

**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 Isaac Wirth, a senior in Tisch studying game design.

**Isaac Wirth:** I grew up in an area that didn't have a very large Jewish community, and my school was holding a holiday play, and the teacher asked, "Are there any Jewish students here to play the Jewish mom and dad?" And me and another student were the only two that rose our hands. And I was like, wait, it's only me and Joshua. It's only me and Joshua, who are Jewish here. That's when I kind of realized, oh, like, I know I'm Jewish, I didn't realize what that really meant. I definitely felt like it was different because I thought just everyone celebrated Hanukkah. I also come from an interfaith family. So I also grew up celebrating Christian holidays, too, and I wasn't really able, at that age, I was like six or seven years old, I really wasn't able to, like differentiate between the two, and that's when I really began to learn.

I definitely felt outside of the tent at the end of high school, when I began to do more research about Judaism and really begin to ask more questions and learn more about my mom's side of the family. My peers really didn't understand why I was interested in learning more and beginning to practice more. I was either friends with people who identified as like purely atheist or people who were Christian, and they just didn't understand. I felt a little othered by it. I really didn't start to find my community until I transferred to school at NYU and found the Bronfman Center. I remember, the first day I came to the Bronfman center, it was like during Welcome Week, junior year, and I sat down with one of the Springboard Fellows, and we had a really long conversation. I was a little scared to like, practice my religion in a community because I was queer. I was worried that I would face backlash for that in my community, and honestly, I have never felt more accepted, and I have felt able to like celebrate my identity, while participating in with the Jewish community at the Bronfman Center. Some of my favorite things was like when I did JLF, the Jewish Learning Fellowship with Rabbi Nikki back when she was working at Bronfman. We did "sex, love and romance", and we talked a lot about gender identity and we did a lot of like Torah study. We talked about the Midrash where it is said that Adam and Eve were one and like a whole nother being. And we were talking about the what that implies for gender identity, and that's when I started to see myself being represented in

the Torah. And I got really excited from that, I, I, it was one of the happiest days honestly, for me.

I honestly felt the most like, inside of the tent back, pre-pandemic, back when we used to, like gather together for in-person Shabbats at the Bronfman Center, and maybe it's like more literal, because we were literally in a building. We were in that fifth floor room, like it was a tent, but that's when I felt like the most involved. I felt that connection to my community around me. I felt the connection back to my family when doing that. You know, typically after every Friday night Shabbat, I would call my grandmother when I came back to my apartment. I still text and call my grandmother every Friday night. She always texts me "Shabbat shalom" as soon as the sun sets in North Carolina. So, you know, I feel, I definitely feel the most in the tent every Friday night, regardless of pandemic. I still feel included and involved.

I wish people understood that, even though I've only begun expressing my Jewish identity to the public more in the past two years, that my Jewish identity has been here since I was a child. I am just as Jewish even though I really didn't start celebrating High Holidays and stuff until about two or three years ago. You know, I still know so many little like Jewish tidbits about my childhood that like I didn't realize were Jewish until like, I look back on it now. When I was in preschool, my preschool teacher called my mom, because I was making up too many words. And I my mom was like "What? First of all, he's in preschool, that that he's like four. He's gonna make up words." But then the teacher was like, "Well, no, he keeps saying his keppie hurts". And my mom was just kind of sitting there like, "That's Yiddish, it's his head, his head hurts. Is he okay?" So like I look back at stories like that and it makes me smile because like I know this is like a part of who I am even since I was a little kid.

**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.