



Vancouver Talmud Torah Sixth Grade Students Present

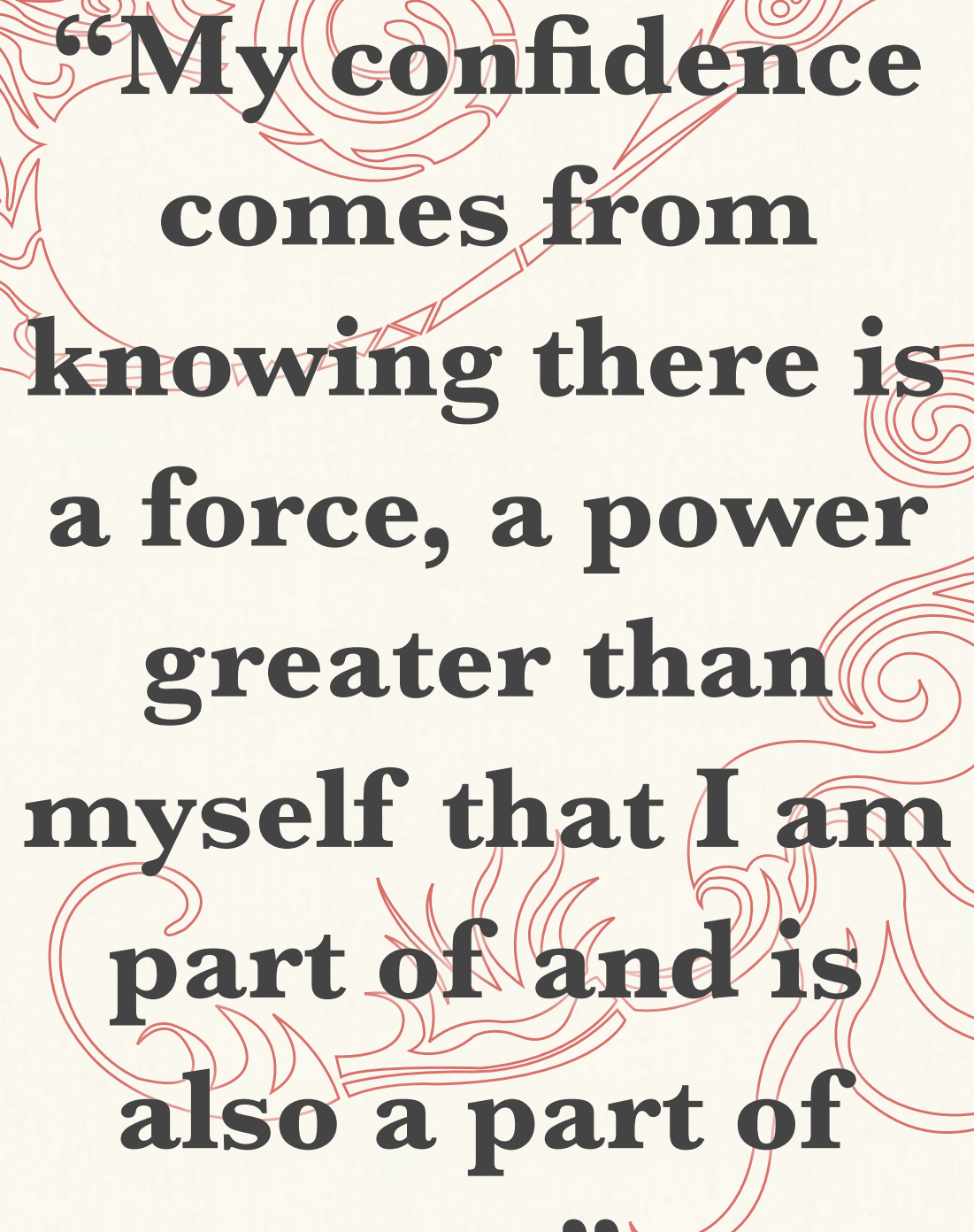
# BELIEF

*As part of an Interfaith Shabbat Dinner Initiative*



# Thank you for joining us!

Tonight's Shabbat dinner is the culmination of Vancouver Talmud Torah's Grade 6 Term II Tikkun Olam course. During this term, we explored different belief systems and faiths, by watching weekly episodes of Oprah Winfrey's riveting series, "Belief." The term's final project required each student to interview someone of a faith other than Judaism and then to write a narrative essay to describe in greater detail that person's spiritual beliefs and influences. This book contains those essays. By reading them, we hope you gain a greater understanding of the similarities that bind us and appreciate the differences that make each one of us unique.



**“My confidence  
comes from  
knowing there is  
a force, a power  
greater than  
myself that I am  
part of and is  
also a part of  
me.”**



# Ava Abramowich: Harjot Bhatti

I interviewed Harjot Bhatti who is a Sikh. She was born and raised in Canada. When she was young she celebrated Gurburbs (festivals celebrating the birthday or martyrdom one of the 10 Sikh Gurus), Diwali and Vaisakhi, to name a few. Vaisakhi, in particular, is very important to Sikhs as it not only marks the the day of the Harvest festival but it is also the day that 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji formed the Khalsa Paanth (Baptized Sikhs). The Khalsa Paanth are saint soldiers who fought for injustice, the rights of the poor and disadvantaged people of all religious backgrounds. On average, Harjot went once a week to the Sikh temple called the Gurdwara. She participated in a camp called Khalsa camp. At Khalsa camp she learned Sikh scripts and prayers, reading and writing the language Punjabi, and various historical facts. Sikhism was very vibrant to her parents and grandparents. They are actively involved in the Sikh community. She was born in Prince George which is in Northern BC and she doesn't celebrate Christmas.

As Harjot has gotten older, she believes that her practice has heightened. "When you are a kid you don't always understand what you are practicing and its true meaning" and now she is following her practices in her own way as her knowledge and understanding has grown. She translates the principles into daily practices. Out of general interest Harjot went to go explore and learn about other religions and their belief systems. She has never rebelled and continues to practice the principles of Sikhism. Before Harjot used to go to the Sikh temple much more than she does now but she still meditates every night. She has visited India where Sikhism began, not for a religious purpose, but to visit the country and to go to the Golden Temple (one of the most sacred temples to Sikhs) with her family. She associates with people of all faiths, not just Sikhs. Sadly, as a Sikh she has experienced racism.

Sikhs believe in one God called Waheguru. "The term itself is of Persian and Sanskrit origin. It was founded by the founder of our religion Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The meaning behind it is simple: we believe that God exists everywhere and that there is one universal creator God. "His" name is true, "he" has no fear or hatred, "he" is beyond birth and is self-existent." Harjot believes that this is the history of their God.

Something that is special about Harjot's religion are the rules that are practiced when entering the Gurdwara. When they walk into the Gurdwara everyone has to cover their heads (usually with some sort of a scarf or turban). When people go upstairs they bow down to the holy book which is called the "Guru Granth Saahib" which they believe is the last word of all of the collective teachings of all the Gurus. Sikhs bow down to the holy book and cover their heads when entering the temple to show humility, and respect. They go serve food in the langar hall which is open to everybody, as is the rest of the temple. Woman can take roles. They do have a dress code for religious people, known as the Five K's or the Panj Kakar, which are five items of faith that all baptized Sikhs must wear at all times. Sikhs have dietary restrictions such as they cannot drink alcohol or anything impure and they cannot eat meat. Harjot's favourite thing about Sikhism is how open it is; how the religion is based upon continuous learning and meditating in the name of god; and its core values regarding fighting for injustice, equality and always giving back to society. Sikhs are usually compared to Hindus and Muslims because of the way they look or because they are from India. However, there are great differences between the three religions. Because of how they dress, Sikhs also face discrimination.

I thought that this project was a great way to open up my mind to different religions. It was very interesting to learn about Sikhism and all their customs and holidays. One thing that was the same between Judaism and Sikhism is that they believe in one God only. Also, Sikhs and Jews both have particular dietary restrictions. Overall, I think that Sikhism is a very interesting religion and I hope to learn more about other religions.

**Primary message of Sikhism: There is one God then three pillars: Kirat karo, vand chakko, nanm japo.**

**Translation: Honest and pure, Being selfless and giving to humanity, meditate in God's name.**



# Jake Axler: Raji Patel

Meet Raji Patel. She was raised in a Punjabi Sikh family. She was born in India where she and her family practiced Sikhism. Raji and her family moved to Quebec when she was seven years old. Later on she moved to Vancouver.

Her parents were religious but did not believe in prayers before or after meals. Every Sunday morning as a child she would have to go to the Gurdwara to help out in the kitchen. The Gurdwara is a house or sanctuary where Sikhs can practice their religion. Sikhism is about helping out people who don't have food because it is a way of giving. After prayers there is a lot of food made in the Gurdwara by the volunteers. Raji's grandparents and parents thought it was quite important for her to be Sikh. They did not mind if she didn't practice Sikhism, but it was important to marry into the same religion. In India where she came from, the dominant religion was Hindu. Growing up, Raji did have Christmas holidays but she didn't really celebrate Christmas like exchanging gifts or going to Mass. Raji would still be spending the Christmas holidays with her family. As a child moving to Quebec she faced some discrimination as many people did not know much about India. Her friends used to laugh at her Indian ways.

As a child and teen Raji used to go to the Gurdwara every Sunday but now she goes less often. As a mother, Raji wants her daughter, Neeya, to find the importance in both religions. Raji's husband, Neerav, is Hindu so if their daughter were to be classified she would take her father's religion. Raji wants their daughter to grow up and find her own path in both the religions and to listen to both their faiths and rules.

In Sikhism there is a harvest festival called Vaisakhi. In the festival people share and trade what they have harvested that season. Raji and her family usually go to this festival in Vancouver. From October to November there is a Sikh and Hindu festival called Diwali. Diwali is a festival of light where you light candles and you exchange candies. Growing up, Raji attended many more festivals but today she does not attend that many. Raji believes in equality and what makes a person special is more important to her than their religion or background.

Raji believes in a higher power, but not necessarily in G-d. Raji believes that the higher power is one G-d that created the universe. The people in that universe split into their own groups and formed their own G-ds and religions.

In Sikhism, you must also wear a Kada, which is an iron bracelet. In the Gurdwara there is normally one priest and music is involved. As a ritual, after prayers, the congregation is joined downstairs for a meal. In Sikhism, women and men have equality so a woman can take part in reading from the holy book or singing in the Gurdwara. Names of people are unisex in her religion. Once you go through a baptism, there are some dietary restrictions, such as you are not allowed to consume any alcohol or some believe you cannot eat meat, while some believe that you can.

One of the things that Raji enjoys about her religion is equality and that women and men have equal rights. Another aspect of Sikhism that Raji really enjoys is the hospitality and generosity to people. One of the biggest misunderstandings about Sikhism is the turban. When you go through the baptism you must wear a turban. If you do not go through the baptism, you can still wear one, but you do not have to. People assume that if you wear a turban you are religious, this is not always true. You may have just grown your hair long and put it up in a turban.

Interviewing Raji was a memorable experience. I came to understand the traditions and beliefs of a different religion or faith than mine. It was a positive experience when I saw how enthusiastic she feels about her religion. This reminds me of how I feel about being Jewish. I have a better understanding of Sikhism than I did before I interviewed Raji. This experience taught me skills and how to improve on interviewing a person. From this interview I learned that there is other faiths and religions, but they all have a side of happiness and helping others. As Samantha Fox says, "It's different cultures that make the world go 'round at the end of the day."

**Raji believes that the essential message of Sikhism is about equality and helping others.**



# Zac Bunim: Jas

I interviewed Jas. Jas was raised in a home with a belief system which is Sikhism. He went to a Sikh temple once a week as well as on Sikh holidays. He did not participate in a religious youth group. Jas did not attend a faith based camp as a child. He was born in Canada, and all he learned about Sikhism was taught to him by his parents. He also learnt about Sikhism by going to temple. He celebrates Christmas, but it is not connected to Christianity. His grandparents are not religious Sikhs.

Jas does not have the same beliefs that he had as a child. He doesn't question just his belief system, he questions all belief systems. He doesn't go to temple anymore, and he has no rituals. He has not traveled for a religious purpose. Jas primarily associates with people of his own religion as well as his own culture, Indian. He does not believe he has experienced discrimination based on his religion. Jas would raise his children as Sikhs because he wants them to know about the Sikh religion. If he had children, he would pay way more attention to the Sikh religion and would go to temple more. He thinks that it is important to have kids with a belief system.

Jas does not believe in God or other spirits. Sikhism requires a style of dress. Traditionally you have to cover your head with something in the temple. Religious people don't cut their hair and they wear a silver bracelet and carry a kirpan (which is a knife/small sword.)

Sikhs believe in 10 Gurus, although Jas doesn't believe in any. The name of the Sikh holy book is called the Guru Gransab. Inside the temple there are pictures of holy people. Sikhs are not allowed to eat meat and drink alcohol. Jas's favorite part of Sikhism is the festival of lights, where people light fireworks everywhere. The language of the Sikhs is Punjabi, and at the temple all the prayers are in ancient Punjabi. In the center of the temple there is an altar. There is also the holy book which everybody bows to.

**The essential message of Sikhism is “to learn about everything and anything, and never stop while treating all with respect and dignity.”**



# Sophie Chelin: Brenda Hearn

I interviewed Brenda Hearn. She grew up in a home with a belief system. She was raised Catholic. She went to church every Sunday with her family. Every year she celebrated Christmas, which was when Jesus was born. She also celebrated Easter, which was when Jesus rose from the dead. Just like we have Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, her family has Baptisms and first communions. She has received all of the religious sacraments. Religion was very important to her parents and grandparents. Her parents were not as religious as her grandparents, but they still thought it was important to go to church every Sunday and to follow the Christian religion. Her grandmother went to church every day, said prayers, and read the Bible.

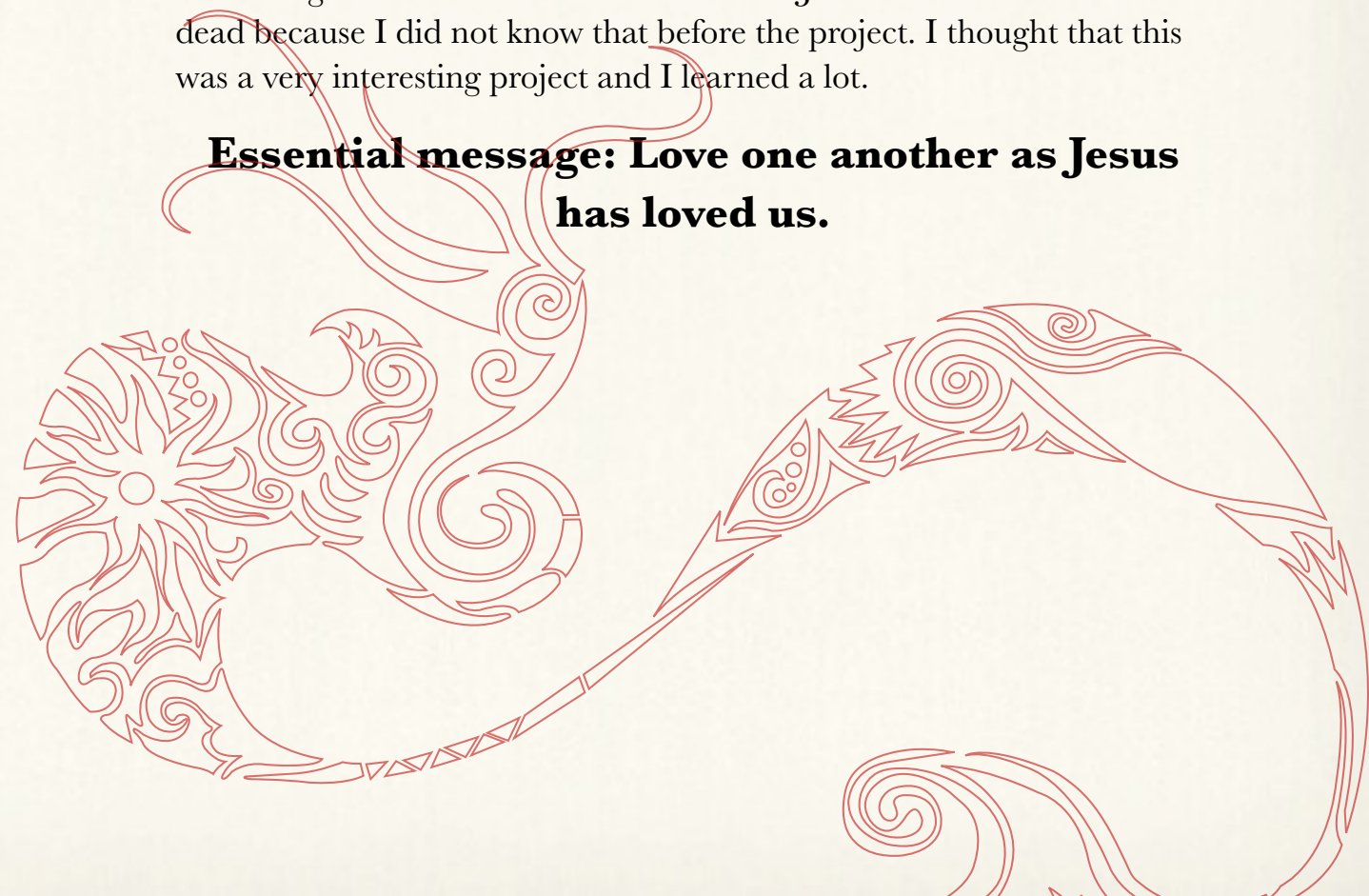
Brenda has the same religious beliefs as she did when she was a child: she still goes to church every Sunday and she is still Christian. Now she feels like there are certain things in the Christian religion that she believes in more strongly and she feels like she can pick and choose based on what she feels in her heart and what she believes in. Trevor, her husband, does not have the same beliefs as she. She still wants her kids to go to church with her and have the same belief system as her until they are at the age where they get to choose their faith. She went to Rome because it is a Christian place and because it is where the Vatican is and the Pope lives. She liked how Rome had many old churches and it had a lot of Christian history. People made fun of her for going to church during university so she went on her own. People have asked her why she was going to church and they thought that it was silly.

When you go to church, you are supposed to enter silently. You are supposed to be respectful, pray, and be reverent. Every time you go to church, you do the same thing. Women cannot take any main leadership roles. Women do not stand up at the front of the church and speak to the congregation. Women can be nuns. There are a few days in the year when you are supposed to fast and practice abstinence. By not eating you are making a sacrifice to God. The two main days of fasting during the year are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Kids and seniors do not have to fast, only healthy adults. Brenda likes the feeling of community. She can walk into a church and she can always know what is going to happen and feels a sense of comfort at church. Church is her sanctuary. Some people think that if you are a religious Christian, you can't have fun. Some people also think that if you are Catholic you have to go to church every day, you have to be really hard core and do everything that Christians are supposed to do.

I learned that both Christians and Jews have a ceremony where you turn into an adult. Jews have Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and Christians have Baptisms and First Communion. Regardless of which religion a person chooses to follow, religion offers an opportunity for people who think alike to gather together. When this happens, a community is formed. When people have a sense of being part of a community, they will be happier. I think that community support is very important. I found it very interesting to learn about Brenda's religion. I also found it interesting to find out that Easter was when Jesus came back from the dead because I did not know that before the project. I thought that this was a very interesting project and I learned a lot.

**Essential message: Love one another as Jesus has loved us.**





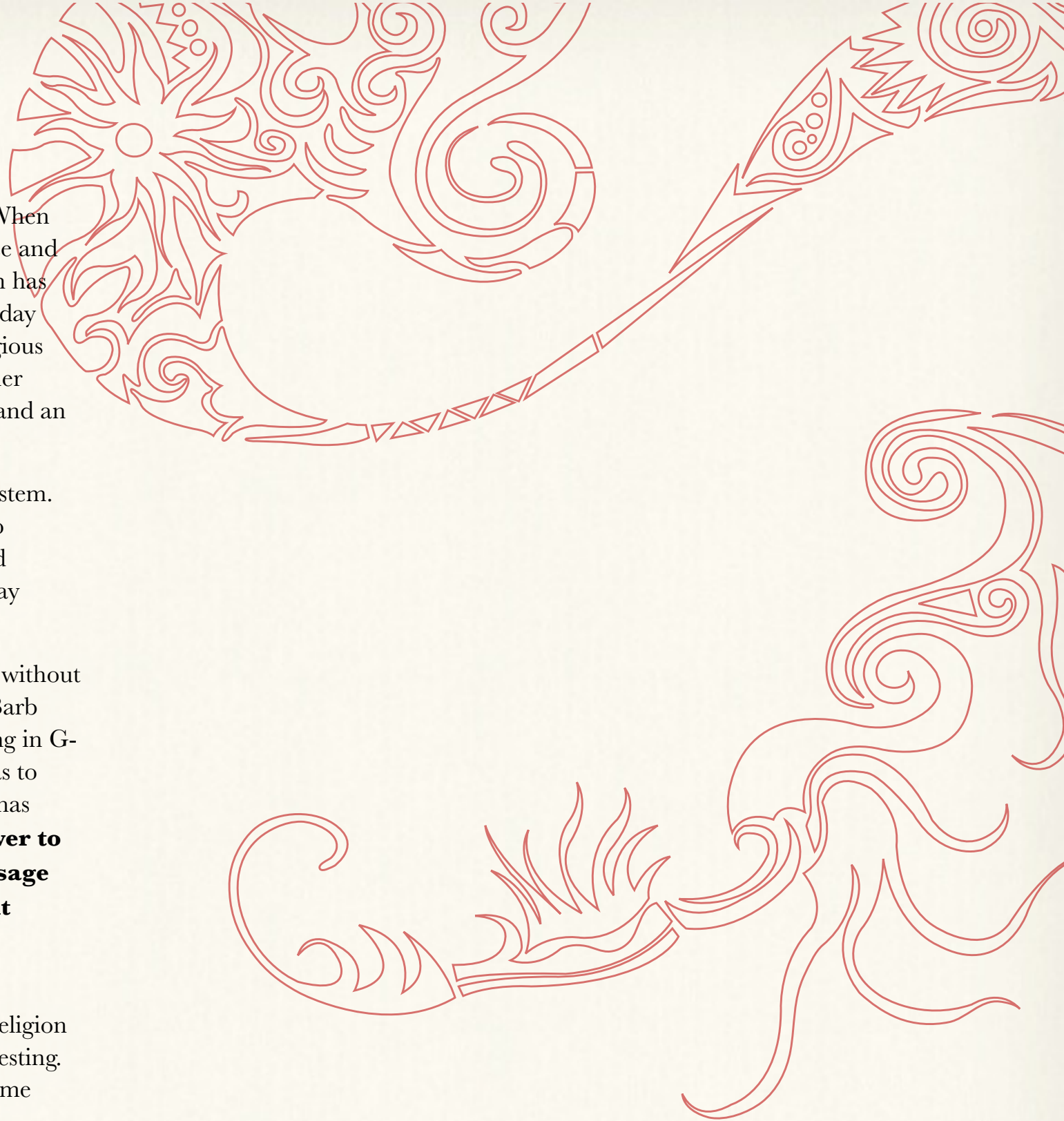
# Sierra Feldman: Barb Gordon

I interviewed Barb Gordon who practices Protestant Christianity. When Barb was young she went to church fairly regularly, and found peace and tranquility in the church. Now, she is an adult and her belief system has gotten stronger since she was a child. She goes to church every Sunday and she has a very strong belief system. Her mother was more religious than her father ever was, so she took after her mom and practices her religion very often. Barb also celebrated Christmas both as a child and an adult. Her version of Christmas is connected to Christianity.

As a child, Barb had a belief system, but it wasn't a strong belief system. As an adult her belief system has become stronger. She now goes to church every Sunday and she loves doing so. One of her rituals and traditions is saying prayers every night. She says, "It's a chance to say thank you for all of the things that are good in my life."

Barb strongly believes in G-d. She can also walk out into the world without a dress code because her religion doesn't require her to wear one. Barb also believes that someone can't believe in miracles without believing in G-d. If you don't believe in G-d, it's not considered a miracle. One has to connect with G-d otherwise it's not a miracle. A miracle that Barb has come across in her life is having her one healthy son. **Barb's answer to the question in one sentence of what is the essential message of your religion is that Protestant Christianity is all about giving and caring for others.**

In my opinion, interviewing someone who believes in Protestant Christianity is something I found very interesting. I only have one religion that I practice, which is Judaism, and I found this project very interesting. In this project we had to interview an adult that doesn't have the same belief system as ours. I am very glad that I chose to interview Barb because if I didn't I wouldn't have gotten the opportunity to learn about Protestant Christianity, which is a very interesting religion. I am very glad once again that I have had the opportunity to go and learn something about a new religion. It really is something new and special to me!



# Erica Forman: Scott Gray

**“In one sentence I think it (Catholicism) is the belief in Jesus Christ and the fact that when you die you go to heaven.”**

I interviewed Scott Gray. He is my next door neighbour. He grew up in a Catholic household. His father was Catholic and his mother was Anglican. His traditions were based on basic Catholic beliefs. Their family had very big celebrations on Christmas and Easter. He also had some Polish traditions because his dad immigrated from Poland. When he was a child/teen he went to church almost every Sunday. He went to a Catholic camp when he was a kid and he went every year. He said that his grandparents took Catholicism very seriously but his parents didn't as much.

Scott told me that he now has the same religious beliefs that he did when he was a child. He is raising his children with the same beliefs that he grew up with, which is Catholic. He believes it is important to give his children the gift of believing in something. Some of the rituals that they currently practice are trying to go to church every Sunday, participating in the church's sacraments, like confession and reconciliation, saying bedtime prayers and prayers before eating. Scott thinks that his family currently does more religious practices than when he was a child. Scott has traveled to the Vatican to see the Pope and he did a Middle East tour when he was in university.

Scott believes in God. As a Catholic, he does not have to follow any rules about the way he dresses. At church, Scott attends mass, which includes certain prayers and other rituals that have to be done with a certain decorum (seriousness). Scott does the physical sign of the cross and kneels at church during mass. In Catholicism, women can take religious leadership roles, but they cannot become priests. There are no dietary restrictions, but on some holidays you fast. One of the things Scott likes most about his religion is the fellowship of seeing people every Sunday and sharing the same belief system with them.





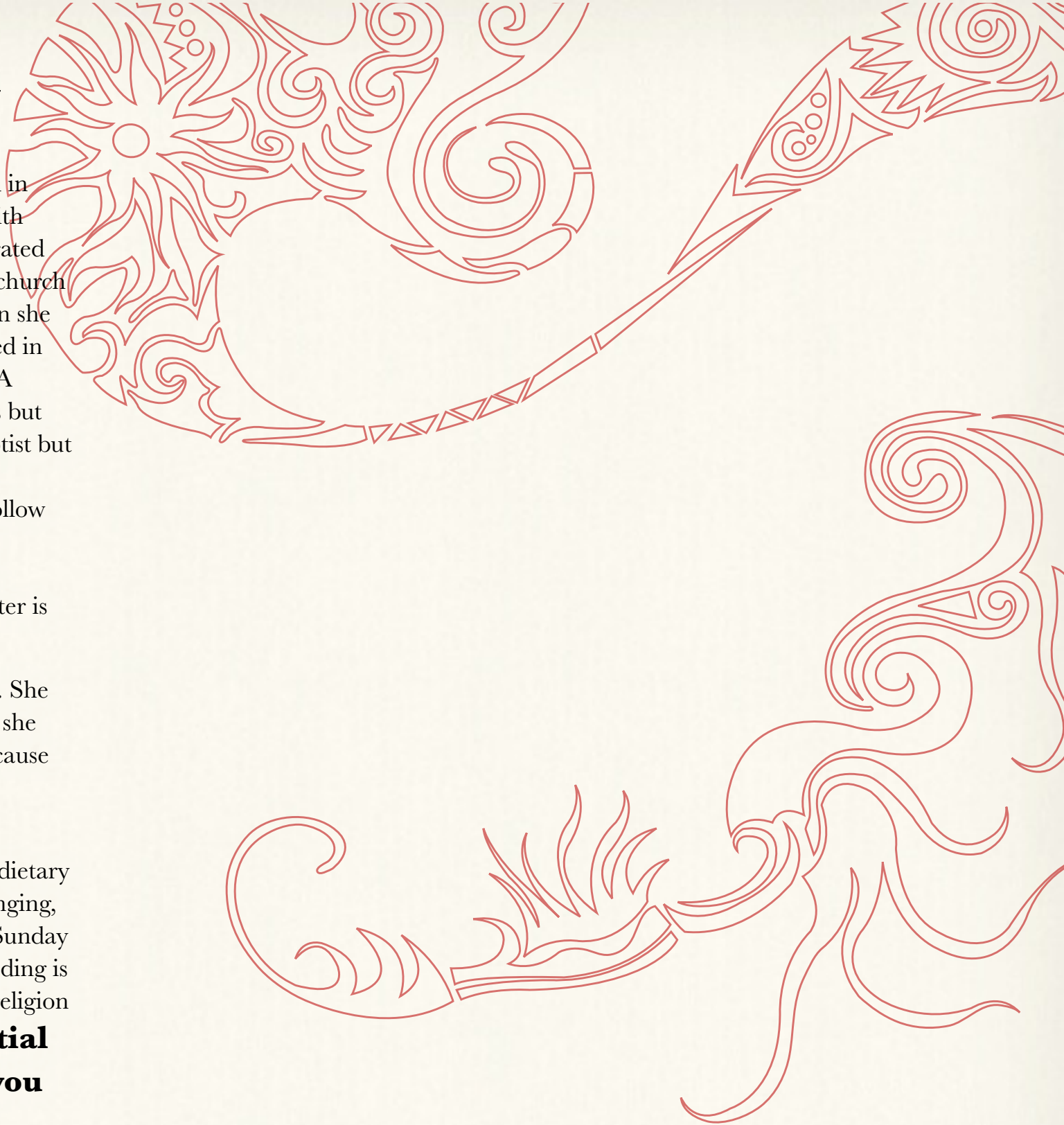
# Sam Friedman: Shelley

I interviewed Shelley who was born in London, Ontario, and raised in Tillsonburg, ON. Tillsonburg was a tobacco growing community with about 9000 people. She was raised as a Baptist Christian and celebrated holidays like Christmas and Easter. Up until age 5, Shelley went to church every Sunday; after that, she stopped going on a regular basis. When she was a teenager, Shelley stopped going entirely. She never participated in any religious group and she went to only one religious camp: YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) which had morning prayers but that was it. Her grandparents on her mother's side were strictly Baptist but her grandparents on her father's side didn't really care for religion. Shelley's mom was considered Baptist, like her parents, but didn't follow her religion. Her dad, out of a scale of 10, with 10 being extremely religious and 0 being not religious at all, was a 0. In her community, Christmas was a religious holiday, being the birthday of Christ (Easter is his death day).

Shelley rebelled against Christianity once, by converting to Judaism. She has never traveled to country for religious purposes. In Tillsonburg, she only associated with people of her religion, though the reason is because everybody who lived in Tillsonburg was Christian. Shelley never experienced discrimination for being Christian.

Shelley has always believed in God. Being Baptist did not have any dietary or clothing restrictions. At her church, she mainly participated in singing, learning, and prayer. The highest position women could be was as Sunday school teachers. Shelley thinks that the most common misunderstanding is that people think that everybody thinks the same way and that the religion hasn't changed at all. **Shelley believes that the essential message of Christianity is "Treat others as you want to be treated."**

I found interviewing Shelley about her childhood was fascinating. Here, we live in a city, and there are thousands of people, most of whom you don't know. Shelley grew up in a small town in the middle of nowhere, where there were about 9000 people and everything is far apart.



# Tristan Georges: Bonita Chen

For this interview, I interviewed Bonita Chen about her religion, Buddhism. Bonita lives in Taipei, Taiwan, and I conducted the interview over Skype. I chose Buddhism because I thought it would be interesting and I remember visiting many Buddhist temples when I lived in Asia. Bonita practiced Buddhism as a child with her family. Buddhism is the most popular religion in Taiwan. I learned that in Taiwan Buddhism is mixed with local Taiwanese celebrations. In Asia, it is common for Buddhism to be mixed with local traditions. This happens not only in Taiwan, but in Japan and China too.

As a child and teen Bonita would practice Buddhism in her home and at the local temple. In her home she had a shrine where they would pray and make offerings to Buddha. The shrine had a small statue of Buddha and there were offerings such as fruit surrounding it and they would also burn incense. For some major holidays they would travel to different temples in Taiwan. For example, during the lantern festival they would go to a special place where many Taiwanese people meet to put wishes in lanterns and then light the lanterns and let them go in the sky! These were special to her when she was growing up.

Religion was important to Bonita's parents and grandparents. They were superstitious, and Bonita still is. She believes this is an important part of her religion because Buddhists believe in the fate of life. Superstitions like the popular Ghost Festival are passed from generation to generation. Buddhists believe in the afterlife so they are aware and show respect to their dead ancestors and spirits.

Bonita's religious beliefs have changed since she was young. As a child she lived in a small farming community so she wasn't exposed to any religions but her own. When she was 20 she moved to Taipei, the big city. She met people of different religions. In Taipei, she met her husband, who is Jewish. Now there are parts of his religion she celebrates but also continues to celebrate some of her own. She still celebrates the big festivals like Ghost Month. She offers food, drink and incense to the spirits. She does this in her home and at work.

Bonita also burns paper money so the dead will bless her each year with good fortune. She tries to live a peaceful life and continues to believe in fate. These qualities have been with her since she was young. When she grew up she had a shrine in her home where she could pray and make offerings. Her parents still have the shrine and when she goes there to visit she will pray with them. She does not have a shrine in her home right now. When Bonita got married to a Jewish man and had kids, they had to think about how to raise them. Though there are no synagogues in Taipei, they introduced them to the major holidays. The children also know about Buddhism and visit the temples as well as celebrate the major Taiwanese festivals.

Bonita associates with people of all religions, not just Buddhists. She feels lucky to have never felt any discrimination for her religion.

Bonita says that Buddhists do not believe in god. Buddhists believe in the teachings of Buddha, who was a man who once lived on earth. In Taiwan, Buddhism is mixed with local festivals and traditions. Buddhists believe in an afterlife so they strongly associate with their ancestors and spirits. Buddhist monks wear a specific dress and shave their heads. These religious Buddhists live together in monasteries. A person that practices conservatively like Bonita does not wear anything specific. Many Buddhists in Taiwan follow rituals not only in the temple but in shrines built in their own homes. They make offerings to the spirit world and pray for fortune in this life and the next.

Ghosts and spirits are a big part of traditions in Taiwan. They pray often for their families' success and fortune on earth and the afterlife. Once a year they burn paper money and make offerings to the spirits. They do this so the dead will bless the living with money. The temple is also a place to ask questions. One ritual is to throw two half moons. Depending on how they fall, their question will be answered by the spirits. Some questions that would be asked could be about education, jobs, health, prosperity and fortune in the coming year. In Buddhist teachings, there is a strong belief in living in peace, having concern for the environment, education and human rights. All of these are important to Bonita. When I asked Bonita the essential message of Buddhism she said, **"To not be a selfish person and care for the well being of others."**



# Celia Gustavsson: Jessie Claudio

I interviewed Jessie Claudio.

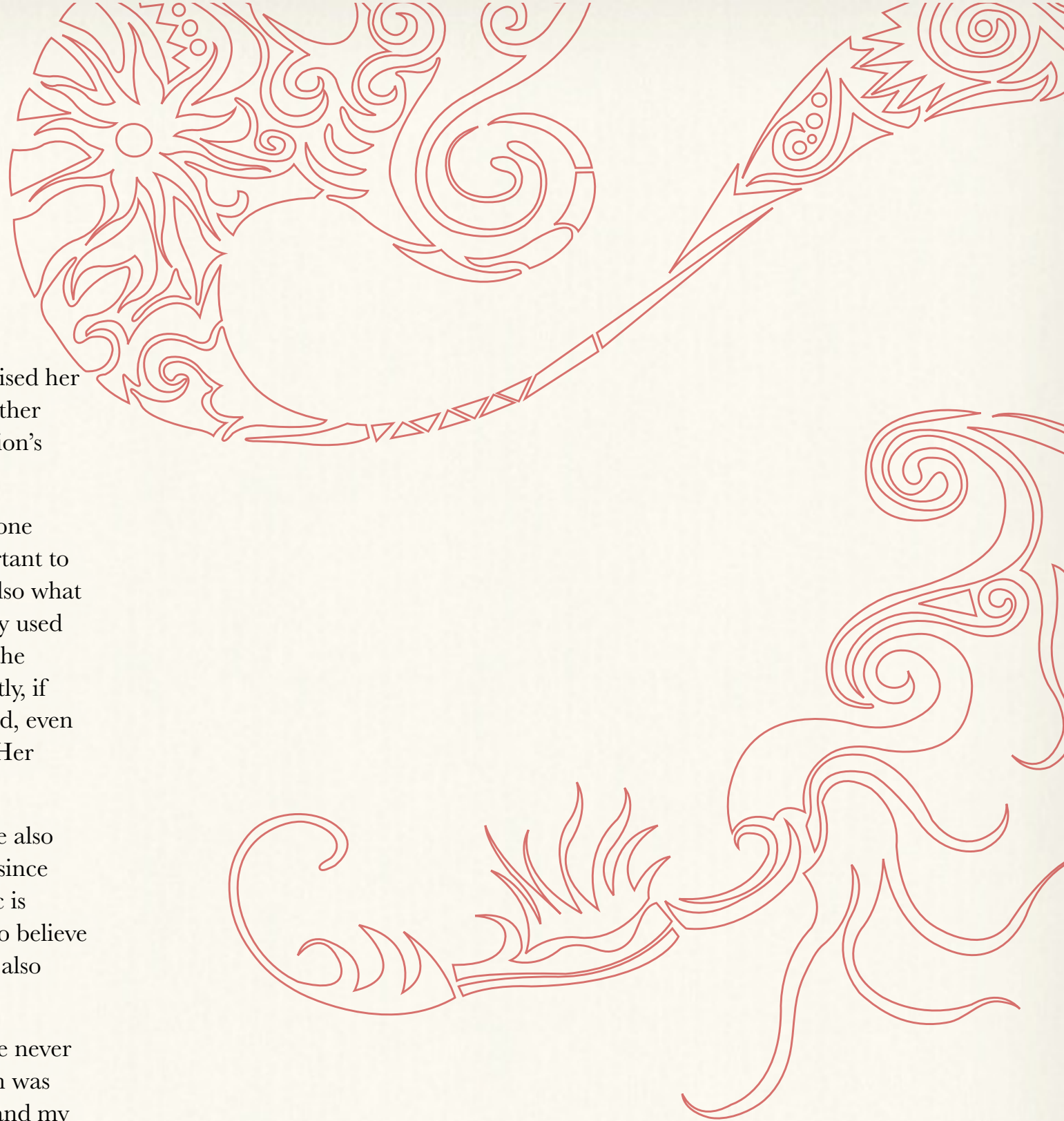
When she was a child, she was Sikh. Although she was Sikh, her parents raised her to embrace all the other religions. (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) Her father read to her from the Quran and the Torah, and they celebrated every religion's holidays.

Since she was taught to embrace every religion, and being Sikh wasn't the one thing she believed, she converted to Catholicism. Catholicism is very important to her and her husband, even though she still embraces all religions. That is also what they teach their 4 year old daughter. They teach her she's Catholic, but they used to send her to a Muslim school for preschool. She has learned verses from the Quran, and they go to Shabbat dinners at Morah Shoshi's house. Apparently, if she could go to Shabbat dinners every night, Miss Claudio's daughter would, even though Mrs. Claudio tries to tell her Shabbat dinners are only on Fridays! Her daughter now attends a private Catholic school.

Jessie Claudio's faith is now Catholicism, but she embraces all religions. She also believes in God. There are no real 'special' holidays unique to her religion since she celebrates them all. A big reason why Mrs. Claudio likes being Catholic is because of how open the religion is. She isn't confined to one single thing to believe in and you always have someone or something to fall back on. Catholicism also helps her raise her daughter in a way that is an anchor for her.

It was interesting to interview someone from a different faith because I have never heard of someone being involved with so many other religions. Catholicism was not entirely new to me as I have met Catholics before through daily living and my dance program.

**The message of her faith is to love all and believe in God.**



# Ben Gutman: Parveen Dosanjh

I interviewed Parveen Dosanjh. Parveen practises the Sikh faith, just like her parents did before her. She was born in Canada, but India is the dominant country of the Sikh faith. Parveen's parents took her to the Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) every Sunday, but Parveen did not participate in any youth groups or faith-based camps.

When I asked Parveen how important religion is to her parents, she replied, "To my mother it was extremely important to the point where my mother would do prayers at home. My father could take it or leave it." Parveen does celebrate Christmas but in a secular, non religious way.

Parveen has had the same religion from birth, but was never baptized. She has never had a problem or issue with being Sikh and thus has never felt the need to rebel against it. Parveen never experienced discrimination for being a Sikh, but her mother did.

Parveen has two children and has chosen to raise them like her parents did for her. She believes that it is important for children to be brought up with a belief system; I agree with this idea. Parveen strives to take her children to the Gurdwara every Sunday as she did when she was young. However, in contrast to her childhood, Parveen is struggling to find ways to help her kids learn Punjabi, since they do not speak it at home and it is hard to find immersive Punjabi language opportunities in Canada.

Parveen travelled back to India and drove three hours to the Golden Temple, the holiest place in the Sikh religion, located in Amritsar.

Parveen believes in G-D. The Sikh G-D is Ik Onkar. Despite not being baptized, Parveen practices the Sikh religion. Those who are baptized into the Sikh faith must adhere to five customs: they are prohibited from cutting their hair, they must have a special comb in their hair, they must wear a bangle on their wrist, they must wear a religious sword, and special underwear. Additionally, those who are baptized may not consume alcohol or meat.

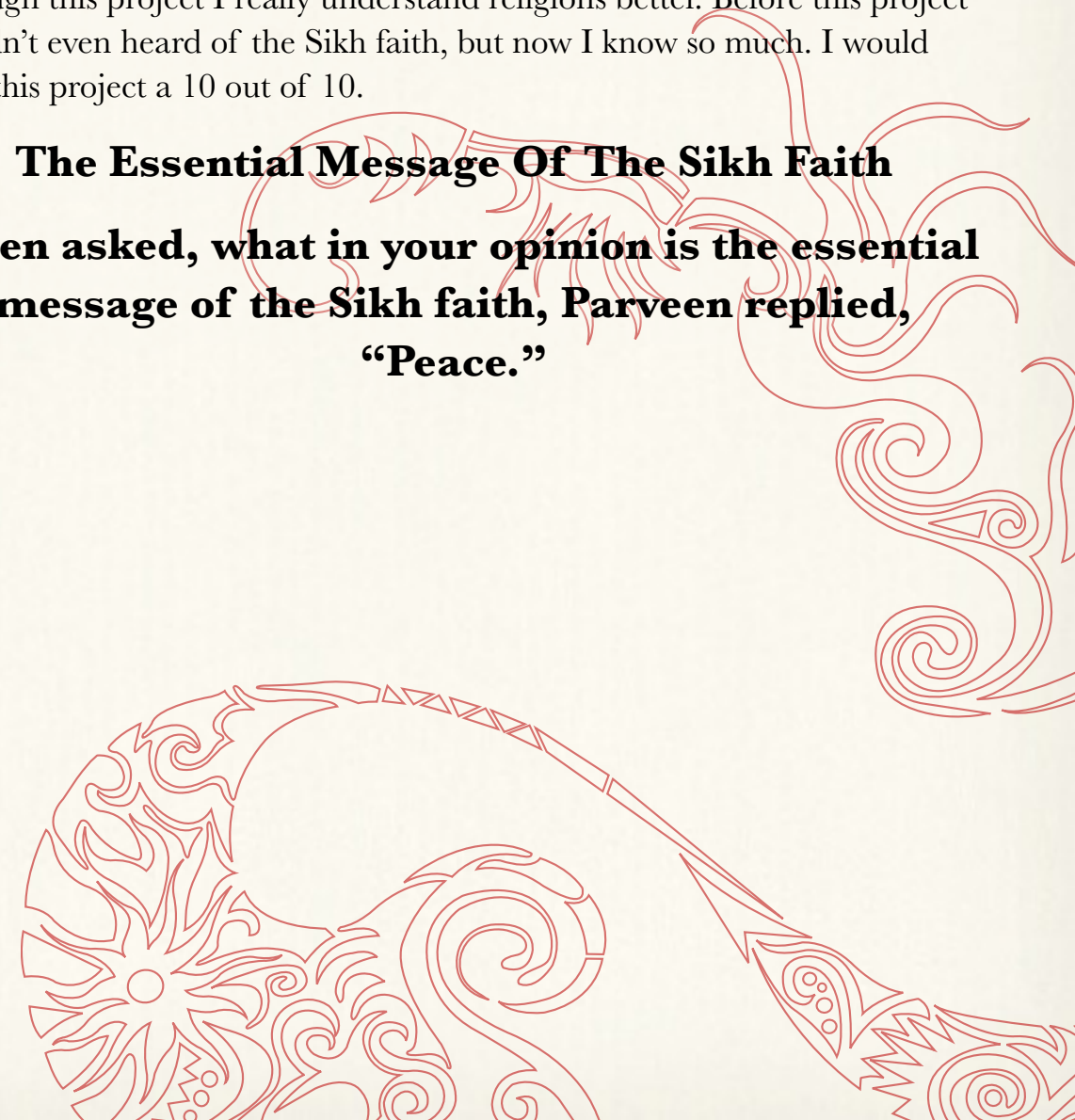
When entering a Gurdwara, people must take off their shoes, cover their hair - both men and women - to show equality and place a cash offering in whatever amount that is comfortable for them. In a Gurdwara, women are able to take religious leadership roles because the Sikh faith believes in equality. Also, men and women dress the same and keep their hair long to demonstrate equality. Parveen feels that the best aspect of the Sikh faith is that it treats all people fairly and equally.

Sikhs are often confused with Muslims because Sikhs wears turbans on their heads that are quite similar to the headgear of Muslims. In reality, there is a distinct difference in the way Sikhs tie their turbans as compared with muslims.

I think it was quite interesting to really learn about other religions. There are so many out there and because of the videos we have watched and through this project I really understand religions better. Before this project I hadn't even heard of the Sikh faith, but now I know so much. I would rate this project a 10 out of 10.

## **The Essential Message Of The Sikh Faith**

**When asked, what in your opinion is the essential message of the Sikh faith, Parveen replied, "Peace."**





# Jette Halevi: Adam

Today we want to tell you more about other religions. We will mainly talk about Christianity today, because it's not so interesting if you know all the important facts only about Judaism. This week we interviewed a young man called Adam. He is Christian. We will be talking a bit about his background to know him better, his current practice, and a bit of our opinion about it.

Adam believes in God. The one thing he really wants to know from God is what will happen to him and which plans God has for him for the future. Adam has been baptised many times in his life. In his religion, alcohol is one of the dietary restriction. Adam's favourite thing about his religion is singing and praying.

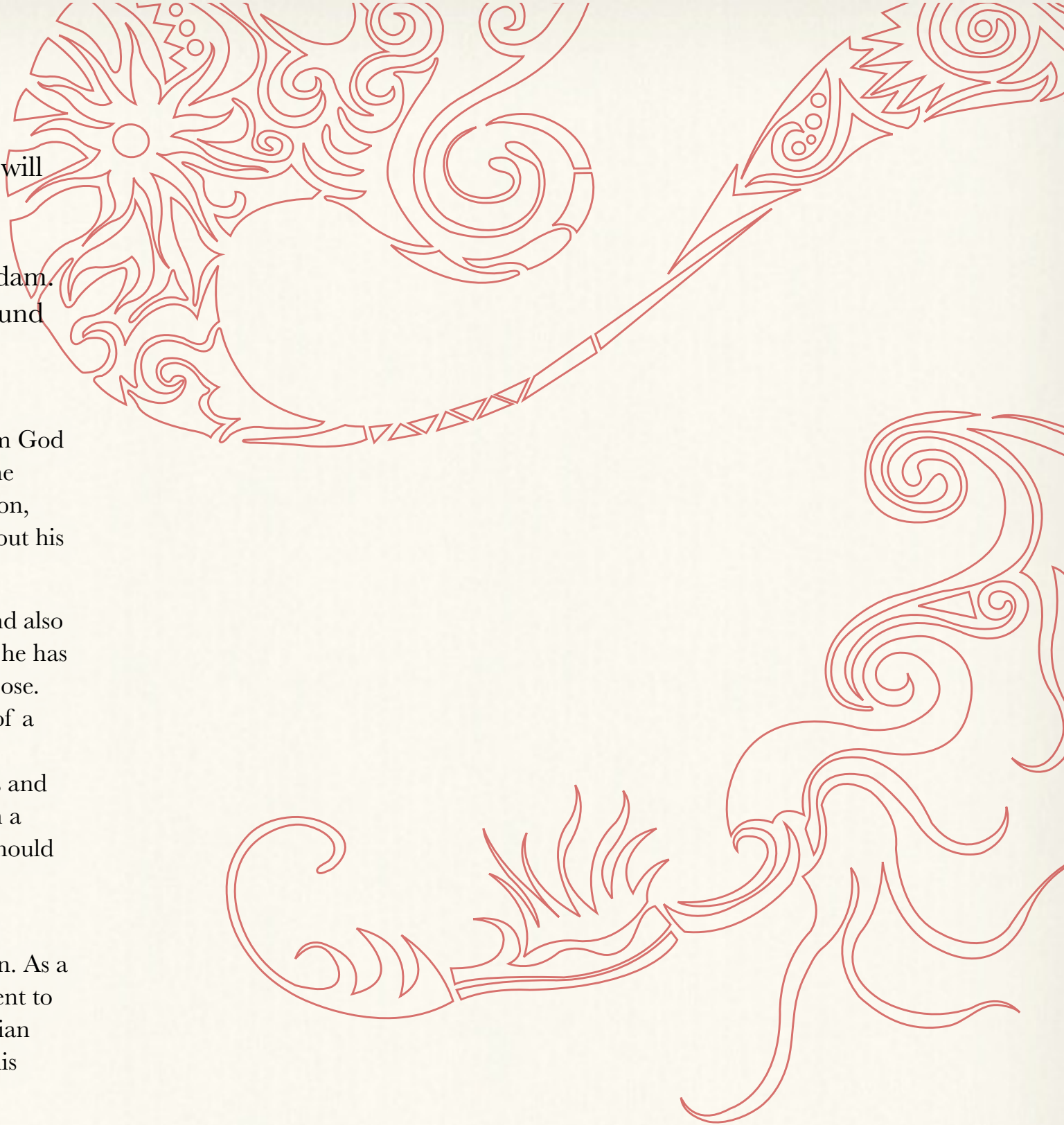
Adam celebrated all the Christian holidays when he was a child and also now. He practices his religion by going to church and praying, but he has never travelled to a religious place in the world for a religious purpose. He also doesn't really think of Christianity as a religion, it's more of a belief and a nature of life. He would want his kids to have some understanding of the religion, but not to force them to be religious and be a Christian. In Adam's view, when people use "Oh My God" in a sentence, it can be a very ignorant thing to say. He thinks people should not use it.

Adam was born in Korea where the main important religions are Christianity and Buddhism. He grew up based on Korean tradition. As a child, he used to go to church once a week on Sundays. He also went to a Christian youth group as a child. Every year, he went to a Christian summer camp too. His parents were very religious. Especially on his mother's side. All his mother's side is Christian.

When I started this project I didn't know a lot about Christianity.

Thanks to Adam, now I know so much more. I learned a lot of new things I never even heard of before. I think Christianity is a very interesting religion and is pretty similar to Judaism.

**Love Your Neighbor as yourself !**



# Abraham Hamui: Fernando Padres

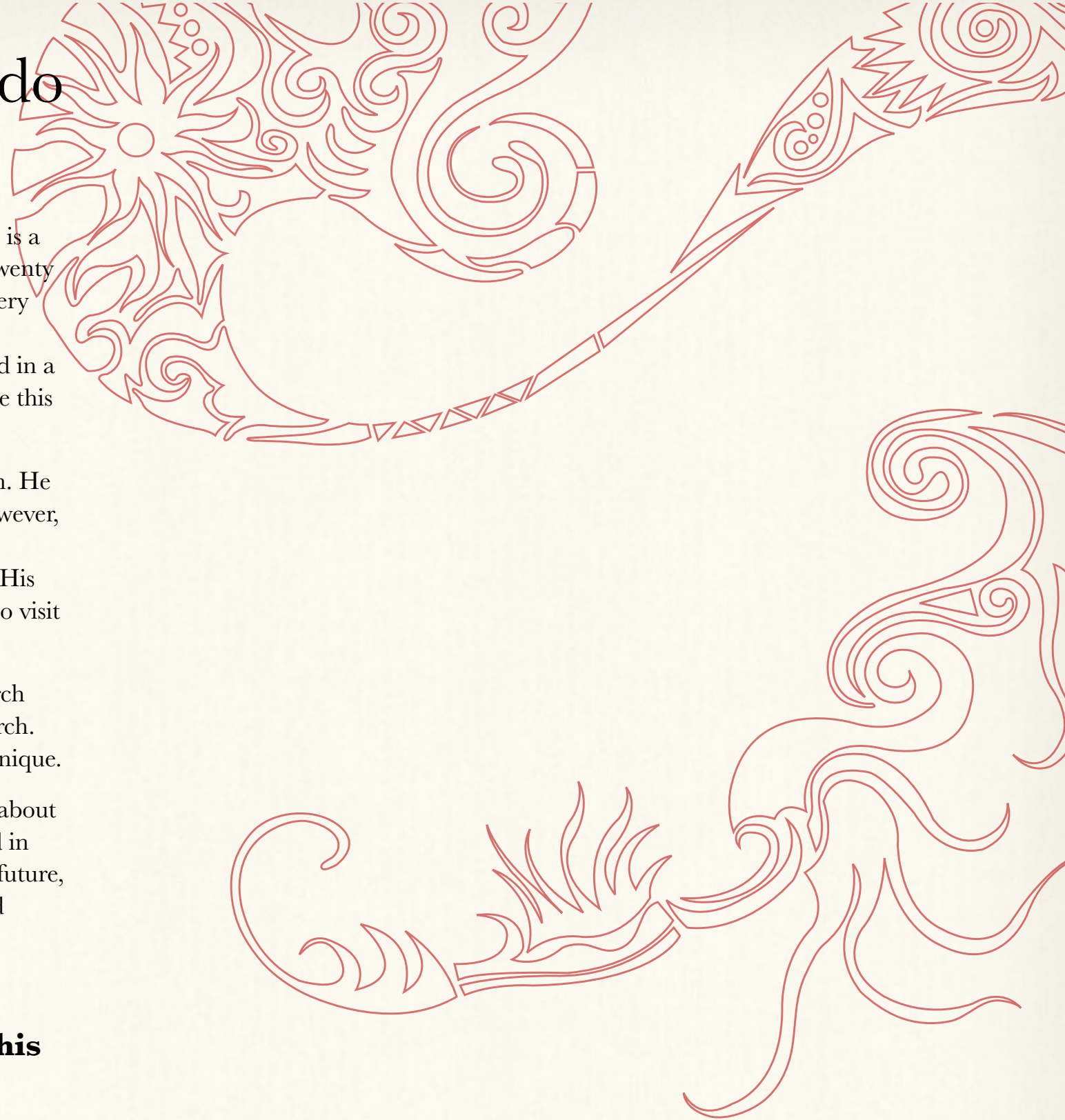
I interviewed Fernando Padres. Fernando was born in Mexico and is a school friend of my father's. He immigrated to Vancouver about twenty years ago. Fernando was raised Catholic and he went to church every second Sunday with his family. He didn't personally believe in the church, but his parents forced him to go. He eventually got married in a church and he was happy he did as he felt it was important to make this life commitment in front of G-d.

As a young child, Fernando was fairly rebellious against his religion. He didn't enjoy going to church and argued with his parents. Now, however, he embraces his religion and is happy to be Catholic. He moved to Vancouver 20 years ago and now lives with four sons and his wife. His family of origin still lives in Mexico and he goes every six months to visit them.

Catholics only believe in one G-d. The religious people go to church every Sunday. Also, they have a Pope, who is the leader of the church. Fernando doesn't believe in the church, but he thinks the Pope is unique.

I enjoyed interviewing this person because I didn't know anything about the Catholic religion and now I know more about it. I'm interested in other religions and this interview helped me to know more. In the future, I would like to know about other religions as well. Finally, I feel sad because not many people have the opportunity to have a religion.

**Fernando thinks the essential message of his religion is "everyone is equal."**





# Julia Huber: Stephanie Mutchnick

I interviewed Stephanie Mutchnick. She currently lives in Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband and two children. She converted to Judaism from Catholicism. Stephanie grew up in Missouri, as a member of a very Catholic family and went to a Catholic school. As well as going to a Catholic school from first grade to twelfth grade, she went to church with her family every Sunday. With school between first grade to eighth grade every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, she also went to church. When Stephanie was younger her family did not eat meat on Friday during Lent. Lent is the forty days before Easter. Her family celebrated Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving. The reason Stephanie converted to Judaism was because she got married to a Jewish man and thought it was a good idea.

Stephanie is now Jewish. She celebrates Shabbat every Friday night. Her family lights the candles and blesses the children. She also celebrates most of the high holidays with her family and friends. Stephanie celebrates Yom Kippur, Passover, and Rosh Hashana. She does not believe in God or any other spiritual deities.

Stephanie's old faith was Catholicism. Catholicism is a type of Christianity. In Catholicism you do not eat meat on Fridays especially during Lent. If you are part of Catholicism, you most likely also celebrate Easter and Christmas. What Stephanie likes best about Judaism is that it's part of the faith to ask questions and to think deeply about those questions.

I found interviewing someone about their religion very fun. Interviewing someone about their religion is fun because you get to learn something. I also found it was fun because you were just having a chat and chatting is fun, which we all know because we do it a lot. I think Judaism is sort of similar to Catholicism because in both religions there are dietary restrictions which you can choose to follow.

**Essential message: It is the rule of the Jewish people to do Tikkun Olam.**



# Gavin Hurley: Tata Afshar

For this project, I chose to interview my neighbor Tata, who is a Muslim from Iran. Growing up in Iran most of Tata's surroundings were Islamic. Her grandparents were very religious, but her parents less so.

To this day, Tata is still Muslim. She prays occasionally and observes Ramadan, which is an Islamic month where Muslims fast during the day for the whole month. She did not attend a religious summer camp as a child or teen. Tata reads the Qu'ran, which is the Islamic book containing all of the religion's practices and instructions.

Tata believes in the essential ethical rules of her religion. For example, no eating pork, no lying, treat others kindly, etc. However, she does not practice some of the more common rituals, such as covering her head. Tata believes in one God. She never questioned or rebelled against her religion. In Islam, women have not yet assumed leadership positions of religious authority. Tata has travelled to a different Iranian province to visit a holy shrine. She likes that her religion only has one God and one prophet. A major misunderstanding regarding Tata's religion is that some people think that all terrorists are Muslim and all Muslim are terrorists. She doesn't force her children to believe strongly in the religion. **The essential message of her religion is unity and friendship and worshipping only one G-d.**

My experience interviewing someone from a different religion was quite exciting and it was cool to learn a bunch of new things about Tata's religion. One way that I can relate to our two religions is that both have been treated poorly over the centuries and in a similar way. We also both believe in one G-d: monotheism.





# Joshua Isakov: Neerav Patel

I interviewed Neerav Patel, who was born in Vancouver and is a Hindu by birth. He grew up in a home where he wasn't pushed to do the rituals or traditions of his belief system.

As a child, Neerav and his family went to the temple once a week for a few years. This was mainly when he was in elementary school and he and his family also enjoyed watching religious shows on TV together.

Hinduism is the world's third most popular religion, with around 750 million followers. The religion of Hinduism originated in Northern India, near the river Indus, about 4000 years ago and is the world's oldest existing religion.

As a teenager, Neerav only went to the temple around once every six months. The religion was more important to his parents than to him, but he wasn't pushed by his parents to observe the religious rituals.

Today Neerav has the same belief system as he had as a child but also enjoys practicing parts of other belief systems too. He celebrates Christmas and also lights Hanukkah candles.

He has questioned and rebelled against his religion, especially when he did not agree with or understand a reason for a particular rule or tradition. For example, he explained that in Hinduism some sects aren't allowed to eat certain foods, for example, onions. To him that doesn't make sense and questions today the importance or significance of that aspect of his religion. He and his family have agreed to disagree over this topic.

Neerav is married and has the cutest daughter, Neeya. His wife, Raji, is of the Punjabi Sikh religion. She is an amazing cook and makes the best chai tea. Neerav explained that when they got married they had to perform religious rituals and ceremonies which they agreed to take part in because it was important to his parents.

Together, Neerav and Raji have decided that it doesn't matter which religion Neeya will choose. Their only concern is that she grows up and takes the good parts of their religion and lives by that.

Neerav doesn't practice much of his religion and same with his family. They perform some religious rituals, which is when they go to the temple and celebrate Diwali, which is said to be one of the most important festivals for Hindus.

As a family they enjoy going to an annual parade every April in Vancouver which connects to their religion. At the parade they enjoy being together as a family, tasting different foods, watching the entertainment and enjoying the lively atmosphere. They have travelled to India for religious weddings, but not for a religious purpose.

Neerav loves all religions and he associates people and friends more on how they act and behave rather than on their religious beliefs. He doesn't believe in labelling people with a religion.

Neerav doesn't really believe in God as such but believes in a higher power and is a big believer in science. The unknown to him is a miracle/godly but he is more biased to science than a God.

In the temple the men sit on the left and women sit on the right and after the service, food would be served to the congregation. Many years ago, women couldn't take religious leadership and in his experience he has only seen male priests.

As far as dietary restrictions are concerned, they are not allowed to eat onions or garlic. Neerav explains that it is due to the fact of its strong nature which insights violence, according to his religion. Neerav is vegetarian as that is the way he was brought up, but says many Hindu people are vegetarian. One reason they can't eat beef is because cows are thought of to be sacred.

Neerav loves that there are numerous Gods in Hinduism. He says, "It's very cool that for everything you can think of there is a God."

He explains that a common misunderstanding is that Hinduism is one religion, when actually in India there are numerous Hindu sects.

I really enjoyed interviewing and talking to Neerav about his religion, beliefs and traditions. I found it very interesting learning about a religion I didn't know much about. While I was interviewing and recording his words I felt I could picture exactly what was happening in my mind. It also got me to think how cool it was how this religion has many different rituals and opened my eyes to other people's lives and beliefs. I would also like to thank him for sharing in his family's traditions. I have learnt so much from him. Neerav believes **the essential message of Hinduism is that you should treat everyone fairly, be honest, empathetic and most of all if someone needs help provide it.**

# Estie Kallner: Joy Fai

I interviewed Joy Fai. Joy was raised in a Christian household. Joy's Dad and Grandpa were both ministers in churches of different denominations. Joy grew up going to church every Sunday. She also loved going to church on Fridays because it was a longer service. Joy participated in the youth choir and enjoyed singing prayers. Joy and her family would move every year because her Dad was a minister. They were part of all churches: Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican, Episcopal and United. Out of all of those, Joy likes United the best. Joy attended a lot of youth groups. She attended Christian camp and she was in the youth group choir. Christianity was very important to her parents and grandpa. Joy was born in Canada and Christmas was huge in their family.

When Joy was a young child she believed in everything, but now she does not believe that Jesus exists in the same way she used to. She believed in the stories of the Bible, but she thinks that they happened in a different way. When bad things happened, Joy would turn away from her religion. Joy's husband is not at all religious. She raised her two kids going to church every Sunday, but she stopped taking them when they were twelve.

Joy's religion is completely different now than when she was a kid. She has lived in 42 places. Ever since Joy's dad passed away, she has not gone to church because she has too many memories with him at the church. Joy has never traveled for religious purposes. She has always wanted to travel to Israel. Her dad tried to convert, but he could not. Joy loves Judaism.

Joy believes in God. There is not a dress code for her religion. Women and men can be ministers. During Lent (40 days before Easter) you are supposed to give up what you love. It is not mandatory. Joy likes her religion because it is not based on colour, it is about being a good person and friend.

It was really cool to learn about Christianity and Joy's experience. I can connect to Joy because at my synagogue we have a youth group and the church that Joy went to also has a youth group. I am surprised that she is not religious anymore because her dad and grandpa were very religious so I would think that they would want her to still go to church. I feel sad that she does not go to church anymore because she loved it so much and loved the community. I loved learning about Christianity and I hope that someday I will get to interview another person from a different religion.

**Essential message: To be a loving person and to care about people.**



# Avia Kaplan: Nicole Wong

This week I interviewed someone named Nicole Wong. She is a Seventh-Day Adventist. As Nicole grew up, in Canada, till the age of 15, the age she is now, she has enjoyed being a Seventh-Day Adventist tremendously. She is a Christian, but her religion has more similarities to Judaism than other kinds of Christianity. Her parents think that religion is very important and they believe that it is needed for a stable life style. Because of this she was raised in a home with a belief system. Nicole keeps the seventh day of the week holy (sabbath). That day is set apart to rest and to become closer to God. Since Nicole is a Christian, she celebrates Christmas; however, she does not believe that it's Jesus' birthday and that they celebrate it to just thank him for all that he has done for them. They have a version of kosher which is basically the same as ours only they don't separate the meat and the milk products. Every Saturday Nicole goes to church. In the church the actual room they worship in is called the sanctuary. Nicole attends a religious camp in the summer; however, anyone who wants to come is most certainly welcome. Nicole participates in religious youth groups. She says, "It's nice to take a break and be around people who share my beliefs and we can share and encourage each other."

When my interviewee was younger she had doubts and was rebellious, as most kids are, but she says that her God always makes it apparent to her that her religion is where she is meant to be. Nicole is still a teen, but she thinks that when she has children she would like them to be Seventh-Day Adventists too. Nicole has an equal amount of friends who are of her faith and other religions, beliefs or even no beliefs at all. To my question of if she has ever been discriminated against because of her religion, she replied that there have been a few times this has happened for different reasons. However, she says that the most recurring one happens to be when when gay people accuse her faith of being homophobic and to some extent yes, some Christians can be, however Nicole herself is not. Though Nicole may not agree with some styles of living, that does not mean she thinks they are less than her; she thinks it's simply a difference of opinion. People, she says should have different opinions because otherwise the world would be boring.

Nicole believes in god. She also believes in the Trinity. She describes it as the belief that God (singular) consists of the Son (Jesus), the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Picture God as a song, in a song you have the melody, the harmony and the rhythm. God is the actual song which consists of the Father as the melody, the Son as the harmony, and the Holy Spirit is the rhythm.

Nicole says that the Bible says that you can wear whatever you want as long as you are not prideful and you dress modestly. Women who are Seventh-Day Adventist can teach in the sanctuary, they can also preach from the pulpit, they can become pastors too, but unfortunately her religion will not sanction women pastors. It's mostly weird because the main prophet that they follow was a woman. I already said that they keep a form of kosher, but her religion does not allow its followers to drink alcohol of any kind, smoke cigarettes or any other form of tobacco. Nicole is most happy with the fact that she feels that being a part of her religion is like being apart of a giant family.

I personally had a lot of fun interviewing Nicole. She kept me interested in what she was saying and I learned a lot about her religion. It really helped me that Seventh-Day Adventist is so similar to Judaism. If it wasn't, Nicole would have had to explain much more to me. I think that if for any reason I decide not to be a Jew anymore I would become Seventh-Day Adventist.

**Essential message: "God (Jesus Christ) died for everyone's sins; He loves everyone; He wants his people to spread His gospel because He is coming back one day to take His people home."**

# Rubi Katz: C

C was raised Catholic. Some of the rituals/traditions she grew up with were church on Sundays, Christmas, Easter, Palm Sunday. She also attended a private Catholic Elementary/High School.

As a child, C attended church most Sundays and Fridays. As a teenager, she began to stray from the Sundays and just participated in the school services. This was called church. C did not participate in a religious youth group as a child/teen. C went to Camp Latona which was a Christian camp rather than a Catholic camp. When C was a child, religion was very important to her parents, but not so much to her grandparents. It began changing as they all got a little older.

C's parents divorced and her parents were no longer able to receive communion, which is considered to be the body of Christ. It's something you eat and is given by a priest. It is small and round and tastes kind of like an ice cream cone that melts on your tongue. However, because they had divorced, they broke their vow and were no longer able to practice the way they once could. She began to question the inclusive nature of Catholicism and organized religion.

C's husband was a practicing Ismaili Muslim, which she found to be a very progressive religion where teachings come from a living leader named the Aga Khan. C found his teachings to be quite worldly and open-minded and even forward thinking. She explored this in classes for over a year and decided to journey down this path. It has been a road filled with questions, and sometimes not answers; however, it is something that she and her family hold as a common belief that is very important. C also encourages her children to ask questions.

C still celebrates Christmas, etc. and holds those close to her heart as she values them more as special family times rather than religious times. Her children love them and she wouldn't change that as she remembers the sparkle she had as a child celebrating those traditions. Her family does celebrate Ismaili traditions, but she has to say that they are not as inherent as are the ones she grew up with. C has never traveled for a religious event. One thing she doesn't share is the language which can make chatting with the older generation a challenge. Most prayers are in Arabic so she has learned both the Arabic and English translations.

C believes in G-D, but her belief gets challenged all the time with all the sadness around the world. Her faith does not require a certain style of dress. During Ramadan, a lot of Ismailis don't eat from sunrise until sundown. Prayers are twice daily, in the evening and first thing in the morning. Women take religious leadership roles in her place of worship. Ismailis don't eat pork or shellfish. The part C likes best about her religion is the community involvement and a chance to be still and reflect. Islam is not a faith that encourages hate/suicide situations.

I learned that Judaism and Ismaili have many things in common such as you cannot eat shellfish and pork and you pray in the morning and evening but in Judaism you also pray in the middle of the day. I have never heard of most the traditions and rituals that are part of the Ismaili religion, but I have heard of Christmas and Easter. Overall I think that the Ismaili religion is a very interesting religion and I had a great experience interviewing C. Hopefully knowing how to interview someone will come in handy later in life.

**Essential message: To love one another, to be well-educated, and to be forward thinking.**





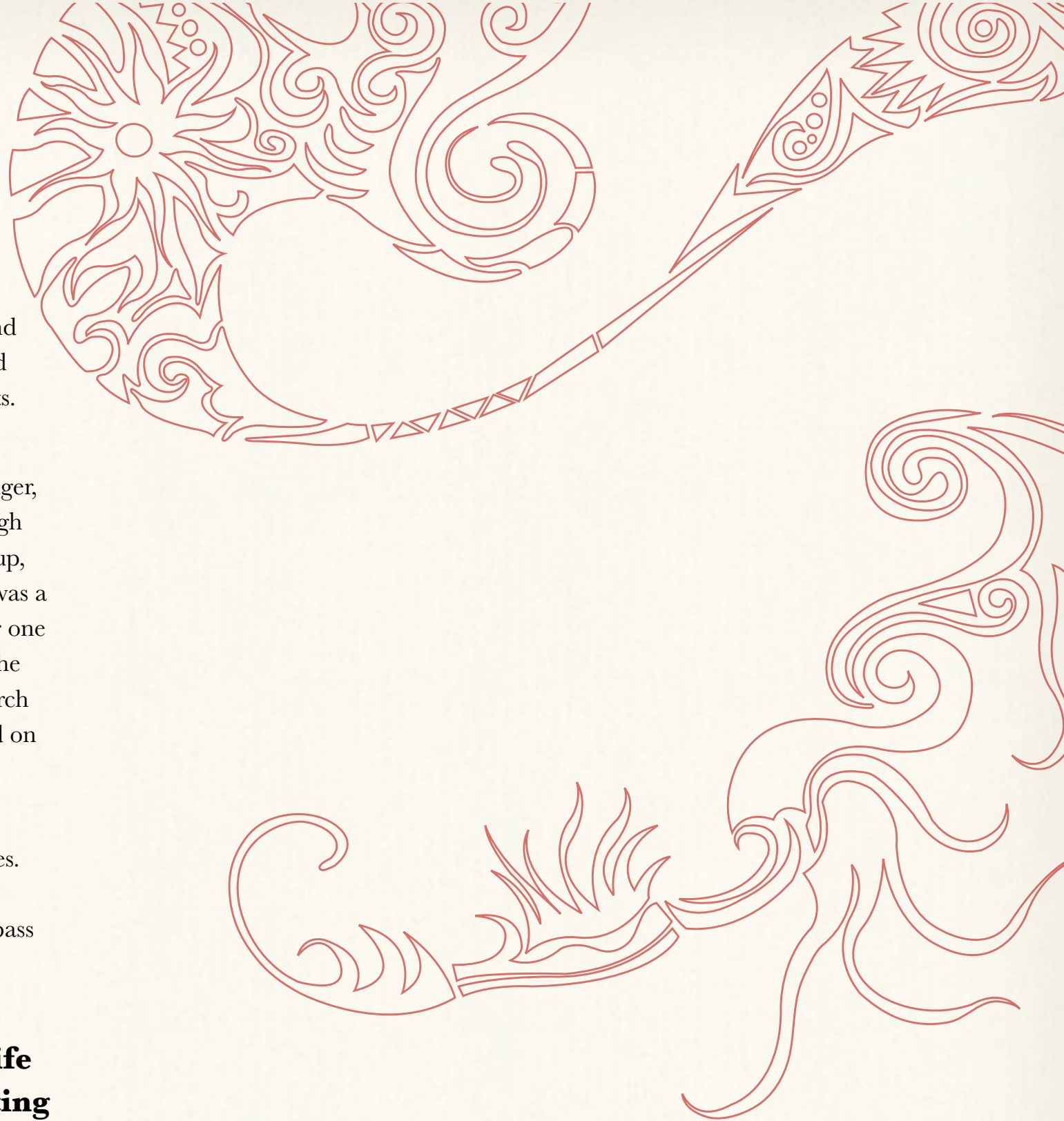
# Isabella Leipsic: Cristina Trasolini

I interviewed Cristina Trasolini, a former neighbour and previous babysitter, who is now a university student. Cristina is 23 years old, and was born and raised Catholic in Vancouver. Growing up, she attended church two times a week. She has three siblings, and two sweet parents. Growing up, she went to a Christian elementary and high school.

Cristina still believes in her religion and faith, and when she was younger, she would go to church every Friday and Sunday. When she was in high school, she went to church once a month, and now that she is grown up, she said that life gets in the way of attending church. When Cristina was a young child, she did go to a Christian camp, called Camp Pioneer, for one week. She says that she has never rebelled against her religion. Now she goes to church as often as possible. It is her responsibility to go to church on her own time. Cristina has never experienced discrimination based on her religion.

One of the special rituals that she practices at church is receiving the Eucharist. She says that this is a way of welcoming Jesus into their lives. They walk up to the front of the room and receive the Eucharist. Cristina's favorite part of her religion is that it gives her a moral compass and a set of values to live her life. It also gives her a sense of purpose, comfort, and love.

Essential message: **“It encourages you to live your life in the light of Jesus Christ, which means treating others with respect and loving one and other.”**



# Dahlia Levitt: Marina Steeves

I interviewed Marina Steeves, a teacher from Vancouver Talmud Torah who is currently on maternity leave. Marina was raised in a home with a Christian belief system. She was born in the United States and belonged to the dominant religion of the country, Christianity. Some rituals she grew up with were going to church Sunday mornings, going to Midnight Mass on Christmas and before Easter she participated in Ash Wednesday and forty days of Lent. At the age of fourteen, Marina and her family started going to church less often. She didn't attend church for a while in her teens, except for Christmas and Easter. Marina attended a Sunday school until age thirteen. She didn't attend a faith-based camp as a child, but interestingly in her twenties she was a leader for outdoor faith-based camps. Religion is very important to her mother, who still attends church, but religion is not as important to her father. To her grandparents, religion is extremely important. Marina celebrates Christmas, which is connected to Christianity.

To this day, Marina still has the same religious beliefs as she did when she was a child. Marina has questioned her religion before. She explained that there are different sects of Christianity and she grew up Catholic. When she went to university, she got re-baptized as a Protestant in a Baptist church. She is currently back to the Catholic Church and decided to get her son, Winter, baptized as a Catholic as well. Her goal is to raise Winter to love Jesus and for him to know that G-d loves him. Marina also explained that she took a job in California before because it was faith-based. She mentioned that she doesn't target hanging out with people who are Christian, but because she works at Talmud Torah, she works with mostly Jewish people, who believe in the same G-d as her. When I asked Marina if she experienced discrimination based on her faith, she told me that she was made fun of in her thirties, but wasn't discriminated against.

Marina believes in G-d. A ritual she observes in her place of worship is taking Holy Communion, which is using bread and wine to represent G-d's love for his people. She explained that there are specific prayers such as Our Father and The Apostles Creed.



Marina stated that women can take religious leadership roles in her place of worship, but in the Catholic Church, they can't become priests. When I asked Marina what she likes best about her religion, she said the sermons, being challenged intellectually and worship music. She also explained that the most common misunderstanding about her religion is controversy with pre-destination. There are many assumptions that all priests are bad and that the whole church is corrupt because of some really bad things that have happened in history.

I really enjoyed interviewing Marina Steeves because it was interesting to learn about a different religion. I got to learn new things about Christianity that I didn't know before. I found a lot of similarities between Christianity and Judaism such as going to church or synagogue for important holidays. I am happy I got the chance to do this project!



# Miya Markovich: Tatiana Koiava

For my Tikkun Olam project I interviewed Tatiana Koiava. Tatiana was born in Russia and she grew up as a Christian and still is a practicing Christian today. Tatiana Koiava was not really raised in a home with a belief system because religion was forbidden by the government. Tatiana Koiava did not grow up with traditions/rituals within her household, but she grew up celebrating religious holidays with her grandparents. Some of these holidays included Christmas, Easter and Saint Maria Day. When Tatiana Koiava was a child/teen, she said that “It was very seldom that we went to church. It was only at home.” Tatiana Koiava did not participate in a religious youth groups as a child/teen because there was no group like that in Russia at that time.

Religion was very important to Tatiana’s great-grandparents but to her parents it was not very important. At the time when Tatiana grew up in Russia, the dominant religion was Orthodox Christianity. That is the religion she believes in. Today, that belief system is one she still follows with her family. She celebrates Christmas but on January 7th. They celebrate Christmas on this day because the majority of the Orthodox churches worldwide use the Julian calendar, created under the reign of Julius Caesar in 45 BC. This is the calendar which Russian Orthodox Christians follow.

Tatiana’s religion has not changed since she was a child/teen. She has never questioned her religion. She has always believed in what she has been taught. Tatiana has two children and today she explains to them about her religion and practices what she has been taught with her family. Tatiana thinks that it is more important that her children believe in themselves and have their religion to guide them. They also follow some traditions. For example, during Easter, they go to church, bake special breads and color some eggs.

The only time Tatiana has only experienced discrimination based on her religion was in Russia. It has never been a problem in adulthood.

Tatiana Koiava believes in G-d. Tatiana’s faith does not really require a certain style of dress although in church women need to cover their heads. In Tatiana Koiava’s place of worship there are some rituals such as lighting candles and praying in front of icons. Tatiana’s religion has some dietary restrictions. These restrictions include a number of weekly fasts or abstentions from certain foods. Tatiana does not follow these restrictions, but she is aware of the religious beliefs around them. In Orthodox Christianity, women cannot take religious leadership roles in places of worship. Tatiana is not aware of a common misunderstanding about her Christian faith.

I think that learning about another religion and belief system was very interesting. I think that it was fascinating because I did not know about the Christian religion and its traditions. I really liked the experience of getting to know someone a little better and understand their religious faith. Although I have known Tatiana for over 10 years, I learned new things about her and her family from doing this interview. This is why I think that interviewing a person of a different faith than mine was so fascinating.

**“To know how to love and forgive.”**

**-Tatiana Koiava**

# Maya Miller: Carol

Carol was born in Calgary. She was raised in a home where both of her parents were Christian. When she grew up, she went to church every Sunday and she celebrated Christmas and Easter. For her Christmas was more than hanging out with her friends. Every Friday Carol went to a youth group. Religion was a very important aspect in her parents' and grandparents' lives. Carol still has the same belief system as she did as a child.

Carol now practices many different rituals with her kids. She still goes to church every Sunday with her kids. On Christmas they have a big family dinner and they sing Christmas songs. On Easter they hide eggs in the bog by their house and then they would tell the kids that the Easter bunny came and put the eggs there. The kids would then try to find the eggs in the bog. Although they go to church every Sunday, they do not regularly go to church on holidays. Carol went with her sister and her friends to China on a volunteer trip to work in a orphanage with a Christian organization.

Carol believes in G-d. There is no certain way to dress in Christianity. At Carol's church they do not have to dress up fancy unlike going to synagogue. When she goes to church she first drops her kids at Sunday school and then she goes and listens to the speaker who talks about a different teaching from the Bible every week. Carol said that listening to the speaker talk about the Bible was similar to when she went to Emily and Jessie's bat mitzvah and listened to the dvar Torah. Carol said that some Christians do not approve of the way the religion is going. They liked all the rituals and traditions and now the next generation is straying away from those. Carol likes how in Christianity you can't force anyone to be it because it is everyone's choice. She also believes that when her kids are older they can choose what religion they want to follow. She still takes her kids to Sunday school because that is how she and her husband grew up. People often think that Christianity is non inclusive and non accepting. But that is not true.

I learned that people believe in a lot of different types of Christianity. Some Christians believe that Christianity means a different thing than others. Christianity is a lot like Judaism because in Christianity they talk about a different story of the Bible each week and in Judaism the rabbi delivers a dvar Torah each week. I also learned that in movies they do not have an accurate representation of all Christians. Carol said that to go to her church you do not need to dress up and you do not do a lot of singing and stuff like that. I learned that all Christians believe Christianity means different things.

**Christianity means that you're not alone in the world and when we die it's not over.**



# Yehudi Moses: Samiran Lakshman

Samiran Lakshman was born Hindu in Saskatoon, Canada. As a child, he prayed daily, and went to temple weekly. Because he was Hindu, he could celebrate other religions' holidays, and he remembers celebrating Christmas with carols, presents, and more fun things. As a kid, Samiran went to a Sunday school type youth group, and would also go on spiritual retreats to places like Calgary with family and friends. He also prayed at home, by himself, every day. He was never discriminated about his religion, but he has been slightly due to his skin colour. He grew up learning that all other religions are all just different pathways to the same centre so he is always positive about other people's belief systems and religions.

Now an adult Samiran is still a Hindu, and he occasionally teaches spiritual education to students in grades 10-12. He has also decided to become vegetarian so that animals are not killed (and cows are considered holy in Hinduism). Many Hindus have chosen to become vegetarian, and there is even a movement that wants to ban meat in India.

Samiran now has two children, and he finds it very important to teach his kids about Hinduism and other religions, just as much. Hindus pray in a mix of different languages so Samiran prays in a mix of Hebrew and Arabic. He has even gone to India just for spiritual reasons. He went because his dad had passed away and he wanted to pour his dad's ashes into the Ganges River. I find it interesting that I have learned about the Ganges at school, and then Samiran tells me that he has been there.

Samiran fully believes in G-d. He recalls that one weird thing about his religion is that in the Hindu stories, the G-d that the good people pray to is the same G-d that grants power to the bad guys. He has always wondered why G-d would do something like that? Why not give the powers to the good people instead? When Samiran goes to temple, the women and men sit separately. I can connect to this because in Judaism men and women also sit separately, so that they are not distracted. A common mistake that Hindus and non-Hindus alike make is that there are multiple G-ds in the Hindu religion. In reality, there is just one G-d that is also the other "G-ds". Basically, the one and only original G-d manifests itself throughout everything and everyone. Let's take the Ganges river, for example. The river is a goddess, but is just another form of the original Hindu god.

Some people also think that Hindus pray to a stone, or rock, and that it is their G-d. This is not true either, and in reality, the rock is just an object with G-d within it, and it is just a tool to get closer to G-d, not actually G-d. Hinduism is monotheistic, not polytheistic. In one sentence, Samiran summed up his religion by saying **THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND GOD IS THAT GOD HAS REALISED HE IS GOD, AND YOU HAVEN'T YET REALIZED YOUR TRUE NATURE.**

It was really fun and interesting to interview Samiran, who is practicing Hinduism. I thought that his belief system was really interesting and that his system and way of praying incorporate different religious prayers, including Hebrew prayers. I have learned so many things about his religion and I think that his religion is very welcoming and respectful. His religion doesn't think that it is the best, it just believes that G-d is within us all, and fully respects other people's religions. All in all, Hinduism seems like a great religion to practice.





# Ruth Nahmad: Peter Kletas

I interviewed Peter Kletas. He is married and has two girls. Peter was born in Vancouver and grew up in a home with immigrant parents from Greece. His household was fairly religious as his mom found religion very important. They mostly went to church once/twice a month when he was young. Now that he is married, he mostly follows his wife's religion, Catholic. His two daughters go to a Catholic school where they learn a lot about their religion. The main tradition they adhere to revolves around Easter for the Orthodox. It is an ancient tradition where they roast lamb on a spit over an open fire and have dyed red hard boiled eggs, both food items signifying the resurrection of Jesus. They also have delicious cookies, called Koulouria, and Tsoureki bread (similar to challah). All his family members get together and celebrate Easter.

His favourite thing about his religion is that **it teaches you to love and treat others in a manner you want to be treated**. This relates to Judaism because Jews all know “וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ” “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Peter's family fasts before Easter and Christmas for 40 days to show respect to Jesus and to acknowledge the hardships that Jesus went through. There are certain things you cannot eat during those 40 days. You can't eat meat and certain dairy products. You are allowed lentils (lentil soup), salads, beans, vegetables, pasta and fish.

In Orthodoxy and Catholicism, there are seven sacraments they practice. 1: Baptism, which is when you're born and have holy water poured on your head. 2: Communion: Orthodox babies eat bread, soaked in wine on a spoon, whereas Catholics have first communion with a solid wafer around the age of seven. 3: Confession: when Catholics and Orthodox go to church and apologize for all their sins. 4: Confirmation: It builds on what was begun in Baptism, which you have to accept that you are old enough to be responsible for your own actions and respect the teachings of your faith, mostly done by Catholics 5: Marriage: when you accept to love and to care for your wife/husband 6: Holy orders: when you accept to be a priest (only #6 is with certain people. Just like in Judaism G-D chose the tribe of Levi to become priests. In Catholicism a group of Catholics are chosen to become priests.

7: Anointing the sick is when you bless/pray for the sick. In Orthodoxy priests are allowed to marry, whereas in Catholicism priests cannot marry.

The thing that Greek Orthodox and Catholics question most about their religion is: Why aren't Greek Orthodox and Catholics the same religion, since they are both Christian faiths once rooted together from ancient times? The answer is, yes, they do come from the same root, but then later they split to become different, but similar, religions, almost like cousins. The story is that there was once five Popes: one from Jerusalem, one from Antioch, Constantinople, and another one from Rome (the final one Peter nor I could find). They did not agree with everything because they argued on who should be the main Pope so they split into two groups: Western Christianity, which is Rome, France, England, Netherlands, Belgium and most of Western Europe, and Eastern Christianity, which encompasses Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, parts of Ukraine, Armenia,, Russia, parts of the Middle East and areas of Africa. Many of these areas later formed their own version of Orthodoxy, such as Russian Orthodox. Afterwards the Catholic church (which is Western Christianity) split again, the main reason being, that Henry the VIII wanted to divorce, which the Catholic church did not permit. So he took matters into his own hands and made his own religion, called Anglican, so he could marry another wife and designated himself as head of the church.

It was really interesting interviewing Peter. At the beginning, I was really nervous, but once I started talking to him, I became really interested in all the history that Greek Orthodoxy and Catholics have. Also Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy are similar to Judaism so I can relate to much of what I learned. It was really interesting interviewing Peter, and I'm glad I got to learn about his religion because in the future I will have some knowledge of Orthodoxy and Catholicism, and hopefully I will learn more about other world religions too!



# Eitan Nurick: Tara Hungerford

I interviewed my neighbour, Tara Hungerford. Tara and her family moved into my neighbourhood last year - across the road from us. Tara is a mother to two young children, Wilfred and Paris. Tara told me that she was brought up in a Christian Anglican home, but they did not practice their religion very much and they didn't go to church often. Religion was rejected by her parents because they grew up in the 60's and the 70's so they challenged their religion. Her father is not religious and her mother is confused about religion. In the interview she said it was not an easy topic in their household as a child. But when it came to the basic holidays such as Christmas and Easter, her family celebrated together. They did not do any religious rituals within their household, but they did the simplified versions of rituals that are the more commercial versions of the holidays.

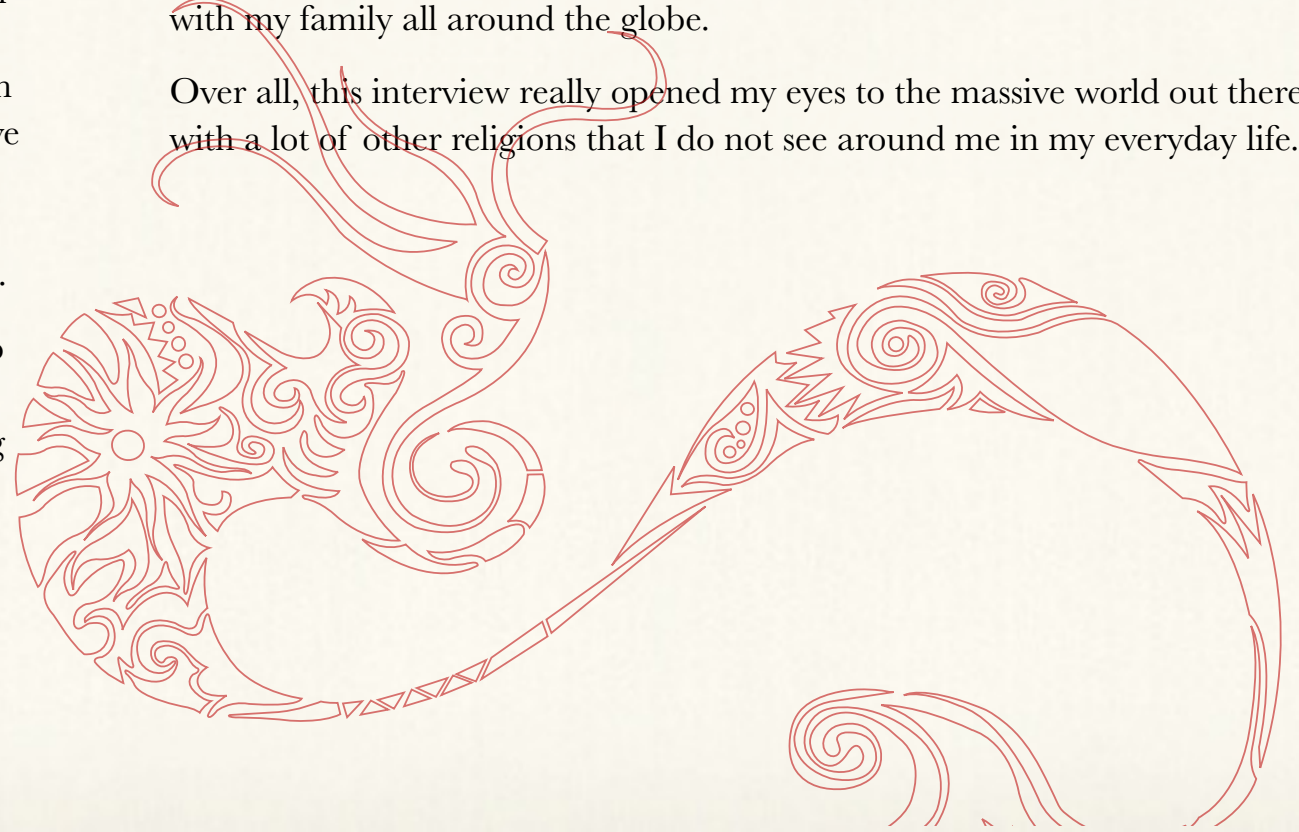
Tara believes that all of the religions out there are all connected and in a way they all say the same thing about believing in something greater than yourself and believing in a power greater than us. We have to be good to one another and love each other and we need to find inner peace so that we can have outer peace. Tara had a brother who was 21 when he died of cancer and she says when he was going through his journey he taught her a lot about Buddhism. He taught her that it is more of a philosophy but it is open to all religions. She also mentions that it is about finding peace inside so you can find it on the outside too. With her children she has incorporated certain rituals into their daily lives such as being mindful and grateful. They also give a little offering to the goddess of compassion called Guanyin when they are feeling frustrated. Every day Tara gives a cup of tea or a fruit or flowers to Guanyin and she reads from a book of quotes about the universe and peace.

Tara has not traveled anywhere for religious purposes, but she loves going to places of worship of other religions such as shuls and Buddhist monasteries to learn about other cultures. Tara believes that religion is supposed to bring you peace but it sometimes creates conflict. For example The Dome of the Rock, which is built in the place where the Temple was built and has been the source of a lot of tension between Jews and Muslims.

Tara does believe in god. But she thinks that god comes in many forms. To me this resembles the way Jews believe that god is all around us. Tara thinks of her belief as a DIY religion because she has mixed many different traditions into her daily life. She feels that her journey of spirituality is never going to end. She likes that her religion brings her peace and it brings peace to her children and they talk a lot about life. Tara said that the essential message of her faith is believing there is more beyond her and it is about finding love and connection and finding peace within and finding peace around you.

Interviewing Tara was one of the most fascinating experiences of my whole entire life. This is because when we were speaking, something struck me that I have never realized before. This was the fact that there are other people out there that believe in something greater than us, a power that can unite us even though we are not related or we are not the same religion. This made me realize that in a way we are all united by one thing... GOD. What also occurred to me while I was interviewing her was that you don't have to be a part of one religion to believe in a GOD. I found this really amazing because being Jewish means that you are apart of a religion that has a GOD that you believe in and that everyone else in that community believes in too. I think that the only way that one can learn about these things is by meeting new people that are not in your own community. I try to do this when I travel with my family all around the globe.

Over all, this interview really opened my eyes to the massive world out there with a lot of other religions that I do not see around me in my everyday life.





# Shoshana Pollock: Grace Esparagoza

For my Tikun Olam interview project I chose to interview Grace Esparagoza. Grace was born in the Philippines as a Christian. Around 95% of the population in the Philippines is Christian, 4% are Muslim and 1% are another religion. So, she has never experienced discrimination of any kind. As she grew up she celebrated all of the holidays. Grace and her family would go to church almost every Sunday. She also participated in a youth group as a teen. She would have loved to go to a Christian camp, but sadly as a child her parents could not afford it, although some of her friends went to them and she wished she could have as well. Both as a child, and now as an adult raising her own family, Grace and her extended family all believe that religion is a very important part of their lives and love being Christian. They did celebrate Christmas, but not like some other families where there is no meaning. They believe that it is very connected to the Christian religion and it is very important to them. The whole family would gather and celebrate this special day together.

Nowadays she still has the same beliefs and practices as a child. Her journey has not changed very much but only small things have been changed since now she has a husband and two children to take care of. She has never rebelled against her religion and has always stayed true to G-d. Grace raises her children the same way that she was raised. They go to church every Sunday and celebrate all the holidays. Grace and her husband believe that that is the best way to raise them. In 1995 Grace travelled to the U.S. for a prophetic conference. She thought this was a great experience and hopes to travel to another city for a religious purpose soon. She primarily associates with people of her religion because the majority of the world is Christian.

Grace deeply believes in G-d: how powerful he is and how much he can do. As a Christian she has no specific style of dress or restriction of food that she can eat. In church there are no rules to follow so you can basically do whatever you want, the only condition is that you just have to be respectful to everyone and everything surrounding you. What she likes best about being a Christian is that you are free to worship the G-d that is in the Bible, there is no restriction on what you can do or who you

should associate it with, you can learn more about G-d and Jesus and who Jesus is in your life. The one main misunderstanding non-Christians have about Christians is that they expect them to be perfect and pure. They think that Christians shouldn't get mad because they are holy and special, but actually Grace thinks that we are all equal and at the end of the day we are all just humans. **Grace would define the Christian religion in this one sentence: Christ is Lord, Jesus died for my sins and Jesus loves me and died for me.**





# Tori Reay: Barbara

I interviewed Barbara. Barbara went to Oak Bay United and Ryerson United Church. She celebrated Christmas and they believed that the holiday was about giving and to really think about the person you're giving to. Barbara grew up in Vancouver as a Christian. When she was young she attended United Church Camp for girls, which is in Ocean Park, Surrey.

Barbara thinks that her belief system is about caring for others. She attends Ryerson United Church on Sundays. There, she and other women work on taking care of people, serving the men's group, and helping with local charities, such as The Red Cross. The holidays that she observes are Christmas, Easter and Lent, that include lots of church activities for teens, women's groups, and others. These are similar to what was available when she was young. Women take religious leadership roles and are trained as ministers, lay leaders, and board members. Many of her friends have different faiths. She and her husband took their children to Sunday School. It was important to their parents and grandparents and it was a social hub for doing good for the community.

In Barbara's church they used to wear hats because that was the ritual the ladies had to observe. This is no longer a requirement. She likes that her faith brings everyone together and she believes things have evolved to take into account modern times. Barbara said that the United Church is quite a wide and accepting doctrine and, as a result, she has not questioned or rebelled against its practices and policies.

**Barbara thinks that the essential message of her religion is that they don't mind people giving to them but it's more important to give.**

I think that this religion is good because they don't only think of themselves they also think of others. I had an amazing time talking to Barbara and I learned lots of things that I didn't know about the religion.



# Alex Ritch: Rick Brooks Hills

Rick is Catholic, but he prefers not to call himself that. In this report, you will see why.

Rick was raised in a home with a belief system, and he was part of the Catholic Church. He went to church most Sundays, and had a belief in the Christian god. He went to Sunday school, and attended Firwood camp in Washington. But this camp was not Catholic, in fact it leaned more towards Baptism. Religion was incredibly important to his grandparents, but interestingly enough, his grandfather was Anglican, and his grandmother was Catholic. All of their children, including his father, grew up Catholic, following his grandmother's point of view. His grandparents went to different churches.

On his mother's side, his grandmother was Anglican, but not quite as religious as his father's side. When she married, she chose to bring Rick's family up along with his dad in the Catholic Church. Although she attended Catholic Church, and participated in it, she never converted.

Rick was born in Canada and celebrated Christmas. His family does not attend church, even on Christmas. His current practice is connected to his Christian faith, but when he celebrates Christmas now, it is based more on cultural traditions. For example, there is an idea called the elf on the shelf. Their elf is called Jingles, and the kids look forward to him as much as Santa, maybe even more. Jingles stays all day at the house on the first of December, and returns to the North Pole each night. When Jingles goes back, he reports to Santa how the children behaved. If they behaved badly, or touched Jingles in any way, thus altering his magic, they don't get good presents. This puts the kids on their best behaviour, and it is very pleasant for Rick and his wife.

When he was a teenager, he was not a strong follower of the Catholic faith, and his most religious connection was in Camp Firwood. The first summer when he came back, Rick decided he would start reading the bible, and he read it every single night, all year long. No one in his family did that, but he chose to do it because he felt that it was an important thing to do. The bible he read was not based on the Catholic faith, it was based on what he felt was important at camp. Another influence was at Saint George's School in grade seven where there was a chapel.

He remembers to this day the prayers that they said, and in times of need, even to this day he may bring those prayers back to his daily routine. He has questioned his religion, but never rebelled against it. He is not entirely sure or unsure whether there really is a god as the Christian faith defines him. But he does believe in a

higher power and that we came to this earth in a way that is much bigger and stronger than ourselves. Nothing brought him back; in fact, he thinks that he has moved away from the Christian faith. But he considers himself still living in a faith-based way. By this he means that he follows his own faith, and his own set of rules. One of the major aspects of his faith is the saying, "you reap what you sow." This is a different way of saying karma, and in this, everything you do, good or bad, comes back to you in one way or another. He also believes in the main message of Judaism, that it is good to be kind to other people. He says that you have to work your hardest and try your best. He does raise his children in a certain faith, and this faith is not the one he grew up with. It is important to him to have kids with a belief system, that teaches them generosity, and what he believes. He also shares his belief with his wife. His rituals are very different from when he was young, because he does not go to church, and when his family does, it is grounded in relationships with others. He has never traveled for a religious purpose, and he does not only associate with the people of his religion. Furthermore, he has not faced discrimination based on his faith.

Rick's favourite part of his belief system is that even though it is not written down, and not fully structured, his belief system allows his wife and him to raise their family with similar guiding principles and beliefs that he instils within his family and within his community. The most common misunderstanding about his belief system is that people identify Rick as Catholic, mainly people who he grew up with. But Rick is not Catholic, and will not call himself such.

**The essential message of his faith is that you reap what you sow, and within that, there is a spirit of generosity and kindness to others, and you should at all times try to display the best efforts possible.**

I enjoyed interviewing Rick because I learned a lot, found it very interesting, and it was a good experience to learn about different religions. I found it very interesting to talk with someone who is not a strong believer in a religion, and learned many new things about the Christian religion. Also, I thought the difference in experiencing our religions was very interesting. I experience my religion on a daily basis, by wearing a kippah at school, keeping kosher and learning about Judaism at school. But Rick expresses his religion in his own way, through being kind. After all, you don't need to go to church every day to do that!



# Yaelle Ritch: Leah Walton

I interviewed Leah Walton. She is Christian. When she was younger, she celebrated the major Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter and sometimes went to the United Church on Christmas and Easter. The holidays that she celebrated were more about family, fun, generosity, and kindness, than the religious aspects. Christianity is not so important to her parents or her, but Leah's grandparents met at a church.

Since Leah didn't grow up very religious, her religious beliefs have not changed much. She has never rebelled or questioned her religion because she is not that religious, whereas Rick, her husband, rebelled against his religion because he used to be more religious. She is raising her children how she grew up which is in not a religious way. They focus more on teaching about morals and values; the right way to lead their lives. She celebrates the same holidays as when she was young. Leah is friends with mostly Christian people that aren't religious. She doesn't go to church and most of her friends don't go to church.

Leah doesn't believe in G-d but she thinks there is someone looking down on us, taking care of us and watching over us and when people pass away, they go to another life. Women can take part in Christian rituals. Leah likes not being religious because she doesn't want to follow things that are written out for you. She likes to learn from morals and stories. Leah's most spiritual place is nature because she can think about things that are important to her best there. Although Leah is not religious she has a friend in San Francisco named Ethan. Ethan and his family are Catholic and very religious. Ethan's family asked Leah and Rick to be Ethan's godparents. The usual role of a godparent is to be a religious advisor for the child. Leah is not being his religious advisor, but is going to be a part of his life and help him have the right values and morals.

I think that not believing strongly in something is a good way to live your life. It is better because you get to completely choose your path in life because you do not need to follow any rules that come with your religion. I think that morals and kindness are good things to base your life on. I think that not being strongly connected to your religion can

have a downside because you do not get to meet people or connect with people through your religion, especially when you do not go to church. I think that interviewing a person from a different religion helps you learn a lot about their religion.

**In one sentence Leah would describe her religion as morals, values, and kindness.**



# Elana Robibo: Lejla Karamesic

For the Term II Tikkun Olam project, I interviewed Lejla Karamesic who is a Sunni Muslim. Lejla was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and was raised in a home with a belief system. Bosnia used to be part of a country called Yugoslavia, but in the early 1990s Yugoslavia split into different countries after a period of war where a lot of people were murdered because of their culture and religion. When Lejla was born, there was no one dominant religion. Instead there were three major religions that most people belonged to: Christian Orthodox, Catholic and Islam. However, the major religion now in Bosnia is Islam. From the ages one to five Lejla and her family lived in Bosnia, but did not pray very much or follow many Sunni rituals, but they did follow the Sunni belief system. After the war, Lejla and her family moved to Saudi Arabia for two years and became more religious. Saudi Arabia was a big change for her family because the women in her family had to cover up and wear a niqab when they left their home. In Bosnia, Lejla, her mother and her grandmother had never covered up. In Saudi Arabia, Lejla's family prayed five times a day and went to the mosque every Friday. From the age of five to eight, Lejla went to mosque once a week every Friday. While in Saudi Arabia, Lejla also participated in Ramadan, which is a month-long fast in which you are only allowed to eat after sundown, and the Hajj, which is an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. After two years in Saudi Arabia, Lejla and her family moved to Vancouver and it became much harder for them to be as religious as they were in Saudi Arabia. Since the age of eight, Lejla has only been to mosque about five times. Lejla had many different levels of following her religion throughout her life, but her family always believed the same thing. Religion was very important to both her parents and grandparents as they believe that it was the thing that kept her family together.

Lejla still believes the same thing as she did as a child but she is not as religious as she was before. Sometimes Lejla questions her religion, but she has never really rebelled against it because she agrees with all of the Muslim rules and traditions. Lejla does not have any children, but if she did, she plans to raise them with the Sunni culture, but not in a strict religious way and more like she was raised in Bosnia.

Lejla's parents do fast during Ramadan, but she and her brother do not anymore. After Ramadan, their family has a big dinner to celebrate, which is one of her favourite family Sunni traditions and the one she likes the most. When Lejla sneezes, she says "Alhamdulillah" which means "Praise be to Allah" and is another Sunni custom (and is like saying "G-d Bless You" or "Gesundheit"). As a Sunni Muslim, Lejla is not supposed to eat pork or drink alcohol and there are a lot of rules on food. Sadly, Lejla has experienced discrimination once before based on her faith and religion.

Muslims like Lejla are monotheistic, which means that they believe in only one G-d. In Islam, there are five pillars or acts that are required: belief in one G-d (Allah) and Muhammad as a prophet of G-d; daily prayer (five times per day); giving to the poor; fasting during Ramadan; and the Hajj. All Muslims agree with these five pillars, but there are some differences in how different types of Muslims practice their religion. Sunni is a denomination or branch of Islam. Sunni is the largest branch of Islam and is the most orthodox, or strict, but Lejla thinks that Muslims find different ways to be a Sunni Muslim. The Hajj is very unique because under Islam every adult is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca which is a city in Saudi Arabia where Muhammad was born. Ramadan is also unique because unlike other religions where fasts last a day or so, Ramadan lasts a whole month. Lejla really appreciates what her religion has done for her and her family. Lejla explains, "I don't know where I would have been as Islam is what has kept my family together."

For me, interviewing a person from a different religion was very interesting, especially since I learned lots of similarities to my religion, like believing that there is only one G-d, no eating pork, and giving to the poor. At the beginning, it was awkward to ask questions, but it got easier as I was able to ask Lejla about her religion. It was nice to interview someone that I knew before because I felt more comfortable interviewing them. By participating in this project I learned a lot about Lejla's religion and I learned that religions can be very similar. Overall, Sunni Islam is very interesting to learn about and has lots of interesting differences such as Ramadan and the Hajj, but lots of similarities too.

To describe Islam, Lejla believes that the essential message would be: **there is only one G-d, and you should only worship one G-d. But Lejla also thinks that her religion has taught her another message: Belief in G-d is very important and you must always be good to your parents.**



# Eitan Sasky: Yelitza Popovic

Yelitza has been following the same Christian religion for all her life. She hopes that her children keep passing the same religion on for generations to come. Although Yelitza has never travelled for religious purposes, she loves learning and consuming more about her religion. Yelitza has never rebelled against her religion because she has no reason to. She learns all her lessons from her religion to keep her life sustainable and peaceful. Going with her son to church is one of her favourite ways of spending time with him. Yelitza has never experienced any form of hate or discrimination against her religion. She deeply believes in Orthodox Christianity, but when it comes to friends and public people it doesn't matter what type of religion you are. I really liked hearing this because we are all people who serve the same purpose in life.

Yelitza's faith is based on the Orthodox Christian beliefs. She believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints. She follows all of the customs of the religion in her everyday life. Some practices that are unique to women in her religion include being able to dress how they want and singing in the choir, but they are not allowed to become priests. Some other unique practices are fasting 40 days before Christmas and Easter and celebrating Easter on the Sunday of the Jewish Passover.

Yelitza appreciates loving everybody the way she loves herself and that in her religion you are meant to forgive everybody. Those customs from her religion are very similar to Judaism as there are 3 steps to forgiveness and there is a saying in Hebrew which says **ואהבת לרעך כמוך**. This means love your neighbor as yourself. I find this fascinating because it shows how religions have many similarities.

I have have had more non Jewish friends than Jewish ones. I love hearing about new religions, but it wasn't all new to me as I have been introduced to many religions with different customs and traditions. Yelitza's son, Stefan, has been my friend for about four years and I have gained knowledge about his religion so hearing about his mother's life was not entirely new.



I really like the way Orthodox Christianity sounds because it is a very kind, helpful, and joyful religion. The ultimate idea is about helping each other. Finding more information about her religion was engaging because there are many customs that are unique and some that are similar. It was also hard to believe how people can believe in different gods, while living and associating with people from other religions.

**Essential message: Love and forgive everybody like equals, always help the needy and share, and do not judge people for this is up to God.**

# Rachel Seguin: Nino Moscone

The person I interviewed is Nino Moscone and he practices Catholicism. Nino was born in Italy on October 24th, 1934. He lived in a little town named Villa Santa Lucia with only the population size of 100 residents. He was a child at the time of the Second World War. Nino was baptized as a child. His mother died when he was only 8 or 9 years old and his Dad was very busy with work so Nino stayed with his grandparents. Later on, his father lost one of his legs to diabetes and eventually he died from the disease. Twenty years after their Dad's death, Nino's sister, Vera, died from kidney failure. By that time, of course, Nino's grandparents had also passed away.

Nino is currently a practicing Catholic. He goes to midnight mass every Christmas Eve. When Nino was a child he did youth camps with friends, and went on camping trips with his friends--those events were planned by the community church.

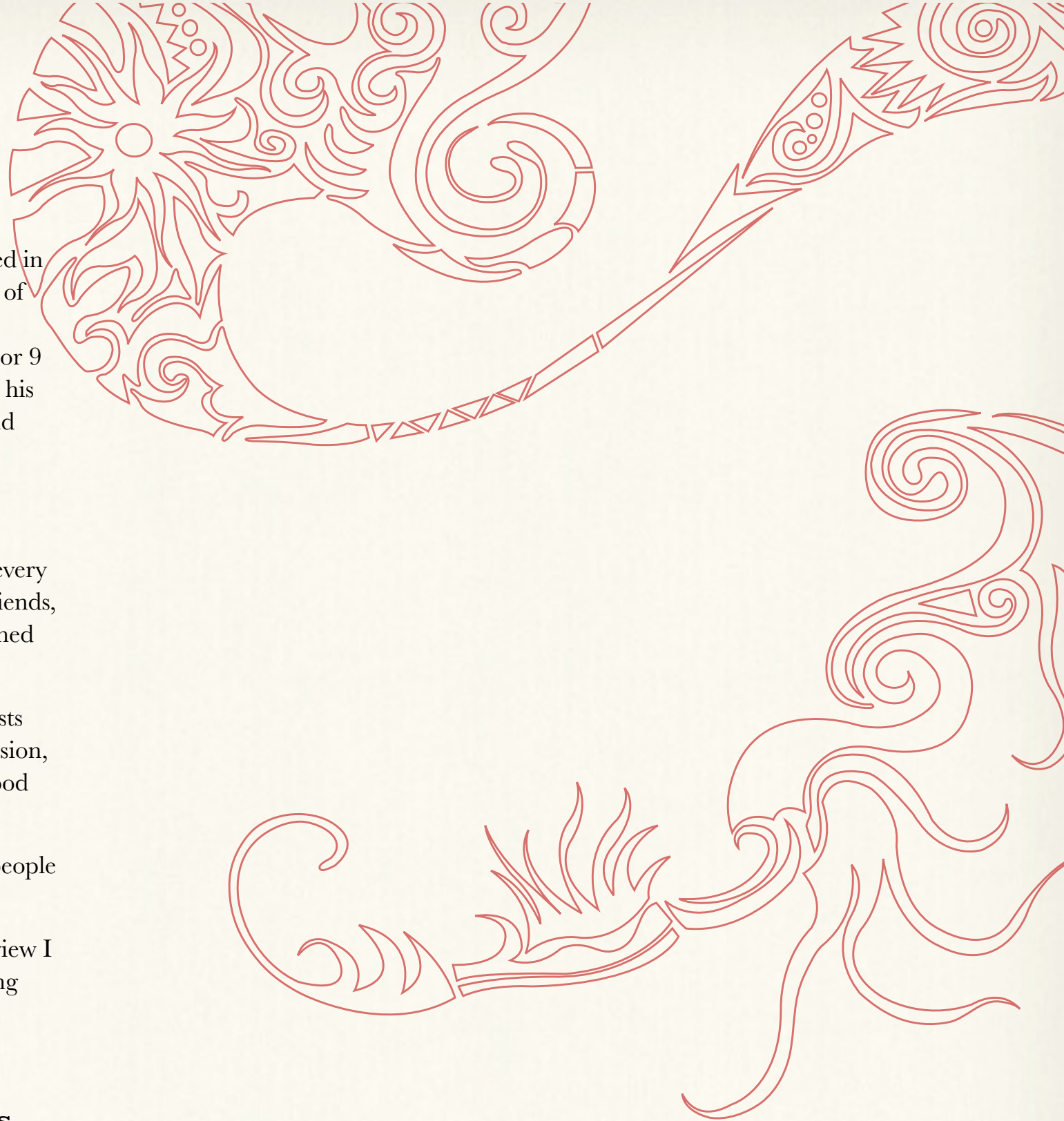
Catholicism is a type of Christianity. Nino believes in God and trusts him. The three practices that are unique to Catholicism are: confession, God uses creation for a purpose, and the belief that creation is a good thing.

Nino appreciates the power of Catholicism. He believes it brings people together and makes friendships happen.

It was interesting to learn about Catholicism since before the interview I had no idea what midnight mass was or how some women wear long sleeved clothing out of respect, similar to Orthodox Jewish women.

**My interviewee's essential message of his religion:**

**Friendship and community**





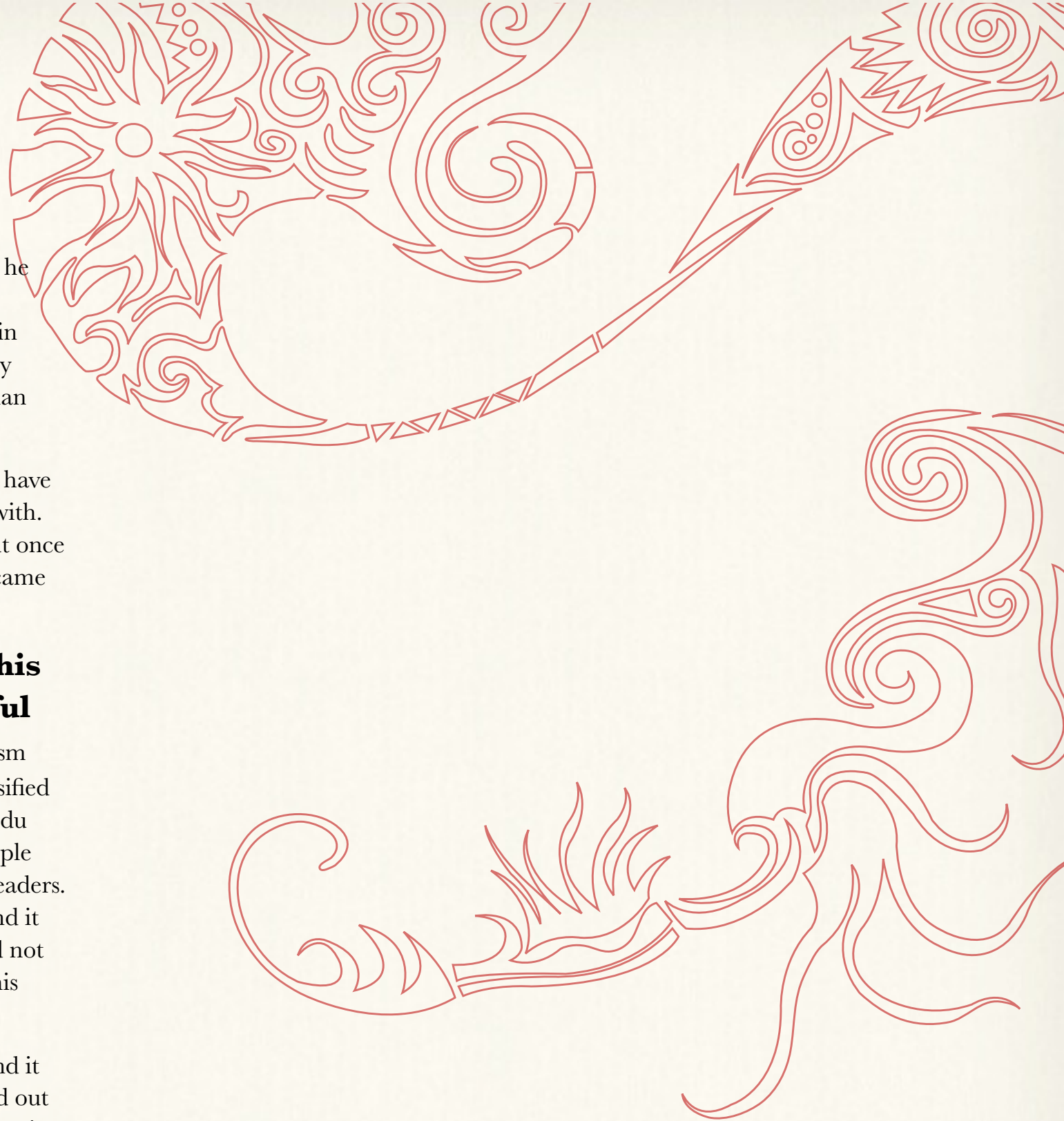
# Sayde Shuster: Gautam Lohia

I interviewed Gautam Lohia. He was born and raised as a Hindu. He participated in many activities and holidays. When Gautam was young, he went to his temple every month. Religion was very important to his grandparents, but not very important to his parents. Gautam was born in India and India's dominant religion is Hinduism. Gautam and his family celebrated Christmas but it did not have anything to do with the Christian religion.

Gautam's children are Hindu as well. He believes that it is important to have children with a belief system so they know the culture that he grew up with. Gautam and his family rarely go to Mandir, their temple. They go about once every three months. Gautam experienced discrimination when he first came to Canada. People called him many different names.

**Gautam believes that the essential message of his religion is respect for everyone and to be grateful for what you have.** Gautam believes in the Hindu G-d. Hinduism does not have a certain style of dress. Hinduism is very open and is classified as an open religion. You do not have to do anything to be a Hindu. Hindu temples are called mandirs. At home, people normally have a small temple where they pray and worship. It is quite rare that women are religious leaders. Some people believe that you should not eat cow because it is sacred and it gives us milk. Some very religious people also believe that people should not eat meat. Gautham's favorite part of his religion is being connected to his culture because his culture is colorful and festive.

I found it fascinating learning about religions other than my own. I found it very interesting learning about the differences between religions. I found out that both Hindus and Jews both don't eat pork. I also found it very interesting when I learned that there are not many female religious leaders because in Judaism there are male and female leaders. From the information that I gathered, I believe that the essential message of Judaism and Hinduism is about being grateful and appreciative for what we have. Overall I think that this has been an amazing and enriching experience.



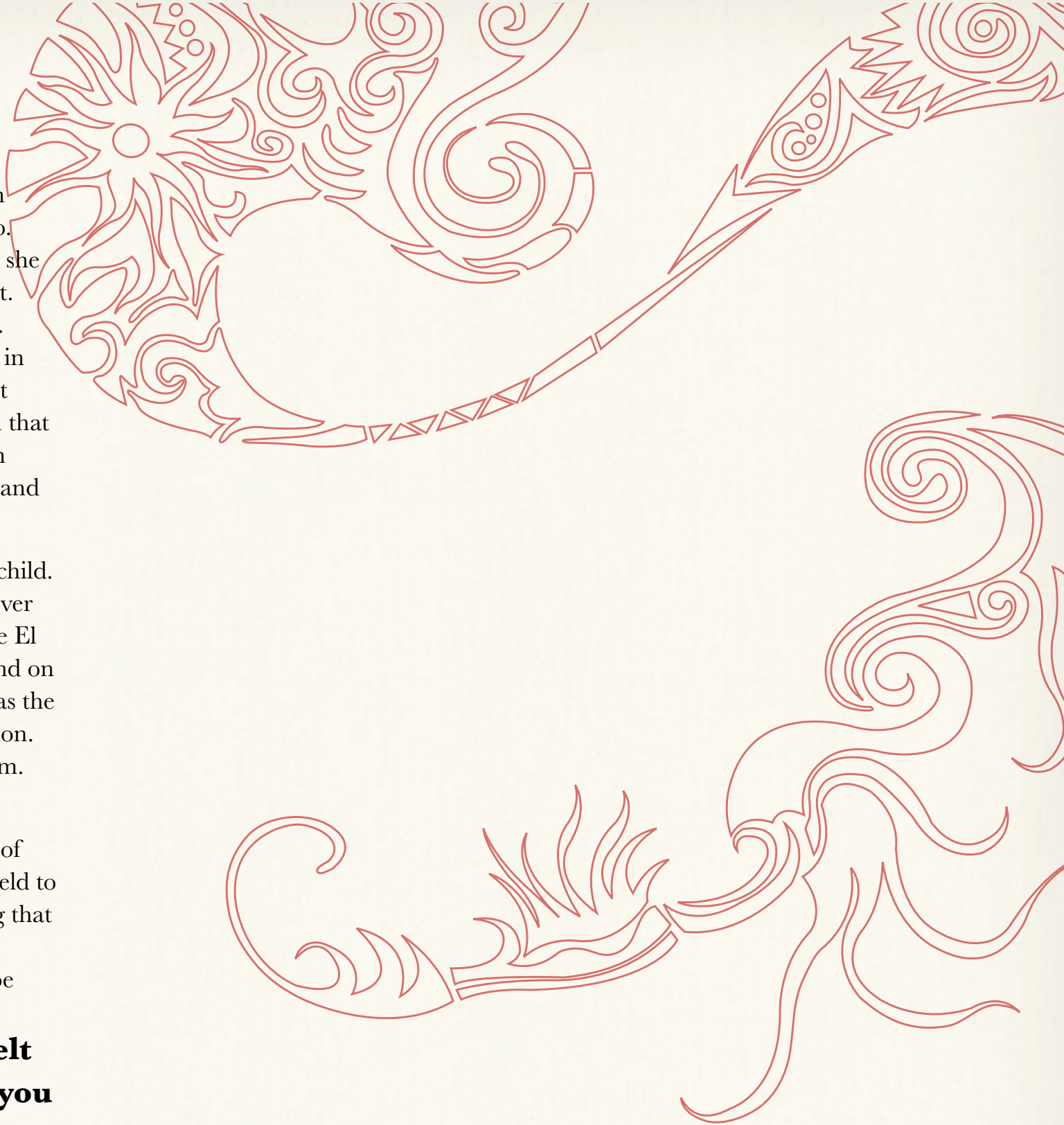
# Aidan Stephen: Anna Aguanno

On Sunday, February 28, I interviewed Anna Aguanno who is a Roman Catholic who was born in Canada and was raised in Thornhill, Ontario. She was raised in a religious home that held only to Catholicism. When she was growing up, her customs included eating a fish meal on Friday night. She would also always say a blessing before this meal, just as in Judaism. Anna went to church every Sunday with her parents and to the services in the morning. Growing up, her parents and grandparents were very strict with the customs and laws of Catholicism. She lived in the part of town that was predominantly Roman Catholic. She celebrated all of the Christian holidays and went to church for services for holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

Now as an adult, Anna seems to be more learned than when she was a child. Anna still goes to church every Sunday and has become more of a believer than when she was a child. She went to Spain on a pilgrimage called the El Camino de Santiago de Compostela where you walk 1000 kilometers and on the way you stop at different churches and do services. It is also known as the Saint James Way. I asked Anna if she had ever experienced discrimination. She said it was not exactly discrimination but more just negative criticism.

Anna believes in G-d. Roman Catholicism comprises the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. It stands under the authority of the bishop of Rome, the Pope, and is led by him and bishops who are held to be, through ordination, successors of Peter and the Apostles. Something that is unique to Roman Catholics is that women are not allowed to have a religious influence on the people, but are allowed to become nuns and be associated in this way. Anna loves the sense of community that Roman Catholicism brings to family and friends in their community. **Anna felt that the biggest message of her religion is that you should always put your friend before yourself.**

It was very educational to learn about someone else's religion. It was a great experience and I would love to do it again. Roman Catholicism is a very interesting religion and is full of complicated details. This is my report on Anna Aguanno who is a practicing Roman Catholic.





# Holden Tait-Miedzygorski: Gary Grewal

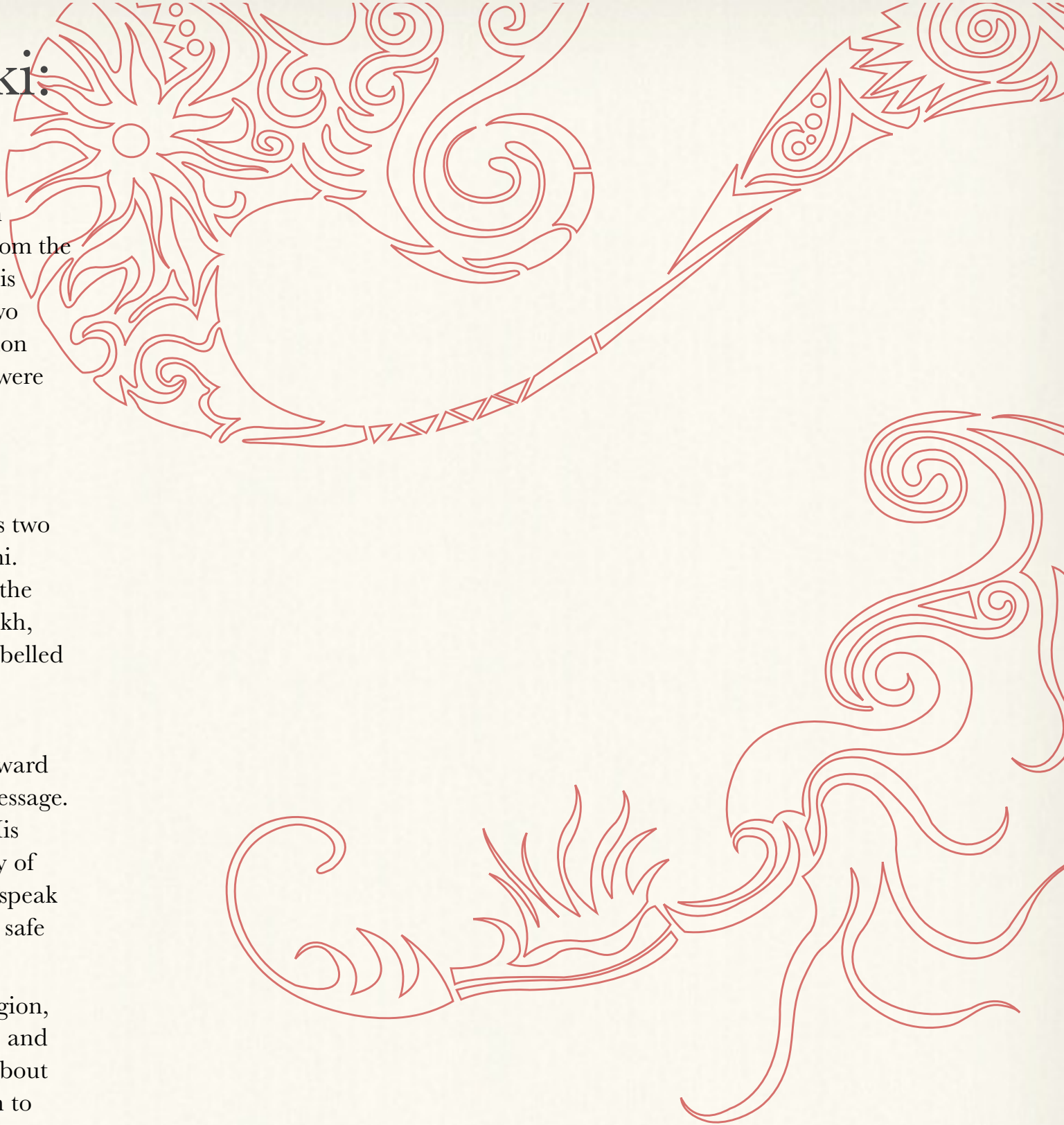
Gary Grewal is a local real estate agent. He was born and raised in Vancouver, but his parents were from India. Gary's parents were from the Punjab region of India, where the major religion is Sikhism. India is diverse and has many different religions, sikhs make up less than two percent of the population. Gary was raised to follow the Sikh religion and attended temple every Wednesday and Friday. Gary's parents were very strict Sikhs and did not let him do anything before he went to temple. Gary did not rebel against his religion when he was a kid.

Unfortunately, Gary currently doesn't go to his temple every Wednesday and Friday because he is too busy with his job and his two children. But he does go to temple on major holidays like Vaisakhi. Vaisakhi is a festival of harvesting in the Punjab region. It is also the Punjab new year on that day. Gary's two kids and wife are also Sikh, but his two girls don't go to temple that much. Gary still hasn't rebelled against his religion.

Gary's faith, Sikhism, is a monotheistic religion founded by Guru Nanak in 1469. Guru Nanak has been called one of the most forward thinkers of all time: he travelled around the world to tell G-d's message. Gary believes in G-d. There is only one G-d in Gary's religion. His name is Onkar. Onkar has no gender and is a symbol of the unity of G-d. Gary did not go anywhere holy for his religion, but he does speak Punjabi, the sikh language. Gary appreciates that he can follow a safe religion that helps people around the world.

I learned a lot of differences between my religion and Gary's religion, but more importantly I learned the central message, that Judaism and Sikhism are very similar. I had such a good experience learning about Sikhism and I hope in the future I can travel to the Punjab region to learn more about Sikhism. I wonder what it would feel like to have really strict parents and go to temple every time I had to.

**When I asked Gary what's the essential message of his religion he said, "Peace on earth."**



# Asher Teperson: Dhruv Mallick

I decided to interview one of my dad's work colleagues, Dhruv Mallick. Dhruv was born in India and raised as a religious Hindu. In India, Hinduism is the dominant faith. His parents decided that religion was one of the most important daily life activities to practise. His parents made sure that they would go to the temple for prayer ceremonies around three to four times a year.

Dhruv isn't as religious now and doesn't practice Hinduism anymore, but he thinks that that's part of being an adult: questioning your religion and learning more. Dhruv finds that it's more important to learn about other religions than to study one religion that your family believed in. Dhruv has one child and doesn't raise her in a certain faith, rather he raises his child multifaith. Luckily, Dhruv hasn't faced any discrimination based on his religion since Hinduism was the dominant religion in India. In Canada, it's not common to be discriminated since there are so many different religions. Dhruv never associated with religious camps and youth groups.

Dhruv doesn't believe in God, but he believes in a stronger power. In Hinduism, there is no certain style of dress that you have to wear. If you believe in Hinduism, you are not allowed to eat beef since cows are sacred. Dhruv's favourite part of Hinduism is that it brings the community together, which creates equality. **The message in Hinduism is quite similar to Judaism which is respect your peers and elders.**

I enjoyed interviewing Dhruv because it's interesting learning about different types of religions in the world and how they have different beliefs and rituals. Whether you're Christian, Hindu or Jewish, at the end of the day, everyone is a human and we should come together as one.





# Adin Tischler:Yazmin Mawani

Meet Yazmin Mawani, a Shia Ismaili Muslim, who was born and raised in Uganda, East Africa. In 1970, Yazmin moved to England and then to France to get a better education. Yazmin moved to Canada in 1974, which has been her home ever since.

Her grandparents lived in India, and in the early 1900s they emigrated to Uganda where Yazmin's parents were born. Yazmin's parents came to Canada two years before her in 1972. Yazmin grew up in a traditional family practicing as a Shia Ismaili Muslim. She attended Aga Khan public schools, with kids from different religions and practices.

Yazmin is still devoted to the religion she was born into. She is an Ismaili so she practices the religion of Islam. Yazmin, true to her religion, prays regularly and attends Jamatkhana, which is an Ismaili house of prayer. Yazmin follow the traditions of her faith, which teaches the importance of peace, unity, tolerance, generosity, caring for the less fortunate, kindness - and most significantly - pluralism.

Yazmin's religion, Islam, was established around 1400 years ago by the prophet Muhammad. All Muslims, including Ismailis, believe in only one Allah (God), and that Muhammad was his final prophet. Ismailis believe that before his death, Muhammad appointed his cousin and son-in-law, Hazrat Imam Ali, as the new leader of Islam. After Muhammad's death, Islam split into two groups, Shia and Sunni. As of right now, His Highness the Aga Khan IV is the 49th inherited Imam (leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims.

Sunni Muslims don't believe that the leader should be passed on from Ali to his descendants. Instead, they believe that leadership has to be earned by learning and knowledge at a very high level. There can be as many Imams as they want.

Yazmin's religion, Shia Muslims, on the other hand, believe the opposite of what Sunnis believe on this issue. They believe that the leader should be passed down from father to son starting with Ali.

Yazmin goes to the Jamatkhana regularly for prayers, meditates to feel more spiritual, helps the community, and does a lot of volunteer work. In addition, Yazmin helps out the Ismaili community, and also tries to help everyone no matter what religion.

Yazmin appreciates the values of the Shia customs. These include peace, generosity, kindness, helping the poor, caring for the aged, and acceptance of other religions.

Learning about the Ismaili religion is like learning about a whole different world. Like Yazmin, I especially love how the Ismailis help out other communities so much and accept other religions. If I were a Muslim, being an Ismaili would be my first choice.

**Essential message: Pluralism, respect, kindness, and just be generous!**



# Yoshua Welch: Zafi Ali

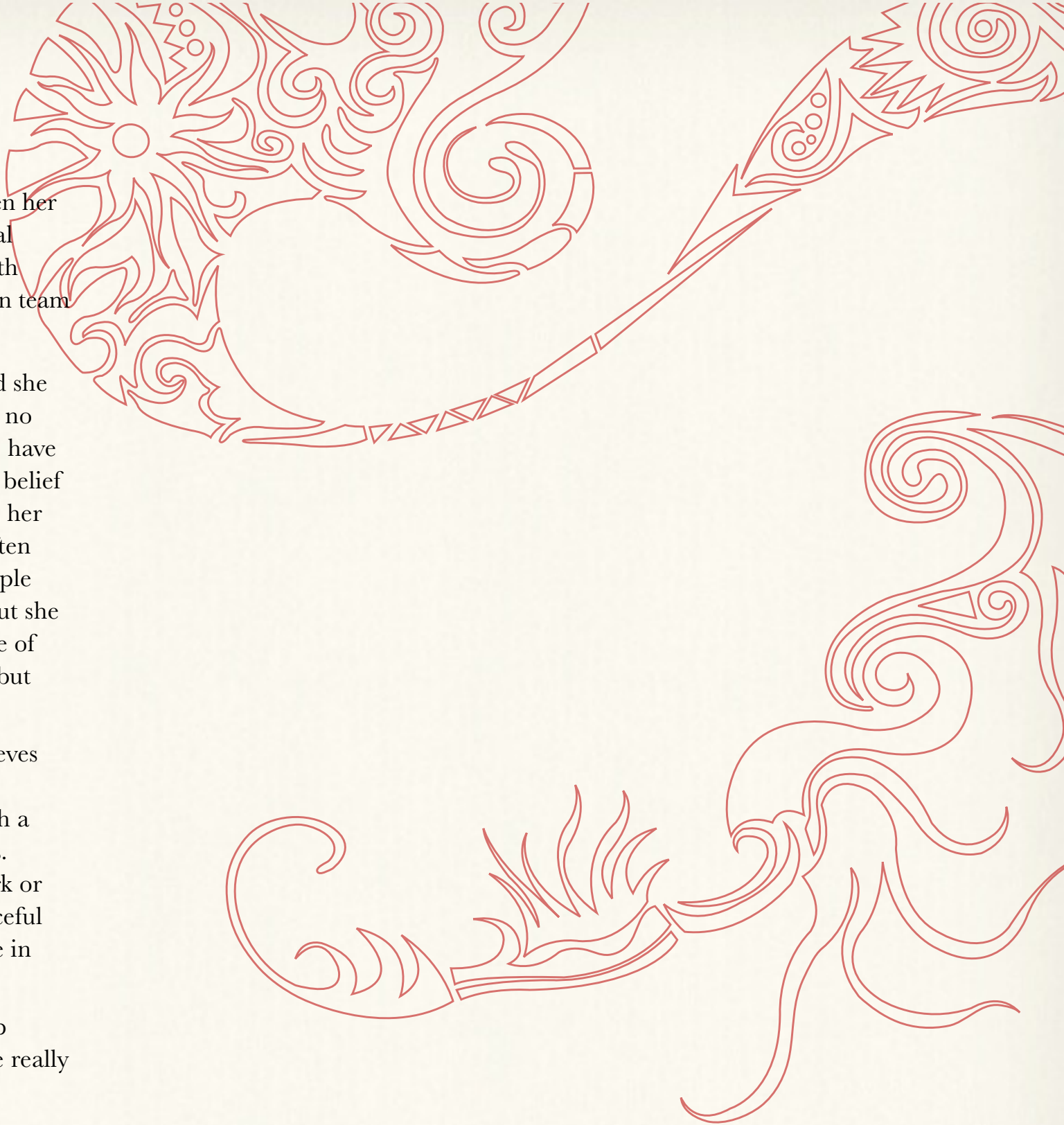
Zafi was born and raised here in Canada in a religious house. When her Dad came to Canada, he built a mosque that Zafi goes to on special holidays and events. When Zafi was younger, she helped run a youth camp during the summers. In this camp the children participated in team building games and religious activities.

I asked Zafi if she has the same practices as she did as a child and she said that she used to go to the mosque three times a week but she no longer goes as often. Zafi doesn't have a child, and chooses not to have a child, but she thinks it's important for a young people to have a belief so that they grow up with multiple areas of guidance. She follows her religion by keeping halal, which is like keeping kosher, and she often prays during the day. Zafi told me that there have been a few people that did not care to be friends with her because of her religion, but she tried to help them understand what she really believes in. Because of her explanation, a couple of people changed their minds a little, but some did not -- and that was okay with her; at least she tried.

In case you were wondering, Zafi does believe in a God. She believes that there's something bigger and more powerful than us. Not all Muslim women wear a head covering, and long sleeved shirts with a long skirts; the ones that do have made that choice for themselves. Muslims keep halal and that means they aren't allowed to eat pork or drink alcohol. What Zafi likes about her religion is that it's a peaceful and happy religion. Zafi told me that saying Muslims only believe in hurting non-Muslims is untrue.

I learned that Muslims can't eat pork or drink wine and they keep something similar to kosher. I also learned that some Muslims are really nice. I never knew who Zafi was until Jen introduced her to me.

The response to this question was to do good in the world and to be kind.





# Jordan Werstiuk: Ashton

For this project I interviewed one of the people that my Mom works with, Ashton. His religion is a type of Christianity called Mormonism. The main difference between Mormonism and other Christian religions is that Mormons follow the rules of the Book Of Mormon, hence the religion's name. When Ashton was young, and still to this day, he was quite a religious person, and so were his parents. Every holiday he does the things at church that all Mormons do, and he participates in other important religious activities. Ashton obeys the other rules, like donating to the church, wearing underclothes, and he avoids foods he shouldn't have. He goes to church every Sunday, for three hours total. He also said that between the ages of 3 and 18, he must've only missed church three times!

When you are between 12 and 18, you can go to a youth night once a week where you can get a better understanding and a wider view of Mormonism. Then, when you are in between the ages 14 and 18, you have the choice to go every weekday in the morning to do the same thing, just more of it. I don't know which of these he has attended. Ashton says that religion takes up the most time out of everything he does. To sum it up, he is quite a religious person.

Nowadays Ashton has the same beliefs as he did earlier in his life and his religiousness has not changed very much. He still celebrates holidays, and follows the same rules as he did all those years ago. He says one of the only things that changed is that now he has a more open mind and a wider view of Mormons. Ashton says that when he was younger (probably 25?), if he saw a Mormon drinking coffee (which is something you shouldn't do), he would probably get upset at them, but nowadays he has realized this his religion has a lot more to it than not drinking coffee. Now he recognizes that G-d doesn't really care whether you drink coffee or not, and Ashton believes that if you like coffee, you can have coffee. He has three children, and he is raising them the same way that he was raised.

**The essential message of Mormonism: That G-d still lives and speaks to us today.**

When Ashton was 19, he went to South Africa on what is called a Mission. Almost every male Mormon goes on a trip at the age of 19 to 21. Going on this Mission is a requirement for men, but is optional for women. The church assigns a place for you to go, but you have to pay for it, and do everything except for choosing your destination.

Ashton has not experienced anything like not getting a job or getting kicked out of a restaurant for being Mormon, although apparently on a show called South Park, they make fun of Mormons, but no one actually takes that seriously. He also says that although he believes in G-d he is still skeptical and not even sure if humans can understand religion completely.

When you are Mormon, the first time that you go to church, you will get underclothes, which is like another shirt, and basically long underwear. You then have to promise that you will wear the clothes as much as possible. These clothes also have symbols on them that are meant to show being true to G-d. Another rule for Mormons is that you should refrain from coffee, tobacco and alcohol. Also, you are supposed to "eat meat sparingly" and eat grains and fruit, although this rule is not paid attention to by most Mormons. Mormons believe that when G-d wants to tell people something, he tells the prophet, who then goes and tells the church, and other people. The person today who is this prophet is Thomas Est Monson. When they go to church for the three hours on Sunday, the first bit of it is a sacrament meeting. This is where they say a prayer, have water and bread (or wine) to symbolize Jesus. To answer the question "Do women take a leadership role?," Ashton said yes and no. The leaders of the congregation are men, and the priest is also always a man--although most Mormons wouldn't care if the priest was a man or a woman. There is a women's auxiliary, called the relief society, where women get together to talk and discuss things. I also asked Ashton what he enjoys most about being a Mormon. He says he had a great time on the Mission, where he travelled to South Africa. He said it gave him a different idea about his religion. When I asked him what is the most common misunderstanding about Mormons, he knew right away. He said that a lot of people think that Mormons have more than one wife. A while ago some Mormons believed that G-d had told a prophet that men should have a few wives instead of one, and that is what some people did. The word for that is "polygamy." That whole thing lasted for 20 years, but when it became illegal, they weren't allowed to continue it.

# Alex Zychlinski: Karin Brandis

This term I interviewed a Roman Apostolic Catholic. Her name is Karin Brandis and she was born in Mexico City and now lives in North Vancouver. She is a mother to three kids: two boys and a girl. She was born into being religious and going to church every Sunday, and attended church one or more times a week on special occasions. To her grandparents and parents, their religion was very important. Karin was born in Mexico and the dominant religion there is Catholicism. Catholicism and Roman Catholicism are very different and they have many different practices. Therefore Karin was not born in a country where her religion was the dominant religion.

Karin has three kids and has raised them as Roman Apostolic Catholics, the same religion she grew up with. She used to go to church more often than she does now. Now she attends church once a week. I asked her if she associates with only her religion, and she said no, she likes to associate with people from all around the world with different religions. They sometimes come for Shabbat to our house to experience the Jewish traditions. Also, we have been to their house for Thanksgiving and other different holidays that the Jews don't celebrate. Karin hasn't experienced discrimination because of her religion.

Karin believes in God. In her religion, Jesus is their God. The ritual she has to observe in her place of worship is the word of God, the Holy Communion. In her religion women are allowed to participate in holy rituals and lead services unlike in Orthodox Judaism where women are not allowed to lead services. In Roman Catholicism you cannot eat meat on Fridays and she respects this dietary restriction. Her favorite part of her religion is the belief in the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus. The most common misunderstanding of Roman Catholicism is that attending worship services doesn't make you a good person.

**I asked her that in one sentence what is the essential message of her religion. She said, "Be a good human being, help others, do things with love. That's what God is asking for".**

I really enjoyed interviewing someone from another religion because I learned a lot about Roman Catholicism and about how to interview other people that I don't know very well. Maybe I will interview her husband that is the same religion and compare their background stories. I loved this project because it was a great experience and I hope we do this again.