

## Marriage Between Gentile and Jew, Does it Work?

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In my teen years, and as a young woman (I'm currently 92) intermarriage was not an issue in my life. I never contemplated it as a possibility; it never entered my mind! Matter of fact, I never even dated a gentile boy or man. Thinking about whether or not I should marrying someone of a different religion would've been like considering marriage to a dearly loved pony. In fact, although I had dozens of boyfriends, I don't remember a non-Jewish boy asking me to go out with him. That was pretty much the way things were in New York in the nineteen thirties. Intermarriage was strongly connected to whether family members: your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles would find it acceptable. Among couples that did intermarry the most harmonious relationships were between Jews and Italians.

It might have been because our cultures had so many similarities. Our personalities were effusive and demonstrably affectionate, family attachments lowered the tendency to stray from the fold. These are factors that impelled and encouraged friendships between these two peoples—Jews and Italians. After a usual, within-a-year time frame of boy/girl dating, and the realization that they love one another, the dating would blossom into a happy marriage between a second generation Italian and Jew. Despite their wide difference in religious practice, Jews and Italians felt at ease together. And since their families easily co-mingled, it increased the chance of happening.

In general, Anglo-Saxons tended to be more reserved than persons of *my* Jewish culture, *my* background in cosmopolitan New York. In dealing with emotional situations, either a very happy event, or a deeply sad one, English, German and Scandinavian people did *not* display their feelings as freely as those that came from, or whose predecessors had come from a Mediterranean or Middle Eastern country. This was true even if the significant event was highly personal, a wrenchingly sad one, such as the death of a loved one. Or a glowingly happy condition, the longed-for birth of one's child, or grandchild. By nature, Nordics were more restrained, they kept their feelings in check. Frequently, and sad to say, they sometimes showed disdain for people that did *not* display the same sedate, reserved mannerisms.

In my husband's Orthodox Jewish family, marriage to a gentile person, and the resultant offspring, would have no recognition. It had *not* been a valid marriage.

The man and the woman were engaging in extra-marital sex. The family had been disgraced, put to shame within the scope of their radically religious cohorts.

A number of years ago I attended the wedding of two friends. One had been born into a Jewish family; the other had converted to Judaism, lengthy instruction and the conversion process guided and sanctified by a Reform Jewish rabbi, who had also joined the two in marriage.

The couple parented two children, and several years later they started to practice Orthodox Judaism. Well, now the marriage was *not!* It took a whole series of ritualistic procedures, including the Jewish legal system for the “gentile” to be considered Jewish, and the couple could be *properly* joined in marriage.

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Books by *Shirley Ann Newman*

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