

**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 Rachel Fadem, a senior in the College of Arts and Science, studying Gender and Sexuality Studies and Journalism.

**Rachel Fadem:** I think a big thing for me was like, as a child, wanting to kind of like fit in with everyone else at school, and like kind of having everyone talk about, you know, these holidays and these traditions that I wasn't really a part of. And so I think that really made me cognizant of my identity. I remember walking to school with my mom when I was younger, and I was like, why don't we celebrate Christmas? Like everyone celebrates Christmas, it seems so fun, all my friends are talking about Christmas. And I remember she was like, "do you want eight days of presents or one"?. That was like the first time I was like okay being a Jew is cool. And like obviously that evolved to like actually be about Judaism and not presents on Hanukkah. But I think that was kind of like the first time that I like really thought about, oh, Judaism as being different than a lot of people. I grew up across the street from the JCC in Manhattan. So we'd go there all the time. Like we were members. They had a pool, and like we would go swimming, and I would take like children's classes there. And like Jewish identity is really important to my dad. And so, you know, he would be there all the time, and I would kind of accompany him. And so I think that really impacted me because I kind of got to be around this community that was really great.

I was really involved with the Bronfman Center freshman year, and then you know, COVID hit, and I was still kind of involved, but I have lots of different health issues and like chronic illness, including migraines, and also just, you know, different mental health issues. And so it was really hard for me to be on my computer all day and especially, you know, with events typically being at night and, you know, Shabbat being on Friday nights, it was kind of a week of zoom, and then kind of being like, I just need a break from a screen. And, you know, I went to every Shabbat, except for like a few when I was out of town or whatnot, freshman year, in person. And it was such a core part of my week, like I really loved Shabbat, it was like one of the favorite parts of my week. And I love the community. I think that was definitely weird and a weird transition, I tried going to Shabbat and just like turning off my video and like being there but doing other things, that I wouldn't just stare at the screen, but it just wasn't the same experience. Every time, I would end up like dealing with a health thing midway through having to leave or coming late because of a health thing. So I kind of just stopped going and I think that was really hard for me, because also I was on the board of Keshet, the Reform Jews at NYU, which is wonderful. And I kind of had to be like, you know what, like I like I need to take a step back. That I think really made me feel less connected to my Judaism, and I've heard a lot of people say that they felt more connected to their Judaism over COVID and I actually feel the

complete opposite. And so hopefully when things are back in person in the fall that will come back.

I wouldn't say I did this in like a Jewish way, again, more of like a health way. But like, I did try to not use technology on, you know, the weekends, which clearly did not end up happening because, for people that know me, they know I have 5 million things going on and never get a break. So like I would theoretically not want to use technology and I would have to, but I really tried my hardest to like take a day of rest. Again, I wouldn't say it was in a Jewish way, it was more than I just like a "I need rest" way. But the fact that it was on Saturday, I think made me feel a little bit of a connection to my Judaism and a connection to, you know, other Jews who are doing this as well.

**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.