

A Grandmother's Secret: My Connection to Israel

It's a great pleasure to address the global community of Israel Forever, but before I do that, let's rewind.

First, I'm not Jewish. I was born and raised in a Christian home, in the suburbs of Chicago, the oldest of six kids.

On a rare quiet afternoon in my house, when I was 10, my mother sat me down and told me to watch a movie and to come find her when it was over. The movie was *Schindler's List*. About 195 minutes later, I found my mom, drinking coffee in the kitchen, with my grandma (my mother's mother). My grandma sat me down and said something like this to me:

"Do you know where you come from? On your father's side, you're Irish, but on my side of the family, you're Dutch. Our family lived in the Netherlands and Belgium, and back then there were lots of Jews in our family. But now that you know that"—she held her finger to her pursed lips—"Shhhhhhhh ... you can't tell anyone."

I felt like my grandma just rocked my world—like she changed my life.

I grew up in a Bible-reading Christian house that honored both the Old Testament and the New. A whole new world was opening up to me with this revelation about my heritage, and I wasn't supposed to tell anyone?

Well, Grandma and I have reached an understanding, and instead of hiding that information, I would rather shout it from the rooftops.

I did not have any details at the time, but I have uncovered some of my distant Jewish roots through genealogical research.

That being said, I was raised—and I am—a Christian.

But starting that day, as a 10-year-old, I possessed a deep-seated desire to help and serve Israel and the Jewish people. It sat dormant in me, but while growing up I would leap to the defense of Israel and Jews in conversation. Through the years, this was further cultivated by my mother, who taught us to revere the Old Testament and show love and respect to Jewish people.

As a young man, I served in the Navy and studied history and international relations in school. In the Navy, I served in Japan and became fascinated with the culture and language. In graduate school, at the University of Chicago, I decided to distinguish myself as an expert on Japan by writing my master's thesis on the alliance.

Before I could finish my thesis, however, I became completely fixated on Israel—even though I had never been there. Especially interesting to me were the articles about the massive natural gas fields off the coast of Israel. Some commentators believed these were prophesied, and they quoted verses from the Torah, such as: "For they shall partake of the abundance of the seas and of treasures hidden in the sand" (Deut. 33:19).

I read everything I could get my hands on regarding oil and gas in Israel. Soon, I was bored with my thesis research. I finished grad school and took a job in Washington, D.C., at the U.S. Department of Commerce, where I would focus on international trade.

My background with Japan and language skills landed me assignments related to Asia, but I was drawn to Israel.

Some nights, I would wake up and run to the computer to see what was happening in Israel. Some nights it was difficult to sleep. I had no peace. I yearned to help Israel, but without resources, connections or a Jewish last name, what could I

do?

I continually searched for ways to help as I became acquainted with my new position at the Commerce Department. One day, I met a woman named Karen Dubin, who worked there and was organizing a trade mission to Israel. I was fascinated with her project and volunteered to help, even though it had nothing to do with my job description.

Unfortunately, Karen passed away in 2011. I eventually got a chance to do a short rotation in Karen's former office, where I received a request one day to assist with an oil and gas trade mission to Israel with Senator Landrieu and companies from Louisiana.

The day I received that request, all the articles I read on the natural gas discoveries came back to me, and I knew how I might be able to help Israel. Senator Landrieu's mission was a huge success, and it helped let the world know about the incredible potential for oil and gas in Israel.

I want to bring more companies to Israel and help Israel achieve energy independence.

David McCormack lives and works in Washington D.C., is a "virtual citizen" of Israel and is excited to help bring U.S. oil and gas companies to Israel. His views do not represent the U.S. Department of Commerce.

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