

Karin Bamberger about Keeping the Religion

And then my oldest brother's bar mitvah...in Amsterdam. My grandmother baked cakes and I had an uncle and aunt who were head of the old age home and they made cakes. In Holland you only learn the "parsha", you don't learn the whole thing. He learned his parsha and we had a reception. I remember I was sick because I ate too much cake - I remember distinctly. My mother was a very strong-minded woman and she made a proper celebration.

Interviewer: And tefillin could be bought?

Karen Bamberger: He had tefillin. Sure. Or maybe my mother had a spare – I don't know, I can't tell you that. Because I know that even my second brother, who was bar mitvah in Bergen-Belsen also got tefillin. So she must have had tefillin from somewhere. And my second brother was bar mitzvah in BergenBelsen and learned the whole parsha, everything...

Interviewer: So you were a whole year in Bergen-Belsen.

Karen Bamberger:...We had Shabbos - we always had Shabbos. You know people got miserable and my mother used to say to the young girls: "Look, whatever they do, don't forget, every Jewish girl is a princess. That is what you are. You have to hold yourself, you have to keep yourself." It wasn't possible for the whole family to keep Pesach, so my mother decided that my oldest brother should keep Pesach. He shouldn't eat "chometz". One member of the family should keep Pesach, so we gave him our potatoes from the rations.

Interviewer: Where did you get potatoes?

Karen Bamberger: From the food or the vegetables - whatever there was in the meal, whatever was in the soup, you know, so he got that. Also, somebody in that camp managed to bake some matzos - I don't know how. They had an oven and my mother with, I think it was this Mrs. Meir, made one or two matzos - whatever they could. So we had matzos and we had Pesach. We knew it was Pesach. I remember the first Shabbos we were in BergenBelsen she lit candles. Everybody said to her: "You can't light candles - it's ridiculous, dangerous." It just so happened that that moment that the Germans came in to check and they started screaming: "You light candles. What are you doing, dumme Juden?" So my mother said very calmly: "This is my sabbath and I light candles." I don't suppose we lit candles every Friday because I don't suppose we had candles every Friday night. But I remember that was the first time. She lit candles. But she never allowed us to forget Shabbos - no way. We knew, every week, it was Shabbos. And when it was "Yom Tov" we knew it was "Yom Tov". You know, you could make "Yom Tov" out of nothing, if you have the spiritual resources which she obviously had unbelievable spiritual resources. She always said: "Der Ribbono schel Olam wird helfen", "everything will be okay" and "don't worry", "we will get together with Papi". You know, she had "bitochen".

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