



Home, where I belong



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Country of residence: **Slovakia**

Writing language: **English**

Despite my country's limited acceptance of minorities, my parents celebrated Jewish traditions and values, preserving our heritage despite a small community and no Jewish school. Their efforts gave me a deep, unbreakable bond with Judaism and a profound appreciation for our religion's importance and magnificence.



This is home, where I belong,

In this breath in this heart.

This is home, where I belong.

My name is Lea Pallas and this is my story.

I was born to a Jewish family in Slovakia, a country where Judaism is considered as an ethnic minority. My ancestors survived the unsurvivable and dared to be bold, continuing the lifeline of strength and fortitude. Despite facing incredibly difficult circumstances, my ancestors not only survived but also showed courage and determination to carry on the family tradition. They passed down this legacy of resilience and perseverance, which has influenced me and my family.

Even though my country is rather new to the concept of accepting minorities, my parents raised me in a household where Jewish traditions and values were celebrated and honored. There is no Jewish school in my country, and the community is rather small, but my parents did an excellent job of preserving our heritage.. Thanks to them I have a deep, unbreakable bond with Judaism. They taught me about the importance of our religion and showed me the magnificence of it.

Since I was a child, I've felt the sense of being different from others. Don't get me wrong, I have always had plenty of friends, had the same extracurriculars- taking piano classes or singing in a choir- and went to the playground with my parents every weekend. I had a beautiful childhood full of unforgettable memories. I was the happiest kid.

But there was this bitter feeling in the back of my mind, alarming me from telling people the truth. Not that I was ashamed of it, quite the opposite. Judaism was such a precious thing to me and still is to this day.

But growing up I have heard stories about events that other kids my age didn't even know happened. So many tragical unimaginable things my ancestors had to go through. And the Holocaust didn't affect the non-Jews, so why should they hear about it, right?

No. On the contrary. It was their grandparents that made these horrendous things happen to MY grandparents. As harshly as it sounds, it is true. And out of apprehension I decided to keep the thing I value the most in secret. For a few years it worked. My friends didn't know

I don't celebrate Christmas or the reason I don't visit the church at all. And I didn't give an explanation. Maybe it was as a result of fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of the history repeating again, if I share too much. Fear of not being understood. I decided that it is better if I keep this information to myself. I didn't feel the need to tell people who I truly am.

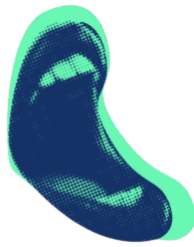
But when I started going to Jewish camps, everything changed. My first camp was 2 weeks long in some village in Hungary. My mom had been there when she was my age and she promised that the camp is going to be amazing. Until then I have never been to any Jewish camp. I was so scared. Questions started running through my head:

„What is it going to be? Do I know all the prayers? Am I Jewish enough? Will I fit in?“

Turns out, not only did I fit in, I also had the best summer of my life. That is how I fell in love with Szarvas.

Who would've guessed that a summer camp full of Jews my age would be such an unforgettable memory? That was when I realized that this was the first moment I was 100% myself in front of strangers who later became my best friends. There was no worrying voice in my head. Only happiness and pure honesty. I was myself and I loved it. At that point I understood how important the aspect of being Jewish for me is. It is what shapes me. What resembles me. My passion, my love, my family, my friends, my home.

And from that moment I decided to stop being scared. I started talking about my most defining trait loudly and proudly. Judaism became my definition and I became the definition of Judaism.



I joined Jewish institutions, became active in the community, started working with Jewish youth organizations. And I have started talking in front of audiences. It was such a freeing and enriching feeling to educate people and talk about the things I love most.

I can't imagine what my life would be without Judaism. My friends in my hometown who are not Jewish will never understand the love I have for my religion. My religion is what forms me. It has given me everything. Family, love, comfort, hope, determination and I could go on and on.

Judaism will always be there for me. To support me, improve me, guard me. And I will forever love being Jewish. Because this is the home, where I belong.

