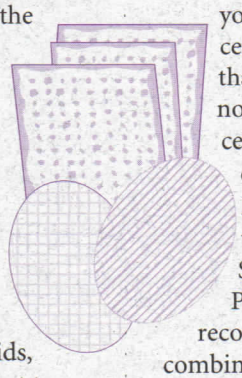
Dovetail
A Journal by and for Jewish/Christian Families

# The Paschal Season: Celebrating the Spring Holidays

In the Christian/Jewish household, the spring holidays are an ever-changing challenge.

Jewish Passover, preceded by Purim, and Christian Easter, preceded by Lent and Holy Week, are both determined by the lunar calendar, but the Christian church made a deliberate and largely successful effort to sunder them by using a different system, so in a mixed marriage you'll seldom have the same spring schedule two years in a row.



Ash Wednesday comes first (March 21 at the latest), and Lent begins. But then comes Purim. Isn't the celebration out of keeping with the spirit of the Christian season? On the other hand, Purim is a nice holiday for kids, sending costumed children out to bring sweets to the neighbors and encouraging mild mayhem with noisemakers during the synagogue service.

Since the Catholic Church has relaxed the rigor of fasting requirements to merely abstaining from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays, and having meat only once a day the rest of the week, Catholics should be able to work this out. A Christian abstainer might reckon days in the Jewish manner, sunset to sunset, and therefore be able to abstain from meat on "Friday" —i.e., starting on Thursday evening—and still have flanken for Shabbat dinner. (As for what canon law might say about this adjustment, Dovetail adviser Eugene Fisher suggests: don't ask, don't tell.)

The real complications set in later on. When Passover falls well before Easter, your only problem is to remember not to eat meat at breakfast or lunch on the first two days so that you're free to partake of the seder. Unless, of course, one of those days falls on Thursday/Friday or on Tuesday/Wednesday, if you're abstaining then too. Well, a perfectly lovely, if unconventional, seder can be made without meat.

If seder night falls on Holy Thursday, you're in luck, sort of. There is a certain piquancy in realizing that many Christian churches now encourage their faithful to celebrate some form of seder on the Thursday before Easter, as a recognition that what Christians call the Last Supper was evidently a Passover celebration. But recognize that this kind of combination of elements of the seder with a commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist may make the Jewish partner uncomfortable, and talk out what you both want ahead of time.

When there's a seder designated for Good Friday, the situation can be emotionally sticky for the Christian

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*Mary Helene Rosenbaum is editor of the **Dovetail** Journal; Stanley Ned Rosenbaum is a director of the Dovetail Institute. Portions of this article were adapted from their book, **Celebrating Our Differences: Living Two Faiths in One Marriage** (Shippensburg, PA: Ragged Edge Press 1994; pb ed. 1999), available at www.dovetailinstitute.org or 800-530-1596. Copyright © 1999, all rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.*

partner, who may feel uneasy about the celebratory atmosphere. It might be useful here to concentrate on the reason this Friday is called "good," on the close kinship between the holiday in which Jews celebrate their freeing from bondage in Egypt and the one that Christians believe marks their freeing from the bondage of sin. Easter can fall as early as March 22 or as late as April 25. The range for the first or second nights of Passover (seder nights) is March 25 to April 25. The chief problem with Easter and Passover coinciding is that the whole idea of Easter, often associated with pogroms and slaughter in Europe, may make a Jewish partner edgy.

Once that's been worked out, recognize that the two holidays have similar spirits—celebrate them together as much as feels comfortable to you both.

We hope this issue of Dovetail helps you explore these issues. Reading about others' insights may support you to find a mode of celebration that suits the choices you have made for your own family.

Mary Helene Rosenbaum

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**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.

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# The Fifth Question

## by Nan Meyer

Both my husband and I have interfaith marriages in our families, going back three generations. He had a Jewish grandmother; I had a Christian grandfather. His Protestant father and Catholic mother had to elope. My parents were an atheist and an Orthodox Jew, which is a really mixed marriage. However, there is also a straight, unbroken line of Judaism in my family reaching back through the centuries.

And every year at the Passover Seder table, when the traditional Four Questions are asked by the youngest person present, this ritual reaffirms our connection with those who came before us. In our immediate family, after our daughter chanted the Four Questions in Hebrew, she would turn to her much older brothers and demand, "When are you guys going to get me out of this?" And little sister's "Fifth Question," as we began to call it, was still being asked long after her brothers married, and our daughter grew to be a beautiful young woman.

Finally, there was a grandchild, a clever tyke who could easily have learned the Four Questions, but she had a Christian mother who couldn't teach her Hebrew. Besides, the child had been baptized, and her parents didn't want her confused. The family's Judaism had survived imprisonment, pogroms, and Holocaust. Now, however, there weren't many of us left and Judaism requires people. I worried, was everything Jewish going to end in this generation? That was my Fifth Question.

### Difficult Days

Those days were not happy for me. I had left a career I loved to care for my Alzheimer's-stricken mother-in-law. This lady hadn't liked me that much when she had her mind. Now as cruel as a naughty child, she was heaping anti-Semitic comments on me daily. Our daughter was looking seriously at a handsome young man, who wasn't Jewish. Oh no, not her too, I thought. Both our sons were married to lovely, but non-Jewish, spouses. So much of our religion is home-oriented. Without a young Jewish family, who would continue the traditions, make the Seder, when I got old and tired?

Even my Jewish niece was going out with a young man who was very pleasant but Christian. That, I could understand. She had grown up without any religious training. Her father had died too young; her mother, angry at God, had fled Judaism.

Our daughter was our last child, our last hope for a link with the future. But I was home now; I had time. My daughter's boyfriend was always glad to eat with us. (Truthfully, he was always glad to eat.) I would start inviting him on Friday nights and expose him to our Sabbath dinner traditions. I'd always lit Sabbath candles. Now I became conscientious with all the rest: the challah, saying the Kiddush, a dinner with a Jewish flavor, served on a finely set table. And from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, I would insist on Sabbath peace, which I needed because my mother-in-law was now

Nan Meyer, a retired journalist, is the author of a user-friendly haggadah, ***The Inter-Faith Family Seder Book: How to Celebrate a Jewish Passover Supper with Christian In-Laws & Non-Jewish Friends,*** which she originally wrote for her own family. See page 19 for ordering information.

**I admit my heart swelled as I heard his young voice singing the traditional words. My father's grandson was our next generation, continuing the tradition.**

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living with us. (She had never forgiven me when—twelve years into our marriage—my husband converted to Judaism. It was of his own volition, which she disbelieved.)

To make the Sabbath dinner more festive, I often invited my niece and her boyfriend. My daughter's young man was from a dysfunctional family. He was noticeably moved when we included him in the Sabbath blessing of the children. And he loved the food.

Time passed. Both my daughter and my niece became engaged to their young men. The two girls did much of their planning and shopping together. My niece married in the winter. My daughter planned a spring wedding. As a child, my niece had played the violin. Thus when our Reform temple had a program of Jewish music, I invited her to the service. When we came to the Kaddish, I nudged her to stand and whispered the explanation that she could recite this prayer for her dead father. Afterwards, I found her weeping copiously. She hadn't known she could do anything for her dad. She began to accompany us to services.

The two weddings came and went. My niece and her Christian groom were married by a judge in the local botanical garden. The interfaith service planned for my daughter and her groom became a Jewish ceremony because his side neglected to engage a minister. The Friday night Sabbath dinners at our house continued, occasionally with one or both young couples.

## A New Day

Then one Friday evening, my niece and her new husband proudly produced a sonogram. They were expecting. Wine and congratulations flowed. Then, shyly they said, "We've been talking. We have decided to raise our children Jewish. Will you teach us how to be a Jewish family?" My husband and I were humbled. More particularly, I was stunned. My niece hadn't been my target.

My nephew-in-law continued, "We've been impressed with the serenity of your home, especially the Sabbath dinners. We want that for our home." And they do have a Jewish home. My niece makes the family's second Seder dinner. She and I alternate preparing Friday's Sabbath dinner. As soon as her son could, he began chanting the blessing for the wine. (Remarkably, he had a speech problem in English, but chants Hebrew flawlessly.)

This last Passover he attempted to ask the Four Questions, so "getting little sister out of it." I admit my heart swelled as I heard his young voice singing the traditional words. My father's grandson was our next generation, continuing the tradition. I listened carefully; I said nothing. After the Seder, this little boy came to me and confessed, "I was only able to learn the First Question in Hebrew, so I said it four times. I promise I'll know them all in Hebrew next year. Do you think it's all right with God?" I told the child I was sure it was all right ... and in my heart I knew that things were going to be all right for all of us.

# Blessings, Blushes, Bruises: Grandma's Gefilte Fish

## by Sandra Carpenter

September's searing heat of a Mississippi morning melts the tar beneath my feet. The walk along Bessemer Boulevard reminds Grandma of the Devil reaching up to grab at her shoes. One of the highlights of my young life is visiting Natchez, Mississippi, the home of my father's parents. His dad was the son of an Episcopalian minister, his mother had been Rebecca Marx from a Jewish family of Biloxi. The scandal, on both sides of this match, made in the last year of the 19th century, had died down. Still, there were occasional cultural differences that made us all giggle. Or blush. Or bruise.

The one standing out in my mind had to do with her gefilte fish. On Thursday mornings I shopped with Grandma (she preferred Bubbe, but Grandpa said if he had to be a Grandfather then she was Grandma). We walked to the store, a fascinating place with a large tank holding swimming fish. We studied them, then pointed to the preferred. Mr. Katz "fished" him out with a net. It wasn't always a successful operation: fish didn't wait to be caught, but swam swiftly. Often, he caught the wrong fish. I enjoyed this immensely, deciding Grandma was smart —she never got confused on her selection, and stuck by her first choice. Finally our flawless fish caught, wrapped in layers of newspaper, he tied around string hanging from a metal cage near the ceiling. I wondered, how did it get up there?

We walked home triumphant, feeling clever about having gotten the right one for us. The fish was unwrapped as the bathtub filled. He'd spend his last day in comfort, the least we could do.

Friday morning was special. In the kitchen, wrapped up in a canvas apron, Grandma began, her flour-white hair falling about her face. Those long, black hairpins sprang from the wiry bun at the nape of her neck in any major effort. She'd never weighed more than 99 pounds, and at age 61 seemed so old to me in her zippered, blue housedress, with the horseradish stain, only used for this purpose. She armed herself with a wooden mallet. To me it seemed too unwieldy, but she handled it like Hercules, whacking the head of the fish over and over. Long after she said it was dead the tail of that fish twitched an uncomfortable number of times. This made me uneasy, but Grandpa said nerve impulses made the tail jump after it was a goner. He always had the answers.

### The Vital Things

Then the vital things started: the making of gefilte fish, the first course of her Sabbath meal, which Grandpa graciously allowed—but in trade, Sunday was his day for pork roast. Even if you had nothing, like their neighbors, the Kravitzes, you saved all week to make it Shabbos. Across the narrow street, Dora Kravitz stood at her kitchen window every Friday morning, with the same sounds coming from the metal chopper banging a wooden bowl. This was done for hours, long enough to make five pounds of fish into something that resembled mashed potatoes but was really whitefish mixed with carp. The skin of the fish became pockets holding the choppings along with vegetables, special spices, and herbs.

Mr. Kravitz told me he was supposed to turn up for the meal looking like a bridegroom, after a serious bath.

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(remnding me that their fish had so recently swum there.) No white tablecloth? Then you used a clean white bedsheet. If you ate coarse brown bread all week, you baked a golden loaf, and put it on a silver plate if you had one. Best of all to Grandma, you put worries and labors away, and your duty was to celebrate the best life has to offer. Grandma always forgave Grandpa his trespasses on Friday night. At age 6, who could guess what that meant? She had accepted the faith of her husband as the tenets of 19th-century marriage demanded, had forsaken her heritage and family, never to see them again, drummed out like an army deserter. Yet the heart's core was a Hebrew one, no one could mistake that inner tradition.

Before the sun went down, Grandma lit the candlesticks, the same ones her mother secretly gave for her wedding present 40 years before. She put a golden silk shawl over her head, waving her hands over the candle flames, gathering blessings for our family. She half sang: "May our home be consecrated, O God, by Thy light....." By then, Grandpa (who had been the city's newspaper editor, and should know better) would be tiring of the whole ritual and say, "Good bread, good meat, Good God, Let's eat!" My flustered mother, of the staunch Methodist upbringing, smirked, not knowing what else to do.

## Passing Them On

Daddy sweltered in the Mississippi evening, and the heat of old conflicts. Saying nothing, he adopted the intolerant expression of his dad. He was his adored mother's favorite; the second, feisty son, so much like her, while Gran's first-born, my Uncle David, had the reserved demeanor of the Episcopal minister he was meant to be. Daddy adored her, yes, but she embarrassed him tonight, it was clear.

Then Grandpa's hand hit the lace-draped table with a swat sending silver dishes an inch into the air, "Becca, enough already!" His tone unmistakable: he's hungry. But Grandma wouldn't let him get away with it, picking up the cup of sweet Kosher wine to chant the blessing. I had a teaspoon of the wine, feeling quite grown up. Serenely she completed her sing-song, hand reaching for mine. I rose to stand beside her and the faded yellow shawl slid over my blonde hair. Abruptly, my father stood, taking her arm and mine in a trinity of joined generations. Her sparkling brown eyes met my youthful blue ones in an intent smile, and I realized my small hand resting on her work-worn one was cut from the same ancient cloth.

She'd taught the Head of her Household, Grandpa, under great duress, to cut off the end of the loaf, break off a piece and pass it, hand to hand at the table. It wasn't ever offered on a plate, but handed about while Grandma softly sang her dedication. Now her Shabbos was official. The gefilte fish was tasty, the horseradish was lethal, and the chicken soup was richly saffron, full of huge drops of oil, perhaps the cholesterol that ended up killing them both with early heart attacks.

The only thing never mentioned, certainly never praised, was the chicken itself. It had cooked from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and lay dry as a desert. Still, her matzoh balls were like feathers. Carrots, cabbage, spinach, and beets melted in a savory soup. We had half-sour pickles and half-sour tomatoes—garlicky, crunchy, delectable. Her special dessert was a combination of prunes, sweet potatoes, carrots, butter, brown sugar, lemon juice, and golden raisins baked until honey soft. None was ever left over. Grandpa saw to that with licks of the huge serving spoon.

Tea was the meal's crowning touch at the end. Everyone wanted a different kind, but I loved Sweetouchne Tea in a metal box painted red and gold with a lid swinging back on heavy hinges. I had a teaspoon of cherry preserves in the bottom of my glass. Grandma put a lump of sugar between her teeth, sipping tea through it. Others drank tea from cups, yet they had metal framed glasses with fancy, rose-carved handles, which also had been clandestine wedding gifts from her family's rabbi, treasured always. A noisy, arguing, loving family, who taught me that diversity could be delicious. I'll always remember that—with every taste of tea, with every sniff of fish.

# Awaiting Resurrection: A Poem

## by Adam Penna

Maura convinced me to spend last Easter
in church, Saint Luke's Episcopal to be
exact. I had attended meetings there.
I knew the layout: dark stone walls, wooden
buttresses chained with chandeliers, stained glass
windows which depicted the trial, the death,
and the resurrection of Christ, but allowed
for little light. It was a church conceived
when religion could still promise relief
from this world's woes or impose on the soul
the fear of eternal fire. The promise holds
credence now only to the very old
and the very young. I wish I were one.
I grew up without God. My parents said
I should choose my own faith, but what choice did
I have? My mother's a Jew. My father
was raised Roman Catholic in a family
whose ancestors constructed the churches,
which still spot the Italian country side.
His mother believed my brother and I
were damned to hell. She'd come to steal us
on odd Saturdays for five o'clock Mass,
where we'd slump and slide into a back pew.
I remember feeling like a Russian spy
listening to the priest rail against sin,
and watching my grandmother's bony fingers
crawl like a spider over her rosary.
At the end of Mass, my grandmother would
rise from her knees, return her crocheted hat
to her head, and march my brother and me
up to the grim-faced priest to be blessed.
He'd genuflect and spritz holy water
over our heads. It didn't burn, but later
alone in our room, we'd pretend it did,
rolling around and trembling on the ground
the way Kung Fu masters in death throes did
on the Saturday Matinee Theater.
Love and suffering I get. My trouble
begins with the resurrection. The heart,
that fearful raccoon, readily accepts
what the mind roundly rejects. I cannot
easily reconcile the two, and my soul
turns from a world which discovers love
and gentleness and nails it to a cross.
Yet it requires little faith to prove
this world's mean and brutish, even if love
can be quantified: i.e., my grandmother
uttered her husband's name before she rose
in congestive dark, clutched her chest and died.
There she was, facing what we all must face,
peering over the inky precipice
into a canyon of unimaginable night,
calling her lover's name. She couldn't wait
for the echo to respond, so in she dove.
This is faith and love. But at Saint Luke's,
I watched the celebrant dip the wafer
into the wine, and I refused to jump
to believe, This His body, this His blood.
I envied the people snaked in the line
which curled from the crossing to the porch, all
coifed alike in the uniform of suppliance,
ribbons and bonnets and sports coats and ties,
shuffling to devour the Eucharist.
The choir's psalm swelled mournfully, the women
wept in ecstasy, the men stared dumbly
at their patent leather shoes, but I remained
with the unconfirmed in the pews, confused.
I understand the need for redemption,
but we're not talking about quitting
our bad habits, forgoing meat on Fridays,
losing those extra pounds for the bathing
suit season. Nor are we referring
to the spiritual awakening alcoholics
and drug addicts (and I am one of them)
claim visited when their lives were darkest.
We're talking about the triumph over
death, the trip to which no one is a tourist.
Christ died, was crucified, limp on the cross.
The women begged to embalm him with spice
and ointment, and his wounds were dressed and washed,
his body wrapped in cotton, clean and white.
Then the corpse was sealed in the sepulcher
full with darkness. When my grandmother died,
I wrote her a poem. I don't remember
what it said, only that her name was Rose
and the central image took full advantage
of that fact. I rolled the poem into
a scroll. At the wake, I stared at her hands,
bluish, cold, wrapped in her rosary.
I slipped the poem under her fingers.
She is buried with it, and I suppose
my stay in the children's psychiatric unit
at Mather Memorial Hospital
later that year could've been connected
to the fact that I couldn't remember
one word of that poem, or that I hadn't,

at her funeral, shed a single tear.
There's something of grieving which makes you hope,
I realize, that all of death's cliches are true:
the bright light that doesn't burn, the tunnel
of apparitions, God's voice calling you home.
Even Dante's sinners humped with transgression
and the weight of purgatorial fire
seem appealing compared to nothingness.
And yet everything we imagine death
might relieve, it cannot if our senses
after still persist, if we know, consider
and calculate. The dead instinctively see
what we debate, i.e., that living
is frightful. This is why the shades, turned toward
the toil of their eternity, shrank
from Dante's solidity. It was a terrible
reminder of the days and ways of flesh,
the constant hunger, the infernal memory,
the sexual desire, rejection, or regret
of things lost and longed for. For the dead there
is one currency, and the soul, that piece
of us which is part air and part dream, pays
with the sweat of infinity. However,
whatever we intimate of the hereafter
is merely metaphor, a sense, shadows
cast upon a dark cave's wall. Yet if just
one I knew had come back from death, doubled
over, huffing the news of the ages
on her breath, all of this dull questioning
would be obsolete, and I'd recollect
my soul, move the boulder of the sepulcher,
step out into the bright sunlight and rise.

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# Dovetail Represented on Television

## by Debi Tenner

I want to tell you all about my family's appearance on the *CBS Early Show.* They wanted to show an interfaith family in the New York area that had children at home, and to have an expert in the studio for commentary. Mary suggested us to the producer. My first reaction when she called was, "Oh, that is so not me," but eventually we agreed to do it, and Dovetail's longtime friend Rev. Robert Brashear did the in-studio end.

I was really pleased with how they represented our family and how they tied in the experts and Sheila Gordon's Interfaith Community in NYC. I was disappointed that Dovetail was not mentioned at the end of the segment, as they promised. I reminded the producer several times that it was very important to me, but it never came about, which was a bit frustrating. I cannot even begin to think of where my family would be right now if I hadn't found Dovetail and all the other interfaith families in my area! I saw that they linked Dovetail to the website, but feel a bit betrayed by the way they promised I could mention it and explain its full meaning to my family, and then they cut it out. And they didn't put the direct link at the end of the segment.

The day the filming took place was a wild and crazy day, and they followed us just about everywhere, including the University of Connecticut, where Josh was singing with the Hartford Symphony (and then an hour's drive back to our house). Joshua's choir mates and the choir directors were all rooting for him, and it was amazing how much the support helped. Being a self-conscious 13, he found it a bit harder than the rest of us, but he pulled through just fine. They set up a camera in the balcony and taped him in the choir right over the heads of the Hartford Symphony, Hartford Chorale, and most of the Children's Choir.

They took hours of shots of us at home, set up lights and booms and stuff all over the house, and still it boiled down to a few short sentences. As a mother, I noticed no one was smiling—we really could have smiled more! We celebrate plenty and happily at the holidays and have a lighthearted banter going about our two religions, but we were so tired that day, I think we just forgot to smile. The producer chose to film Steve sitting in front of the Christmas tree and myself sitting in front of the menorah. I thought it looked great. (I also thought I am getting old, but I put that thought away for another day.)

On a funny note, because my birthday and my father-in-law's usually fall in between Christmas and Hanukkah, every year we "wing it" in terms of when we actually buy and put up our Christmas tree. Of course this year my father-in-law had a huge 65th birthday party, and the producer called me right on MY birthday eve, so by Sunday morning we still didn't have the tree up. The producer said, "I can't ask you to put up your tree, but it would add such an effect to the video."

So Steve (Jewish partner!) was up at 6 the morning of the video shoot, picking out our tree through the fence at Home Depot even before the doors opened. He came flying through the front door with the tree at exactly 7:15 a.m., and we had the

*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 columnist for* ***Dovetail's*** *Parents' Page. The* ***CBS This Morning*** *broadcast aired December 16, 2002.*

**I cannot even begin to think of where my family would be right now if I hadn't found Dovetail and all the other interfaith families in my area!**

ornaments lined up on the couch and ready to toss on the tree. We called it the fastest Christmas tree in the East, since it was up and glowing by 9 a.m. It was our 20th Christmas season together as a married couple, and in all the fuss this year, I forgot to get a good picture of it. But we won't forget this tree for a long time to come, not to mention the great video of it.

We were a bit bummed that, in addition to leaving out Dovetail's name and web site despite their promise, they called Joshua's choir a "school choir." Technically, it's out of University of Hartford and is an auditioned choir that he has worked quite hard for in the past six years. His choir mates were watching, and they come from all over the state of Connecticut, not just our hometown.

Josh opted not to let his friends at school in on his TV debut, and it aired close enough to vacation that the topic didn't come up at school. His younger sister, however, bragged to the entire school about her adventure on TV and made up for Josh's silence. I may let the school have a copy of the video at some point, since they do video morning announcements, and they like to highlight different kids and their achievements. Since Josh works on the morning video team I think he could put together something he is comfortable with about his Bar Mitzvah, his choir, and the CBS interview.

Thanks to the people who took time to post support online on the Dovetail listserv. The first twenty-four hours after the show aired, we were hounded with doubts and worries. Finding the encouragement and support on the list really helped us get through the doubting stage. Many of our neighbors and friends also watched at home, and eventually called to say good things, so we hope that the time invested will result in something positive.

One good thing: the segment seemed to open discussions with our friends, neighbors, and co-workers who had been silent before. Even if they aren't in interfaith marriages, more and more we've found that our silent neighbors and friends respect us for what we have chosen to do and are cheering us on to keep doing the right thing for us. We had two different neighbors actually ring the doorbell and come over for a visit just to discuss it with us, and share about some of their family members who are intermarried. They asked questions about our family beliefs and traditions and admired our determination to deal with them in depth instead of superficially. This was an unanticipated gift.

Even though I was initially reluctant, in the end I was glad we agreed to do it. We agreed as a family that we just wanted to let other parents and kids know that we exist, and we manage just fine. We wanted to remind them that they too can get more consciously involved in sorting out what everyone believes and in working out the conflicts that come up to make something good come from the process. Last, we wanted to remind people to always respect each other's beliefs and traditions, inside and outside the family.

Keep the faith!

# Letters to the Editor

## Reactions to Review of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*

The reviewer of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* has difficulty with two things: what a "white" guy" or culture is, and the story itself.

First, the story itself is pure old fashioned fairy tale of Cinderella.... Perhaps there are wooden or cardboard characters in the movie, but ask yourself, "What was Prince Charming like at Cinderella's breakfast table the next morning?!"

Second, Ms. Barenblat has difficulty with ... how a minority culture deals with the "white" culture which she defines as "people with no culture or opinions." She assumes gentile culture is "white" (or bland like Ian's parents), while assuming her culture is not white by saying that "a Greek, Italian, or Jewish girl turns into her (ethnic) parents even if she marries a 'white' guy."... If she assumes Jewish culture is "not white," she is falling primarily into old non-Jewish prejudicial stereotypes even though most Jews today are Caucasian Europeans and some are the olive skinned, Arab-like semitic types in the Middle East.

Ms. Barenblat may not be familiar with the derogatory Jewish bias that born Jews use about other born Jews, calling that person "a white Jew," which means a Jewish person overly accommodating to gentile culture. The bias here assumes that the dominating gentile culture is "white" (i.e. Caucasian, Anglo Saxon, or European or whatever) that religiously, socially, or culturally denigrated and dominated Jews and Jewish culture as well as other ethnic entities.

But Ms. Barenblat needs to get a handle on her cultural upbringing by osmosis as to exactly what her definition of a "white" culture is, sociologically and historically.

*Hope Pracht*
*Hope Pracht is a longtime friend of Dovetail*

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Everybody's got a right to their opinion, but as an Irish-German Catholic who married an Italian girl from Brooklyn, I found the movie hilarious, right on target, and think that Rachel Barenblat took it entirely too personally.

There are cosmic differences between a Christian-Jewish and an internal Christian, "ecumenical" marriage as we would call it. For one thing, from a Protestant point of view the move to Orthodoxy is not the radical move, by any stretch, that a Jew would make becoming a Christian. It's more like changing from Reform to Conservative or modern Orthodox Judaism, so the premise on which Barenblat bases her critique is simply not a valid one.

It's quite true that when I married Cathie 32 years ago I did not just marry her but her whole, extended family. Many of the lines the Greek family speaks to Ian were said to me, virtually verbatim, in Brooklyn. And while Cathie's mother, G-d rest her soul, being a widow with three children, could not afford to give us a house, she did follow the unspoken rule of Italian mothers: thou shalt not live farther than 15 minutes away from thy eldest married daughter.

I have greatly enjoyed adding my wife's cultural heritage to my own and passing both along to our daughter, Sarah, in turn (especially the cooking!). Recently, we have gotten together with a branch of Cathie's family, the Porazzos, who are Jewish, thanks to Cathie's great aunt Sarah, who also learned to cook Italian but was not at all intimidated about being Jewish, too, and raised her kids to love Italian culture and be proud Jews. We have quite a good time at the holidays going from Cathie's relatively raucous celebration to my own family's dignified and orderly one.

Lighten up, Rachel. There is more than one model for a successful intercultural marriage, which is what this movie is about, not an interfaith marriage.

*Gene Fisher*
*See the Dovetail Editorial Advisory Board list on page 8 for more about Eugene Fisher.*

# Dates of the Spring Holidays in 2003

**Shrove Tuesday/ Mardi Gras—March 2, 2003.** The last day before Lent, which signifies Jesus's difficult 40 days in the desert.

**Ash Wednesday—March 5, 2003.** On the first day of Lent, Christians are encouraged to give up some comfort of life. Observance may include the placing of ashes on the forehead.

**Purim—sundown March 17, 2003.** Marks the triumph of the Jewish people, including Queen Esther, over persecution. Children dress in costumes representing the Bible story and bring sweets like hamantaschen to their neighbors.

**Palm Sunday—April 13, 2003.** Marks the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as throngs of supporters waved palms.

**Passover—sundown April 16 through sundown April 24, 2003.** Passover marks the exodus of the Jewish people, led by Moses, out of Egypt. The first and second nights of Passover are celebrated in the home with the Passover seder. By serving specific foods that represent the experiences of the Exodus, following a script of the Torah scripture, and asking and answering the Four Questions, families recall the Passover's message of freedom. Acting out parts of the story and searching for the hidden afikomen make this an inclusive holiday for children.

**Holy Thursday—April 17, 2003.** Marks the Last Supper of Jesus and the disciples. It is now widely believed to have been a Passover seder. The celebrations of Holy Thursday are usually a church service/mass. In 2003, Holy Thursday coincides with the **second Passover seder,** a common Jewish tradition in the diaspora.

**Good Friday—April 18, 2003.** Marks the day of Jesus's death on the cross.

**Easter—April 20, 2003.** For Christians, commemorates Jesus' resurrection from the dead to confirm the promise of everlasting life, and to grant the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of his bodily death. Easter is celebrated in a church service. In the household, chocolates and sweets are given, Easter eggs are hidden, and a family feast is enjoyed. Note that Easter this year overlaps with Passover, which means that families observing the Jewish rule against eating leavened products will have to come up with some alternatives to kuchen and other baked goods not kosher-for-Passover.

**Orthodox Christian dates in 2003:** Lent begins March 12; Holy Week begins April 20; Easter is April 27.

## 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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# Doing for Dovetail

On January 25, the Dovetail Institute's Executive Board had its semiannual meeting, this time in Chicago at the Union League Club where some of you attended our 2002 conference. This location, rather than the usual one in Kentucky, allowed us to get valuable input from Michael Farnon, David Kovacs, and Gary Kretchmer, and to have a brief but warm encounter with Dan and Abbe Josephs, as well as making it easier for the soon-to-give-birth Jen Cafferty to contribute her expertise.

We had a very productive meeting, at which we made some plans to enlarge the Executive Board, to revamp and reorganize existing subsidiary boards (the Dovetail Institute Advisory Board and the Dovetail Journal Editorial Board), and to add five more sub-boards or committees: Fundraising, Finance, Marketing and Publicity, Programming and Conference Planning, and Local Group Liaison.

Some of you whose talents and interests we are aware of will be hearing from us soon. Some of you may already be serving on these boards or committees: if you're happy with what you're doing, we'd like to know that; if you'd rather focus on some other area, we'd certainly like to know that, too. Still others of you are not "on our list." Perhaps we're not aware of your skills, perhaps last time we asked you had other commitments, perhaps you've simply assumed we had no need of you.

Please let us know whether you are willing to lend us your energies and you are interested in doing. There is a form below. Returning this form to us does not commit you to anything. We will assemble the input we get, shape the committees with an eye to balance in regard to age, religion, and geography, and get back to you with a job description for each committee you have indicated an interest in. The final choice of committee members will be at the discretion of each committee chair and the officers of the executive board.

This is an exciting and crucial time for Dovetail, as we move into the next stage of our development. We invite you all to join with us: by lending your talents, by remembering us in your charitable giving and your wills and trusts, and also by remembering us in your prayers.

I am interested in hearing more about the following boards or committees:

__ Editorial __ Fundraising __ Finance __ Local Group Liaison __ Marketing and Publicity __ Program

__ I am already serving on a board or committee _____

__ I would like to continue with this service __ I would like to serve in a different capacity

My relevant professional background and interests: _____

_____

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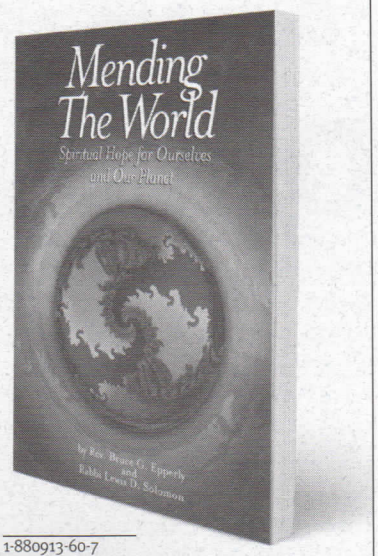


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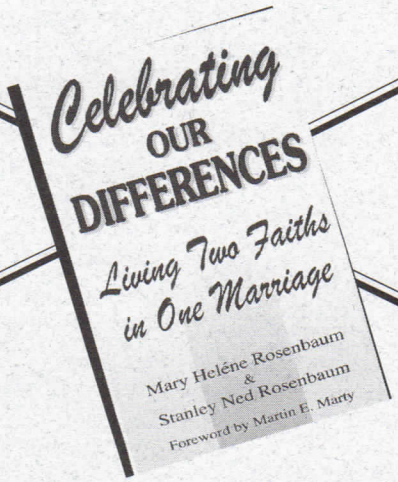


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