

## “From St. Michael to Devorah”

By Michelle Golland

I am running my small fingers over the white lace dress which is draped over a chair in my bedroom. Picking up the pearl covered crown I walk to my mirror gently placing it on the center of my head. The pink foam curlers are still dangling from my hair slightly askew from the night before. The white veil drapes down my back which brings a smile to my 6 year old freckled face.

Today I will be symbolically wed to Jesus, okay even to a 6 year old that seemed a bit weird but I was more interested in the pretty dress and hair accessories than the religious symbolic meaning of this Catholic rite of passage. It is also the day I will receive my Saints name.

From here forward I will be known as St. Michael, "Israel's Guardian Angel." A warrior Angel to boot. To a very girly little girl the idea of being an Angel was great, but having a boys name was more than just annoying it was abhorrent. Why can't I have a pretty name, I wondered? Are there no female saints? My rebellious nature was already in full swing. I like to think I was just very confident but that was not the Nuns interpretation of my incessant questioning.

As I became a teenager the desire for debate had begun to border on out right anarchy on my part. I guess I was a warrior but slightly misguided and surely seen as disrespectful. I can clearly see myself sitting in the back of my Catechism class thinking of questions to try to stump or at least irritate the teacher. Being the youngest of three girls I knew a lot of "worldly" information that the Catholic Church would rather me not have known. Some of my favorite topics included sex, contraception, and divorce. Sister Concillio was not pleased. I spent many an evening on the bench outside the class until my mother had finally been asked to withdraw me from the Sunday School.

Even through all my misguided teenage anger I still felt connected to God. Lying in bed I would pray for guidance and understanding. I never prayed to Jesus, the middleman just seemed to get in the way. I went straight to the Source, GOD. When I went to church I felt inner peace but it was not related to Jesus, the beautiful statues or the Holy Eucharist. It was something deep inside my soul unexplainable to me and those around me. When I went away to college I found my local Catholic Church to my parent's utter shock, they hadn't gone to Church since my sister had been

married two years prior. Once a month the mass was recited in Latin which always moved me to tears, the melodic voices somehow felt familiar safe.

As, the chaplain of my sorority I was the leader of all the rituals. I began to be intrigued by different religions and started reading about other belief systems. Meeting Michael, who would become my husband, exposed me to Judaism, well not exactly. I should say He simply was a Jew, this did not mean he knew anything really about Jewish beliefs. He tried to explain Judaism to me, but you see while I was sitting on the bench outside my church as a teenager, he was sitting in the hallway of his Hebrew School, having gotten into trouble himself. (Pause) The difference being I was in trouble for asking too many questions him for not asking enough. I quickly realized that my rebellious questioning would be somewhat revered in his faith and I was intrigued.

After reading many books and taking courses in college. I knew I had found my spiritual home in Judaism. Somehow it was as if I was always Jewish. My Mom says our family came over with Christopher Columbus. She would laugh and say the Spanish sent all the thieves and prostitutes to America. She always made sure to remind that was my father's side.

The idea of that lineage was deemed cool in my young mind. What she and I didn't realize is the boat was also full of Jews. Was my family somewhere in time Jewish? I do not know.

What I do know is my family here and now is Jewish. I do know I have reclaimed many things for that little girl wishing there was a beautiful female name she could call herself.

I stand here now as Devorah, The female warrior and guardian of Israel.

It is said, "When Devorah was a young girl, she already knew that God intended her to do special things for her people. But she had no idea what they were to be. When she wasn't helping her mother, she went searching for her mission in life."

I too searched and found my mission. The mission of helping others who have decided to convert to Judaism. As a psychologist, I am fortunate to hear there many amazing stories and help them navigate the wonderful and intense process of becoming a Jew.

If Michael, the ArchAngel and Devorah could see me, my hope is I bring honor to both of there names. Some Angel, Some Warrior all rolled into one. And yes, I am still the freckled face girl who will wear a crown any chance I can get.