**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 Sidney Kurland, a junior in Tisch studying Dramatic Writing.

**Sydney Kurland:** I grew up in a really Jewish neighborhood, there were people ranging from like reform to like Hasidic Jews all around me. So I was like, very aware, especially of like the different levels of observance. And my family is very reform like High Holidays synagogue is about the most that we do. And I always wanted to know more. So actually, when I was like six, I used to go to this like weekend class for like little kids to learn about Judaism. I went to a lot of schools growing up. So my first school that I went to was a primarily Korean school, and I was in the Korean Dual Language Program. So it was me and one other kid, we were both Jewish, but we were the only non Korean people in our program. So actually, when I left that school in second grade, the teacher made everyone write me goodbye notes, and one of my classmates, I don't think this was out of hatred, I think it was out of ignorance, wrote, "You are really nice, even though you are Jewish". My parents were really, really upset by it. But I didn't really realize what it meant until like a few years ago, when I guess my dad was remembering that moment. It's like a weird thing to talk about because being Jewish already, you're like, to some people, I'm just white, like, I just think of myself as white and like, my Jewishness doesn't get in the way of that, just because I grew up in LA, now I go to school in New York, like, there's just a lot of Jewish people there. And like, they don't really face as much discrimination, but it was a weird place to feel like being in the minority. It's like a weird experience. So I went to this boarding school in eighth and ninth grade, it was this all girls boarding school that was like a residential treatment facility. So it was like a whole nother level of stuff. And they said it was nondenominational, but it was a, it was a Christian organization. Like there were obviously other Jewish girls that went to that school before me. But I felt like we were continuously having to explain ourselves to the administration. And again, I can't really tell if it was like, an actual hatred, or if it was just ignorance, because I think I like to assume the best. And I really think that a lot of it was out of ignorance. But there was, you know, I was very angry, because they were like, it's a safety hazard to leave the Shabbat, candles burning. And I was like, that's not fair, you know. But that was like about the only time that I felt like I was kept away sort of from something. The whole point of being in a lot of these programs is
about like, this deep introspection and looking at yourself, and they're constantly asking you like about your identity. And I have a whole other thing about, you know, coming to terms with my queerness there, but my Jewishness was something else, because they would regularly take us to a synagogue, and I'd never been to a synagogue, like regularly and just gone to services. So I was, I feel like I was exposed to like, a new type of Jewish experience. And it made me so happy. And that's where I first heard all the music that I love so much that I'm really happy that I've gotten to learn some of the songs.

I wish people understood Judaism is a very personalizable religion. I just have like a personal issue with this, explaining why I want to identify as Jewish and why it matters to me, to my mom sometimes because she just gets really stuck in like the, but the sexism part, and I'm like, well, I'm just gonna take the parts that work for me and internalize those. And that's what I value and I'm going to find communities that I find validating. I wouldn't assume anything of any religion, I think is a good baseline. But I think especially with Judaism, it can be so individualized, like you really can't assume like what it means if someone tells you that they're Jewish. I love the emphasis on like, caring for others, caring for the community, doing community service, like it's, you know, community mindedness. It's so nice. And then I also love, you know, the idea of forgiveness like Yom Kippur is like actually really special to me, because I, because I believe in forgiveness and I believe in like people being able to change and that's really important. And then I love, I just feel like it has a nice a nice culture surrounding it. So I do like the, the humor that us Jews have about our experiences and that you can have these like shared experiences with other people, something to talk about and bond over. I really like that. Like I want something to belong to. And I like that this is something that I can belong to and like the history and the culture is something that interests me so like, it's even just like a learning experience is something that I like about getting to do Jewish things.

**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.