

# Intermarried

by Yael Ben-Zion



*Intermarried* (Kehrer, 2019) considers the notion, and questions the implications, of marriage outside of race or faith. The idea for the project sprouted from a short-lived campaign of the State of Israel that targeted Jews who were "lost" to intermarriage. While uncommonly explicit in its message, the underlying sentiment behind this campaign is not uncommon. Being myself intermarried, this made me think of the many challenges faced by couples who choose to share their lives regardless of their different origins, ethnicities, races or religions.

I initiated the project in 2009 by contacting an online parent group in Washington Heights, my NY neighborhood, inviting couples who define themselves as "mixed" to participate. The people who responded to my post gave me access to their homes to photograph themselves, their children, and the spaces they live in. Through images and texts, mostly culled from a questionnaire I asked my subjects to fill out, I constructed a subtle narrative that deals with the complex, multifaceted issues posed by intermarriage.

The images in *Intermarried* are not straightforward portraiture or documentation, but rather intimate moments and depictions, which allude to the personal experiences of my subjects within a wider social and political context. Moreover, the project juxtaposes interfaith and interracial marriages in order to make viewers re-think their own preconception. And this is maybe the main idea behind *Intermarried* - to create a platform for thinking and talking about issues that are very personal but have vast social and political implications.

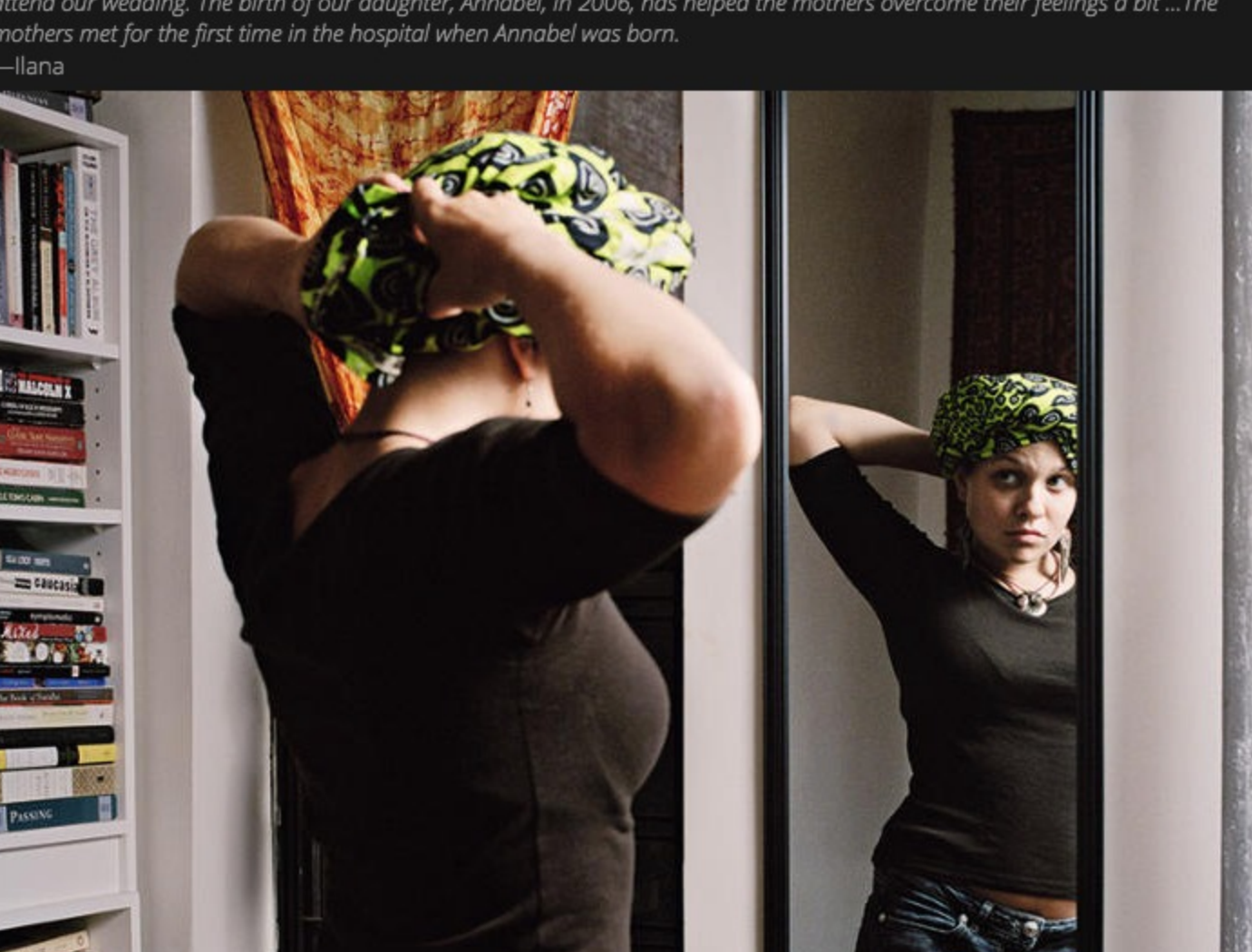


Indian wedding.



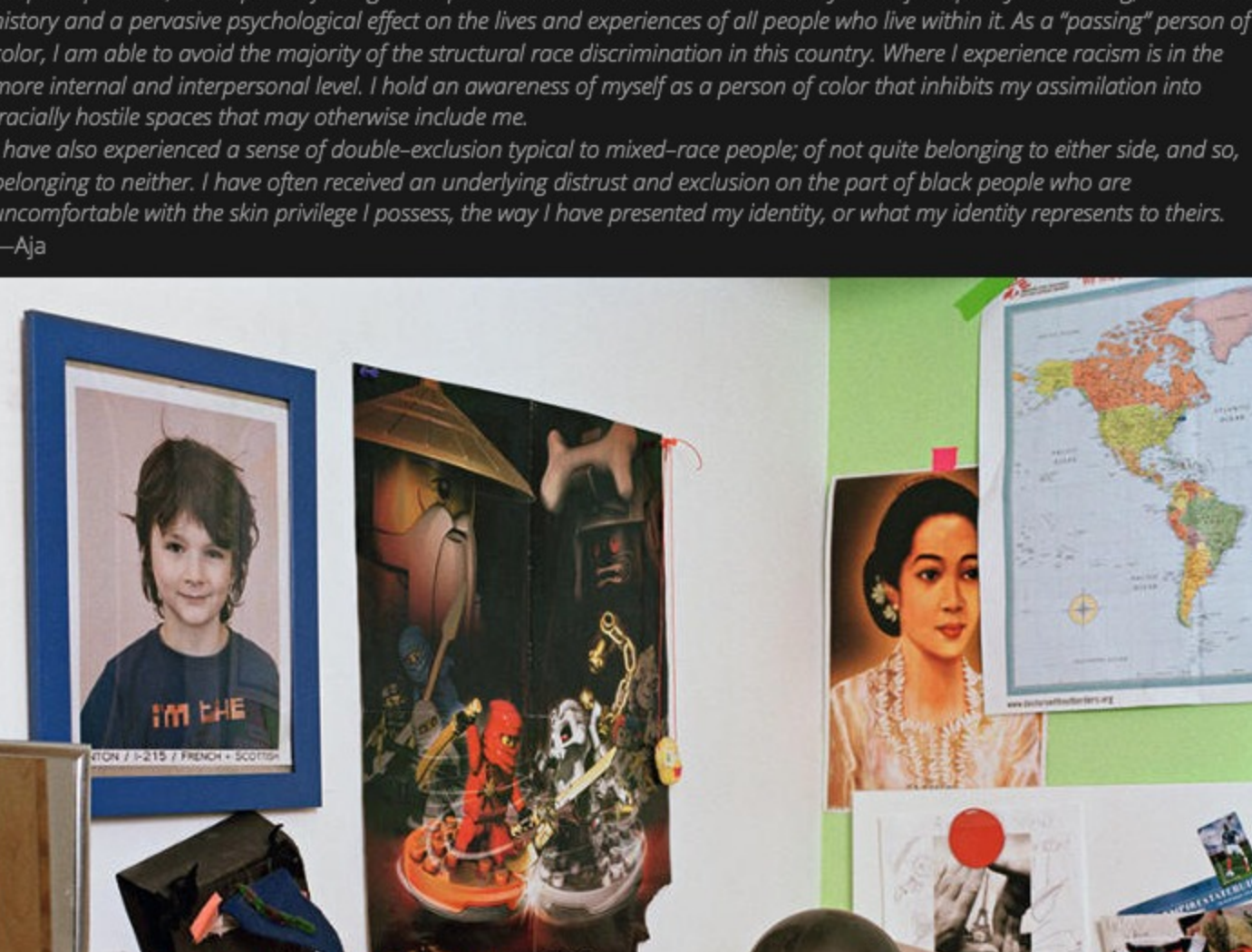
Murphy bed.

The term "mixed" is strictly an outsider observation. It is a term that "others" would use to define what their eyes see. All couples, gay, straight, summer/intermar... all get reduced to common life themes: time with each other, money, sex, children. All relationships are destined to become ordinary. Most people in "same/race" relationships would be surprised at how quickly "different" disappears and you become just two people trying to sustain friendship and happiness.



Frames.

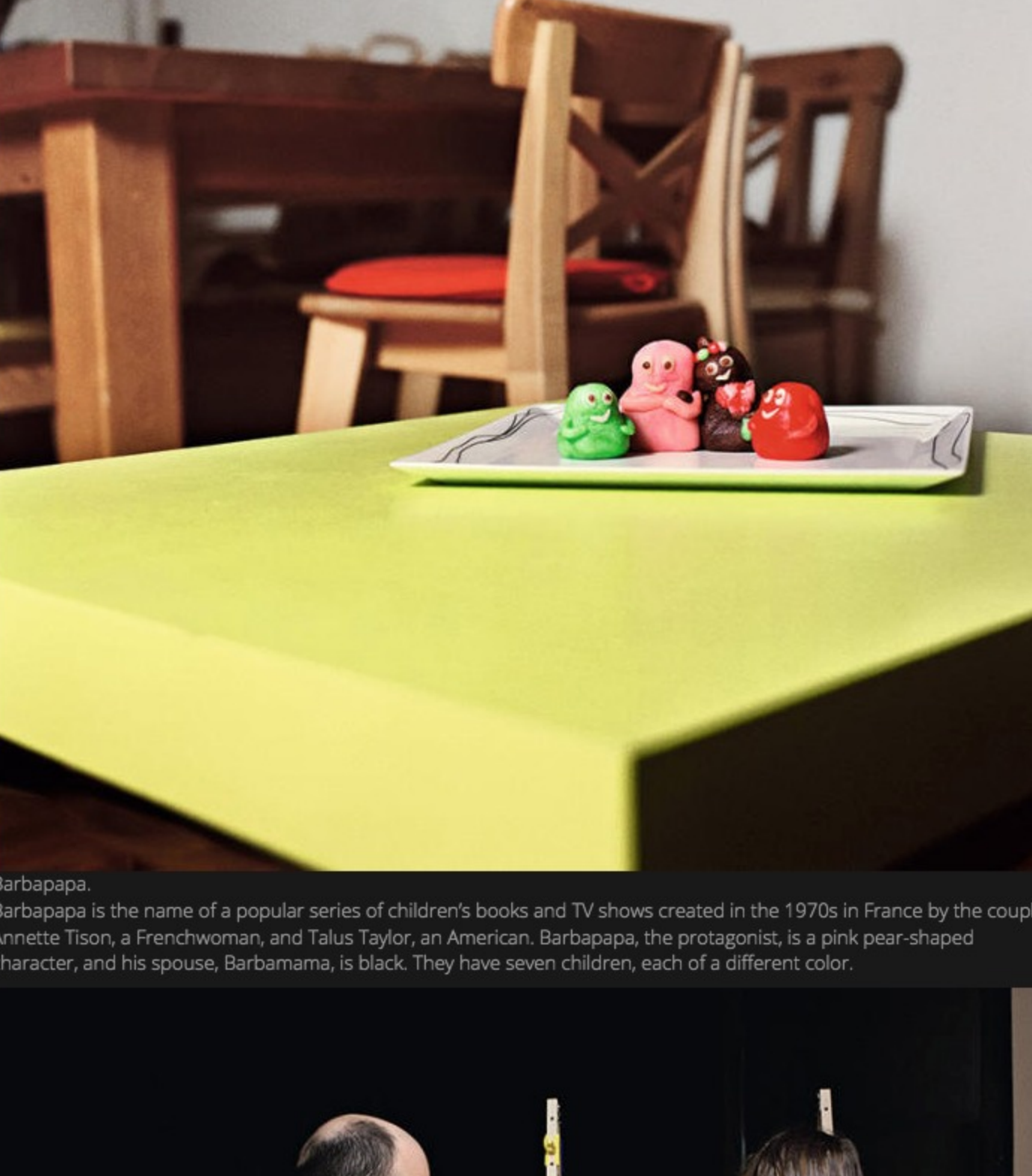
Beatrice Rippy married Carroll Hollister in New York in 1959, one year after Mildred and Richard Loving got married in Washington D.C. to avoid the anti-miscegenation statutes of their home state, Virginia. New York is one of the nine states in the US that never enacted anti-miscegenation laws.



West side story.

Jeff is Catholic and I am Jewish - that difference has defined us mostly because of the impact our relationship had on our families, who were not supportive of our being together. Indeed, for me, our relationship cost for many years the family in which I grew up. Jeff's family was more supportive of their approach to the relationship. When Jeff told them he wanted to marry me, they did not support it and expressed concern that they would have Jewish grandchildren. Unlike my mother and sister, they did attend our wedding. The birth of our daughter, Annabel, in 2006, has helped the mothers overcome their feelings a bit... The mothers met for the first time in the hospital when Annabel was born.

—Ilana



Passing.

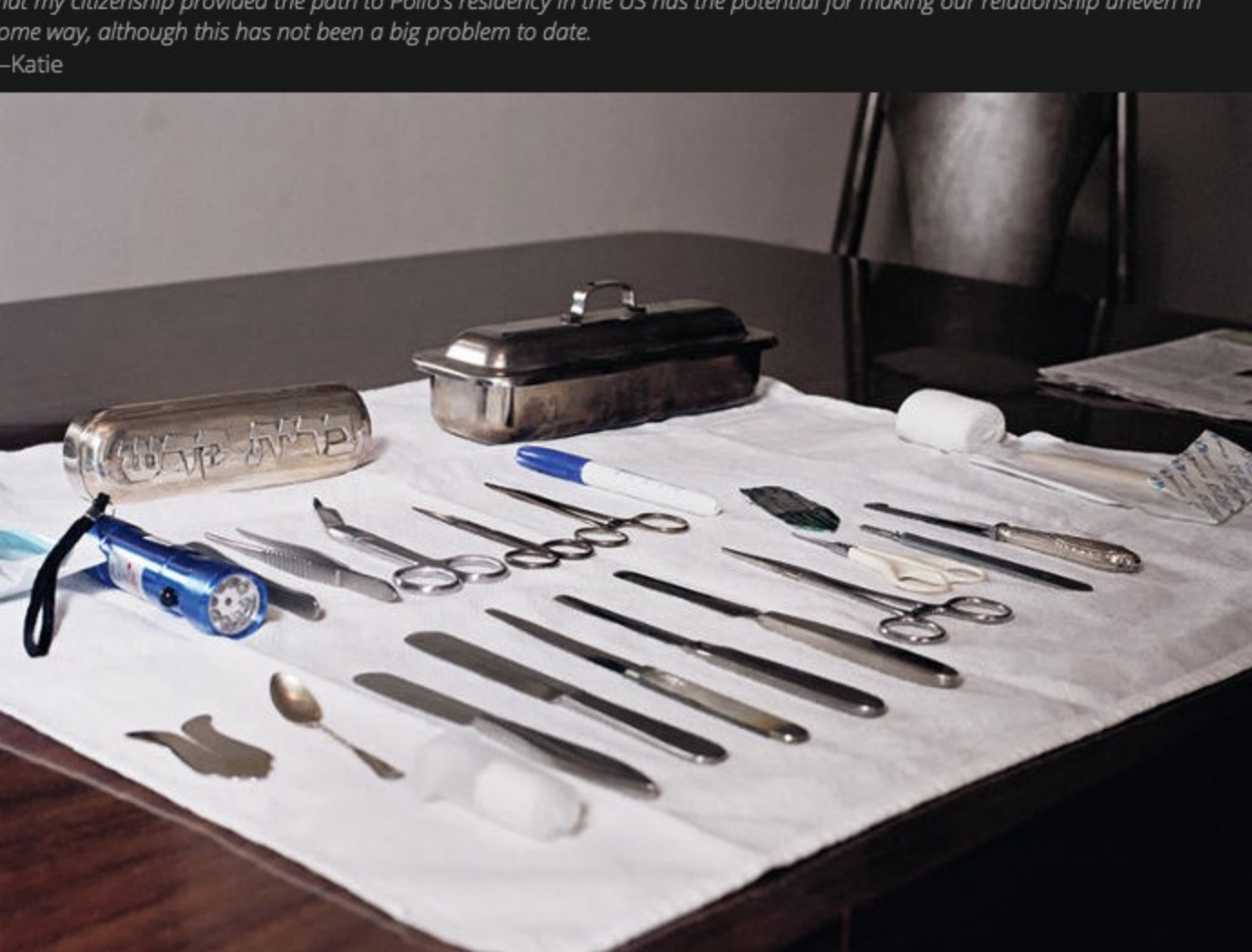
The discrimination I face as a low-visibility or "passing" person of color is very different from what visible and dark-skinned people experience, to the point of being incomparable. Racism is a structural social system of inequality with a long, cumulative history and a pervasive psychological effect on the lives and experiences of all people who live within it. As a "passing" person of color, I am able to avoid the majority of the structural race discrimination in this country. Where I experience racism is in the more internal and interpersonal level. I hold an awareness of myself as a person of color that inhibits my assimilation into racially hostile spaces that may otherwise include me.

I have also experienced a sense of double-exclusion typical to mixed-race people: of not quite belonging to either side, and so, belonging to neither. I have often received an underlying distrust and exclusion on the part of black people who are uncomfortable with the skin privilege I possess, the way I have presented my identity, or what my identity represents to theirs.

—Aja

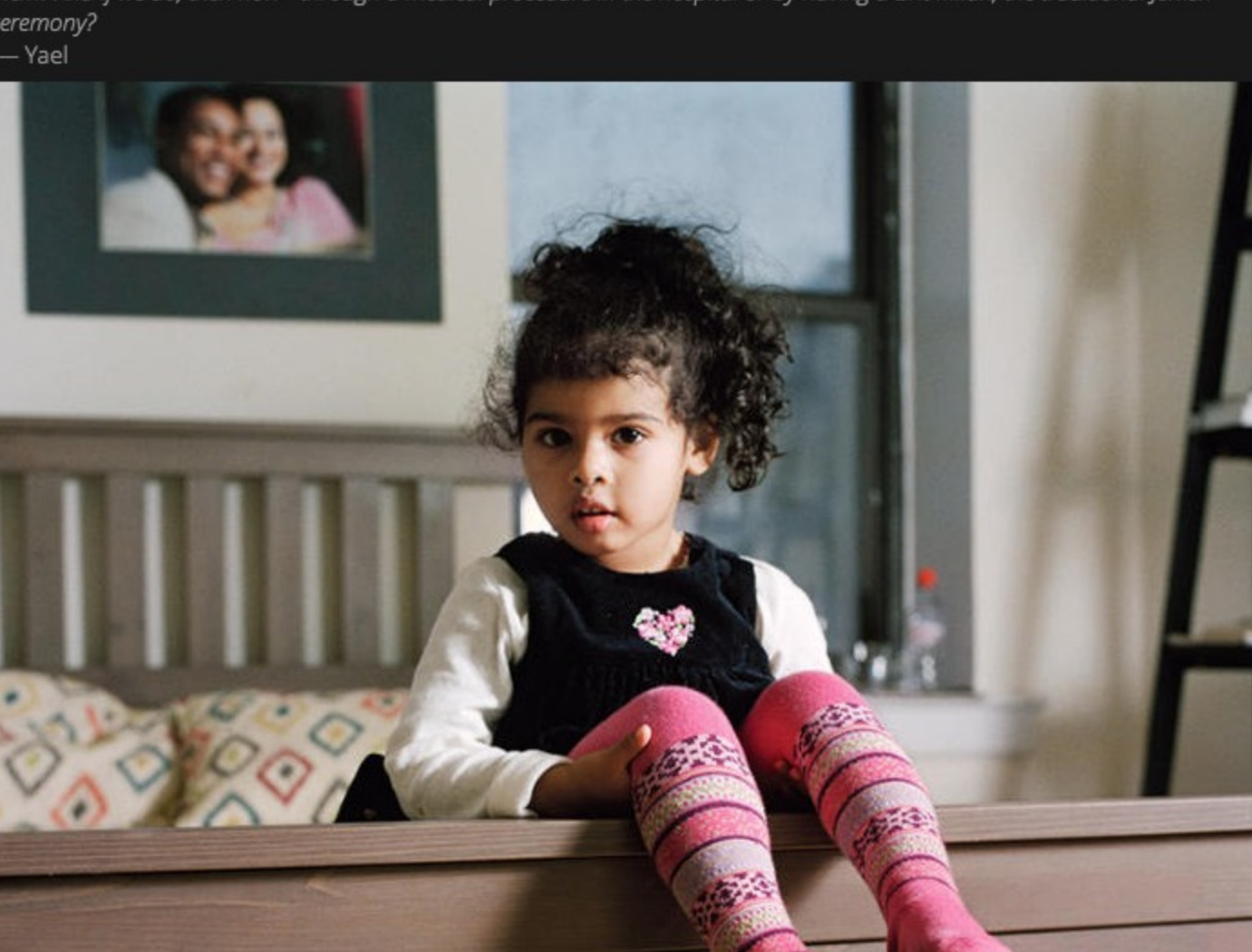


I'm the French + Scottish.



Barbapapa.

Barbapapa is the name of a popular series of children's books and TV shows created in the 1970s in France by the couple Annette Tison, a Frenchwoman, and Talus Taylor, an American. Barbapapa, the protagonist, is a pink pear-shaped character, and his spouse, Barbamama, is black. They have seven children, each of a different color.



Bedtime.

We don't think that our children were ever picked on because of us being a mixed couple, but they are still pretty young. We have some concerns about how Sarah's nieces and nephews will interact with our children because they are the only non-Mormon kids in a fairly large extended family. Young people can be less understanding about these things than adults.

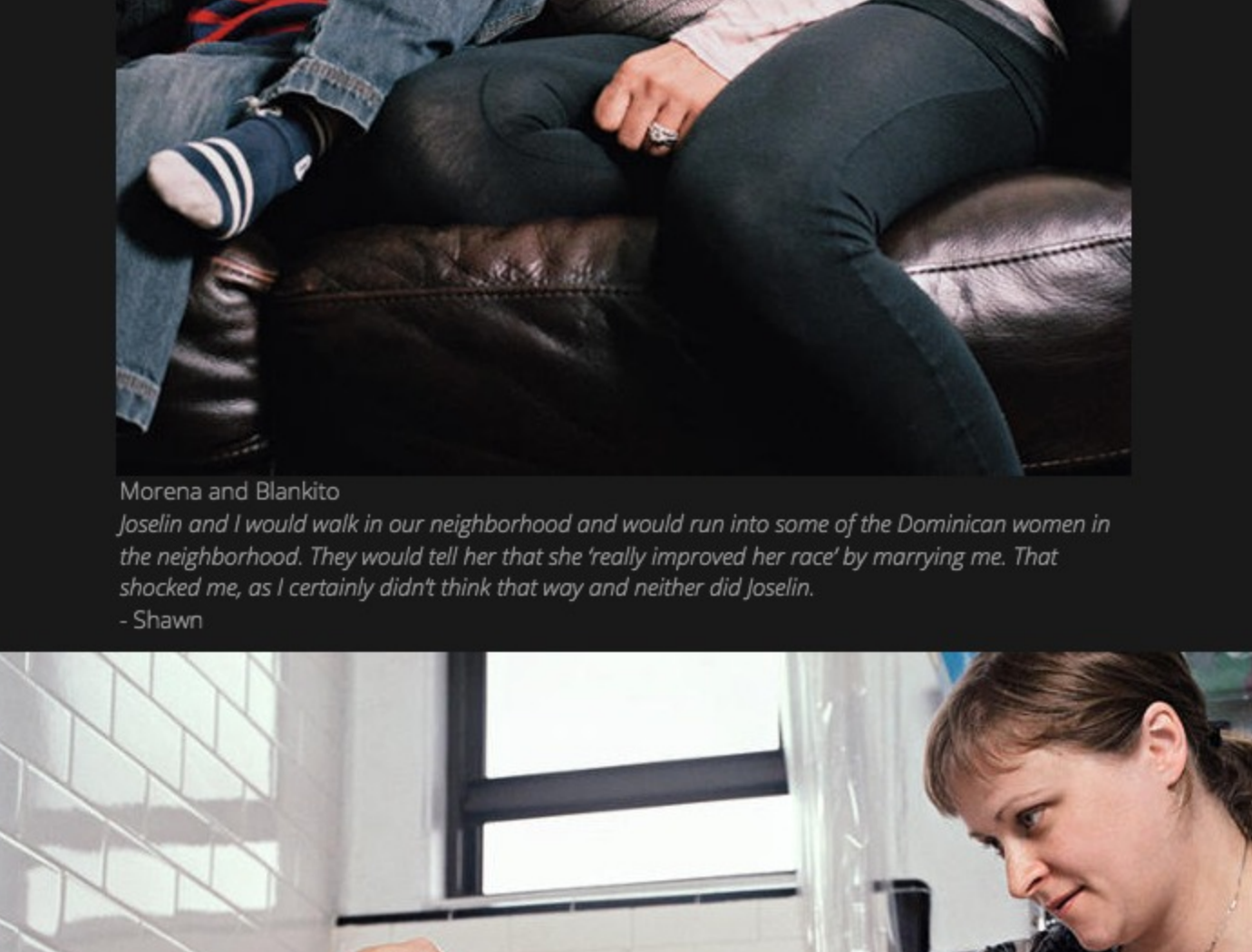
—David



Papers.

We have also been affected by our experience in the legal (immigration) system in regards to Pollo's residency status. The fact that my citizenship provided the path to Pollo's residency in the US has the potential for making our relationship uneven in some way, although this has not been a big problem to date.

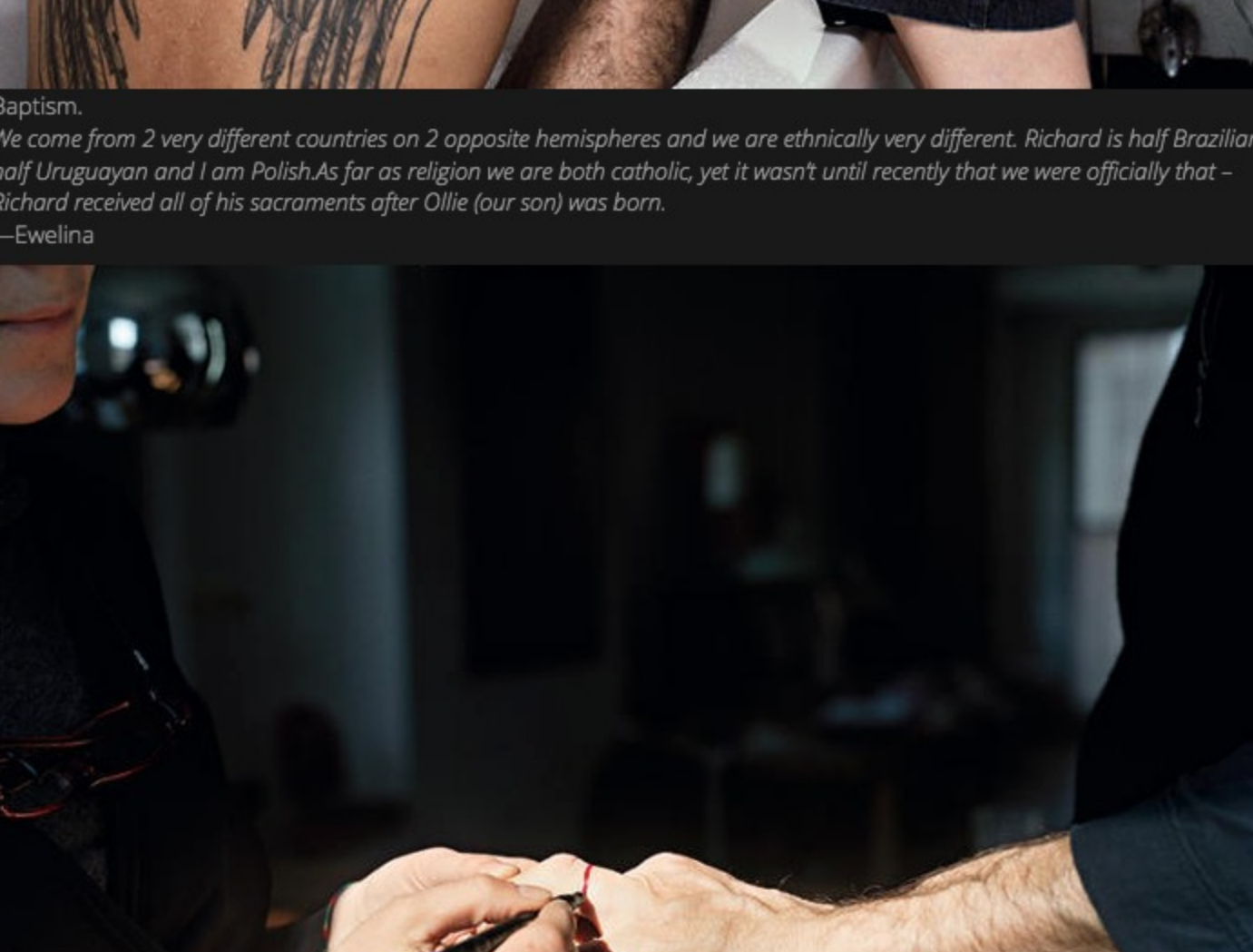
—Katie



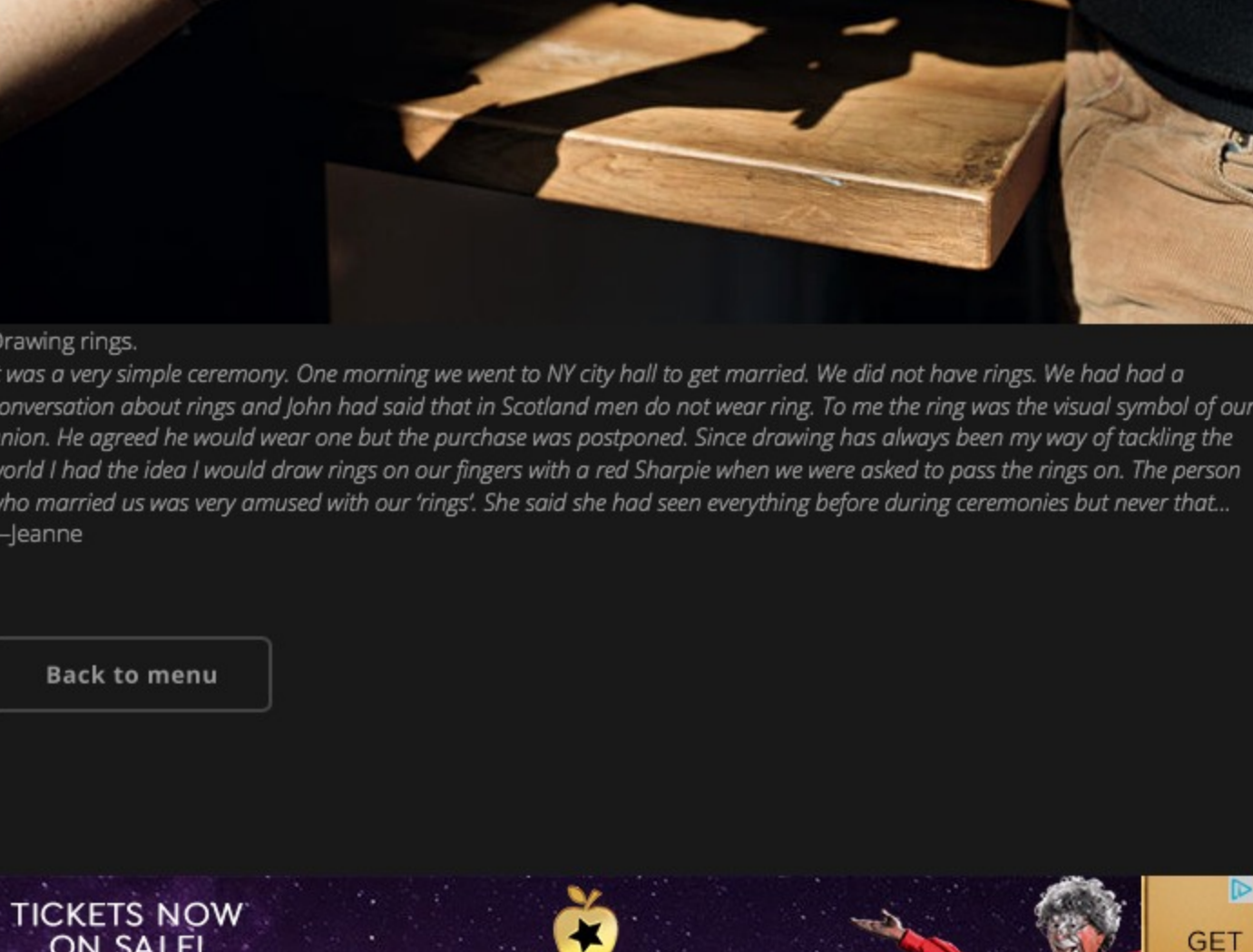
Mohel's instruments

When we found out that we have twin boys the question of circumcision inevitably came up. Do we at all want to circumcise them? And if we do, then how - through a medical procedure in the hospital or by having a Brit Milah, the traditional Jewish ceremony?

—Yael



Moonlit.



Family photos. We were both concerned about approval from our families and were aware that we might encounter some disapproval from society. We were also aware that our child might experience some tension growing up.

—Vanessa and Rick



Morena and Blankito

Joselin and I would walk in our neighborhood and would run into some of the Dominican women in the neighborhood. They would tell her that she "really improved her race" by marrying me. That shocked me, as I certainly didn't think that way and neither did Joselin.

—Shawn



Baptism.

We came from 2 very different countries on 2 opposite hemispheres and we are ethnically very different. Richard is half Brazilian half Uruguayan and I am Polish. As far as religion we are both catholic, yet it wasn't until recently that we were officially that -

—Ewelina



Drawing rings.

It was a very simple ceremony. One morning we went to NY city hall to get married. We did not have rings. We had had a conversation about rings and John had said that in Scotland men do not wear rings. To me the ring was the visual symbol of our union. He agreed he would wear one but the purchase was postponed. Since drawing has always been my way of tackling the world I had the idea I would draw rings on our fingers with a red Sharpie when we were asked to pass the rings on. The person who married us was very amused with our "rings". She said she had seen everything before during ceremonies but never that...

—Jeanne

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