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It has now been 50 years since my sister Myriam and I boarded the ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo *en route* to Camp Miriam, on Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada. Although neither of us spoke English, we were quickly comforted by the warm smiles of the other children who were on their way to the Camp. The air was filled with songs like *Hatikvah* (התקווה) and *Hava Nagila* (הבה נגילה), accompanied by a chorus from the seagulls above. My younger sister Noemi joined us the next summer.

The short ferry ride across the Strait of Georgia was the end of a dramatic westward journey that had started almost a century earlier. A familiar Jewish story, yet unique story. I was born on March 27, 1951, in Odder, Denmark. My paternal grandfather, Avraham Sternkuker, came from Narrol (formerly part of Russia). My paternal grandmother, Minna Preker Davidova, came from the Shtetl of Debica (Dembica-Dembitz) near Krakow, Poland. In 1916, the family moved to Prostejov, Czech Republic (formerly part of Austria) to avoid the next wave of Russian Pogroms. My grandparents had four boys: Feiwish, Judah, Elias and Salo (Slomo), my father. Just before the Second World War, my uncle Feiwish left for Chile, Judah fled and joined the Czech resistance movement in England, and Elias escaped to Israel. My father was not so lucky. He was captured trying to find and save my grandmother, who was tragically killed in the Theresienstadt Concentration Camp.

My mother Frida came from Denmark. Like many Danes she had fled during the war and ended up working for a Red Cross relief organization in Switzerland that cared for concentration camp and other survivors. This is where she met my father after he was liberated from Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp.

Life after the War was difficult. My parents moved as refugees from Switzerland to France to Santiago, Chile, before eventually settling in Canada, looking for a better life.

On May 24, 1962, less than two months before our first trip to Camp Myriam, my mother had boarded on ocean-liner in Aarhus, Denmark with her three children – Myriam (13), Shalom (11) and Noemi (7). We had been living with my Danish grandfather and grandmother for the previous 7 years, while my father had travelled ahead to Vancouver, British Columbia in search for work and to set up a new home for the family. My father always reminded us that it was under John George Diefenbaker, serving as the conservative Prime Minister of Canada from June 21, 1957, to April 22, 1963, that he finally found a home for his family. Throughout the years we lived in New Westminster, BC, copy of the Canadian Bill of Rights 1960 hung prominently on the wall in our dining room and a copy of the two-volume tome of the Royal Commission on Health Services 1961 found a permanent place on the bookshelf b

Shortly after our long journey by boat across the Atlantic and train ride across Canada, a man from the Jewish community visited our house in New Westminster. My father knew we children had to learn English if we were to survive. Camp Miriam became both our English and Hebrew. But we were poor. The money my father earned as an accountant for McKay and Flannigan Sawmills was barely enough to cover food, clothing and the mortgage payment on our house. So he had to ask for help from the community to pay for our participation in the program. The man who came to our house arranged for us to attend the Camp for free that year.

From the moment we set foot on Gabriola Island, Camp Miriam was a wonderful experience. We were greeted by the smell of seaweed along the sea shore, pine needles on the path to our cabin, the wonderful smell spices from the kitchen and a warm embrace of the community.

Camp Miriam immediately transformed our lives. We quickly learned some words that would stay with us for a life-time. The first thing I remember was *arucha boker* (ארוחת בוקר). This was not just a morning meal but a communion with the other children and prayers as we said a short excerpt from *Birkat Hamazon* (ברכת מזון). Breakfast was followed by *avoda* (עבודה). This was not just work white-washing stones and raking the paths in the Camp, but a powerful way to seal the community spirit and sense of equality among its members. Then there was *hafseka* (הפסקה). This was not just a break to have some orange juice and coffee, but a moment to listen to the sound of the crickets in the tall grass and feel the warmth of sun *shemesh* (שמש). But what I remember the most was our encounter with *Bereshit* (בראשית) during our Friday evening walks to the "Berry Point". The beauty of the sun setting to the West and darkness spreading mysteriously from under the trees to the ground around them somehow captured the spirit of the *Kaballah Shabbat* (קבלת שבת) and *Lekhah Dodi* (לכה דודים) even if at the time we did not fully understand the words or their meaning.

Our Camp Miriam experience came to an abrupt end in 1964 when we no longer qualified for the subsidy that we had those first two years. In my case, my father felt that getting a paper route to earn some money in the summer was the next education I needed to prepare me for life.

Camp Miriam filled us with ideals and aspiration about being Jewish that were at odds with some of the things we were soon to see in the world around us. My father agonized when, after the death of Ian Robert Maxwell MC, huge discrepancies were found in his companies' finances, including the Mirror Group pension fund, which Maxwell had fraudulently misappropriated. Robert Maxwell was born as Ján Ludvík Hyman Binyamin Hoch into a poor Yiddish-speaking Jewish family in the small town of Slatinské Doly in the easternmost province of (pre-World War II) Czechoslovakia, not far from my father's former home. My father was spared having to witness the disgrace and shame that Bernard Madoff, the admitted operator of a Ponzi scheme that is considered to be the largest financial fraud in U.S. history, who defrauded many Synagogues and Jewish retirees of their lifetime savings.

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No words can thank you enough for having given us this wonderful formative experience of attending Camp Miriam immediately after our arrival in Canada.

Shana Tova (29 Elul 5772)

Shalom