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MOR Scholarship Entry
1 April 2024

Together as One

My experiences as a Jew in my life have brought me belonging, connection and perspective. Whether it was attending Sunday school with my Jewish peers and celebrating each other's bar mitzvahs together to learning my Moroccan *safta's* stories through her cooking every Shabbat dinner, these experiences have shaped me into the person I am today. There was a special connection that I've always felt to Judaism and to other Jews that I could never describe when I was younger. It was just how I felt. As I have matured, this special connection finally became understood.

After traveling in Sweden with my father to visit our family, he decided to take us on a trip to Berlin. There we took a day to visit Sachsenhausen, a site where over 50,000 Jews were gassed, burned and worked to death. The feeling of seeing an oven where food was not made, but where my people were left to die was indescribable. I felt a rush of two emotions; an immediate anger, asking myself again and again "Why, Why, Why," but at the same time this immense sense of connection and passion for my people that I couldn't quite describe.

As the horrific news of October 7th spread, these exact emotions filled me again. Never again became again, and the scariest part was the silence from the world. Hearing "Well, it's a sensitive subject," and the "Resistance is justified." Being labeled "Colonizers," "Murders," and "White supremacists" highlighted a scary parallel to the hatred and scapegoating seen in that same concentration camp I walked on five years ago. Again I asked myself, "Why," as I sat helplessly and saw the slaughter of my people yet again. I just wanted to do anything I could in my power to better our circumstances.

A week after, my grandpa mailed me a hamsa necklace with *chai* written on it, life in Hebrew. I put it on with pride and held my head up high. It was this pivotal moment I realized that we as Jews need to band together more than ever. I have been blessed to have a Jewish family to lean on, but in times like these we as Jews need to be a united family of one. Being over one thousand miles away from my small family, I knew I needed to be a part of something larger. We all have the power to confide in each other, uplift each other and be there for each other. My Jewish community growing up was what got me through my high and lows and now it was my turn to continue that away from home.

I began inviting all my Jewish friends together to join me for Shabbat dinner at temple and to attend other Jewish events within the community. I started attending more Hillel events at school and encouraging my friends to do the same. I increased my involvement with Mustangs for Israel, tabling and passing out flyers to students, educating them on Israel's history and now holding an executive position within this club. I applied as a Stand With Us intern, and was accepted into their first-year leadership program where I am now learning how to navigate anti-semitism on campus, using legal and professional help available to me, and learn how to put on a successful Israel education event at school. I have joined a friend in bringing a much needed

Chabad to SMU, meeting with the rabbi and already beginning to host our first series of events, “Torahs and Taco.”

My experiences as a Jew have given me the power to push myself to navigate life’s challenges while having a strong community by my side. With that, I have faced waves of helplessness where I want to give up, still asking the same question “Why,” “Why us,” “What have we done to deserve this.” After finding my strong community of Jews and supportive allies in Dallas, I have gained a new resilience fueled by a joint passion to be unapologetically Jewish. I no longer ask myself “Why” but “How,” “How can I change this.”

If there is one takeaway from my story, it is to never lose that spark. Just look at the accomplishments such a small group of people have done to change the world. Even though it can feel as if our good has gone unseen, remember how far we’ve come and the things we can continue to accomplish **together** as Jews.