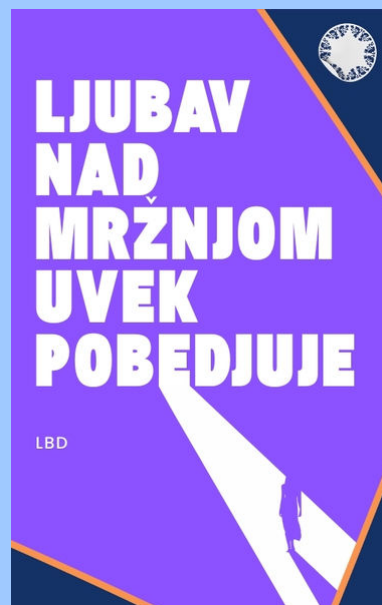




KALEIDOSCOPE

Love over hate always wins



Name: **Lena B**

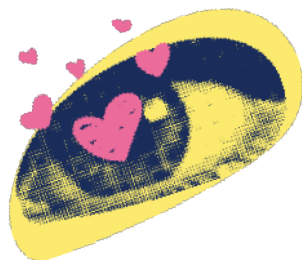
Gender: **Female**

Country of residence: **Serbia**

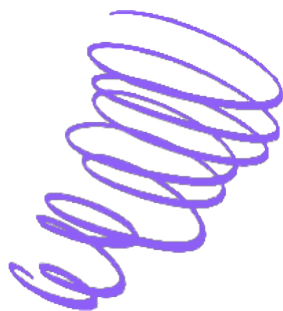
Even in Serbia, antisemitism lingers. A simple moment at the post office—where a Jewish girl hesitated before revealing her identity—reminded me how many of us still live in fear. Yet, I refuse to let fear define me. Love and unity must prevail.

Has it ever happened to you in your life that you feel like something is missing, like you haven't gotten to know yourself completely, in fact like you haven't fully discovered your identity as a person?

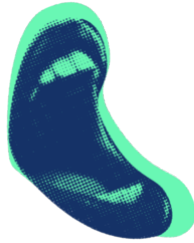
I experienced it when I was fourteen. Yeah, it's kind of a weird feeling. It's like you're missing some part of yourself that you haven't met yet or weren't aware that exactly what you're missing is necessary to feel complete. In my case, what I lacked was that deeper spiritual connection with Jewish identity and culture.



Hi, I'm Lena. I am a Jewish girl born in Serbia who lives in Belgrade, the capital of the Republic of Serbia. I inherited my name from my Jewish grandmother Lena who unfortunately died of cancer right after I was born. I inherited my surname from my father, a Georgian Jew who lived and died in Israel, unlike my great-grandfather Haim who was a rabbi in Georgia.



At the age of 14, I became a member of the Jewish Community of Belgrade and the Jewish Youth Club. Membership in the Jewish Community of Belgrade was of crucial importance for me because for the first time I felt like I belonged to a Jewish collective. Thanks to the Jewish Youth Club, I made my first acquaintances with Jewish youth, since according to the last census in 2022, there are only about 1185 Jews living in Belgrade. By researching and learning more about Jewish culture and religion my acquaintances turned into strong and stable lifelong friendships. Together with our friends, we practiced that on Shabbat we all get together, have dinner together, socialize and research about Jewish holidays, current events in Israel and the Jewish community. What I am very happy about is that we all support each other. For example, if one of our members has a celebration of his first art exhibition in town, we are all counted on to be there to support him. For this reason, if you are Jewish, it is very important to be in the circle of Jewish families because it is a very important factor in the life of a Jew.



With the help of the Jewish Community of Belgrade, when I was 18 years old, I managed to go on a Taglit trip by myself with my members of the Jewish Youth Club and a few other Jews from Hungary, Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was a beautiful 10-day trip that I will never forget. We visited many destinations all over Israel. We were first in Kibbutz Gadot, then Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. We visit wineries, national parks and museums like Yad Vashem. We even spent one night in the desert where we had the opportunity to feed a camel for the first time. It was an unforgettable night. We also went rafting, where we also had many fun activities by the sea, such as taking pictures on the beach, playing volleyball and so on... With the help of Taglit, all of us Jews from the entire Balkans got to know each other for the first time and became closer. That's how we established beautiful new friendships that continue to this day.

I am very grateful to my Jewish family for bequeathing to me its roots and traditions that I will introduce to my children when I have them. I believe that the family is a crucial factor in the life of every Jew because everything comes from it. We inherit all knowledge, tradition and culture from our parents and other members. When we talk about my family, it can be said that it is a mix of religious and modern view of the Jewish life. While my older members are very religious and rigorous in every aspect because they respect their origin, religion and tradition, my father is more modern in that regard.

Since he spent most of his teenage life working in Europe he never forgot his origins, but I can't say that he is as religious as my grandmother Lena was. However, for me it was an opportunity to see the world from two different aspects. I learned a lot from my father and grandmother, and I am immensely grateful to them for that.



As far as friendship is concerned, I have a small circle of friends because I have always tried to be surrounded by people who will respect who I am and will never criticize or bother them that I declare myself Jewish. Unfortunately, antisemitism is still present all over the world, and it seems to me that it is now even more provoked due to the current war in Israel. This makes me very sad, and that is why I am sending all the Jews a lot of support. We must be more united now than ever. In the most difficult moments, we must be the strongest.

The attack on us is unfortunately something we are used to, but the fact that we are used to it does not justify the genocide that was caused on that terrible October 7th. I just wonder when we will get rid of those bloody knives that are always pointed at us just because we identify as Jews. The hatred and pain that others have towards us is not something I want to leave to my children to struggle with. That terrible attack on Israel on October 7th had a great impact on me. Even now I shudder when I remember how they kidnapped young girls and boys, killed babies and families and set fire to houses where people were imprisoned. Horror!!! It hurts my heart to remember that now instead of celebrating Hanukkah with their families, many Jews are still in captivity. I pray for their health and the day when they will meet their loved ones again.

I realized that because of the war in Israel, many Jews feel unsafe, and here is why I think that. A few days ago when I went to the post office. There was a girl working there at the counter. When I gave her my ID, she looked at my first and last name and just quietly asked me: "Are you Jewish?" I told her that I am Jewish, then she turned around, took out her Magen David necklace, and whispered: "Me too." That day after that I felt very sad, because I realized that still a large part of us has to hide our origin in order to feel safe to live. How sad is that...



Regardless of everything, I proudly declare myself as a Jewish girl living in a small state of Serbia. I have hope that one day this fight against us will one day end and that peace and tranquility will finally reign over the world. Does that sound to much like utopia to you??? Maybe it's just a dream, but I will never give up on it because I believe that it is love, not hate, that will save this world from destruction.

I will never give up on that dream, so neither should you.