

## INTERFAITH SPEECH – Dedee Hamson

I was asked to share my family's journey as an interfaith family with you all tonight...

The journey starts of course with our childhoods....I were raised in a mostly conservative Jewish home. I went to Jewish day school here in Atlanta. My family belonged to an orthodox synagogue. My Zaidee was a Rabbi of a synagogue in Spartanburg South Carolina where I spent a majority of the Jewish holidays. As a teenager I dated only Jewish boys.

My husband, Dan was raised Catholic. His mother was and still is devout in her faith. Dan attended church every Sunday as well as attending catholic school as a child. He dated mostly catholic girls as a young man.

However, as we both became older and moved away from home, we stopped attending our respective houses of worship. We both continued to have faith in G-d, but individually we had become disenchanted with organized religion as a whole. At the time we met, we had each become culturally "religious" and lived mostly secular lives.

When Dan and I started to become serious in our relationship, we discussed our upbringings and realized that as different as they were, our views of the world and religion in general were very similar. We both believed in a higher being, the importance of family and in living a moral life. In the beginning that was enough. We did not discuss raising children at that time, we just assumed we would do "both".

Early in our marriage, we put up a Christmas tree and holiday lights in addition to Chanukah decorations. We attended Seder at my mom's house and had Easter dinner at his mom's house. That was about all we did when it came to religion.

As with many interfaith couples we waited until our oldest child, Jesse, was born, to start discussions about how we wanted to raise our children. We both knew we wanted our children to have a religious connection and identity that we both had experienced. We wanted them to be kind, moral, and believe in something larger than themselves. But still we did not make any decisions until Jesse was a toddler.

During this time, I had read an article that posited that children raised as "both" religions did not feel a true connection to either religion and that often they ended up feeling no real connection to G-d at all. I had seen this in my own cousins and I knew this was not what I wanted for my children.

I knew how important my childhood memories surrounding Judaism, the synagogue and my own relationship to God were to me. I realized that my religious experiences as a child and my Jewish identity made up a big part of who I am today. I started feeling sad that my children would not experience the same in their lives.

Dan and I discussed the options of raising the children as either Catholic or Jewish. Raising Jewish children was not something Dan had seriously considered before. However, when I asked him if he would be willing to take the responsibility of taking the children to church regularly and teaching them about Catholicism, he hesitated. His personal relationship with G-d was strong but his relationship with the church had not fully healed.

On the other hand, I missed my connection to the Jewish community and wanted more. I was willing to teach our children about Judaism and take the children to synagogue and religious school. We decided I

would be the primary person to take charge of our children's religious upbringing. That is when we joined CBI.

We currently have a Jewish home, we are long standing members of CBI and 2 of my children have attended religious school and continued in their education through confirmation. My youngest, Gaia is starting her bat mitzvah studies next week. I am confident that my children identify as being Jewish and not as being "both" just as I had hoped.

It has not always been easy, our faith and religious life has been an evolution. I know Dan misses having Christmas morning at our home and when the kids were younger, having the kid's do an Easter egg hunt in our yard. I respect that there are some Christian holidays that are still important him. We still join his family during the holidays for dinner every year. The children know they are not celebrating Christmas and Easter during these times but rather they are supporting family in their celebrations.

Dan's mother, although not happy with the decision at first, was supportive, realizing that these were our decisions to make, and understanding that she would still play a significant role in her grandchildren's lives. Some of Dan's other family has had a harder time even after many years had passed. In fact several of Dan's aunts and uncles as well as his grandparents did not attend either of the boys' bar mitzvahs due to their feelings.

I find such joy in my faith and in seeing my children learn our heritage and beliefs, I must confide that there are times I find it hard that Dan doesn't seem to be able to fully understand and share in something that is such a deep part of me. This is a burden I accept and have learned to live with as being in an interfaith marriage.

We have on occasion experienced what we feel was antisemitism in the school system and in the community and I know that my children's lives would be so much easier if we had not chosen this path.

Despite the obstacles we have encountered, Dan and I remain fully confident in our decision to raise the children Jewish, have a Jewish home and to be part of an interfaith family. While dan has no plans to convert, he often jokes that he feels more Jewish than Catholic.

I have found that there is no right or wrong way to be an interfaith family, each family must take their own journey and find their own way. In my family, we have the opportunity to make Judaism our own, participating in ways that matter to us and integrating core values from both of our upbringings. I am proud to be Jewish, proud to part of an interfaith family and I feel blessed to be part of a community that is inclusive and welcoming to Jews and non-Jews alike.

