



Jewish Life on PEI

By Brian Golod

PEI AJC Jewish Community Representative, spring 2008

Hi everyone, I am Brian Golod, not a writer but a software developer, though I write this from my heart! I was asked to share with you what Jewish life on PEI is and feels like for me, and it is a pleasure for me to do that. In order to do that though I'd like to introduce myself first so you can feel the way I do.

I was born and raised until I was almost 20 years old in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In the 1990s it was estimated that 500,000 Jews were living in the country. The Jewish population grew rapidly in the late 19th century and early decades of the 20th century when many Ashkenazi Jews arrived in Argentina from Eastern Europe fleeing persecution. It is very common to find Jewish people in Buenos Aires. Neighborhoods, pubs, bars, schools and street corners can be found with plenty of Jews. Since kindergarten I went to a private Jewish school named Bet-Am, where I would continue to study until I was 11 years old. The popular and cool thing to do in regards to school was to switch at that age to a more technical and highly respected secondary school called ORT Argentina, which offers education all over the world and has companies looking for its graduates constantly. Jewish private schools in Argentina are a luxury not everyone can have, thanks to my parents' hard work I was able to have one. At age 13 I did my Bar-Mitzvah, who doesn't? Since there are so many Jews it's a challenge to find a shul and reception with open dates that you have in mind. There are plenty of shuls in Buenos Aires; unfortunately they all have concrete walls on the sidewalks to protect them from possible terrorist attacks, which already happened twice in the past when two cars in different occasions crashed into a Jewish institution and the Israeli embassy blowing up both of them. 107 people died. I was always proud of being a Jew, though I wasn't sharing that very important part of me with strangers, just in case... you never know.

Believe it or not being a Jew on PEI is a beautiful experience which in my case has strengthened my commitment with the community and Jewish life. It is true that the PEI Jewish Community is a small one, with 100 members at the most, which really reaches its peak in the summer time when regular members come for long holidays year after year. With such a small number of people it could be easy to say that we have no impact outside the community, but luckily most of us are all well known, respected and kept in mind. As a Jew on Prince Edward Island I can only tell you great stories, one from each day I've lived here. In general, the PEI islanders are very caring people and they show you they are when you need it the most. It really makes a difference when the teller at the National Bank wishes you Happy Hanukkah and sends you a card in the mail or when they are sorry for a loss you've had and send you flowers. It is shocking and beautiful at the same time to see that high school students dedicate a whole year to study what happened to more than 6 million people in the Holocaust and more non Jews than Jews become present in commemorating the end of it every

year and burst into tears when they listen to the guest speakers share their life stories. It would be also good to share with you that Prince Edward Island was the first province to commemorate such event and former Premier Patt Binns introduced this in the culture of the island.

Before moving to PEI all we knew was that there was a book called Anne of Green Gables because my mom read the Spanish version of it in school. We were not looking for Argentineans on the island; we wanted to be the first ones, though we didn't want to be the only Jews, so we began our research. My mom found the AJC's website and decided to leave an entry in the guestbook page saying who we were and that we would appreciate any kind of guidance in moving to PEI. To our surprise and probably your surprise as well, the only people who got in touch with us were Robert and Heather Putnam from New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. It would be worth commenting that they were Mormons, so really there was no Jewish support. Since we know what that feels like, we are making a difference by supporting Jews who are looking forward to living on PEI. All we were looking for was a kind soul to look after us and these angels went above and beyond their plans just because that's their own nature. I wish you could picture us arriving in Moncton from Toronto on December 21, the shortest day of the year and very cold as well, after traveling from Buenos Aires with temperature of 35 degrees when we left. We were tight with money, Argentina had suffered a huge economical and social crisis and the money my parents were counting on to immigrate to Toronto suddenly became half with nothing they could do about it. Flights and places where to stay were unbelievably expensive. We decided to take the train and travel 24 hours to Moncton, where Robert and Heather picked us up to bring us to beautiful PEI. I wish you could picture a family leaving everything behind, memories, smells, family, friends, places and so much more with the hopes that everything would be better in this new life. Let me say thank you once more for opening the doors to your country, which I feel is mine too now and work every day to make sure I add something positive to it. We were offered a home to stay for 3 months for free when we arrived and we met the owners of the house the night before they left on a trip around the world for that length of time. The kindness and hospitality we find every day on Prince Edward Island is second to none, I wish you could feel the way we do.

In regards to keeping the tradition alive, I'd like you to know that on PEI we are Jews because we want to be Jews. It would be really easy to assimilate and lose our identity, we choose not to. We are a few compared to every other city in Canada, though we feel there is more passion to keep this going than there is in larger cities perhaps. We celebrate Jewish life, young and adults all together, and no matter where you are from or how long you are staying on the island for, there's always an open door for you to pray. There are many things we don't have, but there are more things that we do, especially the commitment to enjoying this beautiful way of living life. I feel I am a person on the island, not a number. I feel I make a difference in peoples' lives and that is the reason why I have settled down here buying my home last November. PEI is as full of opportunities as any other province in Canada and I can say its lifestyle is much better, it's really up to you how you want to live on PEI, and there is room for

everyone. There is a study group on the island that meets every Tuesday night at one of the members' house to study Torah and a new group is starting anytime soon to study Hebrew. We gather for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Pesach and last night for Purim, although late, we still celebrated it. My dad is currently the Vice President of the Community and I am the representative for PEI and also the students who are on the island. We are pleased to serve this Community responsibly and committed to make a difference. I hope you enjoyed my story; this is a just a little bit of who I am. If you'd like to hear the rest of it get in touch! And if you'd like to experience what PEI Jewish life is all about, get in touch too, we'll make sure you have a pleasant visit!

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