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Our Family Experiences

Going Kosher²⁰¹⁴

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I was born into a very typical American Southern Protestant family in the 1950s in the town of Annapolis, Maryland. My parents, Bill and Mary Ruth, were both from the Deep South (Alabama and Georgia, respectively), where food has always been an important part of daily living and family gatherings. I grew up to love this Southern cuisine from my childhood that always seemed to include pork or pork drippings in it!

We ate pork chops, pork loins, ham steaks, ham hocks, pork sausage links, pork sausage patties, pork rolls, and, of course, pork bacon. We had green beans with bacon drippings (also known as bacon grease), fried chicken with bacon drippings, fried corn with bacon drippings, corn bread with bacon drippings—just about everything my mother or grandmother cooked was flavored with bacon drippings!

Since I was born in Annapolis, on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, I was also raised to eat and appreciate the finer fare of shellfish. We feasted on Maryland steamed crabs, boiled crabs, crab cakes, soft-shelled crabs, crab gumbo, crab dip and crab soup. We delighted in boiled shrimp, fried shrimp, shrimp cocktail, shrimp gumbo, shrimp scampi and barbequed shrimp. We ate steamed clams, fried clams, clam chowder and clam dip. We had raw oysters, fried oysters, oyster stew, smoked oysters and smoked oyster dip. *I could go on and on!* When we visited my grandmother at her beach house in Gulf Shores, Alabama every summer, she made sure that every meal contained crab or shrimp. She was known for her amazing crab gumbo that everyone raved about. As a child, I thought it tasted pretty good, but she did have a lot of scary looking creatures in her gumbo pot!

However, the Southern cuisine that I was especially brought up to appreciate, and even revere, was Southern pork barbeque with all of its distinct regional barbeque sauces.

If you are Southern, it is just understood that you will not only eat pork, but you will love pork—especially barbeque. Most families will have their own special rubs and sauces that they prefer, with family recipes being passed down and perfected generation to generation. My family had its favorite restaurants we would

Messianic Kosher Helper

frequent when visiting our grandmother in Alabama. She would also bring jars of sauce from these places when she came to visit us in Annapolis. My father would smoke his own pork butt, always hoping that it would be at least close to the meat from Birmingham. We were all raised to believe that Southern pork barbeque was the quintessential food of the South! As a child, I was such a lover of all things pork, that my older brother gave me the nickname of "Porka" even though I was a very skinny little girl! Our devotion to Southern pork barbeque cuisine was never so evident as on the day of my father's funeral in 1989 in Birmingham. We ate at one of his favorite restaurants before his funeral, and at another one after his funeral, so we could have a barbeque "taste-off" in honor of our daddy before we all flew back to our homes across the country.

I went to college in Tennessee where I was able to continue to embrace my Southern roots in cuisine. There I was able to branch out into other regional taste treats that all included pork. The Tennessee barbeque was a bit different from the Alabama version my father raised us on. However, the Memphis style barbeque was also greatly appreciated by this girl named Porka. Never did I ever consider that pork was not considered an acceptable meat in the Bible!

I was married after college and moved to the Greater Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky area, where I was introduced to a great deal of German cuisine. One of Cincinnati's nicknames is actually "Porkopolis"! Brats and goetta were new pork dishes that I had never known about. Pork brats were cooked instead of hotdogs, and everyone served them. We lived in Northern Kentucky which was firmly in the Southern food region, so I felt right at home there while enjoying the new German cuisine of Cincinnati. However, in Cincinnati, I had my first taste of beef brisket barbeque. It was very good, but different from the pork version I had been raised on. Little did I know that many years later, my own son would become quite the beef brisket barbeque smoker as a Messianic Kosher Believer!

In 1992, I lost my husband, Kimball McKee, who was the father of my three children, to malignant melanoma. With his death, my life seemed to have come to an end, but my faith in the Lord and my belief that He had not forgotten me, or my children, never failed me. By God's grace, within two years of Kim's death, I was remarried to an old college boyfriend, Mark Huey, and was relocated with my three children to Dallas, Texas. However, with this move and brand new life, I would never have believed that the Lord would also have us start on a new adventure in our quest to know Him better and to walk in His ways like never before.

Becoming Messianic

In December 1994, after six months of marriage to Mark, we went to Israel on a Zola Levitt tour. By being on a tour led by Messianic Jews, we were able to see and understand places, customs and events in a unique First Century Biblical way that we had really not been introduced to in our evangelical Christian upbringing. Mark and I had amazing times with the Lord all over the Holy Land, as He led us to seek more and more of what He is doing at this time with people of faith. After an amazing two weeks in Israel, we returned to Dallas with a supernatural desire to walk like Jesus walked and to at least start to celebrate the Biblical feasts of the Lord in a Messianic way. I have to confess that we did not immediately start

seeking this direction, for it took more than nine months for us to finally attend a Messianic congregation.

During the Fall High Holidays of 1995, our family started attending a Messianic Jewish congregation in Dallas. We were immediately blessed by all the new things that we were learning; things that were not only in the Hebrew Scriptures—but also in the New Testament. To finally start being taught Scripture from an Hebraic perspective, both historically and ethnically, had amazing results within our new blended family. We were singing songs with words that came directly from the Psalms. We were taught that Yeshua (Jesus' Hebrew name) and His Second Coming will be beautifully and prophetically fulfilled at the Fall festival time during *Rosh HaShanah* (Trumpets) and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of the Lord).¹ We were taught that Yeshua's First Coming had already been prophetically fulfilled at the Spring festival time during *Pesach* (Passover) and *Shavuot* (Pentecost).² Our daughters learned to not only praise the Lord through singing Messianic songs, but to also learn to praise Him through Davidic dance to these same tunes. Every worship service was a joy to us all, as we learned more and more about the Hebraic Roots of our Christian faith, which had been washed out of traditional Christian teaching for centuries. We very much felt and believed that we were experiencing worship and teaching much like the early non-Jewish Messianic Believers were doing in the First Century, as we stood side by side with Messianic Jewish Believers as Jew and non-Jew yet one in Messiah Yeshua!

In the Spring of 1996, Mark and I started to attend the new members class. After its completion, we were able to feel more and more accepted into the Messianic fellowship. We started to learn all that we could about the Messianic walk, and what we needed to “tweak,” so we could feel that we were fitting in the best we could as a new, non-Jewish Messianic family, which had grown up in the Church and not in the Synagogue! We changed Sunday worship to *Shabbat* worship and rest. We changed Church holidays to the Biblical feasts of the Lord. And last, but not least, we changed our eating habits!

The one thing that really got us to find out how our eating needed to be changed, came when the congregational leader would remind us all to only bring “Biblically kosher” food items to meal gatherings. I knew that Jews did not eat pork, but I had no idea about anything else. So, to be careful not to offend our new Messianic Jewish friends, I began to investigate what “Biblically kosher” really meant for them. I had no idea that I would be finding out what it also would mean for me and my family!

I can remember it as though it were yesterday! I had picked up a Messianic magazine that was given freely at the congregation, which had teachings for the weekly Torah Portions, as well as other pertinent topics that were certainly new to me. One issue had a nice long article about kosher eating, so I was not only relieved, but eager to read it! I quickly found out that about seventy-five percent of the fare that I was raised with, was not considered kosher: not only all the pork, but the shellfish, too. And pork barbeque?—*totally on the naughty list*. My heartfelt desire in reading and learning about kosher eating had originally been to be sensitive to the request to only bring Biblically kosher food to any

¹ Consult the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

² Consult the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

Messianic Kosher Helper

congregational gathering. I was not prepared for the conviction that this article would have on my own heart...

Becoming Kosher

The very loving and concise Messianic article I had read, laid out verse after verse from the Torah, about what God considered food. It also laid out corresponding verses from the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) which indicated what was also considered food—and what was not! Needless to say, I had never been taught any of this growing up as a Christian. I was so completely taken aback by this article, that I even remember exclaiming out loud for my whole family to hear that “This is for us, too!” Of course, my husband and children wanted to know what in the world I was reading, and why in the world I was so worked up about it. We were in the car going on a trip, and I did have a captive audience, so I proceeded to read the whole article on eating Biblically kosher to them. Since we were now being taught at our Messianic congregation that the Torah forms the bedrock, where we get our original information, which is further explained in the Apostolic Scriptures—it was hard for any of us to negate the list of what was considered fit to eat from Leviticus. Yeshua and the Disciples did not teach that those meats which were not considered food in the Torah could now be acceptable to eat. Yeshua and Paul never gave explicit permission to eat a meat that was not considered fit food to eat.

I was completely overwhelmed with the truth of Scripture! I, with my childhood nickname of Porka, became totally convicted, since the diet I had been raised on probably consisted of almost seventy-five percent unclean meat that was not Biblical to eat. I did not overreact by condemning my parents or upbringing, now that I had an overwhelming example of how far away from our Hebraic Roots Christianity had gone concerning the dietary laws in God’s Word. I made the announcement on our trip to my family, that as soon as we got home, I would get rid of all the unclean things we had in our pantry, refrigerator and freezer! *You can imagine the mixed reactions I received.* My husband Mark was totally on board with the new regime. He had also been cut to the quick by the Leviticus Scriptures I had read out loud. My daughter Jane, who did not like any of the unclean meats I had been trying to teach her to eat her whole life, was thrilled and finally felt vindicated that she had been “right” all along. My youngest daughter Maggie did not really eat much of what we were now cutting out of our diet, so she did not have much of an adjustment. However, my son John, who was 15 and had been excellently trained in my Southern family recipes and traditions, really balked! He started to question our new family food direction, and even declared that he *did not plan to comply* with it when he was away from home.

I will not tell you that it was an easy transition, especially since we were still learning what was kosher and what was not. We had to wade through what was Biblical and what was tradition. We had to discern from the traditions—what was good and what was excess. We had just greatly diminished what we had been eating from generations past, so we had to start using new recipes and ideas for the food that we could still eat. It was a challenge at first, and John did come around to the new kosher ideas as the Holy Spirit convicted him! After a while, John actually became more aware of the meat we needed to stay away from than I did, and the proper *halachah* for moving forward. He was also very involved in helping us try

new dishes and new family traditions. His true claim to fame had been his love of pork barbeque, which he turned into perfecting the smoking of beef brisket. He has since perfected his own barbeque sauces, as well as smoking chicken, turkey, lamb, beef ribs and turkey sausage. He is an expert now on what type of wood to use with each type of meat. All his friends consider it a real honor to be asked to one of John's barbeque dinners with all the fixings!³

During those early years of the mid-to-late 1990s, it was something of a stumbling block to some of our family and friends who did not really understand why we would want to be living a Messianic lifestyle. The summer of 1996, when we all started to eat Biblically kosher, I had to announce to my five siblings and their families, who we vacation with every year in Gulf Shores, Alabama, that we would no longer be eating the pork and shellfish that was so abundantly served by them all. We were all very nice about it, and did not suggest that they were in the wrong—but only that *we* had changed our eating habits. For the most part, our request was well received, yet the relatives who had the biggest problem with accepting our eating change, were actually the ones who present themselves as being the most committed evangelical Christians. By our considering Scripture from the Tanach, that they had cast aside, was something very challenging to them. They belonged to a particular Protestant denomination which tends to claim that it follows the Bible the best—and their pastor said we were all wrong to be doing “Old Testament things.”

It has been almost two decades since our family has “gone kosher,” and my extended family has been able to see that we are *still* Messianic Believers and are *still* trying to walk like Yeshua walked—and *eat* like Yeshua ate. We still get sarcastic comments now and then from one particular relative, who has gotten rather unhealthy—and almost morbidly obese—during these same years as we have gotten fitter. By us wanting to follow Scripture in all areas of our lives, I know that we are doing what is right for us both spiritually and physically.

In our family's observance of eating a Biblical kosher (or some might say kosher-style) diet, we have been willing to put aside some very meaningful and special recipes and cuisine styles, because of our commitment to living Biblically. Yet we know from our experience in Messianic ministry, that giving up the pork and shellfish from our Christian background, is actually comparatively little, when many Messianic Jews who come to faith in Yeshua, have their families turn on them and treat them as being deceased. Yeshua the Messiah, however, was the One who gave up His exalted glory in Heaven, to be humiliated and executed as a human being—for the sins of us all!

³ Some time in the future, Messianic Apologetics will be releasing a BBQ cookbook by J.K. McKee.