



My Life



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Gender: **Male**

Country of residence: **Hungary**

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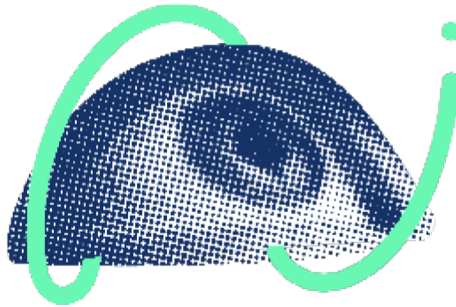
I think the first thing I have to tell you is my name. Its Dodó. There is a family tale about how I got this name. I gave it to myself. According to the tale, when I was about 18 months old, and beginning to learn to talk, my Mother sat me, my brother and my sister down in the living room, and told me: „This your brother, Marty, your sister, Greti I'm your mom, and who are you? (... és te ki vagy?) A bit of context is needed here, this conversation happened in hungarian, and in that language the order of the words goes: „you are who”. To this I replied with frustration: I am not „who” (nem vagyok teki!). My mother then asked me: then how should we call you? To this I replied: „Dodó”. So ever since then my family, my friends, everyone I know calls me Dodó.

I was born into a non-religious american-hungarian jewish family in august of 2002. I grew up in Hungary all my life.



My father grew up in Chicago and later moved to Hungary after finishing college. He always says that the simplicity, superficiality and the consumerist nature of the culture of the US made him leave in search for a place more authentic and honest. I think it's important to note that now, after almost 30 years of living in Hungary, he longs for his home in America. My parents separated when I was three months old and we all grew up with my mother. I don't have memories of their divorce, but I don't have memories of seeing them together either. I have 3 siblings, 2 of which I grew up with. The 3rd, Mark is from my father's second marriage. My dad was kind of absent, he was sick and out of work for most of my life, so me, my brother and my sister didn't spend too much time with Mark. This also means I have little contact with my dad's side of the family, they all live in the US.

My mom was born in 1970 in Budapest. They didn't have a lot of money back then but she never complains about her childhood. She was a very normal child from what I can tell. Good student too. She was the one who raised us. We all lived in a medium sized apartment close to the center of Budapest. My mother, despite growing up in a family, which practically denied its own Jewish identity became interested in the religion and culture in her 20's. Her father was born in the ghetto in Budapest, and her mother, right after the war. Her mother, my great-grandmother escaped being taken away during the soah. She hid in different places in Budapest with fake papers. Sadly I don't know too much of that story, because my grandma doesn't talk about these kinds of stuff. I respect her choice, but it makes me sad when I think about the fact, that these stories will be lost when she passes. Practically everyone else in the family was taken away to Auschwitz. Both of my grandparents' reactions was to assimilate, and pretend as though we never had anything to do with Jews. A very understandable and frequent reaction in that time in Hungary. Anyway, my mom told us jewish stories, we sometimes lit the candles on Shabbat and during the high holidays we would go to the synagogue. She learned all about judaism from books and a couple of her friends, since she didn't have anybody to teach her. Don't get me wrong, she doesn't resent this, this was just the way for somebody who wanted to get reconnected. This is the first source of jewish experiences in my life. My mother always put more emphasis on making these experiences fun and digestible for us rather than following the strict rules. Because of this for example, my concept of Shabbat is about having everyone around the table and my mom kissing my head, blessing me, and having peace around us. It is very far from the concept, that we aren't allowed to do certain things, and etc..



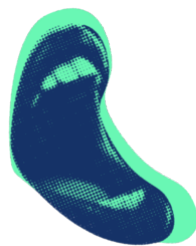
Later, my mother decided to put us in Lauder - a jewish school. My late grandfather got very mad at that choice, he was scared this would open the door to discrimination against us, although I don't remember that, since I'm the youngest of the 3 of us, so my sister was the first to go to that school. I loved Lauder school. It is the second main source of my jewish experiences for me, and it opened all the doors for the rest to come. It was through the school that I got connected with Szarvas - an international jewish summer camp in Hungary - and it was through Szarvas, that I made so many Jewish connections.

I was a problematic kid, especially when I was going to elementary school. I remember in second grade, me, and my 2 best friends, Bálint and Bendi would sneak in our classroom while everyone was outside playing in the afternoon and we would steal the chocolate from this girl's lunchbox. We did that maybe 20 times. And another horrible detail was that this girl couldn't speak then, because she had some anxiety around people. This means she wouldn't tell on us to the teachers. I feel terribly ashamed because of this. These sorts of problems were quite common with me during those years.

I even had to change schools because of this. Looking back, I think

I had a very bad reaction to not having any boundaries set for my behaviour. Lauder was a very liberal-minded school, they didn't believe in being strict with the children – to an extreme. I think this scared me on a very deep level and I went above and beyond to test the limits of my teachers' tolerance.

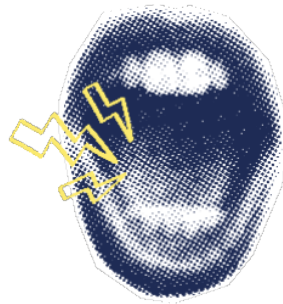
I went on to a public school to finish the remaining 3 years before high school. This school was very much the opposite of Lauder. I got thrown into a strict unforgiving world. The teachers expected a lot of work from us and did not care about anything else other than our performance. This didn't bother me too much. I thrived in this strict environment – finally I knew where to put my overpouring energies! By the time I went to high school that little trouble maker I was was totally transformed. I was still very social and outgoing but I didn't look for the rules I could break. I did get into some trouble in high school as well, but it was always for speaking my mind.



Now, I am 21 years old. I still go to szarvas – now as a counsellor. It is very hard to stay involved in the jewish community after somebody reaches adulthood. Before that, you can go to camps, jewish school, Hanoar or Somer (which are youth organizations). But you grow out of these when you become 18 years old. That is why – if you want to stay involved – people usually go work at Szarvas as a counsellor or get jobs in jewish organizations. My girlfriend and I started hosting shabbat dinners for our jewish friends every other Friday as a way to keep our little community together. We usually say blessings for the wine and challah, sometimes we say Kiddush. After that we eat, drink, have conversations and play board games.

Most of the people who come are our friends from Szarvas camp, but we also try to invite anybody, who has somewhat of a connection to judaism and is looking for a way into the community. There are lots of young jews in Hungary, who either find out about their being jewish too late or have some other reason for not getting involved in the community early on. These people get locked out because most of the programs and communities for young adults are just like our shabbat dinners. Small because my home can only fit so many and somewhat closed because we only know the people in our social bubble. I am truly frustrated by this dynamic and I'm always looking for ways to get more people involved. My philosophy is that people should relate to their jewish identities through experiences they have. These experiences can be anywhere from going to the synagogue to attending a shabbat dinner or a Bar Mitzvah. These can overwrite the fact that a lot of people relate to judaism through the holocaust, or through our history. At this time I am actively trying to get these sort of people more involved with the help of organizations like JDC and others. Everybody, who I turn to is very supportive and helpful regarding this mission which is a great feeling. I love the fact that everywhere I turn in the jewish community here in Budapest I am treated as a brother.

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Now back to Szarvas. I love being a counsellor at szarvas. I love making programs for kids, I really love the community of counsellors. We are all pretty close, and despite the hardships we love working together. I think one of the main reasons I kept on working at Szarvas is the fact that it was such a huge part of my childhood. When I was a kid, I literally waited all year to go to camp in the summer. And when I was there, I thrived in that environment. Hundreds of kids, all there to make friends and have fun. Every year I made tons of friends – a lot of them from different countries. I think those summer camps is where I learned most of my social skills because I constantly talked to new people, sometimes with whom I didn't have a common language. This was possible because of the fantastic atmosphere that place has. I want to pass these amazing and formative experiences down to the kids of today. I care very deeply about the future of that camp.

I'm in my 2nd year of law school at the moment. I'm enjoying it and I seem to have some success doing it too. On the side I'm working at Centropa, which is a foundation dedicated to documenting and preserving the stories of over a thousand elderly Jews about their experiences the 20th century. I've had a girlfriend for the past year now, her name is Dorci. We love each other very much and my life has changed so much because of her. I truly learned to take care of someone emotionally, I also opened up to her about stuff I didn't even know I contained. The primary principle I live by in my personal life is honesty. This is nuanced of course by tact, which is necessary in human communication. I took this principle into our relationship and I think it helped us truly deepen our connection.

I don't know what the future holds for me, but I can easily see myself both in the profession of law and in the world of jewish non-profit even somewhere completely unrelated. I intend to stay in Hungary for all my life. I do consider the USA to be my second home, but I don't think I'd really be happy anywhere else.

