

## **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 Max Gross, a senior in Gallatin concentrating in Film Journalism.

## **Max Gross**

I grew up in a not very religious town, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where we were one of very, very few religious families. I went to Jewish school there, but virtually none of my classmates were religious, nearly to the same degree. It was more of just a traditional town where people would send their kids to a Jewish school, despite how they practiced personally. I've always kind of felt like the outlier in whatever school I was in. In Allentown, for sure I was, you know, the most religious one of the most religious other than like the rabbi in his family. And so I kind of was always looked at like that I was, you know, when I would go to a friend's house, I was told don't eat this and this and this, you don't really know if it's kosher. And then in elementary school, when I moved to New Jersey, I was also went to a religious school, but I was suddenly among the least religious in my school, which was a very interesting shift to go through, you know, my I had friends who came over for playdates or sleepovers and were not allowed back because we showed *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*, and that was, that was too much for some kids. In my school, that was a very weird shift to go through. And then in high school, I went to SAR like seemingly quite a lot of the community downtown. But there I kind of was thrown back into being among the more religious people there where in the minority, where we didn't my family didn't eat out dairy, and, you know, was fully shomer Shabbat. So it was kind of this weird back and forth throughout my life of, of being the most religious in my environment and the least religious in my environment. So I've never, you know, was I was never really totally comfortable squarely in the middle and the average of my peers, but I kind of was always very comfortable in my own practice and stuff. And I think that kind of helped me, regardless of if, of how well I did fit in, helped me feel comfortable. Whenever I would be among non Jewish friends, definitely there are, it was not an active exclusion, of course, but you know, friends want to hang out on Saturday, and I can't really do that with them. That would, that's frustrating, or, you know, go out, have a meal, go to Chipotle or something, and I can't do that. But, yeah, again, even with that, I don't, I don't, I don't know, if I ever really felt like I was being excluded with

that. I know that they were not ever making some sort of active effort to exclude me and stuff, it was just that, you know, how should they they shouldn't be, you know, changing up their schedule to accommodate me, the one person I, you know, I'll manage.

I'm sure you've heard this from other people who are Modern Orthodox, that we're in this very, you know, careful and precarious position of not really passing when we're walking around, we don't really pass for other people, for non-Jews, when we're walking around. We kind of always will stand out a little bit. But we still, you know, we want to be part of that world, we still want to be part of both worlds. And that that kind of need to balance those two is is not easy, and it's not on other people to kind of accommodate that conflict. That's that conflict is for us to work on on our own. I think that I fall more under the camp of I have nothing to hide, I'm fine. You know, I wear my kippah, I specifically make sure that I'm wearing my kippah when I go out of the house. I'm not ashamed of that at all. But you can't really change that, how you're seen, the visibility of who you are and how you practice and stuff. You can't really affect people's impressions like that. So, I mean, do I wish people understood, you know, when when some when I say that I'm orthodox do I wish people understood that and like didn't you know, have that little look like But you're not wearing the hat. You're not you know, only in black and white? You know you're wearing a V-neck t-shirt and stuff, you know? Yeah, that'd be nice. But I can't you know, will everyone to understand all of the political and religious issues that Modern Orthodox people kind of feel on a day to day basis.

## **Outro**

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