



Chavrusa Profile

Naomi Smith

LOCATION

Scarborough, ON, Canada

OCCUPATION

Retired School Principal

Leah Gansburg

LOCATION

Crown Heights, NY

OCCUPATION

Shadchan, Homemaker



Recently on the JNet map:

Washingtonville, NY
Silver Spring, MD
London, UK
Las Vegas, NV
Chevy Chase, MD

Enhance YOUR life
with a JNet chavrusa.

Sign up now at jnet.org

A Click, A Connection, and a Journey of Rediscovery and Growth

In the quiet, tree-lined suburbs of Scarborough, Toronto, I find myself living a remarkable story of Jewish rediscovery. As a retired principal with a wealth of educational experience, I've embarked on an extraordinary journey of reconnection that began with a simple click on a Facebook group and has blossomed into a profound exploration of my Jewish heritage.

I was born in Ottawa and spending a few years of my early childhood in Africa, I grew up on the periphery of Jewish life. Hebrew school was a childhood obligation, and I eagerly escaped at age 12, feeling disconnected from my Jewish roots. I would tell people I was 'born Jewish' but I didn't feel Jewish.

My childhood Jewish memories are few. When we were in Ottawa, we celebrated my brother's Bar Mitzvah at a local Jewish nursing home and adopted an older Jewish gentleman who had no family, he was completely alone.

I learned just from observing him. He would don his tefillin and pray, and when he came over for Chanukah, my mom would use different dishes, and he would give us Chanukah gelt. When we eventually moved, he would take the train and stay with us for three or four days at a time. My mom would go to the Jewish grocery store, buy some kosher food, and he would bring his own dishes.

For Pesach, we would buy matzah and have a seder.

The turning point really came through an unexpected medium: social media. Joining various Jewish Facebook groups, I began to explore my Jewish background with newfound curiosity. Local community resources and a nearby Chabad center also began to spark my interest.

I attended the Purim party at Chabad of Durham, my first significant Jewish community event in over four decades.

The real transformation truly began around six months ago, when I found out about JNet almost by accident. Not wanting to feel pressured to do anything, just to learn at my own pace, without fear of being embarrassed to ask questions, I reached out. I was honest and vulnerable,

sharing exactly what my upbringing was, and that I didn't associate personally with my culture and religion.

A couple of weeks later, JNet responded. Leah from Crown Heights had chosen to learn with me.

Leah and I connected instantaneously. Despite coming from vastly different worlds, we formed an immediate and profound bond. Initially, Leah arrived prepared with various learning materials for me to choose from. I felt like a fish out of water. I simply wanted to discuss and ask questions and Leah happily agreed.

Our weekly virtual meetings often extended from planned one-hour sessions to marathon two-and-a-half-hour conversations, and I would spend the week collecting questions to ask Leah. I sought to understand the "why" behind traditions, not just to follow rules. My inquiries ranged from the deeply philosophical to the charmingly practical, exploring everything from the laws of kashrus to the intricacies of living a Jewish life.

Daily learning became a ritual. Leah recommended a Tanya WhatsApp chat that provided short, digestible lessons, which I eagerly consumed each morning.

A pivotal moment came this past Purim, when I attended the Purim party at Chabad of Durham, my first significant Jewish community event in over four decades. Despite initial nervousness, I

found myself surrounded by warmth and acceptance, participating in traditions like making noise when Haman's name was mentioned.

It's been a huge learning curve for me since I started. But it's more than that, I finally have a real connection. My ultimate dream now is to spend time in Leah's community, truly immersing myself in the rich tapestry of Jewish life. I envision experiencing a family Shabbat dinner, understanding the intricate customs of Jewish life, and continuing my journey of discovery and growth.



JNet is a project of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch Suite 302 and was established with a grant from the Rohr Family Foundation.

News

Navigating the world of Jewish prayer books just got easier. A new video review offers a helpful breakdown of today's most widely used siddurim, guiding viewers through the key features that distinguish each one. It's an ideal starting point for anyone looking to make a more informed choice and strengthen their daily prayer experience.

Check out our newest Torah Unboxed video here



Accomplishments

JNet just hit an incredible milestone: 10,000 all time chavrusas matched! It's amazing to see how many meaningful connections and hours of Torah this has created. We're so grateful to everyone who's made this possible, and we're just getting started. With your support, we're excited to keep growing, reaching more Jews around the world, and bringing even more light through learning.



Are YOU interested in learning or volunteering?

Visit us at **JNet.org** or call, text or whatsapp us at **(347) 770-5638** to find out how you can get involved