

"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?"

"Bardejov - Little Jerusalem".

It was written on May 16, 2001. Insignificant date? Not far from me. On this day a person was born who influenced me 17 years later and became a big part of my life. It was Rachel.

Overall, the Nathan Guttman family has kind of crossed my path. To begin with, I must mention that the Guttmans were descendants of the founders of the Jewish community in the city. They founded a synagogue, a school, a cemetery or a poorhouse. They were an integral part of our city and left more than 3,000 descendants, whom I still meet on the streets to this day. Jewish or Christian streets. The fact that they later accepted the orthodox direction was also told to me.

Well, but how do I know all this? My best friend Rachel is a Jewish woman. Low, hive girl with dark hair and brown cheerful eyes. Beautiful, wise as the only daughter of a good family. Her father works under the administration of Bardejov rabbinical office of the Jewish community from the city and 30 surrounding villages. Mom is a teacher at a Jewish school. And Rachel? She had squinted in my eyes for years, but we never talked. Until ...

Orthodox Jews. Each activity is a manifestation of the desire for the union of soul with God. They are kind and very kind, as is my Rachel. We met at random and our conversation couldn't last long because of Shabbat. Shabbat is considered by many to be the most significant day in the life of every Jew, perhaps even more significant than Yom-Kippur (Day of Atonement). Only during Shabbat are individuals from the assembly in the synagogue called to read from the Torah.

Ráchel came out of the synagogue and I spoke to her where she was going, since there was no one else on the street and I had no girlfriend. Only later did I realize where she was coming from and that she had no time for me. However, I insisted that we sometimes talk and make closer contact. My life was quite ordinary. I had a friend James, I wasn't from a wealthy family, and everyone I knew didn't meet Jews. I wanted to be different. But why? I knew there were the same people we were, and I wanted to make sure. Someone invisible must

have heard me and I saw Raška again (she is the nickname Rachel I gave her at the second meeting). We have become sisters. My name Elizabeth became Betina and Rachel was Raška. We did everything inconspicuously. Our first encounters were also shrouded in mystery. It was unusual to have Jewish friends, though there were many in the city. In a few months we became friends for life and death, I knew everything about her. We exchanged every single secret. Three days before the feast, when the Jews put eight-armed candlesticks in their windows (Chanukiji with the ninth arm, which serves as a servant for lighting candles), Chanukou told me what I had no idea. "Betina loved James." I wasn't even breathing at first. We both knew it wasn't allowed. Jews have strict rules. Even in my dreams, I wouldn't have thought I'd see my best friend so unhappy. Suddenly there was silence in our conversation. Did you tell someone? There must be a solution, right? Do you meet Jakub? So many questions and unanswered answers. She said, "I told my mom." "Are you normal?" At that time, I thought I was going to chase Raska. "What did she say to you?" I asked, though I thought the answer. Of course, Mum screamed at her, as Mum knew, and forbade her to meet him immediately. According to the steady tears on the face of my only friend, I figured it must have been strong. Their community, the orthodox community in the city, is closed and they don't tolerate that. They have a shadder to find suitable partners.

An unstoppable flow of emotions swirled through my mind. I want to help her very much. The Feast of Initiation is a Jewish holiday that begins on the 25th day of the Jewish month kisle and lasts eight days. For eight days I have been intensely thinking about this unauthorized love. I borrowed books on Jewish culture. Don't want to know how the librarian in our library looked at me. Passover, Yom Kippur, Shabbat, Purim or Rosh Hashanah. This foreign terminology has come to me in every literature. I slowly recognized the holidays, the customs of Rachel's faith. Knowing how religious her whole family was, she realized with pain in her soul that this love was out of the question. What about Jakub? I met him in front of Mr. Schondorf's Kosher food, where Raška and I usually had our meeting point. He was also quite out of this situation. I wanted to relieve the situation a little bit so we walked through it and I didn't even know why she started talking about kashrut. It is a set of Jewish prescriptions about what can and cannot be eaten, what we can combine with and how to prepare food. The essential point of the kashrut is the division of food into kosher - clean and trivia - unclean. Unclean must under no circumstances consume the Torah Command. Do you

even know what the Torah is? I want all of this to happen that you can't be together. I didn't want to lose either, I was the epicenter of their romance. I had it even harder than the two of them. After Chanuk, we met Rachel. I have never seen such a sad look in my life as today. Has something happened? Mom told my father. This was not the happiest sentence I wanted to hear after a long separation. Do you think he took it right? While working at the rabbinical office, he had many contacts mainly with the chief rabbis in Nowy Sacz, Poland. I have heard this information several times. But I had no idea that her own father had promised to marry Rabbi Steiner a nephew a few years ago. Not even she. I felt so sorry for the little warrior. In the year we were intensely friends, there was something too much for her shoulders. She still stressed that if she wanted to or not, she would have to marry him. "You take responsibility for your actions, guilt." I couldn't allow Rachel to do anything stupid and couldn't even meet James again. My grandmother about Jewish culture what she knew. She told me that Rachel would be expelled from the Jewish community if she did not obey. I learned that a good-family Jewish woman would want to marry a rich-family boy. They open a shop, a pub, have a lot of children, a doorway in the doorway (expressing their love for God and belonging to Judaism as they have now, and their parents will be happy that their daughter is in good hands.) Whatever it was I wanted Rachel to know that I was standing by her, I

regret to say that our fears had come true, and I received a white envelope from Rachel. My hands were shaking as I opened it, I found a wedding announcement inside, and a piece of paper folded in. Rachel and Kazimierz get married in one of the Bardejov synagogues on 14 March 2019. In the letter she described that her upcoming was nice, attentive and kind. "I love you Betinka!" - those were her last words in the letter. I was crying from joy. and let her future husband let us be friends even if I'm not Jewish. I was looking forward to another young Jewish family settling in Bardejov. Our city has thus grown to a place where many respecting people with different cultures, customs and religions live together.

Life will bring different people in our way. He gave me a person I never condemned for faith or other culture. He brought me to Rachel's life - a friend for life and death.