

## **What would today's Bardejov be like if World War II had never taken place and the Jewish community still lived with us in our town to this day?**

"You won't catch me, you won't catch ..." the screams of running children echoed all over the street. It also penetrated the window of my room and together with the bright sunrays, pulled me out of my sleep. The voices were familiar. they were of my classmates Jacob, Sarah, Moritz, and his little sister Nina. Today we are not going to school, because passover begins tonight. It is one of our most important holidays as we remember the liberation of our nation/the Israelites? from captivity. Since Christians' Easter begins only a few days later, we are the only ones who do not have to go to school today. Our parents and our teachers teach us to tolerate each other and treat each other as equal. I like not going to special Jewish school: Jew - non-Jew, we are the same people. Still, I notice some small details that make us different. When we, the Jews, approach our faith with great love and devotion, we enter the room and we touch the mezuzah on the door frame. This way we express our respect and remind ourselves to have the Word of God on our lips and in our hearts. Like the Torah scrolls inside the mezuzah, also tefillin is handwritten in a special font. During prayer, we have these words in a leather box fastened on our hands and between our eyes.

Eventually, I managed to leave my cozy bed and get up. I looked out the window at the street where my friends were playing. We lived on the outskirts of town. Our neighbors were not just from the Jewish community, cultural diversity prevailed here. I believe that this is why we create such a harmonious environment. We help each other, for example, during Sabbath, our neighbors help us with housework. In return, we share our food with them. I'm happy to grow up here. I ran happily to the kitchen where my parents were waiting. They are a role model for me. Their marriage is beautiful and they live as one soul in two bodies. One of the laws we must follow is the Mitzvah to have children. The family is sacred to the Jews.

During Passover, We must not consume anything fermented, so breakfast was modest. When we were done, I asked Dad with the sparkles in my eyes if I could go out and play. He looked at me with a stern look, but he let me go on condition that I was home by 2pm. We have to prepare for the Seder, the Passover dinner. Leaving our house my mom yelled at me to remind me to watch out for the trains: We lived near the train tracks. Indeed I like watching the trains as they are passing by my window, thinking about people and where they are going. They, for sure, know where they are headed. It would be pointless if they

didn't know where their journey was going. People are afraid of the unknown, which can be like hell to some.

My friends and I went to the suburbia. On the way, we passed through the market square where Jews were selling the last food items that they could not have in the house during Passover. It was a bargain because it is quality food that is forbidden just for this holiday. Most of the shop owners in the square are Jewish. Some people would not buy there because of their prejudices and preferred to buy elsewhere. We were approaching the suburbia. From a distance, we could see an expansion tower that serves to store rainwater for ritual baths. Surrounded by other buildings, the synagogue is built, because it was not allowed to build prayer rooms in visible places. Nearby was the playground where we liked to play. There were not many children at the playground as schools were in session as usual – we just had a day off because of our holiday. While we were playing with the ball, our teacher came to us. We liked him very much because he always told us interesting stories and even now it was no exception. He took us for a tour of some secret places. Along the way we were meeting various people, whom we greeted politely. At the end of this trip, the teacher promised to take us to other undiscovered places next time. I leaped with pleasure as I was looking forward to getting back home. Not sure what she meant by this paragraph. What teacher? If schools were in session what was he doing there?

Preparations were in full swing. Mom baked Matzas - the unleavened breads made from flour and water That we eat in Passover.

I started helping Dad prepare the table. We had to arrange it before it got dark. In the middle of the table we put a glass of wine, which is symbolically intended for the prophet Elijah. We also put the Seder plate, Matzo, wine, salt water, and of course the Haggadah – books, from which we read during the Seder. The sun had begun to go down slowly, we had everything ready. At the beginning, Dad recited the blessing of wine. After that, he washed his hands followed by the breaking and eating of the Matzas, during which we told stories from The Haggadah. This time we've all washed our hands. After the feast, we say *barech*, blessings after meal and we ended up with traditional songs. Today we had only one duty left, to visit the synagogue. Anna, this is completely wrong... they go to the synagogue BEFORE the Seder and not after. I am not sure how you want to deal with it... maybe switch the order of the story? Leave as is? We put on our coats because it got cold outside. We met Jacob and his parents in the square. Our parents knew each other very well and our mothers grew up together from a young age. Jacob's mother was not born Jewish and she converted to Judaism before marrying Jacob's dad.

Groups of families were already gathering in front of the synagogue. Men were entering the main prayer room and my mother and I took the west entrance, up the stairs to the women's gallery. As everyone sat in their seats, the Song of Songs began to be read. After the ceremonies we said goodbye to our friends as we walked home (to celebrate the SEDER). It was already dark outside, the stars could not be seen clearly because it was cloudy. Holding my mom's hand, I rub my eye as a sign of fatigue. Mom laughs. "We'll be home in a minute, hold on." She was right, a few minutes later, we crossed the threshold of our house. Climbing up the stairs to the room is very hard. Of course, I did not forget the evening prayer, which we said together with my parents. We wished each other a good night and went to bed. I look out the window and gaze at the overcast sky, my eyelids approaching each other until they are completely united.

Names, voices and accusations. Noises disturbed the silence of my thoughts and opened my eyes. I was startled, but father's arms comforted me. I felt safe with him. I see people, the church and the town hall. Are we in the Town square? How did I get here? I don't understand. The sky had a reddish tinge, although the clock was showing 10 o'clock in the morning. "Dad, what's going on?" I asked in a shaky voice, but he didn't answer. "Mom!" I tried to find out what was going on. In vain. I looked around recognizing people's faces. Everyone had suitcases with marked names in their hands. People with dead-pan expressions on their faces were heading for the train station. Those whose name were pronounced, were given a sort of a one-way ticket. Sarah, Moritz, our teacher, everyone was leaving. In the cluster of names I heard mine. But I didn't want to go anywhere, my home is here. "Dad, why don't you tell them we want to stay?" I urged a man, whom I thought was my dad but he had an empty expression. I began to cry and tried to break free from his arms. I couldn't. As if it was my destiny to leave.

After a few steps we were at the train station, and in front of me was the same train on which I look out every day from my window. The door opened I was pushed with the crowd of people into the wagon. I felt cramped. Cramp was nothing compared to the fear of the unknown. Perhaps this unknown will not be hell. The train moved. Somehow I got through the mass of people to the window to see where we were going. I recognized our house and looked into our windows. In the window of my room I saw a little girl looking through the window watching us, watching me. It shocked me, how is that even possible? Who was this mysterious little girl? Was it me? Perhaps I'm fooling out of fear. Suddenly I recognized my mother's coat. I see her getting out of the slowing down wagon. Are we already there? All I care about right now is her. As I grabbed her, she pulled me off and I started falling off the

train. I hit the ground but nothing hurt me. I looked around. There were unknown people everywhere, mud. The train was long gone. With an accelerated breath and tears in my eyes, I was hopelessly looking for my parents. I only saw people's hands with numbers. How can I find someone who doesn't have a name but only a number? How can people be reduced to numbers? Addition or subtraction. I screamed out my lungs, but my voice was not coming out. I closed my eyes in despair. Darkness gripped my mind as the sound of the approaching train gradually increased. I felt it getting closer and closer, as if it were in me. Suddenly it honked.

Sweaty, frightened and with wet eyes I woke up and sat on the bed. I wanted to cry. I ran to the window and saw the train coming into town. It woke me up from my nightmare. Everything was as usual, It was just a frightening dream. With small steps, I crept quietly into my parent's room to make sure nothing was happening. They are/were in bed, both sleeping. With peace of mind, I return to my room tarnished with an evil dream and lay under the duvet. I couldn't sleep for a while. I did not want to. But I was relieved that it was a dream and not a reality. People are not wild animals. Hate has not obscured our minds enough to worry about our lives simply because we are different. After all, could people hate more than love? Could one allow such a thing?

Miriam Helena Hudák

Leonard Stockel High School