Opening The Tent - Episode 9: Julia Leschi

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 Julia Leschi, a junior at NYU Steinhardt. She spoke with us about her experience growing up in a country in which the scars of the Holocaust are visible everywhere.

Julia: I don't even know if I can remember the first time I was recognizant of my Jewish identity because it has always just kind of been a given I think from the education I received and the family history. My grandmother, well my grandparents are Holocaust survivors and so I heard a lot of stories of the war from her. She was a child so it was more of her life not being fully aware of what was going on around her, but still now when she thinks back on it realizing close calls and the craziness of it all. So I had a lot of negative feelings about my Jewish identity when I was pretty young, I guess I associated it with pain and trauma. There was a part of my life when I was in primary school where I really kind of rejected that identity or at least the omnipresence of this identity in my life. My brother would read a lot about Jewish history and ask my mother and my mother is a historian so like she would always bring in whatever she was talking about and connect it to Jewish history somehow, and I got really like annoyed with it. I would say I was French before I was Jewish for a while and at some point that changed because the more I learned about the Holocaust and interacted with classmates who were sometimes antisemitic even if they really didn't know it, I realized from then on I was more receptive to my family's way of living with that reality.

Interviewer: Julia reflected on her negative feelings towards her Jewish life in France and the shock of stepping into a Jewish community bursting with pride.

Julia: I didn't have a sense of community also community is not a very French concept so I never felt like I was missing that community either until I came here and it's what everyone's about. It's a heavier feeling growing up Jewish in France and in Europe in general because the weight of the Holocaust is just way more present and you go to school and on every school, there's a little sign that says here this amount of kids were killed under Nazi Germany because of the collaboration of the French government. You kind of just walk
into school every day and you read that and at some point, you don't really see it anymore, I mean I don't think anybody sees it anymore because it's so relevant to France's history. We do learn more about antisemitism and World War 2. I was very surprised maybe a little shocked seeing how joyful the concept of a Jewish community was here, cause for me, it was never something I wanted to bring up. It was always easier for me to say I was gay then I was Jewish in social settings, so that was a wild thing to see for me. For a while, I felt that I couldn't relate to the Jewish community here and if I would I was out of place because I knew so little about religion and I bought a little Magen David the summer of my freshman year that started wearing in the US that I didn't wear at home. So I don't know it was on my mind obviously, at therapy it was like I don't get how all of the Jews here are fine with being Jewish it looks like it's chill for them. And at some point, I think when I was already reconciled enough with the differences between my experience and the experience of people here I let myself be engaged and it's been good ever since. I enjoy going... I like that I have this new part of my social circle that relates to this part of my identity.

**closing:** 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.