back in time. Everything is so laid-back and *heimish*, with several generations of families living in the same community.

As soon as we arrived in Denver I began teaching and working in *kiruv*. I became the Program Director for The Jewish Experience, *Yeshiva Toras Chaim’s* outreach organization run by Rabbi Aaron Yisroel Wasserman. I created programs, built relationships, taught classes and *chavurahs*, and learned how a small organization grows into a thriving, successful community institution. I worked there for five years and then shifted my role into teaching exclusively. It was experience and information that served me well as I took the next step.

Six years ago I began working for *Ner L’Elef*, a worldwide leadership program, which trains young Rabbinic couples to do community service in five different languages: Hebrew, French, Spanish, Russian and English. I was invited to join by my AJOP friend and mentor, Chaya Levine, who handed me the follow up for the North American branch of the program. Though officially a part-time job, it’s really full time, as I travel frequently, visiting about sixteen cities a year. I keep in touch with nearly 200 women who are in various *kiruv* positions, advising them, answering their questions and giving them *chizuk*. I’d best describe my position as being a ‘Rebbetzin coach.’

What are their concerns, you might ask? Well, there are plenty. Many *Rebbetzins* face a few bumps as they transition from the *kollel* world in Eretz Yisroel to the world of work in America. Some might feel lonely while their husbands are off ‘saving the world.’ Others are shy or insecure about giving a class and I help them find their teaching voice. Some have *chinuch* questions, or wonder how best to reach the women under their care. Some need help formulating flyers, preparing for classes, or just wanting to know what color *paroches* to choose for the new *Aron Kodesh* in their community *shul*.

I love visiting and supporting women from all types of different communities. From Victoria, Canada to Mexico City, from Houston to Charlotte, from Boulder, CO to Savannah, GA, there are couples giving their lives to strengthen *klal Yisroel*. Some share concerns, some have unique conditions, all appreciate a visit... and the hours we spend together are really seeds for warm relationships during the rest of the year.

In Denver I teach two classes on a weekly basis: *Sefer Hachinuch* and Jewish philosophy currently focusing on Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. In addition I have a weekly *Derech Hashem* class by phone, for women with a strong background. I also teach short series for different organizations throughout Denver and I still teach for The Jewish Experience on a regular and “pinch hit” basis. A lot of these classes can be found on my website: ABiteOfTorah.com

Finally, I teach in almost every city I visit, often on a college campus, in a *shul*, JCC or private home. My life today is so beautiful and meaningful. I still feel like the more I learn, the more I love being Jewish. I feel so privileged to be a Jew and to be “on Hashem’s team”.

Postscript:

I made the decision to join Am Yisroel, and learned how to accept the responsibility as I grew into Jewish adulthood.

As I said, I feel like an adopted princess who was given a golden opportunity. I see the possibilities of what a Torah life, a Torah community and a Torah nation can offer both the individual and the world. I try through my work to give people a glimpse into what they can accomplish through Torah and a real relationship with Hashem. I hope that will empower other women, and eventually contribute to changing the world.