

A Reform Jewish family copes with a son becoming Orthodox.

What's Up With the Hard Core Jewish People? An irreverent yet informative approach to Judaism and religious devotion from a Reform Jewish mother's perspective

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WHAT'S UP WITH THE HARD CORE JEWISH PEOPLE?

(The Jewish Kid is the one on the cover with his hat on backwards and his tzitzis hanging out over his shorts.)

This is the first book about Observant Jews that is written from the perspective of a non-Observant person with a sassy attitude. It will capture the interest and entertain both Jews and non-Jews who want an easy way to learn more about Judaism.

Four years ago our youngest son, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, blew off law school and decided to study in Israel to be an Orthodox rabbi. What a ride it has been for our family trying to stay close to Carter, because we're Reform Jews and very different than him. Whenever I relate stories regarding incidents in our household or tidbits of Jewish knowledge I have acquired since Carter went Hard Core, regardless of age, gender, religion, or level of religious observance, people are always fascinated. It seems like everyone knows someone who has become more intensely religious in life, and they enjoy hearing how our family has coped with the situation.

How The Hell Did This Happen In Our Family?

Knowing our family and the manner in which our children were raised, no one could have possibly anticipated that one of our offspring would become an Observant Jew. From our children's names alone, it is evident that Barry and I are children of the 60's. We've got our oldest son, Tyler Blue, a flower-child who lives in Santa Barbara with his non-Jewish fiancé, Raven. They adhere to the philosophy of "live for today" and "go for the moment." Tyler and Raven met at a Phish concert several years ago. After Tyler graduated from Clemson University, they began living together in Santa Barbara in 1999 and have a very loving relationship. They adore their two dogs, share a passion for live music, and enjoy the activities and friends that life in California affords them. Tyler is a freelance writer for a variety of publications. Raven is a non-denominational wedding minister who performs beautiful custom-designed ceremonies for that special day. She is also an herbalist who specializes in the medicinal use of plants and treating the whole person rather than just the symptom. The extent of Tyler and Raven's acknowledgment of a Higher Being is celebrating Chanukah, having a Seder on the first night of Passover, and their custom of waving their hands over their plates before they eat a meal.

On the other side of the world is Carter Sky, two and a half years younger than Tyler, who lives in Jerusalem and is studying to be an Orthodox rabbi. No one would have ever

expected Carter to take on a *Torah*-centric lifestyle, chock full of stringent guidelines that dictate how he should lead his life. Carter was never a submissive and obedient individual. It was always a challenge being his parent. He was strong-willed from birth, and our household revolved around him in order to keep the peace. As Carter went, so went the Schwartz family. He was in the terrible two's for about five years. I remember trying to get him dressed so we could meet friends or go to an appointment, and he would insist upon putting on his own shoes. "Cartie do," he would say as he obstinately tried to get the shoes on his feet, even though a two year old can't easily do such a task. I would say to him: "Carter, you're being argumentative, cantankerous, and belligerent." He was so precocious that after I said those three words enough times and in the same type of situation, I could ask Carter what he was being and in his little voice he would say, "Argumentative, cantankerous, and belligerent." Sometimes he was such a terror that I told him he'd need to have a lucrative profession when he grew up in order to buy gifts for his wife to apologize to her for insults or other negative behaviors. Subsequently when people asked Carter what he was going to do when he grew up, he'd say in his little boy voice, "I'm going to have a lucrative profession."

As a young adult, Carter was this charismatic guy who one would find in the VIP rooms at South Beach's finest clubs when he was home on college breaks. He was a fraternity guy at the University of Pennsylvania who could party hardy; he knew how to have a good time. He was Mr. Body Beautiful who worked out faithfully and sculpted his body to

a masterpiece. For Carter's 21st birthday, we rented a bus and Carter, Tyler, and a busload of friends went to South Beach clubbing. No one had to worry about driving under the influence and we had three ice chests filled with water, alcohol, soft drinks, and food to keep them going all night. It was a party to remember. It's amazing how so much can change in two years. It's still difficult for us to fathom that this free-spending guy is now someone who prefers living a minimal material life and focusing on more spiritual and moral values. Who'd of thunk such a thing could happen?

Barry, my husband of 35 years, is a soft-spoken level-headed guy with a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology. After working at Burger King Corporation for 19 years as their Director of Consumer Research, Barry came on board at ASPEN RESEARCH, a marketing research company I founded in January 1991. He works out of the home office while my office is in Coral Gables. Because of our reputation, experience, and mission of quality and excellence, word-of-mouth keeps the business flowing in without the necessity of cold calls. We are empty-nesters living the Life of Riley in my opinion. It's just like when we were first married except we have a lot more money now. To have no child-rearing responsibilities feels like such a victory — we did it! Now we're free.

I'm a wild woman with a zest for life and am appreciative for everything. "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" is my theme song and it's not unusual to find me shimmying through the house to the sound of Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels "Devil

With a Blue Dress On.” Barry calls me his high school daughter because I still shriek when I hear a great song come on and view life through the eyes of a teenager. I drive around in my 2006 330i Bimmer listening to my iPod playing "We Are Family" or some other oldie, and I'll look up through my sunroof and say, "Thank you, *Hashem* (another word for God)." Okay, so I pay homage to Hashem in a different and more spontaneous way than the Hard Cores.

Being products of our environment, Barry and I are casual Jews, viewing ourselves as Americans first and Jews second. Like our assimilated parents, culture has replaced tradition and spirituality has replaced religion. While we regard being Jewish as central to our being, we are unwilling to devote ourselves to Torah law, customs of praying, and praising Hashem on an ongoing basis. It wasn't until Carter became a Hard Core Jewish Kid that I realized I was functionally illiterate with regard to *Jewish values*, tradition, and history.

Our children attended a Reform Jewish day school from nursery school through sixth grade, and we were members of a Reform synagogue. We frequented services on Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and would go to our friends' house each year for the first night of Passover. Tyler had his Bar Mitzvah at Temple Beth Am in Miami and had a celebration afterwards at the Hyatt Hotel in Coral Gables. My dad and my father-in-law were still alive and well and able to attend and participate in the ceremony and festivities. Barry's mother died when he was a senior in high school and

my mom passed away when Carter was two months old. Carter's Bar Mitzvah was in Aspen, Colorado because by then, both of my parents were dead and my father-in-law had Alzheimer's. I knew that their presence would be greatly missed, and I didn't want us to be sad. Since Aspen is one of our favorite places on earth, that seemed like a good place for us to be. My brother and his family, my sister and her daughter, a few friends, and some other relatives joined us in Aspen for a very warm and loving ceremony and celebration. After their Bar Mitzvah, we didn't force the boys to attend Confirmation classes at the synagogue. For me, Confirmation classes were a social thing and I didn't learn much, so I spared both of our boys from that obligation.

We had a Christmas tree every year because my dad wouldn't let me have one when I was growing up, and I love to see the twinkling lights. Since a Christmas tree is not treated as an idol but rather a temporary fragrant fixture, I figured it couldn't do any harm. One time Carter slipped and told his Jewish day school teacher or his teacher overheard that we had a tree. I got a phone call from the school's religious director inquiring, "Mrs. Schwartz: Don't you think you're confusing your children by having a Christmas tree?" I said, "No, the boys know that when pineapples are in season we have pineapples. And when Christmas trees are in season, we have a tree. It's not a religious thing for us." I asked the boys, "Does the fact that we have a Christmas tree confuse you about your being Jewish?" And those little angels said, "No Mommy, we're not confused." So annually I got to have my twinkling lights until Carter became a Hard Core

Jewish Kid. Out of respect for his beliefs and those of the Jewish People, I gave away all the beautiful ornaments we had accumulated over 32 years. Oh well, things could be worse.

Our family was always very close and now I thank my lucky stars for all the years we were together. I didn't know that our boys would leave us and be so far away when they became adults. No one warned me about that. I was like Earth Mother when they were born. Neither child ever had a bottle of milk or a jar of baby food. I even made their teething biscuits with soy flour and molasses. We took the boys with us on all our vacations because we loved being with them. In addition to multitudes of trips to Disney World, they joined us in places like Las Vegas, Maui, Europe, and we went skiing together in Aspen, Vail, Steamboat, Beaver Creek, Lake Tahoe, and even Zermatt, Switzerland. When Carter was in London for his semester abroad, Tyler flew in from Santa Barbara and we flew in from Miami and we all converged there for Thanksgiving. Up until January 2002 when Carter left for Israel, we were a seemingly normal family to the untrained eye. We had no idea that our youngest son was on the verge of a drastic lifestyle change that would challenge the solidarity of our family.

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