



GETTING TO KNOW
Rahel Cela Behar

I was born in Istanbul, Turkey, in a Sephardic family who settled in Turkey in the 1500s after leaving Spain. There remains a city Bejar in province Salamanca in western Spain. Part of the family settled in Italy. My mother's side of the family (Menda) came from Thrace, in the European part of Turkey.

My inherited first name came from my grandmother as per Sephardic tradition to call the first-born girl after her father's mother. I have two younger siblings, a sister and a brother. Our family was not too religious but very observant of customs and major holidays. We held two Sedarim, went to synagogue on Yom Kippur and restricted our activities on Tisha B'Av. Our parents talked to us in Ladino language.

My knowledge of Judaism greatly expanded after coming to Vancouver in 2015 and meeting my future husband, Ari Belenkiy. I took a Hebrew class with him and began reading prayers from Siddur and following the weekly parashat shavua. I tried several synagogues but eventually found my home at Or Shalom in 2016.

In Turkey, I got a BA in Business Administration at a local college and started my own business in wedding dress design. After settling in Vancouver, I found a full-time job as a manager in a wedding store, Bridal Fashion Group, and worked there for 2½ years until COVID-19 struck all small business across the world and Canada in particular.

I like taking photos and enjoy being outdoors, taking long walks toward English Bay with my husband. For many years, I was a columnist at the weekly Turkish online newspaper "Sec Haber" and still regularly contribute sketches of Vancouver life.

I have a son in Montreal and a daughter in Israel.