

I was born in Papa, a city about 2 hours from Budapest a few years after the liberation of my parents from Auschwitz. My father lost his entire family, including his wife and one-year old son in Auschwitz. He was very religious. After my mother married him, she too became observant. My memories, growing up in Hungary are mostly pleasant even though we lived with a constant undertone of antisemitism.

While attending school, my Hungarian school mates never let me forget that I was a Jew and not really a true Hungarian. The teachers were no different. But, I learned to make the most of my life. During the summer I swam in nearby rivers and in winter, when they froze over, I skated on them.

My parents often travelled up to Budapest with me where I attended the Kazinczy Street orthodox synagogue. My mother took me to the opera and to the famous "English Amusement Park". We observed the Sabbath and all Jewish holidays and ate strictly kosher. I remember being sent by my mother to the Rabbi with a live goose for "shechting" or ritual slaughtering to make it kosher.

Although Papa was a "large" city of 30,000, it was small enough, so everyone knew everyone else. While our being Jewish seemed to be a constant irritant for our non-Jewish neighbors, I had many friends both Jewish and Hungarian. We played soccer together.

In 1956, there was a revolution by the Hungarians against the communist regime and our house was smack in the middle of the fighting. With machine guns firing back and forth, our windows were shot out and we were nearly killed. During the revolution, most of our Jewish neighbors snuck out of the country, and those of us who remained behind, were further isolated. With less Jews in town, our large synagogue was shuttered and the less than 100 remaining, prayed in smaller quarters.

Finally, in 1960, on my tenth birthday, my family emigrated from Hungary and ultimately arrived in the USA (NY). For the first time in my life, I could observe Judaism freely and was not subjected to dirty looks or nasty comments. I value my Hungarian experience as it taught me to appreciate my heritage as a Jew and to understand the gift of freedom.

My involvement with the Maccabiah Movement began in the early 1970's. In the years since, I have endeavored to enrich the Jewish experience of our athletes and to strengthen their connection and identification with their people.

I am thrilled to be the Mission Chair for the 2019 European Maccabi Games and welcome our delegation to Budapest. I trust that they will be dazzled by the excitement and beauty of the host city as I always was.

Shabbat Shalom!