



### **Meet Leora Zalik**

Former Board member  
Former chair of the Youth and Family Committee  
Former Keren Or editor

I was born and raised in Montreal, the youngest of three children. Though my parents were not orthodox we attended an orthodox Hebrew day school. My father considered himself a secular Jew and was active in the Farband Labour Zionist Organization. My mother kept a kosher home and lit Shabbat candles but had no Jewish education. I left that school confused about Judaism but with a remarkably good working knowledge of Hebrew. My values were seeded by my father. My resilience comes from my mother.

I was 12 years old when, as part of a summer volunteer program, I found myself working with children with developmental disabilities. It proved to be the defining experience that drove lifelong education and career choices. By 1977, I was a McGill grad, active in the disability civil rights movement, teaching in rural Alberta, and doing my best to deinstitutionalize children one by one. I spent over nine years in small-town Alberta, married, had a daughter, divorced, met and came to love the child who would eventually become my son. It was less than a decade. It was a lifetime.

I spent the next 21 years in Grande Prairie, Alberta teaching disability studies at Grande Prairie Regional College. I equipped a small army of frontline workers and disability activists to transform service delivery in Northwestern Alberta and it was with delight that I watched the evolution of community living values and practices become the standard. Sabbaticals and summers afforded me the opportunity to pursue graduate studies at McGill, the University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary.

My re-exploration of Judaism was born of my determination to provide my daughter with a sense of her heritage. For awhile we enjoyed membership in a small reform congregation in Edmonton, but, for the most part, I was without Jewish community for many years.

A variety of health challenges interrupted this journey. I developed a serious mood disorder in childhood and have struggled with it lifelong. I battled cancer, thyroid disorders, back surgery, and ensuing debilitating pain. Eventually my health issues ended my career. In 2007, I moved to Vancouver to be close to my daughter and her family. Finally, I was able to explore the spiritual longings that I had repressed for so long. I found Or Shalom. I came home.

Ask me about George or Busetta....