



**CRYPTO-JEWS AND THE SPANISH INQUISITION**  
**A Passover Seder**

Background: The following is a master list of readings done at the Spiegel's 2002 seder: *Crypto-Jews and the Spanish Inquisition*. Readings for specific individuals were assigned to each person, with some people playing the role of more than one person. The handout that everyone received showed only the role name and their first couple of words. The intention was to provide enough to keep everyone on track, but prevent reading ahead so that each person had to listen to what everyone was saying. (Text in lighter type was optional, time permitting; starred \* readings were selected for a shorter seder.) There was also a coordinated Haggadah with altered readings and prayers for the Crypto theme. 28 people participated; readings plus Haggadah plus ancillary discussions took us about 2 hours. In addition, there were projected images of the Southwest US (for atmosphere) and of Crypto-Jewish artifacts, the Belmonte Crypto Jewish community, historical markers of the Inquisition and ancient Jewish quarters. We played interviews with some of the people mentioned, read Portuguese readings of the Belmonte blessings, and lighter-hearted fare. The host couple, who read the roles of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabelle, were dressed in King and Queen costume and entered to an extract of "Procession of the Nobles." We also had coordinated foods: kosher-for-Passover wheat tortillas, salsa dip, and chicken mole. (You could add guacamole, etc)

The References section lists sources for personal quotes and background: lots of web sites, organizations devoted to Crypto Jews, a few books, and an excellent series of three Public Radio programs that aired in NM. Should anyone wish to alter this to their tastes and audiences, additional quotes are contained at the end.

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**TOPIC                      Seder begins**

**Leader**

Thank everyone for coming long distances, food preparations, etc.

Annual question: Karachi doctors dilemma, stay or leave. This news report was played (aired Mar 19, 2002 on National Public Radio, one week before seder):

"All of Pakistan has suffered for decades from sectarian violence. In recent years, the killers in Karachi have attacked educated professionals, businessman, government officials, as well as physicians. The gunmen have killed 77 Karachi doctors in the last few years. The killings are coming faster than they have in years, and in Karachi, about 10 doctors have died in the last 3 weeks. Nearly all the victims are Shiite Moslems, a minority sect, and police say they're being killed by extremist groups of Sunni Moslems. In Karachi, some doctors talk of fleeing the country. Dr Imrada Afridi says his wife and children talk of little else. "And I hear that every night from my family, that I should leave." Afridi is ... hoping ... that he can find a way to stay. He says he's already left Pakistan once. And so did one of his best friends, another Pakistani doctor. Doctor Aleez Afdar Zaiidi had been a kidney specialist in Phoenix. But he sold his house and moved his family back to Karachi. Dr Zaiidi: We don't want to run away from this, we don't want to be frightened to the point where we get paralyzed and are not able to work."

**Leader**

(Murray S)

Here's our annual intro question: Imagine you have lived in a country all your life. You have very strong ties here: your profession, your family, your friends. Furthermore (unlike the Shiites in Karachi), recent decades were a "golden age" for your people. Gradually though, the environment has turned against your people. The populous are resentful of your success, government is unresponsive - or worse; you begin to fear for the future. In the past, this has happened to Jews several times (this news story emphasizes it doesn't only happen to Jews). The Jews recall most strongly Germany in the 1930s and Spain in the 15th century, but these aren't the only times. However, there are many other 'near misses' where things turned around, but we don't "memorialize" those times. The question this year is: What will you do? Remember: you have very strong ties to your homeland (more than most of us do in the US). Do you stay and hope it gets better? Do you take your family to a far away, unknown land and start over? Do you fight it out here? What ...?

Introduce yourself, because as always, we have some new faces. Tell us what you'd do, and why. (Leader gave own answer to start off.) When done, continue ...

### Leader introduce **TOPIC**    **Introduction**

For tonight, all of us are marranos, conversos, *chuetas*, *anussim*, crypto-Jews – descendants of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. We've come together to celebrate Passover, as hidden Jews in New Mexico, or Portugal, or Brazil might be celebrating it right now, tonight. We each represent a real person, and will be giving voice to their own words. We will be sharing our experiences of discovery about our background, our family traditions, and what our hidden, sometimes latent, Jewishness means to ourselves, our family, and our community.

You are role playing *real* people: Invest the readings with attitude, make the people come alive. Now open your pamphlets and your readings envelope. Keep track of when your person speaks.. The first time you have a character reading, introduce yourself. Of course, these readings are to spur your thinking, discussion, comments. Don't focus on script; absorb and comment freely.

### Leader

We, the marranos, kept their family traditions alive, under a greater duress than most of western-European ancestors. It's hard to believe they even exist:

### Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn<sup>1</sup> (*Murray H*)

I am a Rabbi in Pennsylvania, raised in Sao Paulo Brazil

"After 500 years the Marranos surely must belong only to history. Their descendants cannot have maintained any secret Jewish practices during all these centuries. The possibility that some might be interested in returning to the Jewish faith is too romantic an idea to be anything but a fantasy. But then I discovered one of the most amazing Jewish phenomena of our times."

### Leader introduce **TOPIC**    **How We Discovered our Past**

### Daniel Yocum<sup>2</sup>                      (*Bob D*)

I am a young engineering student, who grew up in Albuquerque's Hispanic South Valley.

"I had been researching my genealogy and noticed really odd family customs: kosher food preparation, Friday night prayer, ritual circumcision and keeping the Sabbath. We went to Catholic mass on Saturdays. But, if kids tried to do things on the Sabbath, they'd get hit.

### Anna Rael<sup>2</sup>                              (*Claire K*)

I'm a teacher in Texas who attended Catholic School when I grew up in Santa Fe.

"When I was young my grandmother used to light candles on Fridays and we took it for granted. I traced my family to 1610 in New Mexico and found ancestors with the surname Yisrael, similar to my own, "Rael."

### Juan<sup>3</sup>                                      (*Ken A*)

"I discovered my Jewish identity by chance, while researching his family genealogy. I asked an elderly aunt if she knew, she said, "Of course we are Jews. We've always known that." But no one ever told me, and I'm 40. I'm trying to find out if my family has any Jewish rituals, and I'm reading many books on Spanish Jewry. I want to know what this means, to live as a Jew.

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<sup>1</sup>"Sheaar Yashuv: A Remnant Returns Searching for Brazilian Marranos," Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn with Robert H. Lande. © Kulanu Used with permission. See [www.ubalt.edu/kulanu](http://www.ubalt.edu/kulanu)

<sup>2</sup> Article by Nancy Plevin, posted in [soc.culture.jewish](http://soc.culture.jewish) and [soc.culture.latin-america](http://soc.culture.latin-america) news groups

<sup>3</sup> Kulanu/Kunin: "The Secret Jews of New Mexico," Seth Kunin. © Kulanu Used with permission. See [www.ubalt.edu/kulanu](http://www.ubalt.edu/kulanu)

**Randy Baca Hensel**<sup>4</sup> (Don K)

"It was strange that no one made a "big deal" over my First Communion. The only person who attended was my beloved Mama and after a few quick photos in the front yard, the rest of that Sunday was like any other. It was equally mystifying to me that no one had statues of saints with candles burning, or a crucifix in every room, as did most of my friends' families.

"Mama just quietly went about her work, cooking, cleaning, always sweeping the dirt from the corners toward the center of the room. (Later I found out this is a converso tradition, to not defile the mezuzah that used to be at the front door.) Her only mention of religion was always "Dios es muy grande." I was perplexed that, while most Hispanic families were staunchly Roman Catholic, my Mama was so nominally "R.C." they didn't even go to Mass. Ever! They didn't believe in confessing sins to the priest. Nobody even owned a rosary--never mind used one for prayer.

"I was curious why so many of my relatives had "Old Testament" names--Abram, Jacob, Sarah, Solomon, Rebecca, Ephraim, Reuben, David. When the clan gathered for a wedding or a funeral, it sounded like a convention of the Prophets and the Patriarchs.

"The family customs were, to me, unique. I don't know whether the candles lit on Friday evenings were for Shabbat or because the electric generator on the rancho wasn't working. And like many--if not most--offspring of families living with five hundred-plus years of secrecy, lots has been forgotten. Except all the male offspring had to be circumcised within a few days after birth. Except the weird, ritualized manner in which animals were slaughtered. Except for more and more research that indicates we were indeed conversos--the shadowy remnants of the glory days of Sefarad; a sense-memory that will not go away.

"I found out the truth just weeks before my grandmother died, she told a cousin the family secret -- "Somos Judios." ("We are Jews.") Our family springs from some of the very earliest settlers of what is now Northern New Mexico, Southern Colorado and Northern Arizona. "Stay away from the priests!" "Never speak of family matters to others." "We are Spanish!" "We're 'Manitos,' not ' Chicanos!" Across the years and the miles--my grandmother's quiet "Somos Judios" is the loudest whisper I've ever heard.

**Alberto Omero Lopez**<sup>5</sup> (Skip T)

"When I was 20, my mom told me, "There are big family secrets, but you will never know them," and she didn't explain further.

"I grew up Hispanic in South Texas. My mom and dad are Catholic and me and my siblings attended parochial school when we were young. My (uncle) Tio Noe told me we had a family secret: We were descended from German Jews. He said my grandmother called a family meeting when he was a boy and announced to everyone she was descended from German Jews. I've asked my mother about it, but she refused to talk to me and has maintained her silence to this very day.

**Orfa Salinas**<sup>6</sup> (Steph G)

I live in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

My first clue was in 1996, when I read an article on Hanukkah that mentioned *buñuelos*, crunchy delicacies sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon, as Sephardic Jews prepared for the holiday. The dessert also was special in my family; though Hanukkah was never mentioned, they were eaten during the same time of year.

"By age 13, children in my community were expected to master reading and writing skills in Spanish, using the Bible as their guide. They then had to read aloud from the Bible during a special service, similar to the Torah readings by a Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

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<sup>4</sup> Halapid, the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies. Available by subscription from The SCJS c/o Gloria Trujillo, 2000 Avenida, Monterey Park, CA 91754 ([sephardiconnect.com/halapid/membership.htm](http://sephardiconnect.com/halapid/membership.htm)), or available from Art Benveniste, [artbenven@aol.com](mailto:artbenven@aol.com). Used with permission.

<sup>5</sup> ©1997 by Alberto Omero Lopez. Used with permission. See [www.ubalt.edu/kulanu/lopez.html](http://www.ubalt.edu/kulanu/lopez.html)

<sup>6</sup> "Crypto-Jews celebrate finding their families' faith roots," by Nancy San Martin, Dallas Morning News, December 16, 2000. Used with permission.

"I dug into my family history and discovered all four grandparents had names with ties to Sephardic Jews. I traced my ancestors' migration from Spain to Mexico and ultimately to South Texas, where I grew up.

**Paul Carpenter**<sup>6</sup> (Jon G)

I'm a teacher at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque

"I was assigned to teach a course at New Mexico's Elderhostel Program on converso Jews in 1995. I came across my mother's maiden name, Salazar, and its ties to Judaism. With further research I learned about another half of me that I didn't know existed. I grew up Catholic but always had trouble with the religion. I changed faiths many times until 1980, when settled on Unitarian. Now, I'm 71, and prepared to celebrate my bar mitzvah at my synagogue in Albuquerque. After studying Judaism, I find it's a magnificent religion. It engenders discussion, inquiry, not dogma. It's my kind of religion. Even if I wasn't a converso, I'd be Jewish."

**Lupita Murillo**<sup>7</sup> (Rebecca L)

I'm reporter for TV station in Tucson

"I also discovered I was a Crypto Jew from an assignment. I prepared to anchor a program on crypto-Jewish descendants in the Southwest. Suddenly I realized my own family fit the profile: My grandmother didn't eat pork - she said it was a dirty animal. She would light candles on Friday night. She covered mirrors when someone died. I had thought all my parents, grandparents and ancestors who migrated here from Spain were Catholic. But they weren't. "

**Melissa Amado**<sup>7</sup> (Cara L)

I'm a researcher at University of Arizona

"I came across my heritage accidentally when researching my family's background. In 1989, I wrote to every Amado in the LA telephone book. One response came from a Sephardi Jew. The letter opened a door. I wondered if my Spanish ancestors were conversos, and delved more deeply into my family's past. Cousins remembered that their own mothers had lit candles on Friday evenings; some had refused to eat pork. Later, a great-aunt took me aside and said "the family has always known about being Jewish."

**Guillermo Lazo**<sup>4</sup> (Jim W)

"There was a kind of unspoken knowledge that our family had come from somewhere before Mexico. Dad would tell us that he thought we were 'Moros' who had immigrated to Mexico. It was pretty much left at that.

"Most of my genealogical searches on my family led to dead ends. Once I posted questions about my surname to a number of email bulletin boards. Much later, I received an email in a funky kind of Spanish. As I read it I thought to myself, "This guy's Spanish is jacked." As it turned out, it was from a researcher writing to me in Ladino. He showed me that people with my surname were exiled from Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition. Then more genealogical evidence appeared. After I saw some evidence on the history of my people, it dawned on me I really was a Jew.

**George Cirkovic**<sup>8</sup> (MS)

Murray saw this posting on a Sephardic-roots newsgroup

"My father's mother would light candles Friday evening, then would cover them with an earthenware pot. She did it as a continuation of a custom practiced in her husband's family. Dad thought this was related to the knock on the door by the Inquisition. Looking for anyone with names like Cirko, Chirko with Marano/Sephardim background. (Signed) George Cirkovic 11/1999

Murray contacted him March 2002 to find out more:

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<sup>7</sup> 'Crypto-Jews Seek Lost Heritage as Academic Debate Rages', by Sarah Wildman. © Kulanu. Used with permission.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication.

“Good to hear from you. Before he died my father did a lot of genealogy work. His ancestors left Valencia in 1492. They eventually came to Sarajevo, and settled in Bakar, Croatia.

“He got started with the genealogy because he was contacted by the local Archbishop to restore a leaky roof in the old church (all the family had been Roman Catholic for centuries). After he cut a sizeable check, the priest asked if there was anything he could do to show appreciation. Dad asked [to] look in the Bakar archives. He told the priest his family was referred to as "the Spaniards" in town, even though there was nothing obviously Spanish in the name Cirkovic nor in the speech (nobody spoke Ladino).

“He traced the first family member to a seaman, who stopped sailing, became a merchant and began to lend money for interest. No Catholic was allowed to do this, so here's a definite red flag. Before my father died, he told a very close friend he would be delighted if I converted to Judaism. He didn't "pray about it" because he was an atheist.

“When I converted, the circle of 500 years was closed. That's my T'shuva story for Pesach. Shalom”  
He signed his email – ‘Eliyahu Ben Avraham’

### Leader introduce **TOPIC A (Brief) History Of Inquisition**

**Narrator** (Mark H)

How did all this begin? We now explain a (brief) history of the Inquisition. Anti-Jewish sentiment, persecutions, and forced conversions have been around many centuries, even before the first Crusade in 1096. However, the Inquisition that we are familiar with began in 1215. Throughout this time, prosperous Jews were well integrated into European commerce, had inter-married with Spanish nobility, and felt they were highly respected. They didn't realize how virulent the Spanish Inquisition would become.

**Monty Python** 

The ferocity of the Inquisition rose in direct proportion to the success of the reconquest of Spain from the Moors, and its speed accelerated as the cities fell to it. The citizenry of Christian Spain was heavily taxed to finance the reconquest; eventually this taxation fell heavily on the Jewish communities.

I now introduce Isabella of Castile, our esteemed Queen:

*[The King and Queen were played by the host and hostess, dressed appropriately.]*

**Isabella:** (*Randi*) When I ascended to the throne in 1468, I was only 17 years old. But I had to deal with a defiant nobility, widespread banditry, impoverished royal coffers and openly contentious clergy.

**Ferdinand:** (*Murray*) Pesky, pesky.

**Isabella:** But historians will note that within 4 years I turned things around and established order and central authority in all of these areas.

**Ferdinand:** What magnificence.

**Isabella:** Who is that man?

**Narrator:** That's your husband, your eminence, King Ferdinand of Aragon.

**Isabella:** Oh how tedious.

**Narrator:** But your marriage with young Ferdinand combined Aragon with Castile into the most powerful state in Europe.

**Isabella:** Ferdy, we did all that?

**Ferdinand:** Yes we did, love.

**Isabella:** OK, tell me more. What happened next?

**Narrator:** Well, the civil war ended in 1477. Historians credit the victory to you because you visited the battlefield to bolster the morale of the troops.

**Isabella:** I knocked them dead with my Bob Hope imitations. Then what?

**Narrator:** Initially Isabella was not anti-Semitic, but she was devout and under the influence of her confessor, Torquemada (who was of Conversos origin) taught her to hate heretic behavior.

**Isabella:** I came to Seville after the war and heard of terrible activities around Holy Week.

**Narrator:** Because Passover occurred during Holy Week, innocent activities took on ominous consequences. On Mar 18, 1478, a number of Jews and Marranos were together at “some mysterious celebration.” They were discovered by a young cavalier who had come into the *Juderia* to carry out an intrigue with a Jewish maiden, or so he said. It was Passover, and the community had come together for a Seder celebration. Because it was Holy Week, the general population concluded these Marranos had

assembled – during the season of the Passion of Jesus – to blaspheme the Christian religion. The local Friar, Alonso de Hojeda, heard about it. He hated the Jews more than Torquemada. Hojeda told the Spanish ambassadors, Torquemada, and anyone who'd listen.

**Ferdinand:** Eventually, we asked Pope Sixtus to give us authority to appoint Inquisitors to attack heresy, and he did.

**Narrator:** Isabella was angry because Spain's economy was in shambles and needed more money.

**Isabella:** The Inquisition and Auto-de-Fe's (Acts of Faith) helped us get more money. We impounded all their possessions, let them accuse each other to save their own necks, and we got rich in the process.

**Ferdinand:** Sometimes the accused would be guilty of something as trivial as cleaning real well, or wearing nice clothes on Saturdays.

**Narrator:** The warring continued, as did the Inquisition's evils. Finally, in Jan of 1492, Spain conquered Granada, the last Moorish stronghold, and concluded an 800-year war of reconquest.

**Isabella:** Finally Spain was pure and free of the Moors.

**Ferdinand:** No more moors.

**Isabella:** We felt Muslims and Jews were still a threat to the monarchy, so on March 30, 1492 we issued the "Edict of Expulsion"

**Ferdinand:** I just noticed an interesting coincidence - this Sat. is exactly 510 years after our edict.\*

**Isabella:** Well, some books say it was March 31<sup>st</sup>. It's been so many years, even I don't remember.

**Narrator:** The edict gave Jews four months to convert, or settle their affairs and leave. Jews were barred from taking anything of value with them except what they could carry. A tremendous wealth of Jewish art, jewels, gold, and property went to the Catholic Church.

**Ferdinand:** Let's get this moving – I'm going to be hungry soon.

**Narrator:** The Inquisition pursued insincere conversos for centuries, across many lands. When Portugal's new King Manuel asked for Ferdinand and Isabella's daughter's hand in marriage, in 1496, they accepted with one condition - Manuel had to eliminate the Portuguese Jews as Spain had already done.

**Ferdinand:** We were brilliant, dearie.

**Narrator:** Mass conversions began in Portugal in 1497 and, later, cruel persecutions from Portugal's version of the Inquisition. Later, conversos were pursued in New Spain, what we now know as Mexico, and the American southwest. The Inquisition continued for 350 years into the nineteenth century. Its last victim was a woman burnt at the stake in 1765.

### Leader introduce **TOPIC** **The Rediscovery of the Crypto Jews**

**Reader1<sup>9</sup>** (Jon G)

One of the earliest "discoveries" of modern Marranos was done by Samuel Schwarz, a Jewish mining engineer from Poland. In 1917 he was in Belmonte, a remote village in Portugal near the Spanish border. He heard one merchant refer to another as a Jew. The de Sousa family had been (outwardly) faithful Christians for centuries, so it intrigued Schwarz they were still considered Jews. De Sousa eventually admitted to Schwarz that he was a secret Jew. Schwarz met the others in the community, but the men refused to believe that Schwarz was Jewish; they thought Jews no longer existed elsewhere in the world.

One of elderly women said "Since you pretend to know Jewish prayers, recite them to us in Hebrew, since you claim Hebrew is the language of the Jews." Schwarz pointed out they knew no Hebrew and wouldn't understand him, but the woman insisted. Schwarz recited *Shema Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad*. When he said the word Adonai, the *sacerdotisa*, an old woman who knows all the prayers and leads the community in prayer, said "He is really a Jew, for he knows how to pronounce properly the name of our Lord Adonai." With this, Schwarz was accepted and the first published report of hidden Jews reached the European world.

**Reader2** (Mia K)

Another accidental discovery in Majorca in the 1920s was similar in most respects. The crypto Jews didn't believe their visitor was Jewish; they recognized the single word Adonai; but they couldn't comprehend hundreds of thousands of Jews were currently lived in the major cities of Europe.

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\* In other years, the edict anniversary date will still be close by. Alter text appropriately.

<sup>9</sup> © Joachim Prinz, *The Secret Jews*. See References.

## Leader

The mention of Adonai and blessings is best segue to Kiddish we're going to get. (Do: KIDDISH, URCHATZ, BREAK MIDDLE MATZ. Tell people they can nash, then return to readings.)

### Leader introduce **TOPIC** **Family Traditions**

**Stanley Hordes**<sup>10</sup> (Eugene R)



I am New Mexico's state historian.

"People would start coming into my office and saying so and so over there, I think she's one of them. I'd say, "Well what makes you think that?" "Well, she lights candles on Friday night." They'd look around to make sure the door was closed before they say that, then they'd rush out. I would ordinarily dismiss this as a crank, or two cranks or three cranks, but it would happen with such regularity, a couple times a month, over the course of a matter of years, it began to seem it was a very strong pattern." (End of audio) **Leader add:** They'd all display secretive behavior and would tell me about Jewish customs, but not use the word 'Jewish.' I was bowled over by the drama of it all."

**Shulamith Halevy**<sup>11</sup> (Robin S)

I'm a professor at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago,

"Since I gave a series of public lectures on the topic of Crypto Jews a few years ago, nearly every day I receive a secretive phone call or visit from someone in Chicago's Hispanic community who thinks he or she may be a Secret Jew. Most are practicing Catholics, but they've noticed their families have customs that bear the indelible mark of Judaism.

\* **Edwin Barry**<sup>10</sup> (Rhoda H)

I spent most of his life on a plot of land in Tomé, a village 30 miles south of Albuquerque.

"I have childhood memories of practices that make me suspect my family were hidden Jews. Sixty years ago I saw my grandmother go to a room in my parent's house to light candles. My grandmother would always, like, trot, all the way over, disappear into the house, and we knew she was lighting candles. (After supper we'd look in the window and the candles were burning.) Eight candles, ten candles. But they never told us anything. They always told us don't tell anyone. They never gave us a satisfactory answer when we asked, they would always say, "It's for the souls, don't tell anyone." Like that, that's the way it was. It died out. Nobody lights candles anymore.

"I also remember my mother making an unleavened bread only around Lent. Like a *galleta*, like a long biscuit. It wasn't bad, we liked it. When I was in the Army around Lent they placed baskets of unleavened bread on the tables. I took some and ate it. Across from me were some soldiers - they looked at me, and they looked at each other, and one said "Why do you eat that, that's for Jews. You don't look like a Jew. You're also eating the other bread." I told him "I eat what I like. I like this bread and I'll eat it." When they told me that's only for Jews, I said "When we were boys we used to have this and I'm not going to miss it."

**Man #1**<sup>10</sup> (Martin E)

"In the Catholic Church it was a requirement on Fridays that we eat fish. Well, my mother would say we're going to eat what we're gonna eat, and you don't discuss this with anybody. We grew up knowing we didn't really have to do what the Catholic church told us to do, we just did what our mother said. She didn't want us to say anything to anybody 'cause we had to keep it to our family that we didn't observe all the Catholic things.

\* **Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup> (Barb S)

I'm a descendent of hidden Jews living in the same Albuquerque neighborhood my family settled 12 generations ago.

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<sup>10</sup> Excerpt with permission from transcripts of "Hidden Jews of New Mexico" radio series, copyright 1995 by Benjamin Shapiro, available from N. Rubin, 212-463-7411, NanRubin@aol.com. No unauthorized duplication allowed.

<sup>11</sup> "Secret Jews believe they still have crosses to bear: Inquisition converts embracing ancestry," by Tara Gruzen; Chicago Tribune, May 28, 1996. Used with permission.



"On my mother's side of the family, it seems to be common knowledge we were descended from Jews. Cousins on that side required in their will that they would be buried in a *casia*, a wood casket with stars of David carved on the sides or in the coffin lining. We always knew."

### Leader<sup>10</sup>



"Here is a picture of one grave containing both Christian and Jewish symbols. One of the post blow-ups shows others. (Of course, these are Jews that are not as "hidden" as the ones Ramon was talking about.)"

### Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn<sup>1</sup> (*Murray H*)

"I visited a Brazilian community, Venhaver about 230 miles from the state capital. The Venhaver people are all devout Christians. Yet, they still continue traditions that can only be Jewish in origin. At first, they refused to tell me much, but after they got to know me they began to talk more openly. Even then they had no knowledge of the origin of their practices; no knowledge of what these practices indicate about the community's history.

"The Venhaver woman light two candles every Friday night. They say that they are doing it so the "good spirits" will take care of the house. Hanging on a few of the doorposts of their houses are small bags of earth. People touch or kiss this vestigial mezuzah when they enter or leave. Many front doors also have a Star of David or Psalm on their back. (In Mexico, some conversos smeared blood of the sacrifice on the inside of their door posts at Passover.) The motivations for both traditions is to "protect" the house from evil spirits that otherwise might haunt it.

"The Venhaver keep a form of Kashrut. They do not eat meat from pigs, meat from hunted animals, or seafood. They do not eat meat and dairy in the same meal.

"They only eat meat they've slaughtered. They slaughter chickens with a very sharp knife. They drain the blood, wash the chickens thoroughly, salt them, and wash them again. They explained they don't eat meat containing blood because such meat was *carregado* (charged). No one could explain exactly what "charged" meant, but it seemed to have some kind of spiritual meaning.

"They don't eat bread during the first week of April, which is like Passover. Yet, they have no association between their practice and the Jewish holiday. In no other way do they celebrate Passover. The only explanation I could get is that the bread becomes "charged" during the first week of April.

### \* Seth Kunin<sup>3</sup> (*Pat D*)

I'm a professor of Divinity and Religious Studies in Aberdeen

"During Pesach some Crypto Jewish families in the Southwest use extra-crispy wheat tortillas in place of matzah. The Passover story is sometimes connected with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, with Queen Isabella playing the role of Pharaoh. New rituals have also been created to replace forbidden or forgotten ones. Fearful of being revealed as Jews because of the practice of circumcision, some Crypto-Jews would cut a symbolic slit in their infant's foreskin.

### \* Alberto Omero Lopez<sup>5</sup> (*Skip T*)

I remember my grandmother cooked a chicken soup, using a recipe I couldn't find in a Mexican cookbook. Other foods were different from the meats other Latin Americans used.

"Yeah, listen to this - when I was around 25 years old, my mother was curious about a girl I was dating: "What's happening with that woman in New York? I told her that she wanted me to get a circumcision. My mother blurted out, "Didn't I scar you?" I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "It's a custom with my mother's family to cut some of the skin off the male organ." They buried the skin in the back yard, and placed a stone over it to identify it. The circumcision was done in such a way as to hide it. You wouldn't know it unless you look closely.

\* **Seth Kunin**<sup>3</sup> (Pat D)

"Still other rituals were created by Crypto-Jews as a corrective to mandatory Christian rites. After a baptism, families perform a cleansing ritual in which they wash their babies in water or perfume. Others invented ways to avoid the Church. Maria Gomez of Albuquerque remembers her mother always gave her an herb to make her sick before Mass; she never went.

\* **Priest identified as "SC"**<sup>10</sup> (Horst)



"I remember when I was going to be about twelve. I was looking forward because they were going to buy me a record player. My great-grandfather told my grandfather, in Spanish, it is time to tell the boy. So the next morning, which was my birthday, my grandfather woke me up. He said let's get water, and I said there's plenty of water, but since he is my grandfather I respected him we went to get some water. He began to tell me about the Jews, you remember the Jews in the Bible, and I kept thinking, I have heard all these stories in catechism. You remember Moses, and they went to Egypt and they came out, and Jesus was king of the Jew ... and finally I asked him, "Why are you talking about this?" "Because," he said, "*Eres Judio*" (you are a Jew). I said "No, I'm Catholic." And he said, "No, eres Judio." It was very strange thing and all of a sudden I became angry at him. We had been taught to hate the Jews because they were Christ killers, the Jews nailed the cross, they betrayed Jesus, and here all of a sudden my own grandfather was calling me a Jew. After I got angry and cried, he called me over, he pulled the water out and he poured water over my head and said "*not tas portisado*" (you're not baptized). So by pouring water over my head, he had took back the baptism I had been given. It was time to wash it off. Then all of a sudden I realized, these families that would come to eat with us, we had these strange foods and did strange services; we were Jews, we're hidden Jews."

**Prospero Chaves**<sup>6</sup> (Andrew S)

"Since I've heard about the hidden Jews, I've been flooded with family memories that seemed odd when I was a Catholic child, but make sense to me as an active Jewish adult - the way mirrors were covered after the death of a relative, the way a special knife was used for slaughter and the way the lamb was hung upside down to drain its blood.

"Before Easter, my mother would clean the house spic and span. Then she would use different utensils to cook, like Jews do for Passover. She was practicing Judaism, but she didn't know why.

\* **Gilvanci ben Shmuel Portillo**<sup>12</sup> (Mia K)

"I had a grandmother who spoke a strange language. She had a statue of the Madonna in the house. I often saw her kissing the Madonna's foot. Once I saw her take a little box out of it while cleaning it., but I didn't know what it was.

"My family also did "strange" things: they used a Christian Bible with the New Testament cut out; my father attended church but never uttered the name of Jesus and he began prayers with the words, "Baruch Atah Adonai, God of Abraham, Itzchak and Yaacov." Candles were lit on Friday nights; after leaving a cemetery, my grandmother washed and changed clothes; when a boy was born there was a celebration on the eighth day - all the baby boys were circumcised by the grandfather. My grandfather was like a rabbi and he made the religious services, as well as he prepared the foods to be kosher.

"At the age of eleven I began researching his family roots and found that they were descended from conversos. "When I was a teenager, I spoke to a rabbi who told him the strange practices indicated a Jewish background. The strange language my grandmother spoke was Hebrew with many words in Ladino. The rabbi showed me a mezuzah. I then recognized it as the box his grandmother had hid in the Madonna's foot."

**Leader** Crypto Jews developed their community traditions to counteract the power of the Church.

\* **Josef**<sup>10</sup>



I'm a Jewish journalist in Belmonte, Portugal

**Josef:** "Jews, when entered a Christian place, we knocked three times and say "In this house I entered, but I don't believe in wood, in the priest, and in the stone."

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<sup>12</sup> © Trudi Alexy, The Mezuzah In The Madonna's Foot. See References.

**Ramon:** "I imagine they used to say it to themselves, not our loud.

**Josef:** "No, we say, we entered and we don't believe.

**Leader** Another version of this pledge mentioned elsewhere is to say this after knocking on the Church walls: "I swear and confirm that this is but wood and stone, and nobody is the Lord but thee."

\* **Administrator**<sup>13</sup> (Selma L)

I'm an administrator on the University of Arizona campus

"I recall a kid who spoke a funny Spanish. We used to kid him. One day I ran across a Ladino dictionary. I then realized that kid had been speaking Ladino. I asked myself: 'Was he a descendant of conversos from Spain?' Then I began to think about my own family and I puzzled as to why we always had a menorah in our Catholic home!"

**Mrs O**<sup>13</sup> (Rosalie S)

'Mrs. O.' in Flagstaff called the Archives to ask for some research on her family name because she said "I have a feeling I must be Jewish." Asked for a further explanation she said she was raised in a Hispanic community where "we were the only family who were intellectuals, so therefore we must have been Jewish." Pressed further, she said, "Well, we were the only family there who had books in our house therefore we must have been Jewish." She added that there was never a crucifix in their home.

\* **Ruth Ruiz Reed**<sup>13</sup> (Sandy W)

I'm a Spanish translator at the University of Arizona

"I was raised Catholic, but I recall my grandfather told me that his father used to take candles and do certain ceremonies at night in his room. He only read the Old Testament. My mother never served pork or shellfish in our home.



I brought an amulet to the Southwest Jewish Archives in New Mexico for identification. It had been passed through the women of my family for many generations but I had no idea what it was.

They told me it was a silver amulet in the shape of tablets, with the Ten Commandments inscribed in Hebrew. When they told me this, I remembered my grandfather went to a seminary in Jalisco, Mexico. The bishop there told his pupils they should live by the precepts of the Old Testament and at graduation he gave the boys only Old Testament bibles. He must have been a hidden Jew too.

**Leader**<sup>13</sup>

Another object depicting a Judaic past is this Spanish toy, used in Crypto-Jewish families. It looks like a dreidel but without the Hebrew lettering.

**Leader introduce TOPIC Traditions Associated with Passover**

**Serafina**<sup>3</sup> (Claire K)

I've been studying her family's history in Albuquerque for twenty years.

"My grandparents told me stories of our family's long and difficult journey to New Mexico, which they likened to the forty years the ancient Israelites spent in the wilderness. The search for my family's history took me all the way back to Spain, where my family lived at the time of the expulsion. Some people in my extended family want me to remain Catholic, but I beginning to connect with the Jewish community here.

\* **Rowena Rivera**<sup>8,10</sup>

**AUDIO** 

I used to be a Spanish music professor at the University of New Mexico

"In two or three notebooks found in northern New Mexico, I came across a poem or two that are almost directly Jewish prayer. The flight from Egypt, for example. Some of these same poems have been found

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<sup>13</sup> Bloom Southwest Jewish Archives, Arizona University Library. Used with permission. See <http://www.library.arizona.edu/images/swja/>

in other converso communities. Now, that kind of evidence or information is exciting and starts giving more indication about the hidden culture here in New Mexico. It may be a poem that the folksingers didn't know the history of, but it seems sacred.

(Murray called Rowena for a copy of the "Flight to Egypt" poem mentioned in the 1988 public radio program. She told him:) The notebooks were personal family possessions, a long family tradition passed from generation to generation. She wasn't allowed to copy them, merely page through the notebooks to see what was there. Couldn't say for a fact, but it seemed like a mixture of Christian and Jewish songs and poetry. Verbal art was intermingled, influence due to sharing the same peninsula. Similar to Sephardic music she found in Mexico, beautiful wedding songs. (She told Murray a story of being in Turkey, hearing Spanish spoken in a cafe; the Turkish woman, noticing her gaze, and perhaps her Hispanic appearance, began conversing with her. It was Ladino, but Rowena had virtually no trouble talking to her.)

\* **Reader3**<sup>14</sup> (Robin S)

In 1985 several Israelis visited a Portuguese village one month after Passover. The timing was intentional. The villagers don't know the Hebrew calendar, but the community has good approximations. They celebrate Passover one month later - what Jews call "Pesach Sheni" - as part of the tradition meant to fool the spies of the Inquisition.

During Passover, one family is designated the special honor of baking the *pão santo*, the holy bread. The entire community gathers in this family's house, which is thoroughly cleaned as all Jewish homes are cleaned for the holiday. The flour is put into special bowls and special prayers are said. One portion of the bread is thrown into the fire, and good luck for the year is indicated if it explodes. No Marrano works during the week of Passover.

\* **Reader4**<sup>4</sup> (Eugene R)

**AUDIO of Portuguese**



On one day, they gather for a Passover picnic in the mountains, praying and singing and dancing. Then the people go to a river, wave olive branches, and recite the "water prayers." *Aqui vem Moises com o seu galho de arvore para vencer o mar.* (There comes Moses with his raised branch to beat the sea.) They beat the surface of the river hoping it may part, as did the Red Sea. Those olive branches are kept to be used the following spring to light the oven to bake next Passover's *pão santo*.

A common feature of 17<sup>th</sup> century new-Christian Seders was reciting the Passover story while standing up or walking around in symbolic reenactment of the Exodus from Egypt. In 1642 the Mexican Inquisition was told on Passover you have to eat the Paschal lamb while standing.

In Iberia the Biblical precept was taken literally - the Passover consumption of a whole roast lamb persisted for two and a half centuries after the Expulsion.

### Leader introduce **TOPIC** **Personal Reactions**

**Leader** What were your personal reactions to discovering you were Jewish?

\* **Prospero Chaves**<sup>6</sup> (Andrew S)

"We always knew our ancestors were Spanish. But a cousin went to Spain 10 years ago, and found archives listing my family as Sephardic Jews fleeing the Inquisition. When she came back and told me what she found, I cried and cried like a baby. For the first time in my life, I knew where my blood flowed. Immediately, my heart told me she was right. I always felt that something was missing, like having a pain in your chest and you don't know why it's there. For 400 or more years, my family was deprived of their religion."

\* **Woman #1**<sup>10</sup> (Val D)

I'm a Catholic living in Albuquerque

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<sup>14</sup> "Passover with the Anussim" Translated by Renee Reinharz. See <http://www.geocities.com/Eureka/1514/passover.html>

"Once the issue of my Jewish roots was raised, I was forced to look into it, and I never realized that the Catholic Church had been a part of the Inquisition. It was like, how could I be part of a church that would do something like that. At the time I faced a lot of things like my identity, spiritual roots, fears I had known most of my life. I believe within each of us, we have not only our own lived experience, but also a part of those that went before us. It was like I was experiencing the pain they must have felt.

\* **Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup> (Barb S)

"I was raised Catholic and still sing in the church choir, but I'm exploring my Jewish heritage. As far as I'm concerned we're already Jewish. It's simply a matter of whether a person wants to incorporate that into his life or not. I'm enraged by what I've learned. The fact that my ancestors were raped of their religion is something that I'd like to correct."

\* **Gloria Trujillo**<sup>10</sup> (Elisa E)

"I was researching my genealogy in the New Mexico State Archives, when I met Stanley Hordes tracing the same families....

"My background is in my thoughts a lot, it's such an important part of your entire being. We wanted to find the truth, then I can put one foot in front of the other, I could sleep at night.

\* **Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup> (Barb S)

"I think about it a great deal. The Jewish thing is always in my mind. I'm always trying to scheme ways to find out more about it.

\* **New Mexican Writer identified as "DM"**<sup>10</sup> (Sandy W) **AUDIO** 

"Many Hispanics are doing genealogies, and they throw a couple of stones over, and here's a little Jewish moss growing. I think some either shudder away from it or accept it. And it brings some questioning into their minds.

**Randy Baca Hensel**<sup>4</sup> (Don K)

"My search continues. I am no longer a Christian. I may never be a Jew. But the good nun in her starched white wimple so very long ago pretty much had it right: I am a child of God. Perhaps, in the end, that is what really matters. Perhaps that is who--and what-- I really am. Perhaps .....

**Guillermo Lazo**<sup>4</sup> (Jim W)

"As I was discovering my Sephardic roots, there were hints but no conclusive proof - e.g. why weren't we Catholic if we were Mexican? Why were we more "international"? Why did we travel more? Why did we consider our family "cleaner" than others? Why was there such a premium put on education? It's a very deep and personal discovery. It's core feelings kind of stuff. When a Marrano starts reaching, he is letting his guard down. Fortunately, in my case, many people reached back.

\* **Marina Vaca**<sup>10</sup> (Steph G)

"In my conscience I couldn't stay a Catholic because of the way they treated the Jews. But because I was born a Catholic and we went to church every day, and a lot of my ancestors also were religious and went to church every day; it was very hard to leave the Catholic Church. My mother didn't understand, she wanted me to stay a Catholic anyway. Well why did she tell me I was Jewish, and then expect me to stay Catholic. And I think I'll get more Jewish as I go along, 'cause I'll learn more about what I'm supposed to do. So that's why I'm going to go to the Rabbi in the synagogue and see what I need to do.

\* **Woman "MM"**<sup>10</sup> (Claire K)

"I discovered our family's secret when my grandmother died. I went to my mother's house and my sister showed me this little prayer book my mother had, that belonged to my grandmother. When I first started reading it, and the word "Jew" was there; I saw my grandmother wrote "Jew, you are a Jew, we are Jews." The word Jew hit me right in the face. It was like the words were burning on my hand, and I didn't want to get burnt. I thought maybe if I hid it, no one would know. I kept saying, "No, no, I cannot be a Jew." I said "Please God, please don't let me be a Jew.

"After this discovery five years ago, my husband and I became deeply interested in Judaism. We once were devout Catholics but we now consider ourselves Jews. When we first became interested in

Judaism they talked with their friends, family and members of their church. We discussed their new religious convictions—especially the laws of Moses and the falseness of worshiping idols, statues and crosses.

**Rabbi Isaac Celnik**<sup>10</sup> (Bob D)

“During my two decades being a Rabbi in Albuquerque, I’ve seen only a handful of conversos attend temple services. Occasionally, I’ve been invited to lead prayers in their homes. I see crypto-Jews as falling into three categories: those who identify themselves as Jews; those who have one foot each in the Jewish and Catholic communities - they call me “father”; and those Catholics with some Jewish heritage.

\* **Reader5** (Val D)

Each descendant contends differently with their dual Jewish-Catholic heritage or the sudden discovery of their family’s secret history. Most chose to remain Catholic, although some hidden Jews eventually convert to Protestantism or other forms of Christianity. A few have entered the priesthood, while a very small number attend synagogues in Albuquerque or Santa Fe, and go through formal Jewish religious ceremonies. Don Padilla’s choice was clear: dual heritage requires interest in Judaism but faith in Christianity.

\* **Don Padilla**<sup>10</sup> (Marcia S)

I live and work in Albuquerque, and have traced my ancestry to hidden Jews in several branches of my family.

“Can you go back to a religious philosophy and belief your great-great-great-grandparents had? If you now have a strong religious life, you can’t easily embrace another. You can accept the fact that your family did embrace Judaism one time. But some of the big major things that they believed in, I have to deny those. How could I be a Jew after I’ve already accepted the Messiah?

\* **Priest “SC”**<sup>10</sup> (Horst S)

“There is great mental anguish in living two lives,” he says, “You can’t decide which side to live in. If you do decide to become totally Jewish, you’ll lose your friends and lose your family. And the other Jews may not accept you. The choice on either side is damned. It becomes a matter of conscience between you and God.”

\* **Alberto Omero Lopez**<sup>5</sup> (Skip T)

“My family didn’t mean to hurt me by not telling me the dreaded family secret sooner. But every time I learn something else about our Jewish past, something I’d always thought was “Mexican-American” or “Spanish,” I feel as if a rug has been pulled out from under me. With every new fact I learn, I feel I have to brace myself for a fall. It’s been a great shock. There’s resentment at not having been told the truth until I was 43 years old. Anger, because leaving the Catholic religion was a very painful experience, no less so than being forced to do so.

“I don’t have a yellow parchment or amulet that was passed down through the generations to show any historical connection. I just have oral traditions passed down from generation to generation, and the semblance of past traditions that I now realize are not “Mexican-American” nor “Spanish,” but Jewish. I feel humbled.

**Isabelle Medina Sandoval**<sup>6</sup> (Rebecca L)

An assistant professor at the College of Santa Fe.

“I was raised in what I thought was a Christian household. But a Sephardic friend urged my to explore my roots in 1990. After two years of research, I traced my roots to Toledo, Spain, and Mexico City.

“When I told my brother about my discovery, my brother just looked at me, pulled a necklace out of his shirt and said, ‘You know, I’m not surprised to hear this.’ Hanging from the necklace was a Jewish charm, which he had been wearing for years. So he knew, but couldn’t talk to me about it. We spent the rest of the night being able to speak the unspoken. I wish I could have talked about this with my mother (who died in 1985). We would have put a lot of pieces together.”

"I'm now an observant Jew, and write Spanish poetry for my emotions – here is one:

Cousin Rabbi, blood of my blood from Spain.  
Many years ago, more than 400 years ago, my family lived in the desert of Sinai  
without a temple to pray in.  
Many years ago, more than 400 years ago, my family lived in the deserts of Mexico.  
Cousin Rabbi, I need a temple in which to pray.

**Leader introduce TOPIC Family Reactions**

**Leader** What was your family's reaction to the news?

\* **Orfa Salina**<sup>6</sup> (Steph G)

"When I found out after months of research, a lot of things in my life came together. It made sense. I talked with my mother, who's a born-again Christian; both she and an aunt became defensive, as they let me in on the family secret. When I found out that they knew we were Jewish, they wanted me to drop it."

\* **Stanley Hordes**<sup>10</sup> (Eugene R)

**AUDIO** 

"Everywhere when I've lectured about this phenomenon, always the same pattern would emerge; after the talk, after the questions and answers, one or two people would hang around the corner the room we're in and then would come up to me afterwards and nod their head and say "Yeah, everything you say is true. And I am part of this family. And I am very reluctant to talk about this. If my family knew that I was here saying this they would be very angry with me."

\* **Randy Baca Hensel**<sup>4</sup> (Don K)

"In my own family, my son states proudly--but rudely, "Thank God, Jesus is my Savior!" while my daughter gives me a dreidel for Christmas. I love them both. I love my dreidel.

**Gilvanci ben Shmuel Portillo**<sup>12</sup> (Mia K)

"In 1990, I gathered my family and confronted them with the results of my research. They confirmed that we were Jews, but out of fear of persecution had hidden their identity.

**Daniel Yocum**<sup>2</sup> (Bob D)

"Now I know why my grandma got mad at my grandpa – I later found out he was making a menorah. My grandma used to call him a 'Judio;' she'd say 'leave the ways of the old men alone.' When he made the menorah she got really mad and made him keep it in the garage."

**Max Valerio**<sup>4</sup> (Rhoda H)

I'm a converso who was always puzzled why my name was more Italian than Spanish

"One cousin remembered her father covering mirrors when people died and turning pictures to the wall. A great-uncle who sent a card with a Star of David on it, and stories of secret prayer rooms. My uncle once told a cousin, "Don't worry about going to church, just do good deeds." When I talked to my cousins about it, they'd say "They knew, they knew! Why didn't they tell us?"

I confronted my parents. 'I found some of our family names on a website for Sephardic Jews... Maybe we have some Sephardic Jews in our background.' My mother and father looked down after I said this, they both looked struck by a sudden shock. Their faces had the appearance of sudden fear.

\* **Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup> (Barb S)

"My mother refuses to discuss it, and my conversion will tear the family apart. She says we are Catholic and we should leave the rest alone. But my father has always disagreed. Between them, it is a constant argument."

\* **Shulamith Halevy**<sup>11</sup> (Robin S)

"Religion is a centerpiece of social and cultural relations in the Latino Catholic community, and the risk of ostracism from friends and family too great for most people to willingly leak their ties to Judaism. It may not be that the Inquisition is going to come burn them at the stake, but they'll lose their friends all right. As an example, **Ariel**, why don't you tell your story."

\* **Ariel Zamarripa**<sup>11</sup> (Martin E)

I'm a Hispanic in Chicago

"My parents fervently denied the tie to Judaism, but my aunts affirmed the validity of my inklings. When I was a teenager, I decided to "return" to Judaism and formally converted. I was shunned by many of my friends, even by some members of my own family;

"My parents told me when I converted, "there's nothing wrong with being Jewish, you just don't have to tell anyone about it." In spite of the social consequences, I decided it was important and worth the effort.

### Leader introduce **TOPIC**    **The Culture Of Secrecy**

**Reader6**<sup>10</sup> (Rosalie S)

Most of the people interviewed for a New Mexico radio program didn't want their names used, some would only talk off the record. Others would at first agree to be interviewed, only to back out later.

\* **Woman #1**<sup>10</sup> (Val D)

"It's important to recognize anonymity is part of the culture of hidden Jews. To miss that is a grave mistake. People attempting to collect information about conversos have been mystified that so few people want to give out information. To me it is self-evident if you have lived in a particular way secretly and if you've done that in order to maintain your relationship as you see it with God, secrecy itself becomes part of your tradition."

\* **A Morrano**<sup>15</sup> (Pat D)

"People keep asking - why we stayed hidden, today, why Marranos choose to remain invisible as secret Jews. After all, we don't have to worry about the Inquisition hunting us now, do we? They don't understand that Marranos never feel it is safe to come out. Those Marranos who fled to Holland during the Inquisition, in the early 1500's, stayed hidden there for four hundred years. In 1920 most of them finally decided it was safe to come out openly as Jews. Twenty years later nearly all were killed in the Holocaust."

**Rabbi Cukierkorn**<sup>1</sup> (Murray H)

"I came away from a visit in Belmonte with the feeling it would be extremely difficult for any outsider to completely understand their beliefs and practices. I wondered why so many members of the community were reluctant to tell me that they were "Judeus," to discuss their ancestors, or the origins of their rituals. To my surprise my closest friend there said many people were afraid of me. From the media they knew that there were Nazis outside of Brazil. They also knew that Nazis hated Jews and in the past had killed Jews. When an outsider, who spoke Portuguese with a different accent, came and started asking a lot of questions about Jews, what were they to think? Many thought I might be a Nazi looking to persecute them.

**Leader** However, the recent publicity seems to be driving away some of the culture of secrecy.

**Stanley Hordes**<sup>10</sup> (Eugene R)

"Rather than send people back into the shadows, it has created a climate of acceptability. If they are reading about it in state-wide magazines, people are sitting back and saying, well if it's being discussed, then maybe we can talk about it now. People who would not give me the time of day four years ago, are now starting to feel like it's okay to discuss it; that has surprised me greatly.

**Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup>

"Telling someone outside the family your grandmother told you we're Israelites, that would not have been done. Now these things are coming out; people no longer feel if they tell someone that they will be ostracized by their family or by their community or by their culture.

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<sup>15</sup> "The Secret Jews" by Beth Randall. Used with permission.  
See [www.mcs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/Illum\\_html/Secret.html](http://www.mcs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/Illum_html/Secret.html)



\* **Roman Salas**<sup>10</sup> (Barb S)

"I visited the Belmonte community in Portugal. It was really interesting seeing these Iberian-looking people not only say they have some Jewish background, but actually consider themselves Jewish and were openly practicing Judaism. From the resemblance, they could have been my aunts and uncles! It made me feel this dichotomy I had been living for a long time wasn't as large as I thought it was. My mind was having problems merging the idea I am both Jewish and Hispanic. These people who are very Portuguese, are totally part of the culture, and are just as Jewish as anyone in Israel. It was shocking, but it was a good kind of shock. It gives me hope for my home community.



**Leader introduce TOPIC Fear Of Discrimination**

\* **Michael Granados**<sup>11</sup> (Ken A)

I'm a Mexican Jew

"The problem is Latinos in the US already feel they are objects of discrimination. Adding a Jewish element to their identity only makes that marginalization worse. One of my friends is a lawyer who serves primarily Latino clients. He's so convinced he would lose business if his Judaism were revealed that he prefers I not discuss the subject with him. He said "Don't even tell anyone I exist."

\* **New Mexican Writer "DM"**<sup>10</sup> (Sandy W)

"The ones that know they have Jewish background, they'll quickly end the conversation. When I brought up the issue, it greatly upset one old gentleman. "We've already got enough biases and prejudices against us; adding Jewish on top of that may be condemning us to even more problems."

**Leader introduce TOPIC (Jewish) Community Reactions**

**Man #2**<sup>10</sup> (Eugene R)

"My generation is beginning to understand that we are of Jewish descent and we no longer want to hold it inside us, but rather we'd like for our Jewish brothers to acknowledge us; not only to acknowledge us, but to embrace us, to bring us in.

\* **Priest "SC"**<sup>10</sup> (Horst S)

"We don't want to be absorbed. We don't fit with this culture they label American Jewish, which is mostly Yiddish-based, and we don't exist with this Spanish culture also over here. We're neither, we're in a twilight zone.

**Man #2**<sup>10</sup> (Eugene R)

"I suspect at some point there may be a Sephardic synagogue, Hispanic Jews with their own synagogue. It's already being discussed right now by some close friends."

**Leader**<sup>6</sup> In many communities the orthodox reject the Crypto Jews, because they can't prove a matrilineal descent to someone "authentically" Jewish. They want the hidden Jews to convert. Some do, while others feel it's unnecessary.

Some historians believe that ancestors of today's crypto-Jews belonged to small Church of God (Seventh Day) congregations that clung to Old Testament-style rituals. The Church of God also celebrated the Sabbath on Saturdays and ignored Christmas and Easter in favor of its own versions of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Passover.

\* **Rabbi Cukierkorn**<sup>1</sup> (Murray H)

"In 1990 the Brazilian orthodox establishment sent a Rabbi to Natal to check out the community. The Rabbi asked one of the few Jews in the city whether the Marranos could meet the standard Orthodox test, tracing their maternal line back 500 years to unquestioned Jews. This man said they couldn't, so the Rabbi decided they were of no interest. He even refused to speak to Marranos who came to plead their case.

"The reasons for the Orthodox refusal to accept Marranos in Brazil, let alone welcome or encourage them, are complex. Halacha plays a role, but Russians and other Jews whose ancestry is problematic, face no such barriers. It may be a fear of being overwhelmed. The Brazilian Jewish community has only 175,000 members. Scholars estimate about 10% of the Brazilians population, or 1,500,000, are of

Marrano descent. Even if a small percentage returns to Judaism, they would dominate the local Jewish community.

**Reader7<sup>10</sup>** (Jim W)

In Portugal, Belmonte is now at a crossroads. Many of the elders watch unhappily as their kids move away from community traditions, which were an amalgam of Catholic and Jewish traditions. The young people claim that what's been going on there wasn't really Judaism – now, finally, they say, they can practice the real thing, following their new Orthodox Rabbi.

\* **Priest “SC”<sup>10</sup>** (Horst S)

“Many of us in America are so conflicted we'd rather ignore it, let it die out. But, I want something to remain, OK? If once we were a bright fire and there's ashes left, I want somebody to know that one time there used to be a little campfire here, and that campfire guided our people for hundreds of years. And you can still see some ashes, and you know that they were there.”

### Leader introduce **TOPIC** Summary <sup>3,6</sup>

One writer says: Most historians think most cases are authentic, rather than being influenced by the Church of God. Even if some cases are linked to fundamentalist Christians rather than Judaism, what is true is many people have embraced Judaism as a result of their research into their families' roots. And many of them say their new Jewish faith has made life seem more complete.

We honor and respect their courage, and wish the modern-day crypto Jews spiritual growth and successful integration into whatever accommodation they choose with their heritage.

**Leader introduce Images<sup>4,10</sup>**



- Street marker in Madrid, memorializing the Inquisition
- Plaque in Segovia, showing where the Jewish quarter was
- Q Isabella
- Play Mel Brooks “The Inquisition” from History of the World, Part 1
- Cycle back to Southwest images



### **HAGGADAH – Encourage people to transform wording to Inquisition/Spain/Marranos**

**Belmonte, Portuguese blessings:**<sup>14,16</sup>



**MATZAH:** She lifted up the small box in right hand, covered left eye with her hand and said another blessing: *“Abençoado seja, Adonai, Nosso Senhor, quando comemos o Matzah que nossos ancestrais comeram quando fugiram do Egito. Mesmo que nos tenhamos conseguido ter esse matzah hoje, devemos nos sentir privilegiados de poder assa-lo amanhã e come-lo durante nosso santificado feriado.”* “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, on the eating of the matzoth that our forefathers ate as they exited Egypt. Even as we have attained the merit of seeing this matzah today, so should we have the privilege of baking it tomorrow and eating it during the holy holiday.”

**MAROR:** She raised the bitter herbs and pronounced a blessing:



*“Abençoado seja, Adonai, Nosso Senhor, que nos santificou com seus mandamentos e nos ensinou a comer especiarias amargas.”* “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, who has sanctified us with Your holy commandments who commanded us to eat the bitter herbs” (Her blessing was said in their native tongue, as are all their prayers - only the word Lord is said in Hebrew - Adonai).

**NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM:**



*Esse ano aqui, ano que vem, na Terra Prometida.* This year here, next year in the Promised Land.

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<sup>16</sup> Portuguese translations c/o Chaim Litewski, NY, NY

## Leader

(Before meal served, leader encouraged people to discuss what we felt the Jewish community's response should be – should Crypto Jews be required to convert, accept them as they are, encourage additional exploration of Judaic roots, etc.)

At the end of the evening, people were still talking about some of the responses to the “leave or stay” question.

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### Sites (in no particular order)

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[www.library.arizona.edu/images/swja/sjhart.htm](http://www.library.arizona.edu/images/swja/sjhart.htm)

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[www.geocities.com/Eureka/1514/passover.html](http://www.geocities.com/Eureka/1514/passover.html)

[nanrubin.com/html/hjaudio.html](http://nanrubin.com/html/hjaudio.html) (audio and some images)

[nanrubin.com/html/melton.html](http://nanrubin.com/html/melton.html)

[www.mcs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/illum\\_html/Secret.html](http://www.mcs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/illum_html/Secret.html)

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News group: [soc.culture.jewish](mailto:soc.culture.jewish), [soc.culture.latin-america](mailto:soc.culture.latin-america); Subject: Re-discovering Jewish Heritage; Date: 13 May 91; Poster: Seth.R.Rosenthal, quoting article by Nancy Plevin

### Radio Program

The Hidden Jews of New Mexico – transcript available from N. Rubin, [nanrubin.com/html/transcript.html](http://nanrubin.com/html/transcript.html), 212-463-7411 or [NanRubin@aol.com](mailto:NanRubin@aol.com).

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## ADDITIONAL READINGS

Unused in original seder. Use to augment or replace the readings above.

A representative of Kulanu says:<sup>1</sup>

“Some organizations like Kulanu extend Marranos a warm welcome back into the Jewish people. We let them know that not everyone regards them with suspicion, cynicism and hostility. If they want to rejoin us, we let them know that we need them. We truly regard them as our long lost brothers and sisters. We treat them accordingly and they know it.

A Spanish Catholic asks:<sup>15</sup>

"Who, other than Spaniards and their descendants, have names like Jesús, Cruz, or Jesús María? Not the Italians, not the French. Look at Spanish sacred art. Nowhere are crucifixes bigger, bloodier, more explicit than in Spain. They wanted to show how '*muy Católicos*' they were. Many of those who became such 'super-Catholics' were Marranos who put off the Church's spies by asking, 'Would I name my son Jesús if I were not the most Catholic of Catholics?'"

Stanley Hordes<sup>10</sup>

We're a very fragile people just generally in our history with people just not passing on traditions. And if we don't find out about these sorts of things from the *viejitos*, the old folks, in Northern New Mexico today, then we're just going to lose this forever.

From NM radio report <sup>10</sup>

Many hidden Jews are grappling with their dual Catholic and Jewish heritage, and with living openly after 500 years of secrecy and fear.

### **Woman #1**<sup>10</sup>

“Facing the fact that I may be Catholic not because my chose to be but because they were forced to become Catholic made me face the idea would I choose to be a Catholic today if it were just up to me. I decided since I did have the experience of Jesus Christ that Christianity was where it was for me, but also it helped me to feel very connected to the Jewish people. I just feel it was just a continuation for me.

### **Priest “SC”**<sup>10</sup>

Studied in a Catholic seminary, became deeply interested in and practiced Judaism, and finally joined the Russian Orthodox church, which he says involves some aspects of both traditions.

“Since it was dangerous for anyone even to suspect a family of being Jews, children weren’t let in on the secret until their parents felt they could be trusted.

### **Woman “MM”**<sup>10</sup>

“Along with a few friends, my husband and I created a hybrid religion which blends elements of Judaism with the Catholic credo which is familiar to us. We’ve decorated the walls of our home with biblical phrases in Spanish, English and Hebrew.

### **Man #1**<sup>10</sup>

I only recently discovered my heritage. I’ve asked to remain anonymous and will meet reporters only in a public place.

“I remember most clearly my mother would cover our heads when we prayed, and this was something unusual because I don’t remember that anyone else would do that. I suspect it was like the tallis when you worship in synagogue.

### **Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup>

“I take visitors to see a particular headstone in Santa Fe, from a plot of a family that still carries the remnants of Jewish traditions. It has a dark obelisk, and it appears to be covered with some kind of shawl. The shawl has four fringes, one on each corner; it’s called a tallis. The individual buried here was a wealthy Albuquerque businessman who died in 1912. We know he visited New York City and signed the register of the Sephardic synagogue there.

### **Ramon Salas**<sup>10</sup>

“We already had the oldest history in the United States, but it’s a combination of European and Native American. Our European ancestors have been here since 1598. Our Native American ancestors since 20,000 or even 30,000 years before that. But we’re now finding out that European piece, which has been here for fifteen generations, has another element to it which ties us to a tradition that is also several thousand years old.

### **Orlando Romero**<sup>10</sup>

head librarian, New Mexico State Historical Library

“It seems there was an explicit desire of the 1940s generation to let the secret die.

“World War II caused a crisis. It took my grandfather to pass it on to me, not the generation of the World War II people. Hispanos who fought in World War II, they came back, had whole different notions of what your house should look like, we had the Anglos who came to New Mexico to build the bomb, the establishment of Los Alamos – those people for that period did not pass on a great deal of the traditions to their children, our generation. We had to find that out from our grandfathers and our great-grandfathers.

### **Mona Hernandez<sup>10</sup>**

Mona Hernandez and her sister Gloria Trujillo were researching their own genealogy in the State Archives, when they met Stanley Hordes tracing the same families.

“My reaction was shock because we had always believed the family with Catholic. You think, wait a minute, these people are Catholic, how could they possibly be Jewish, this doesn’t make sense. But at the same time you look at marriage records and baptismal records, and it’s like the records say one thing, but there were just a lot of inconsistencies. Now there seems to be this explanation.

### **Gloria Trujillo<sup>10</sup>**

“We’ve been brought up to believe one thing but in reality you’re really something else, and it does really matter because it sheds a whole new light on how we are today, of the things that have gone in the past. So we want to know the truth, so we can understand.

### **Stanley Hordes<sup>10</sup>**

“No one phenomenon proves anything. Just because someone doesn’t eat pork doesn’t necessarily make them Jewish. Just because there is circumcision in a family doesn’t necessarily mean anything. Just because someone has a particular name. But you begin to see families that observe Jewish dietary laws, and there’s a Sabbath observance, and there is ritual male circumcision, and you have Old Testament names in the family like Isaac, Abraham, Jacob, Rebecca, Leah, Ruth, Esther. When you see these all in common, it points to strong indications; those are the families we are looking at much more closely in our historical research.

### **Josef<sup>10</sup>**

Jewish journalist in Belmonte, Portugal



Josef: When we entered a Christian place, we knocked three times and say “In this house I entered, but I don’t believe in wood, in the priest, and in stone.”

(Another version mentioned elsewhere is “I swear and confirm that this is but wood and stone, and nobody is the Lord but thee.”)

Ramon: I imagine they used to say it to themselves, not our loud.

Josef: No, we say, we entered and we don’t believe.

Ramon: “How do the Christians treat the Jews here?”

Josef: “Even now we have some problems with the priest.

Ramon: “How does he react to the situation?”

Josef: “The priest against, against. He wrote a lot of articles, letters against the Jewish families in the local Christian papers. The priest wants the Jews in Belmonte to become Christians. He wants to destroy a way of life.

### **Josef<sup>10</sup>**

“The Belmonte community is orthodox, they keep kosher. The Rabbi doesn’t like them to go out on shabbat, and they don’t. Most modern practicing Jews might look at these people and marvel at how dedicated and pious they were. They are very orthodox, they take the law seriously, and they practiced it. they did it because it was so important to their families for so long; when they got the opportunity to practice openly, they availed themselves of it completely.

### **Josef<sup>10</sup>**

“When Ramon and others ran into some friends of Josef’s. It’s Friday afternoon, and they’re out shopping for their sabbath dinner. The couple bid us Shabbat Shalom. Seeing this Portuguese couple being so openly Jewish was a surprise to Ramon:

### **Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn<sup>1</sup>**

“I was told they also have an alternative house of worship besides the local church. The place, called "snoga," was said to be a prayer hall and pilgrimage place, up in the mountains. The word sounds like it came from the Portuguese word "sinagoga." They go there only during certain times of the year, for vigils that can last for an entire day.

"They have one other custom that finds no Christian parallel. While a parent is blessing a child, they lay their hands on the child's head or shoulders. This resembles the same Jewish practice.

### **Seth Kunin<sup>3</sup>**

"Some researchers question whether or not Crypto-Jews are authentically or even historically Jewish. Crypto-Jewish practices, they say, bear little or no resemblance to those practiced in Spain or Portugal; therefore, there is no provable connection. Other doubters insist that Crypto-Judaism could not have been maintained Judaism in secrecy and isolation for so many centuries. Today's practices, they say, may resemble Jewish rituals, but they bear no relationship to the real thing. The Crypto-Jews are claiming a Jewish identity to which they are not entitled. Those who accept the authenticity of Crypto-Jews argue that it is unrealistic to expect them to have preserved Jewish practices in a pure form. Those folks say several hundred years of persecution has removed three key elements in maintaining cultural continuity: connection with the wider Jewish community, the literary tradition of Judaism, and organized worship. It isn't surprising that Jewish practice and identity, relying on orally transmitted memory and knowledge, became idiosyncratic.

"Some people may not have an actual historical link to the Sephardic Jews, and they chose to be Jewish for their own spiritual reasons. But a large body of evidence (artifacts, Inquisition documents, and anecdotal accounts) suggests Crypto-Jews lived in New Mexico for the past five hundred years. In many respects, their experience reflects an extreme form of Diaspora Jewish life that has existed since antiquity. Like all Jewish communities, it has had to respond to persecution while adapting to the surrounding culture. Crypto-Jews have been forced to hide their identity, but they contribute to our Jewish inheritance.

### **Nancy San Martin<sup>6</sup>**

"Some historians believe that ancestors of today's crypto-Jews belonged to small Church of God (Seventh Day) congregations that clung to Old Testament-style rituals. The Church of God, like traditional Judaism, celebrated the Sabbath on Saturdays and ignored Christmas and Easter in favor of its own versions of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Passover.

"Most believe the majority of the cases are authentic. Even if some cases can be linked to the fundamentalist Christian faith rather than Judaism, what cannot be disputed is that many people have embraced Judaism as a result of their research into their families' roots. And many of them say that their new Jewish faith has made life seem more complete.

"If you have poverty, discrimination and then don't know who you are, it can be very difficult. Some people have always had doubts that they were Catholic, but they resolve it by not thinking about it. One gentleman in his nineties, it upset him a great deal. 'We've got enough biases and prejudices against us,' he said, 'Adding Jewish on top of that might be maybe condemning our race to even more problems.' He quickly ended the conversation."

Growing up in a tightly knit community, Orfa said she always felt there was a "them" and an "us." There was an unwritten rule not to associate with outsiders. Everyone she knew belonged to the same church, a Baptist congregation run a lot like a synagogue.

Though it's still a sensitive topic for her family, Orfa says her newfound Jewish faith has filled a void. She believes she has a "Jewish soul." "For me, it's brought closure," she said. "It's been a fascinating journey."

### **Leader introduce TOPIC History of the Basque Jews Joaquin Carlos Caragueguie<sup>4</sup>**

A securities attorney in his mid-50s, in Basque area.  
trad How hidden, current denial of any Jews Reax of community (BASQUE)

Myrna Frommer writes of meeting Joaquin, who tells her he is Jewish during a visit to the Basque country. This comes as a surprise. She'd talked to the Public Relations director of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, a fierce Basque patriot. She lost no time telling us the Basque country is the cultural capital of Spain, the Basque people are more educated than the rest of the population, etc. She was equally

certain they have no Jewish history or contemporary presence. Her statement was confirmed by the owner of a dress shop in the Casco Viejo, the old town. His grandmother had opened the shop at the beginning of the century and as far as he knew, there were never any Jews in Bilbao or the rest of the Basque country.

"He was lying," Caragueguie said. "That man is old Spain. There have been Jews in the Basque country all along. They never achieved the prominence Jews enjoyed in other parts of medieval Spain, but they also suffered little direct anti-Semitism. The region was a refuge, a place the Inquisition never reached.

"Right now, there are about 10,000 Jews. They might not publicize the fact, but they know who they are. Plain-door synagogues have always been around, but you have to know where they are. No one is going to tell you. The Basque people are intensely Catholic but they didn't agree with the Inquisition. There is a Basque saying: 'We know who the Jews are because we used to be Jews.' They know Christianity comes from Judaism."

"My main memory of being Jewish was that it was something to be hidden. Still everyone knew. We went to the public schools, which were taught by the Jesuits. In order to register, you needed a certificate of baptism, and of course we didn't have one. That was the tip-off that we were Jewish. But here in the Basque country, they did nothing about it. The attitude was 'Okay, move on.'

#### **Joaquin Carlos Caragueguie<sup>4</sup>**

"My grandfather saw to it that my brother and I were circumcised even though he and my father had to take us to Endorra to find a doctor to do it. He raised us to know that the Old Testament was our Bible and every so often had a traveling rabbi come around to instruct us in Jewish laws and get a free meal."

"My Jewish connections were limited. We'd do Seders. If someone died, burial was immediate and we covered the mirrors. I my grandfather was buried in his tallit, which we knew was sacred. But that was it. I didn't know kosher food existed until I saw New York."

"I grew up in the Basque country. I want to tell you an interesting story about how one community honored the Jews that used to live there. Vitoria-Gasteiz is the capital of the Basque country. It had a thriving Jewish community of merchants, traders, craftsmen and doctors up to the expulsion of 1492. Their well-preserved homes stand along Calle Juderia. In the city center is a park called the Parque de Judimendi. Prior 1492, it was the town's Jewish cemetery. When they left in 1492, the Jews extracted a promise from city leaders that their sacred burial ground would not be violated. The tombstones deteriorated and disappeared over the centuries, but the land was kept intact. All proposals for construction on the site, from houses to markets to stables to parking lots, were met with the same response: It is forbidden.

Four hundred and fifty years later, a delegation of descendants of the Vitoria-Gasteiz exiles came to the city and presented officials with a formal release from the centuries-old vow. But their offer was declined. City officials commemorated the place's history in perpetuity – in the park's center is a tall monument inscribed with a Star of David that informs everyone of the special nature of the place.

#### **Guillermo Lazo<sup>4</sup>**

"Discovering Marrano ancestry is like going up into an attic and sifting through an old family trunk and finding out that you were adopted. It is something that changes how you see yourself, your self-image.

"Once a friend told me of the 'crypto' Jews of New Mexico. He talked about the gravestones and other evidence that had been found. He ended it with, "Just think, the Latinos are the only people who want to be Jews".

#### **Guillermo Lazo<sup>4</sup>**

"After talking to a Rabbi, I felt a pull from inside me to embrace Torah. My father and brothers and sisters accepted my decision. I have an older sister who confided that some of our people were Jews. Is this a pattern among Latinos who find Jewish ancestry? It is not spoken of; it is avoided; but when the

hints and stories and evidence mount up, then it is accepted; sometimes grudgingly, but eventually accepted.

### **Gilvanci ben Shmuel Portillo<sup>12</sup>**

Gilvanci found a CD of Sephardic music that contained a song that he had learned from his mother. He cried when he heard it.

### **Carlos Velez-Ibanez/Melissa Amado<sup>13</sup>**

I'm a University of Arizona anthropologist and former altar boy and Catholic school graduate

Melissa Amado interviewed a professor at the Univ of Ariz: "When I arrived, the professor said that he could not speak to me about his family history in public and lead me to another office where his secretary could not hear his story. Before the professor could discuss his family history, he had to make sure the door was securely closed. The professor's sense of remaining hidden and feeling uncomfortable occurred throughout the interview as in a very low voice he would discuss his family's "...deep dark secret..." of being of a Jewish heritage. The professor shared the following experience of discovery: "My mother said it's been a deep dark secret among my great-grandmother's family, that the secret of being Jewish was passed down through the women... and since my sister had passed away, my mother thought it was her responsibility to let me know..." "Somos Judios [We're Jews]," she said. "I was absolutely chilled by it. I was stunned to learn that we were Jews, but then I remembered that in our house my mother never served pork or shell fish."

### **Young man<sup>13</sup>**

A young man from a small, ingrained community in New Mexico, described the different feelings within families. He told interviewers he remembered seeing his grandfather carve menorahs and place them in the window of their house at Chanukah. "My grandmother," he said, "would take them out quickly and insist we have a Christmas tree." He also remembered that in the spring his grandfather would hang a lamb, cut the jugular vein according to Jewish tradition and let the blood run into the ground. "He would cover the blood with soil," the young man said, "but my grandmother would get angry because she wanted the blood to make sausage. I also remember my grandfather going to a secret house to pray. I think he prayed there in Hebrew, although we were raised Catholic."

### **Dentist<sup>13</sup>**

A dentist in Denver joined a Jewish congregation in Denver, saying he did not have to convert because although his father was a church-going Catholic, his mother did not want him to go to church and told him repeatedly that she was Jewish and therefore he was as well. "My mother was the clever one in our family," he recounted. "She was the business woman and had a store in the Hispanic area of northeast Denver. She always closed the store on Yom Kippur, even though our Catholic friends sneered at us. I am sure we are descendants of Jews who fled the Inquisition in Spain." His family name is one called by the Inquisition many times.

### **Max Valerio<sup>4</sup>**

A converso that was always puzzled why his name was more Italian than Spanish

When I began researching our background, I confronted my parents. 'I found some of our family names on a website for Sephardic Jews... Maybe we have some Sephardic Jews in our background.' My mother and father looked down after I said this, they both looked struck by a sudden shock. Their faces had the appearance of a sudden fear. I continued to bring them back to a state of calm, "Well, I found Romero but not Valerio. But I did find 'Valero'." My father looked up cautiously and slowly said, "Valero could be a variation." "There are supposed to have been Jews who practiced Judaism in secret, Dad." "Yes, there were Jews in Taos who practiced in secret." He said this slowly.

"Later I tracked down second cousins who were asking the same question "What are we?" When I told them we could be of Jewish ancestry, they were surprised and excited, although not entirely convinced. We got together, everyone was talking, trying to figure out the puzzle of who we were. One cousin remembered her father, covering mirrors when people died, and turning pictures to the wall. There is a tale of a great-uncle who sent a card with a Star of David on it, and stories of secret prayer rooms. Their father once told one of my cousins, "Don't worry about going to church, just do good deeds." Every now



and then, one of my them would exclaim “They knew, they knew, why didn't they tell us?” Then another would counter, “But we were Catholics!”

**Everardo Treviño Garza<sup>4</sup>**

“It has been a continuous family tradition to live at the border, a visible strategic practice of Crypto Judaic families since about the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17th centuries.

**Shulamith Halevy<sup>11</sup>**

“Their families avoid pork and don't have milk and meat in the same meal. The rationale behind the dietary restrictions, they said was health related, yet they now see the link to Jewish dietary practices is undeniable. Add to that circumcision ceremonies, dates of fasting and methods of cleaning that coincide with Jewish law, or insistence on having a Jewish Star of David on family tombstones.

**Leader introduce TOPIC**

**Passover Traditions**

The length of the holiday varied even within a single new-Christian community – around Coimbra, Portugal in the 1590s, Passover was celebrated for four or five through seven or eight days, up to ten days.