

Introduction: You're listening to Opening the Tent: Stories of Jewish Belonging, an original podcast produced by the NYU Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life. Our guest today is Caroline Cook, a junior in the College of Arts and Science, studying Art History.

Caroline Cook: Judaism was really fun for my family, because really, the main way that we practiced is during the holidays, we don't get together with my family. And we didn't go to synagogue, but we'd all just sit around the table and we'd talk and I have cousins from Israel who would come over and they'd speak Hebrew. And that was, that made me feel connected to my Jewish identity. But I think the first time that I realized this was mine, was when I was around, I think, 14 or 15 and I was sleeping over at my grandparents house. And I remember walking around their bedroom and looking at these, just so many books that they have in their bedroom. And I remember either taking, I think it was my mom's copy of the Torah that she got as a Bat Mitzvah present when she was 13. And I remember taking that home with me because I felt like oh, I want to learn more about this, I want to study this, I want to have this. That's when I felt Jewish because I realized it was something that wasn't only there during the holidays, but it was something that was really mine and something that I wanted to to develop and learn more about. Since I grew up in West LA, there were a lot of Jewish kids that went to my high school. So it was just sort of it was just very normal for me just to kind of be Jewish, but not feel super, super religiously Jewish. But I think the first time I fell outside of the tent was when I came to college. Freshman year, I lived in Rubin, which was right around the corner from the Bronfman Center, and so I went because I grew up Jewish. And then when I went there, I realized, oh, a lot of people like went to Jewish Day School or had Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, know all the prayers and during Shabbat, and I didn't know it. I think I felt aware of the fact that I wanted more of a Jewish identity. I loved it, but I didn't know what I was doing. Now I've been more aware of it. I actually just started an internship at The Renee and Chaim Gross Foundation which is an art gallery right below Washington Square Park. And just looking around at his sculptures, I felt very in touch with my Jewish identity.

I've now become confident in the fact that I'm just figuring out how Jewish I am and what Judaism means to me. I remember telling Talia Gnessin, when we got coffee a year ago, I remember saying, I just wish I had, you know, felt more Jewish. I wish that I had had a Bat Mitzvah. I wish I had gone to

synagogue regularly. I wish I had day school or summer camp or something to speak on. And she said, no, you, you can't feel that way. Because everybody's on their own path. Everybody's on their own journey to getting where they want to be. And it's beautiful that you're different, you know, and that you're, you're figuring it out. And once she said that, and I think Arin Edelstein, too. I think she may have said this on a podcast is that she just wishes that people didn't feel like they had to explain their Judaism or prove that they're Jewish. And I think I want to echo that, because I do want people to feel that. And so I feel like because I've adopted a lot of leadership roles at the Bronfman Center, I'm not sure if I'm perceived this way, but I feel like a lot of times, people who are, you know, in leadership of different groups look like they have it all together, and they have it figured out. And it looks like that I probably have, you know, my Judaism figured out and the kinds of groups that I want to be involved in and really, it's, I have no idea what I'm doing. And I'm just happy to keep meeting people and keep exploring different types of Judaism and sort of what makes you feel Jewish and Jewishness and I'm actually becoming confident and okay in that and I hope others are too.

Outro: Thanks for listening. This episode was produced by the b|hive story collective at the NYU Bronfman Center. Subscribe on Spotify or Apple podcasts for new episodes every Monday.