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‘Nightline’ Co-Anchor Juju Chang Talks About Conversion to Judaism and Raising Jewish Children

by Shiryn Ghermezian



JuJu Chang. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

JuJu Chang, a co-anchor on *ABC News*‘ “Nightline,” spoke about converting to Judaism and living a Jewish lifestyle when appearing as a guest on Monday’s episode of the podcast “Call Your Mother.”

Chang, who immigrated to the US from South Korea with her family when she was 3, married her Jewish husband, Neal Shapiro, in 1995.

“Our families, I think it’s safe to say, were not thrilled” about her courtship with Shapiro, she said. “There was a lot of ‘Are you sure?’” She added, “I think a lot of it was under the well-meaning umbrella of ‘Well, your kids are going to be biracial and bicultural, and that will be really tough.’”

Prior to their marriage, Chang told Shapiro she would never convert to Judaism, though she was open to raising their children as Jewish. The mother-of-three changed her mind about the conversion years later.

“A good eight years went by, where I would go to high holiday services, and do the *seder* and I really enjoyed Yom Kippur of all holidays, all that sacrifice and inward spiritual thinking,” she explained. “One day I said to my husband, ‘I think I’m going to convert.’ And he literally did a spit-take. Kind of as if hit by a metaphorical bolt of lightning.”

“When I examined why, I really felt like I wanted it for me,” Chang continued. “I wanted that kind of clarity and perspective that Neal had. He just felt like he had a stiffer spine and a clearer

outlook and I wanted that...I aspired to that and it turned out to be an amazing experience.”

Chang described her conversion ceremony as “unexpectedly meaningful, and beautiful and powerful,” and further talked about other aspects of Jewish life, such as going to the mikvah (ritual bath), which she said, “was hilarious...and yet when you get in the water and you look and you say the *shema*, it’s incredibly powerful.”

She briefly discussed making “pretty good” latkas and cooking matzah ball soup for her Korean aunt who then took the recipe back home to Seoul, South Korea to make for all her friends. She additionally opened up about her biracial children growing up in New York City amid a rise in antisemitism in the US.

Chang said, “I think what they’re starting to see, and what all young Jewish kids who are coming of age are beginning to understand, is that there’s a hostile world out there that doesn’t like Jews. If you look at the Tree of Life synagogue shooting [and] the kind of beefed up security that the Jewish schools have now, they’re actually more afraid of a school shooter than they are of an antisemitic act being perpetrated upon them.”