

Annika chronicles small communities

BY SIMON YAFFE

ANNIKA Hernroth-Rothstein knows all about being part of a minority.

Growing up as one of four Jews in the small Swedish town of Lysekil — the other three were her mother and grandparents — she experienced antisemitism from a young age.

Harassed by neo-Nazis at school, she only embraced her Judaism in her early 20s, having shaved her curly locks off, such was her desperation to rid herself of her 'Jewishness'.

Ten years ago, having experienced that isolation, the investigative journalist decided to write about smaller Jewish communities around the world.

And her pet project led to her new book *Exile: Portraits of the Jewish Diaspora* (Bombardier Books), which sees her travel to Jewish communities in Djerba (Tunisia), Uzbekistan, Cuba, Morocco, Iran, Finland, Siberia, Sweden, Turkey, Palermo (Sicily) and Venezuela.

"It used to annoy me a little when Israeli friends would ask me to make aliya when they heard about how things were for Jews in Sweden," Annika told me from Stockholm.

"Jews in the diaspora have a strong Jewish-Swedish identity or strong Jewish-Tunisian identity, or whatever it may be, and I believe that is something worth protecting."

She was prompted to start her project while at a dinner in Israel.

Annika said: "One of the people there was from Iran and he still had family there.

"He told me he would give anything to know how they were doing."

She spent a month in Iran, which is home to around 10,000 Jews.

"I was really scared before I went there," the 38-year-old recalled. "I was the most afraid when I was sitting in the airport in Istanbul and was about to board the flight to Tehran.

"Here I was, all alone, a Jewish woman and I was going into the belly of the beast.

"I had planned it all on a whim and the next moment, I was arriving at Imam Khomeini International Airport."

Surprisingly, during her stay in Iran, where she was accompanied by a government minder at all times, she discovered that most of the citizens she spoke to told her how much they loved Jews and that they felt a strong connection.

Annika explained: "Most Iranian Muslims are not religious, are highly-educated, and are a sophisti-



IRANIAN TALES: Annika at a synagogue in Iran

cated people.

"The anti-Zionism, at least, comes from the regime, but I did not find any hatred of Israel from the Iranian people.

"There is, of course, hatred towards America, which comes from a pretty real place and most of it stems from what happened during the Iran-Iraq War."

While in Tehran, she visited the Abrishami Synagogue, located, ironically, in Palestine Street.

The shul houses a kosher restaurant and a mikva.

Annika said: "There was a mechtiza, thankfully, so I was able to speak openly to the women in the shul — it was the only place where the minder would not go.

"They asked me if I had been to Jerusalem and what did it look like."

Annika also met Dr Siamak Moreh Sedegh, the director of the Sapir Jewish hospital in Tehran.

Proving his loyalty to the regime

As well as practising medicine, Dr Sedegh is the sole Jewish representative in the Iranian parliament.

She said: "At first, I thought he was the most despicable Jew I had ever met because he was talking about how he hated Israel and compared Benjamin Netanyahu to a Nazi.

"I was then told that he was proving his loyalty to the Iranian regime.

"The Jewish community in Iran is lost in a golden cage — its members are not being persecuted, but they are not really allowed to leave the country.

"If they do want to leave, there are various caveats which comes with securing a visa."

Annika also visited Palermo, which, like most Italian cities, is home to a strongly-Roman Catholic population.

"I went there because I had heard the city and the Church was giving back a synagogue which had been taken during the Inquisition," Annika recalled.

"I went there for the official ceremony and also visited the Museum of the Inquisition.

"I spent a Shabbat with a group of Marranos who were converting back to Judaism and with the rabbi who was helping them.

"It was proof of how strong the Jewish soul is."

The mother-of-two, who is of German and Russian descent, was aware she was Jewish when she was growing up in Sweden, but, as she describes, she was "unaware of my Jewishness".

Annika added: "Being Jewish was more of a fact and I didn't really reflect on it — and it did not mean anything to me — until it was pointed out to me by others, such as the neo-Nazis in school.

"I even shaved my thick hair off because I thought they might think I was not Jewish any more, but then I realised that the Jewishness they hated was more than skin deep."

Having moved to Paris and becoming a mother to two boys, she embraced her Judaism.

"When I became a mother I became observant — they were the last push for me," she said.

Antisemitism has long been a problem in Sweden, a country where shechita has been banned since 1937.

"Most antisemitism in Sweden comes from the left, which has put forward various anti-Jewish legislation, such as trying to ban circumcision," said Annika, who imports her kosher meat from Belgium.

"There is also imported antisemitism from immigrants who come to Sweden from Muslim countries.

"There are, at most, 300 neo-Nazis in the country, but the left-wing antisemitism is the most virulent and dangerous."

She does, however, see a future for the Jewish diaspora, having taken heart from her travels for her book.

"I have never been as positive or felt as good about Jewish life around the world as I do now," Annika said. "It was an amazing experience."

■ Annikahernroth.com

SPORTSWORLD

MANCHESTER Maccabi 1st stormed into the semi-final of the Peter Morrison National Trophy with a 4-2 win over London Maccabi.

Manchester went into the break three goals to the good on their visit to the capital.

After a cagey opening 15 minutes, with both teams missing half-chances, it was Toby Levy who opened the scoring from a free kick.

Aaron Goldman poked home from a corner to dou-

Maccabi storm into Morrison semi-final

ble the lead and Sam Hatton had a simple tap-in for the third.

Hatton restored the three-goal advantage after London had pulled one back — and they scored another late consolation.

Manchester player-manager Michael Sacks said: "It's not easy spending five hours on a bus and then going straight into an intense game of football, but the boys adapted well and delivered."

Crunch MJSL title match on Sunday

THE Manchester Jewish Soccer League is heading for an exciting climax.

Leaders Reich moved a step closer to the title with a 10-1 win over their Masters side.

But Leeds Maccabi have kept the pressure on by beating Manchester Maccabi Yellow 3-2.

The Yorkshire side are just one point behind, but have played a game more.

Things could be a bit clearer after this weekend as Reich host Leeds on Sunday.

Victory for Reich would see them needing just two points from their last three games due to their much superior goal difference, but a Leeds win will put extra pressure on Reich.

Maccabi Manchester Blue and Reich Masters are also scheduled to play on Sunday.

■ AT the halfway stage of the season, Manchester Maccabi Broughton are still in the running for honours in the East Manchester U-15 Division Three, writes **STUART SHAPIRO**.

On Sunday, they blew away the chal-

lenge of Queensway Wasps in 9-3 win that sees the team perfectly poised to strike in second place.

Dovid Ross went nap, Shalom Silverstone hit two with goals apiece for Dan Mocton and Yoel Miller.

They take on leaders Woodhouse on Sunday in the league's cup competition.

South Manchester Sports U-12 can also see the possibility of title success in the Timperley and District League Division Three.

South went joint second with a game in hand after overcoming the challenge of Wythenshawe Tigers 7-3.

In unstoppable form was Harvey Wolff, who scored six, with Joe Spencer grabbing the seventh.

Manchester Maccabi U-13 girls ran out of steam after performing valiantly in a first half against Westbury.

Keeping the deficit to only 2-0 at half-time promised a tight second half, but it was not to be as Westbury ran riot to notch a further seven goals with none in reply.

Two-horse race in Israel league

THE Israel Premier League now looks to be a two-horse race between Maccabi Tel Aviv and Maccabi Haifa, writes **Simon Yaffe**.

Haifa, who have not won the title for nine years, are now just four points behind leaders Tel Aviv after thrashing Sektzia Nes Ziona 4-0.

The visitors' task was made even more difficult after Shay Elias was sent off in the 17th minute.

Goals from Australian internationals Trent Sainsbury and Nikita Rukavyt-sya, as well as Yarden Shua and Ofri Arad, saw Haifa claim the three points.

Tel Aviv eased to a 3-0 win at Hapoel Hadera, with Eitan Tibi scoring

twice in the last four minutes of the game after Nigerian Chikeluba Ofoedu had broken the deadlock.

Third-placed Beitar Jerusalem won 3-1 at home to Maccabi Netanya.

Levi Garcia put the capital side in front before Montenegrin international captain Fatos Beciraj equalised.

Beitar retook the lead through another Garcia goal, before Dan Einbinder made sure of the three points.

Basement side Hapoel Ra'anana's miserable season continued as they were beaten 3-1 at fourth-placed Hapoel Tel Aviv.

Stefan Spirovski gave the home side a 27th-

minute lead before Yoav Tomer levelled matters just before half-time.

However, Omri Altman regained Hapoel's lead in the 65th minute, with Spirovski adding their third — and his second — 15 minutes later.

Hapoel Beersheba won for the first time under new manager Yossi Abukasis as they beat Hapoel Haifa 1-0 thanks to Oren Biton's 40th minute strike.

Dor Jan's 57th-minute winner for Bnei Yehuda pushed Hapoel Kfar Saba closer to the relegation zone, while SC Ashdod moved clear of it after beating Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona 1-0 courtesy of Nir Bardea's first-half goal.

It's lucky 13 for high-scoring ladies

above — train every Tuesday (8-9pm) at Parrenthorn High School, Prestwich. All football abilities are welcome to attend.

■ Contact: Sam on 07967 222203 or Jade on 07967 800521.

MANCHESTER Maccabi's open age ladies team found 13 to be their lucky number.

Tash Stoops (5) and Sam Dunn (4) scored nine of their 13 goals against Bury Vets Blues in a very one-sided affair.

Yael Lewis scored two on her full debut, while Jade Block and Ruth Purdue also scored.

The open age ladies — from 16 and