

**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 Hannah Rothbard, a senior in Steinhardt studying Studio Art.

**Hannah Rothbard:** I don't really remember first being conscious of my Jewish identity, but I do remember the first time someone like said to me, oh, you're a Jew, I've never met a Jew. And I guess that's when I realized like that my little South Florida bubble that was full of Jews that wasn't the same everywhere. It was it was on my soccer team, someone who'd moved from like Connecticut or something. And it was the first Jews she ever met. I went to public school so there were a lot of Jews in my area, and I would say the more religious ones went to Jewish Day School, but I went to public school. So I was like the archetype of a Jewish student. So some, some people would think of me as like the religious one, but I wouldn't have ever considered myself to be a religious Jew. Well, in high school, that was weird, because I remember like these students that were in a film class, and I guess maybe I was like, the only Jewish person they knew or like, or was friends with. And so they I remember they were doing a film about religion at our school, and so they wanted to come to my house and like film Judaica, and things like that. And it was kind of weird to me, because I never thought of myself as like that archetypal Jew. And I was like, but I'm not even religious, like, why did they want to come fill me but I guess compared to who I went to school with, I was quite on quote, more Jewish, which is really different being here. Like I don't really have to explain my Judaism to other Jews at NYU, because there's so many people that are kind of in the same boat. Like we kind of just understand we're not necessarily religious or cultural or XY and Z. Everyone's just, I don't know, I guess being here there's more diversity and in types of Jews and people know that. The only time I can think of like, off the top my head was when I was promoting Havdalah Under the Stars, actually, with Hillel. And I remember going to K-caf and I had never been to K-caf. I know a lot of like Jewish people, and will you meet their friends there, but that that just wasn't my experience. And so that was the first time I went because I was trying to get people to sign up for Havdalah under the Stars. And some orthodox boys were talking in Hebrew to me, even though I didn't speak Hebrew. And they were kind of like teasing me basically poking fun at Hillel in general, not just me, but Hillel as like being in a non Jewish organization because we're more social than religious. So that was a little

weird, but I don't really remember how I responded, I didn't really give them my time. I was like, okay, that's fine. But it's a community event. Obviously, it was aimed at all kinds of Jews. I mean, I remember the presidents at the time stood up to that and said something on my behalf or I don't, I don't even remember it. It wasn't that big of a deal. But I don't know, I guess it's just kind of sad to think that there's people in our community that don't view some of us as part of that community. But I've chosen to surround myself with other people of various levels of, you know, practice, religion, cultural, whatever. But everyone is open to being part of the same community. Being in classes, sometimes when people might say something about Israel, and somehow I'm involved or implicated because I'm like the one Jew in the room. And even sometimes it's happened where they say something that you can tell, they don't really know anything about just like copy and paste it from a wiki page. And being the only Jew in the room, I feel the responsibility to speak up. I feel like when it comes to other Jews, there's not much I need from that. But I guess I've had some friends that I don't even know how to word it. But they've at times made jokes, or casted me in this weird way as like, white and, in a way, negating my Jewish identity. And that's felt weird before. Like, I remember, a friend had made a comment. I said something and they're like, oh, my God, that's a white person thing to say. And I was like, actually, it's more like something my mom, my Jewish mother would say. And it was it's just a very weird interaction. And that's a friend who had laughed when I said, oh, let's go to an AEPi party. And she said, oh, is it all gonna be Jewish boys? And I'm like, yeah, what's wrong with that? Sometimes it's weird interacting with people. You're white when it serves them and you're Jewish when it serves them, but all in all, they're somewhat antisemitic, maybe without realizing it. Yeah, I mean, I guess it's just, it's something that I've never experienced in Jewish circles. Like I feel like most people inherently understand even the ones that are teasing me understand that I'm a cultural and not religious Jew. Like it usually just goes without saying within Jewish circles. But yeah, it's definitely hard to explain to other people. I was having a really nice conversation with someone the other day who he was raised Christian, he converted to Judaism. So I feel like he he understood Judaism as like a religion more, but it found it really fascinating that to me as my culture I understood it differently. So I guess it really just depends on who you're talking to. And knowledge they have about Judaism because I would say like most people just have the assumption that it's a religion.

Well, I mean, what I love about Bronfman is that it like it is so welcoming to people of all different levels of like observance. And so I'm like, once I met people and you know, had Shabbat dinner and stuff with everyone, I didn't feel outside of any circles. And I know that like just going to Shabbat dinners and not going to services was fine. No one was judging me for that. But just showing up and like showing up to Bronfman, just to dinner and being like, oh, where is everyone, no one told me where to go. That was a little intimidating. But as you know, with Hillel, we're working on that. So I guess like that would be the goal at NYU to make it more make the community more welcoming to people. Make them know that we're welcoming because we are welcoming, but I think it's hard at first to get involved like, if you might be, I guess intimidated by religion.

**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.