

Passing the Torah by Valeric Scott

When I watch the passing of the Torah at a bar or bat mitzvah,
I wonder: Who passes the Torah to me?

My father is Irish Catholic,
and my mother a Catholic who was once a Presbyterian.
My name is Ruth bat Avraham v'Sarah
But Abraham and Sarah died a long time ago.
I have no family stories about Passover.
Like Ruth, I'm here only because I wanted to be.
Who passes the Torah to me?

When I approached a rabbi about conversion
He gently suggested we study together
And passed the Torah to me.

When my first Hebrew teacher patiently
guided me right to left through the aleph-bet
She passed the Torah to me.

When I shivered in the water of the mikveh
and the cantor led me through the blessings
She passed the Torah to me.

When I talked for an hour with the Beit Din
When the Torah study class showed me how Jews study Bible
When the Talmud group welcomed me for discussions and stories
When an Israeli acquaintance corrected my Hebrew
When my study partner clapped a kippah on my head
They passed the Torah to me.

When a little girl showed me how to tear the challah
When a woman offered me my first taste of a Hillel sandwich
When the guy at the bakery said, "Shabbat Shalom!"
When a committee chair said to me, "Here, you can do this."
When friends shared recipes and stories and customs
They passed the Torah to me.

If it takes a village to raise a child
It takes a congregation to raise a convert:

We pass the Torah from hand to hand
and make sure all the Jews who want can hold it:
can write it on their hearts,
speak of it in their homes,
teach it to their children,
bind it on their hands;
hold it before their eyes,
and write it — in golden letters! —
on the doorposts of their gates.