

My Dream /Mon Rêve



Lena B, 19
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French/English

I am 8 and my father made me act in front of the family after Shabbat dinner.

I'm 10 and my mother enrolls me in Talmud Torah.

I'm 12 and I do my Bat Mitzvah.

I'm 14 and I'm wondering about the existence of God.

I'm 16 and I fall in love with a boy who isn't Jewish.

Hello, my name is Lena, I'm 18 and I've been asked to write my biography as a young Jewish woman.

To tell you the truth, I didn't know where to start - at 18 you don't think much about your biography.

But as the hours went by, I realised that it was the term 'young Jewish woman' that explained the blank page on the computer.

I wondered if the common thread between my life and my Jewishness was rich enough, at the age of 18, to write a biography?

I found the answer to my question. But first I had to start from scratch.

I was born and grew up in Marseille, in a traditionalist Jewish family.

My father, my mother, my two older brothers and me. So there are 5 of us.

My mother made me listen to the best music by Amy Winehouse and Alicia Keys and my father made me watch thousands of films.

I grew up with Bar Mitzvahs, apples in honey, eating canteen bread unintentionally at Pesach, my family in Israel, summer camps at Habonim Dror and stares during lessons on the Second World War.

Above all, I grew up without asking myself too many questions about my religion.

Until the day when I needed to ask myself some. Because I got my first anti-Semitic remark. Because my first non-Jewish boyfriend left my parents unhappy. Because I was asked if I believed in God. Because I became a young Jewish woman.

And because my father died on 25 December 2021.

Today, 2 and a half years later, I've had time to start mourning, to finish secondary school, to fall madly in love, to go into higher education, to live on 7 October.

But in those 2 and a half years I never took the time to really think of myself as Jewish. Because I'm full of contradictions. Because there are times when I wonder if a life without religion wouldn't have been better.

And I have always felt a failure.

Probably towards Jews, certainly towards 8-year-old Lena.

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So when I can, I stop and look up. To see what?

I don't know what.

Maybe the sky, maybe my father, maybe a dream.

A dream where 7 October doesn't exist.

A dream where I don't break up with this boy because he's not Jewish.

A dream where the 5 of us spend one last Shabbat together.

A dream where I can write this biography.



So how do you explain that it wasn't until I was drafting it that I realised everything was connected.

That I realised that it wasn't that I hadn't taken the time to really think of myself as Jewish, but that I was afraid. That I preferred to disguise myself, to carry on acting like 8-year-old Lena.

But afraid of what? You might say. Of not being a Jew 'as I'm told'.

Today I'm ready to play it straight, to stop being the actress of my life, to take my hand off the puppet. Because to say that my Jewish identity is not one of the red threads of my life would be to lie to myself for too long.

I accept that I am Jewish in my own way. The way I was brought up.

And today I find that rather beautiful.

Today I accept the double-edged sword of starting afresh.

So I raise my head in the air one last time, perhaps to see the sky, perhaps my father, perhaps a dream, I still don't know.

And at last, I present myself to you properly.

Hello, my name is Lena and I'm proud to be Jewish.

I dedicate this biography to my father
and to all those who forgot to look up.

Link to full story



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