

September 7th 2021

A few months ago I spit in a tube and discovered that I am 99.5% Jewish Ashkenazi. this could come as unexpected to my friends as I am very well known for my pkeila ! a delicious Sephardic dish from Tunisia. ☺

It is actually not that surprising as My grandparents are from Romania and Poland, but I was surprised that my DNA could prove that generation after generation my ancestors have succeeded to pass on their Jewish identity over the last 3,000 years, sometimes risking their lives.

Do I have the right to stop this chain of transmissions? Do I have the right to cast away their treasure? Clearly the answer is NO: even if I feel that it is a huge responsibility, I am 100% sure that I need pass the baton to the next generations.

I was born in Israel on the 5th day of the Yom Kippur war, one of the darkest periods in Israel's history. My father was in the Army, fighting to defend the Golan Heights, my mother couldn't get any news, and wasn't even sure if he was still alive.. Through the stress of my mother and people surrounding her during the first weeks of my life, to some extent I experienced what it means to be born Jewish.

My first name is Meital, a pure Israeli name meaning "dew water". Even if I dreamed about changing my name to Caroline or any more conventional name when I was a kid growing up in France, I'm today proud of my name, which obviously reminds me of my origins every day. That's the reason why I gave Israeli names to my 4 daughters, even if sometimes they would also prefer to have more common American or French girls' names.

A big part of my Jewish identity clearly comes from the Jewish summer camps that I attended when I was a teenager. I learned traditions, blessings, but more than that - the extraordinary feeling to be part of a community. I also had a chance to discover Sephardic traditions that I loved so much that I finally married a Sephardic husband!

I grew up in France where antisemitism kept rising. Even if I have never felt threatened directly, I was used to hiding the fact that I'm Jewish. My daughters went to a Jewish school that was protected days and nights by 4 policemen. For safety reasons kids were not allowed to wear a kippah or a Magen David on their way to school. In more and more schools with a high concentration of Muslim population, the teachers cannot teach the history of the Shoah anymore. All that led us to consider another future for our kids, and we decided to move to the US 10 years ago.

When our kids went to school in the US, I remember Lea, our first one, telling me : "Mom you know what ? I told my classmate that I am Jewish and they found that super cool! She was definitely not used to that kind of reaction.

(Over the last 10 years, we had the chance to be part of a wonderful Jewish French community. We are also grateful to be part of Kol Emeth Community, which warmly welcomed us .

My 4 daughters are now ranging in age from 14 to 24 years old. They are now young ladies and I hope they will take responsibility to not break this chain of 3,000 years of Jewish heritage.

Meital Amzallag