

Shoshana Miller Still Recovering In Colorado From Conversion Battle In Israel

By Phyllis Singer
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Although victorious in her year-long battle with Israel's Interior Ministry to be declared a Jew without qualification on her Israeli identity card, Jew-by-choice Shoshana Miller was wounded emotionally. The scars are evident.

In a case brought by Miller, Israel's Supreme Court ruled last December 2 that the Interior Ministry could not add any words to identity cards without approval by the Knesset. Fourteen months earlier, when Miller made aliya, Interior Minister Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz (Shas) had refused to register her as a Jew, then agreed to do so with the word "converted" on her card.

Miller, 44, had converted to Judaism under the auspices of Reform Rabbi David Kline of Temple Shalom, Colorado Springs, Colo. Under the current interpretation of the Law of Return, any Jews, including a Jew-by-choice, may immigrate to Israel and claim citizenship, but the Orthodox parties have been trying to amend the law to apply to Jews-by-choice only if they were converted through traditional Jewish law.

Miller became a test case, gaining international attention. She won wide support from Reform Judaism in Israel and the United States. But the battle left her feeling hurt and isolated.

She returned to the United States, originally because her father, 86, is ill in Bowling Green, Mo., and she felt he needed her to be in the U.S.

But she has accepted a full-time job as cantorial soloist at Temple Shalom. "It was time to come back and lick my wounds," Miller told the American Israelite in an interview. She was in Cincinnati last month to serve as cantorial soloist at Founders' Day exercises at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Kline received an honorary degree.

She seems worn out from having to still talk to media, albeit Jewish media, everywhere she goes. One senses she would like to be left alone, with her support system.

"I have a tremendous support system at (Temple Shalom)," she acknowledged. "When I came back there, it was family, all of them, from all streams. They are welcomed me back and it really was a feeling of a family and I felt like I

belonged. I had feelings that I really hadn't had for a long time because I felt isolated ... It was exactly what I need at this time. They are really good people there and they know who I am. That's where I grew up Jewishly."

In Israel, Miller said, she said she felt she had become "the professional convert." Everywhere she went people knew who she was. Some supported her, other denigrated her; it was difficult.

Miller had made aliya in 1985 because she came to feel that living in Israel would be "the epitome" of being Jewish. With papers in order for aliya from the World Zionist Organization, including a certificate attesting to her conversion, Miller entered the country in October 1985, not anticipating any difficulties.

Her conversion had taken place in 1982, after a number of years of study and increasing interest in Judaism.

Born in St. Louis and raised in Bowling Green, Miller is the granddaughter of a Baptist minister. During her high school years she became disaffected with her family's religion and by the time she reached college she had left it.

Interest in Judaism began as early as high school, when she saw a production of "The Diary of Anne Frank." It increased during her college years through contact with a Jewish friend. Following college she married and moved to Turkey with her husband, who was in the Air Force. There she had contact with some Israelis, and her interest in Judaism increased again, but was not shared by her non-Jewish husband.

The couple returned to the U.S. and settled in Colorado Springs, where Miller's husband was still with the Air Force. A divorce followed, and Miller remained in Colorado Springs.

Although she thought that one day she would convert to Judaism, she was not ready to take any formal steps until 1981. She then approached Kline at Temple Shalom and told him she wanted to convert. After several months of further study, she underwent the conversion process, including immersion in the mikvah.

Because she had a background in musical theater, Miller served as cantorial soloist for Shalom, part-time, until she made aliya.

Following the difficulties she faced on making aliya, Miller is often asked why she didn't un-

dergo a second conversion under Orthodox auspices in Israel. That would have eliminated most of her problems.

Miller still refuses to consider it, as she believes her conversion was according to halacha, since it contained the necessary elements of study, acceptance of mitzvot (commandments) and immersion in the mikvah.

For her, conversion was "the moment" she became Jewish. "It would be redundant" to undergo another one, she said. In addition, it would be a rejection of Kline and all he meant to her during the conversion process.

Although Miller felt a "tremendous sense of relief and elation" at the Supreme Court ruling in December, she knows the battle is not over for Reform converts. Does she see any solutions? Not really, although she said "the more who fight, the better the situation will be."

But she is tired of fighting, tired of being "on the soapbox" every day, tired of being recognized on the street, tired of being a "professional convert."

She's not sure if she will return to Israel. And if she does, she still has one more battle. She does not yet have the identity card in her hand. She was unable to pick it up before she left in December and now officials will not allow her to assign power of attorney to anyone to pick it up. (Phyllis Singer is managing editor and general manager of The American Israelite, Cincinnati, from which this article is reprinted.)

There may be a shortage of vocational teachers in Southern Nevada in the next few years, according to Thomas Kirkpatrick, a UNLV professor of secondary, postsecondary, and vocational education.

UNLV and Clark County Community College have established the Capstone Program to help alleviate a possible shortage of occupational instructors. The Capstone Program allows community college students who earn an associate of applied science degree to transfer to UNLV as a junior in the vocational teacher program.

For more information on the Capstone program, call UNLV at 739-3635 or Clark County Community College at 643-6060, Ext. 338.

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