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Culture

Q & A: She's Sarah Silverman's Sister – And Just Officiated Tiffany Haddish's Bat Mitzvah

By Talya Zax

Sure, there are a lot of Jews in Hollywood. But not one of them has ever had quite as memorable a showbiz bat mitzvah as Tiffany Haddish.

Haddish, whose father is an Eritrean-born Ethiopian Jew, became bat mitzvah on December 3, her 40th birthday, and simultaneously premiered her new Netflix special “Black Mitzvah.” The actress and comedian, who sprung to stardom with the 2017 movie “Girls Trip,” chose Rabbi Susan Silverman – sister of comedian Sarah Silverman – to officiate the ceremony. Small and emotional, the service was followed by a party unlike anything you attended in grade school; Barbra Streisand showed up, and gave Haddish a necklace bearing a Star of David to commemorate the occasion.

Silverman, who is based in Israel, spoke about the experience with the Forward's Talya Zax the morning after. “It wasn't even 12 hours ago,” she said, somewhat sleepily. The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Talya Zax: How did you first meet Tiffany Haddish?

Susan Silverman: I was familiar with her work; I was most taken with her story and with the work she's doing on behalf of foster youth. She's really open-hearted and compassionate, from her soul – I could see that in the work she was doing, and I really wanted to connect with her about the work. I run an organization that partners with synagogues to help them prioritize foster care and adoption in their communities. Then my sister became friendly with her, we connected around that, and she joined the board of my organization. And she asked me to be the rabbi at her bat mitzvah. From what I understand, she came to understand that she was Jewish later in life. She wanted to mark that commitment, that her lot is with the Jewish people.

What was the process of preparing for her bat mitzvah like?

Tiffany, I can't imagine that she's not a genius. We only had spots of time: an hour and a half here or a half-hour there, because she was making a movie while we were working on this. My daughter, who lives in

New York, was able to meet with her a number of times to learn Hebrew. She will just weep talking about being Jewish. God just floats through her.

Given that Haddish's bat mitzvah was in some ways a public event – “Black Mitzvah” doesn't include footage of the ceremony, but obviously is referential to the process of becoming bat mitzvah – what do you think its significance could be both within and outside of the Jewish community?

It was a spark, a Jewish spark happening. The bat mitzvah ceremony itself was fairly small; it was intimate, down to earth and real. Most of the people there were not Jewish. It was incredible to see people really listening and participating, getting teary and talking about it. She gave a *drash* about Jacob's ladder that was so brilliant and so insightful. She placed herself in the story in such a meaningful way. You couldn't help but be moved by the living tradition.

You could see it going around the room. I feel like in a time where there's in general so much anti-Semitism, to see a group of people who are mostly not Jewish really seeing the beauty and power of Judaism in a moment – wow, I'm so grateful to be along for this ride.

There were a lot of celebrities at this shindig, including Billy Crystal looking on as Haddish read Torah. What was his role in the ceremony?

He had an *aliyah*.

Tell me about Haddish's *tallis*.

When she was in New York making this movie was when she went *tallis* shopping. My daughter went with her, and she couldn't decide, so she bought a bunch of them. I brought her a gift from Jerusalem, a yad, and what's amazing about her is that she used that yad to read Torah, but she's [also] using it for all of her Jewish studies. Who integrates ritual objects like that into their daily lives? That's so lovely. She wants to be connected to Judaism, to tradition in everything she does. You can see the relief, and joy, and power in that for her.

Haddish is a Jew of color. Do you think her engaging in her Judaism in such a high-profile way might shift the public's understanding of what Judaism looks like?

There's so much good work happening in general in Jewish community toward a more inclusive understanding of what a Jew is, and also in terms of loving the diversity of who the Jewish people are. It's something we celebrate and grapple with. I think this is just another powerful energy that's moving us in that direction.

Was there anything unique about the ceremony?

We didn't want it to be a traditional *davening*. There's this Mi Chamocha-slash-“Redemption Song” mix-up that someone made that's amazing, so we did that. That was cool, and everybody was able to sing along and participate.

Were there unexpected challenges, for you, in overseeing such a public bat mitzvah?

I've never done a bat mitzvah before where I end up on a red carpet. I was with my sister, and I was like, please, tell me how you do a red carpet. I would be fine if it was my last. I was pretty mortified. I was like: When will this end?

How was the party?

I am not someone who's on the dance floor all night, but I just couldn't help it. The whole place was just kind of on fire. For 11 years she worked as an “energy producer” with an entertainment company that brought the DJ and dancers to get people at events dancing and having fun. She worked something like 500 b'nai mitzvah. The same company that she worked for all those years [worked] her bat mitzvah, and there was so much joy and love.

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News

Sarsour Saga Shows Sanders's Continued Struggles With Jewish Voters

By Aiden Pink

A controversy involving a top campaign surrogate is proving to be a setback for Sen. Bernie Sanders as he works to earn more Jewish support ahead of the Iowa Democratic caucus, less than two months away. It's the latest example of Sanders, the most successful Jewish presidential candidate in American history, drawing anger from Jewish voters over what some see as his lack of concern for their specific communal issues.

In a speech at the American Muslims for Palestine annual conference in Chicago over the weekend, former Women's March leader Linda Sarsour, asked how people can claim to be against white supremacy but support "a state like Israel that is based on supremacy, that is built on the idea that Jews are supreme to everyone else."

After an online outcry from many Jews, including Anti-Defamation League national director Jonathan Greenblatt, Sarsour wrote a Twitter thread apologizing for the "confusion" her statement had caused, claiming she was merely referring to Israel's recently-passed Nation-State Law.

But the damage was done, and Jews once again condemned not only Sarsour for what they saw as her inadequate apology, but also Sanders for continuing to associate with her and not issuing a condemnation of his own. [Sarsour and the Sanders campaign did not respond to requests for comment]

Polls and donation data have consistently shown for months that Sanders has less support among his fellow Jews than he does among the general population. One key reason is the presence in his ranks of Sarsour and others who are harsh critics of Israel, both voters and experts told the Forward.

One such voter is Susan Shapiro, an author in New York who says she's been left-wing since she was 10.

"I wanted to love Sanders," she told the Forward. But, she added, "Linda Sarsour has said so many anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist comments that there's no way I'm going to vote for a candidate who is aligned with her." Other Jews she's talked to feel the same way, she said.

It's likely that these aren't isolated cases.

The issue is not that Sanders is a critic of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - a 2018 poll found that more than 60% of American Jews oppose at least some Israeli policies.

But Steven Windmueller, an emeritus professor at Hebrew Union College who studies American Jewish political behavior, told the Forward earlier this year that many Jewish Democrats think Sanders hasn't sufficiently pushed back against harsh anti-Israel sentiments coming from the "Squad" of Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, all of whom have endorsed the senator and used language to criticize Israel that even other pro-Palestinian Democrats have blanched at.

Indeed, Benjamin Bloomenthal, a former Democratic statehouse candidate in Massachusetts, said the fact that Sanders accepted endorsements from Omar and Tlaib, both supporters of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, was "where I draw the line."

There are lots of reasons why Jews may not be in Sanders's camp: They might think he's too old, or fear a Jewish president could engender more anti-Semitism. Since Jews are on average older and wealthier than the general public, they also lean more moderate and may be less enthusiastic about his democratic socialist policies like Medicare for All, argued Aaron Keyak, the former executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council.

But some self-described progressive Jewish voters say his embrace of Sarsour is a bridge too far.

"As a Jewish-American, as someone who ran as a progressive, it concerns me deeply" that Sanders "has literally not said one word regarding his surrogate," said Bloomenthal, who supports Medicare for All.

And Rabbi Jacob Herber of Wisconsin tweeted Tuesday in response to Sarsour's remarks that despite the fact that he abhors Trump, "I'll be damned if I'm going to vote for Bernie Sanders."

Sanders, who was criticized during his 2016 presidential campaign for not talking enough about his Jewish background, has done much more of that this time around, including an essay in *Jewish Currents* titled “How to Fight Antisemitism.”

But Bloomenthal argued that Sanders’s silence after Sarsour’s remarks betrayed the promises he made in his op-ed.

“It is true that some criticism of Israel can cross the line into antisemitism, especially when it denies the right of self-determination to Jews, or when it plays into conspiracy theories about outsized Jewish power,” Sanders wrote. “I will always call out antisemitism when I see it.”

Bloomenthal argued that by Sanders’s own definition, Sarsour – an anti-Zionist who does not believe there should be a Jewish state – is an anti-Semite, yet the senator has said nothing.

Keyak argued that while Sarsour’s remarks were troubling, a distinction should be made between her views and Sanders’s, since the senator, unlike the activist, believes in a two-state solution and is opposed to BDS.

To be sure, Sanders does not need Jewish votes to win the Democratic primary. Nobody needs Jewish votes to win the Democratic primary. The fact that Jews are overrepresented among Democratic donors means that the lack of widespread Jewish enthusiasm for Sanders could conceivably affect his cash reserves – except for

the fact that he already has the most successful small-dollar fundraising program in political history.

But if he got the nomination, would the lack of Jewish enthusiasm hurt him? Put another way: How many “Never-Sanders” voters are there among Jewish Democrats?

Jews, after all, are one of the most consistent Democratic voting blocs, and are also the most anti-Trump religious group. Persuading moderate Jewish Democrats to cross the aisle and vote for the hated Trump is highly unlikely to be successful beyond a “handful” of Never-Sanders voters, Keyak said. Still, enough dissenters could be costly in a swing state like Florida.

If the Vermont senator got the nomination, “I would hold my nose and vote for Sanders,” Bloomenthal said, because four more years of Trump “would be a disaster.”

Shapiro was extremely reluctant to consider the possibility of Sanders winning the primary. But if she had to choose between Sanders and Trump, what would she do?

“I would go to therapy,” she said.

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News

Did A Bot Generate Those Auschwitz Ornaments On Amazon?

By Ari Feldman

What do the Korean Demilitarized Zone, the House of Slaves memorial in Senegal, a small track and field stadium in Chile and the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp all have in common?

Amazon has sold Christmas tree ornaments featuring images of each of those places, although it has removed the Auschwitz ones, saying in a statement that they violated its “selling guidelines.”

The Auschwitz Museum’s Twitter account first brought the ornaments to wide attention on Sunday.

Though Amazon has faced repeated criticism for selling items with Nazi-linked imagery or that deny the Holocaust, new examples – like Nazi action figures, and custom-made Nazi LEGO figures. keep popping up.

In the case of the ornaments, an algorithm may be to blame.

Algorithms help generate countless products on Amazon, from uncanny iPhone cases to wall decals featuring elderly people just doing stuff. The images used in these products appear to come from stock photos or from pictures found on Google Images that do not have copyright protections.

The account behind the Auschwitz ornaments similarly features dozens of other ornaments with photos of landmarks and tourist destinations, from New Orleans’ French Quarter, to Greek Islands, to an Indian temple. Auschwitz fits the pattern: over 2 million people visited the camp in 2018.

So does the DMZ ornament: the so-called “truce village” of the Joint Security Area in the DMZ between North and South Korea, where soldiers from the rival nations can look each other in the eye from only a few dozen feet away, is also a popular spot for tourists.

It’s not really clear who exactly makes these ornaments. The seller’s account name is given as

“Fcheng,” though the manufacturer is listed as Jollin Travel Gifts. The Forward could find no business registrations for either company name in the United States.

Sometimes, though, Amazon strikes a very different note on the Holocaust. Last month, a viral video showed the production team for Amazon’s series “The Man In The High Castle,” a dystopian thriller that asks what would have happened if the Nazis had won, cutting up thousands of swastikas used for the set and costumes. Amazon Prime is also promoting a show about Nazi hunters, starring Al Pacino, which will premiere next year.

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Opinion

Judaism Is Not Just For Jews: The Lesson Of Interfaith Families

By Edmund Case

Now that nearly three out of four marriages among non-Orthodox Jews are interfaith, 84% of new households that include at least one non-Orthodox Jew are interfaith households. That means that the future vitality of every aspect of liberal Judaism depends on engaging increasing numbers of interfaith families in Jewish life. Yet instead of discussion of the issue in Jewish organizations and media, there's deafening silence.

The silence around interfaith life from the organized Jewish world is doubly frustrating given the challenge that interfaith couples face – and in particular, the partners from different faith traditions. Many doubt that they can belong in Jewish groups, organizations and communities. That's because in the traditional view, Judaism is for Jews; what matters is “being” Jewish, being part of the Jewish people. Those who identify as Jews are “in,” while a partner who is not a Jew is “out” or “other.”

Despite recent suggestions to the contrary, the truth of the matter is, interfaith couples don't feel completely welcome. Many report an undercurrent of disapproval or feel they are treated as outsiders. Moreover, welcoming interfaith couples is a necessary first step.

But by itself, it is insufficient, a distinction that has been drawn by advocates for every other marginalized Jewish group. Take the Reform Movement's resolutions concerning LGBTQ and transgender/gender non-conforming people, and people with disabilities: It commits to “integrate fully all Jews into the life of the community regardless of sexual orientation” and to “welcoming communities of meaningful inclusion, enabling and encouraging people with disabilities and their families to participate fully in Jewish life in a way that promotes a sense of personal belonging for all individuals.” It also insists upon the Reform Movement's “commitment to the full equality, inclusion and acceptance of people of all

gender identities and gender expressions.”

But the movement's latest resolution on interfaith marriage commits only to welcoming interfaith families and partners from different faith backgrounds, while also encouraging conversion.

Like every other marginalized group, it stands to reason that interfaith couples will not stay unless they are made to feel that they truly belong.

How can people who are not Jews feel that they truly belong in Jewish communities? That is the challenge of our time, and overcoming it requires a new understanding of interfaith marriage, and adapted attitudes and policies that support full inclusion.

First, we need to understand the foundational covenant as being not between God and the Jewish people, but between God and the people who are Jewishly engaged. Judaism is not just for Jews; it is for people who are “doing” Jewish, whether or not they identify as Jews, in a community that consists of other Jewishly-engaged people. This is radical, because it stands the traditional view on its head.

A rabbi told me once that it didn't make sense for someone to say, “I live Jewishly but I'm not a Jew.” We need a new understanding of interfaith marriage in which that makes perfect sense.

Second, inclusion requires an adaptation of underlying attitudes towards the marginalized group. In the context of interfaith marriage, full inclusion means considering interfaith families as equal to inmarried families, and partners from different faith backgrounds as equal to Jews.

Unfortunately, examples of expressions of negative attitudes abound, including the “missing mazel tov” when Jewish leaders described Chelsea Clinton's wedding as not a Jewish event; “expert” assumptions that Mark Zuckerberg's intermarriage meant his children would not be Jewish (which later was disproved); denunciations from Israel of intermarriage as a “plague” or “catastrophe.”

We have quite a way to go before we consider partners from different faith traditions as equal. Even expressing a preference that our children marry Jews delivers a message of disapproval to the 72% of them who will intermarry anyway. Feeling disapproved of is not conducive to feeling belonging.

Third, inclusion requires adaptive change in the established system. In the context of interfaith adaptive change means not just considering, but treating interfaith families and partners from different faith backgrounds as equal.

What leadership roles can partners from different faith backgrounds take? In what rituals can they participate? How will we explain those policies and communicate our invitations to engage?

When Jews and Jewish organizations are fully inclusive, interfaith couples and the partners from different faith backgrounds can feel like they truly belong. With a new understanding of interfaith marriage, and adapted attitudes and policies, we can make this happen and secure the liberal future.

Edmund Case, the retired founder of InterfaithFamily, is the president of the Center for Radically Inclusive Judaism, publisher of his book Radical Inclusion: Engaging Interfaith Families for a Thriving Jewish Future. Contact him at ed@cfrij.com.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.

Eat, Drink + Think

Letter from Berkeley: A Bagel That Tastes Like Home is Worth Waiting For

By Alix Wall

There were more than 50 people waiting outside in the cold before the much-anticipated opening of Boichik Bagels on Friday. They had started lining up by 6:30 a.m., though the doors didn't actually open until 7:50 a.m. Before the brand-new store sold out of its planned 2,000 bagels by 1 p.m., some customers had waited more than two hours.

"I typically never eat bagels west of New Jersey," said Marnina Cherkin, who lives in Seattle and, along with her husband Sam Ostroff and their aunt Deirdre McLaughlin of Berkeley, were the first in line. "The pursuit of a New York bagel outside of New York is mostly pointless," Ostroff added, "because it's so elusive."

Not anymore. Two years after Emily Winston, an engineer and industrial artist from Old Bridge, N.J., started selling bagels out of her home kitchen in Alameda, Calif., the Bay Area finally has a bona fide New York-style bagel shop, and a kosher one at that.

It's worth noting that the Bay Area has been going through a sort of bagel renaissance lately. Since 2012, Berkeley's wholesaler Baron Baking and Beauty's Bagels of Oakland were seen as the best in the business. This summer brought two new players: Daily Driver in San Francisco, which like Beauty's does excellent Montreal-style bagels [boiled in honey water and wood fired] and The Bagel Mill in Petaluma, doing what its chef calls a New York-California hybrid. Also earlier this year, Oakland's kosher Grand Bakery teamed up with a local bagel maker to offer a bagel that is sold primarily in grocery stores.

I first wrote about Winston two years ago for J. The Jewish News of Northern California, where I'm a contributing editor writing mainly about food. She told me then that when she read in 2012 that H & H Bagels was going out of business, she took it personally: her

H&H's were slightly sweeter than many other bagels, with the perfect trifecta of texture, flavor and chewiness in Winston's mind. "A world without an H&H bagel is a world I don't want to live in," she told me then. "It was like someone died and no one thought to tell me."

Winston, now 41, soon began reading and watching YouTube videos about bagel-making, and experimenting with various techniques. Friends who tasted her bagels loved them, and she realized that if she was yearning for a New York bagel in her adopted home, surely others must be, too.

She started doing periodic popups, making eight dozen bagels each time – and once selling out by 8:17 a.m. though she wasn't even supposed to open until 8:30. A year ago, she began construction inside a storefront on Berkeley's College Avenue with a storied history: it was the very first Noah's Bagels when that chain began in 1989.

I've lived most of my life in California, but my dad was born in the Bronx and my mom grew up in New Jersey. I spent much of my 20s living in New York, and when I first moved to the Bay Area, often flew home from New York with a dozen bagels in my carry-on. So I've been as excited as anyone about Boichik's. Still, I've been astounded at how many times over the last year I've been asked when Boichik's would open, including at a recent shiva call.

The original opening was scheduled for early 2019, but permitting and construction delays kept pushing it back. While everything was ready, Winston decided to do a "soft opening" with just bagels and schmears (no smoked fish) for what she dubbed "Bagel Black Friday."

"Thank you for being part of this complete insanity that has taken over my life," Winston told her six employees before unlocking the doors.

Among those in the kitchen was Joe Gaglio, owner of Gotham Bagels in Madison, Wisc., where Winston had spent a week in 2018 learning bagel-making technique. Gaglio, a gruff New York native who breathes bagels, was in town visiting his daughter and sister for Thanksgiving, and offered to help out with the opening.

He asked rapid-fire questions and offered his critique on everything from the saltiness to the grade of

cornmeal used to the height of the work surface outside the oven, making a steady stream of comments like, "We have to talk about these whole wheats."

On the wall near the door is a bat mitzvah photo of Winston with her grandmother Lila Krufka, who died in 2015. Winston, who is queer, said that after she had "gone butch," she went home for a visit and Krufka remarked, "such a boichik." That inspired the name of the store.

Winston told me she thinks of Krufka often, imagining her sitting in the window kibitzing with customers, asking them, "Have you tried my granddaughter's bagels? Aren't they the best?"

Some in line on Friday were excited not just about the New York style of Winston's bagel recipe, but about the kosher certification on Boichik's wall. Rabbi Gershon Albert, a part of East Bay Kosher, said it is one of only two officially kosher establishments currently operating in Berkeley, joining Flying Falafel, which is vegan and opened in 2017 but only got kosher certification this year.

"This is a huge day for us kosher keepers," said longtime Berkeley resident Andrea Brott, who had waited in line despite not being a morning person.

Brott said the last time she was able to buy a fresh bagel that was certified kosher in Berkeley was in the early aughts.

That was from Noah's Bagels, the chain savvy in selling New York nostalgia with stores decorated in faux subway tile, but not in actually making New York bagels – for starters, they were steamed rather than boiled. Noah's founder, Noah Alper, has been among Winston's advisers; he sold the chain to Einstein Bagels in 1999.

The rabbis of East Bay Kosher decided to provide Boichik with certification at no cost.

"For Jews living in major metropolitan areas with large Orthodox communities, it's hard to imagine living in an area without kosher establishments," explained one of them, Rabbi Gershon Albert of Cong. Beth Jacob in nearby Oakland. "We feel a responsibility to create and strengthen infrastructure that facilitates mitzvah observance in our Berkeley and Oakland communities."

Winston, who is not religious, arranged with the rabbis

to transfer ownership of the store to a non-Jew each Shabbat, using a decades-old halachic ruling to skirt the prohibition against Jews working or making money on the Sabbath. Though the major kosher-certification organizations no longer allow such deals, the rabbis of East Bay Kosher agree that it can be done here because the need is so great.

“This has become the largest expression of my Jewish identity and a spiritual path for me in a number of ways I don’t quite understand,” Winston told me a few months ago. “The fact that so many people are desperate for a kosher restaurant makes it feel right.”

By 1 p.m. on Friday, Boichik was turning people away for lack of bagels, and Winston noted: “Only one person complained the whole day.”

She had decided to close on Saturday to regroup and make dough, and opened again Sunday at 7:30 a.m. It was raining, but people still lined up starting at 6:30 with another line around the block. This time, all 2000 were sold out by 11.

Alix Wall is a freelance writer based in Oakland and the founder of the Illuminoshi: The Not-So-Secret Society of Bay Area Jewish Food Professionals.

Culture

My Very, Very Last – Seriously, I Mean It This Time – Non-Jewish Boyfriend

By Jenny Singer

It was a Sunday morning, the third or fourth time I slept over. I woke up to the feeling of his hands running through my hair, like a novice hairdresser procrastinating making the first cut.

“Hey,” he whispered.

“Ggghhh” I mumbled.

“Can I ask you something?” He sounded nervous. I opened my eyes and saw the numbers on the digital clock blinking 6:57. I closed my eyes.

“Jenny?”

“Wha,” I said. “Wha is it.”

His hands combed urgently through my hair. His breath quickened. I felt his heart slamming, timpani-like, against my shoulder blade. Suddenly fully awake, I braced for a bombshell.

“What is AIPAC?” he whispered.

“What?” I said.

“What is AIPAC?” he said, adding more fervently, “And what – what happens on Shabbat?”

And that’s when I decided – enough. No more dating non-Jews. I shouldn’t have to explain the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee before brunch, and I won’t. So long to my salad days of pretending that I don’t think about the Holocaust every six minutes, I thought. Time to literally kiss non-Jews goodbye.

But I was wrong, wrong by a mile [of foreskins.] That wasn’t my last non-Jew, not at all. Because let me tell you something: Even if you live in the state that has the highest number of Jews per capita, even if you have the patience of eighteen therapists when it comes to rehashing bar mitzvah trauma, even if you try hard and your mind is totally made up, it’s hard to

to only date Jews.

The scourge of interfaith marriage is a topic many Jews are surprisingly wild for, given its capacity to pull down close relationships brick-by-brick. Growing up, I bought the idea of intermarriage as it is portrayed in “Fiddler On The Roof” – Jewish girl marries Christian boy, cuts out her parents’ hearts, they never see each other again.

But there’s nothing morally wrong with marrying a person who isn’t Jewish. And there’s something gloriously tragicomic about thinking that a community can and should influence marriages by threatening people with shunning, then actually shunning them.

Jews coupling up with non-Jews isn’t new or inherently harmful to Jewish continuity – intermarriage has always existed in Jewish history. (That’s why Moroccan Jews look Moroccan and Indian Jews look Indian and Polish cab drivers always want to talk to me in Polish.) Besides, if you’re really concerned about retaining Jews, may I suggest not alienating them?

But some Jews do want to date other Jews. It’s not any more discriminatory than wanting to date someone who enjoys hiking or supports the same baseball team as you. But it is limiting.

In my work covering dating for the Forward over the past two-and-a-half years, I have met hundreds and hundreds of people who are trying to find love with another Jewish person. I’ve seen people uproot themselves and move to different cities, quit their jobs so they have more time to focus on dating. I’ve seen people spend money on matchmaking services, and singles getaways, and makeovers and advice and gallons of alcohol. And that’s in New York, where Jews are as common as cheese pizza.

Like many of these people, dating Jews is my preference because I want to do Jewish activities and speak about Jewish things and not feel like I’m running a one-woman Introduction To Judaism class. But unless you’re in an exclusively Jewish community, tracking down Jews to date is a struggle.

I only dated The Non-Jew for a short time, but thanks to the Jewish calendar it was still onerous. I reenacted the Purim story, broke down the symbolism of the Seder plate, tried to reacquaint myself with the Omer. It could have been worse. We could have started dating in August, then I would have had to shepherd

him through Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shmini Azeret and Simchat Torah. I imagined the hundreds of questions he would have if he ever spotted a group of Jews moaning and huffing spices around a column of flame, or as it is known by some, Havdalah.

For a few years after the early morning AIPAC-attack, I stayed on the path – an AEPI bro here, a Young Judea graduate there, an Israeli for diversity. Then one day, I slipped and went out with a person whose religion I didn’t know. The date wasn’t even happenstance – I had ordered him off an app, like pad thai. I wasn’t looking for anything serious, I told myself. And there was a chance, wasn’t there, that he was Jewish? He was tall, but that can mean anything these days, what with access to animal proteins. He was polite, but politeness is a side effect of any number of ethnic and religious backgrounds. He grew up on the Upper West Side, which might as well have thrown my Jewdar into a bucket of whitefish. He wore thick-frame eyeglasses, but those have become omnipresent in a way that precludes them any longer being a shibboleth for members of the tribe.

I tried to draw him out. I brought up Jewish TV shows – nothing. I name-dropped Jewish lifecycle events – nope. Finally I got him, on Passover.

“I know one of the prayers!” my date said, explaining that he had Jewish family but wasn’t brought up Jewish. He had a crazed mid-Atlantic accent with a slight-lisp, like a Kennedy who was raised at a truck stop. He cleared his throat, and shouted, “BARUCH! ATAH! ADONAI!”

Laughing, I imitated him. “*Baruch! Atah! Adonai!*” I said.

He visibly recoiled. “It’s not very sexy when you do that,” he said.

This is where I have to disagree with him. One reason, I think, that it’s hard for Jews to date each other is that many Jews have bought into the idea that Jewishness isn’t sexy. Due to overexposure to the “Fiddler On The Roof” box set during puberty, I never internalized the Western conventions of ideal male beauty, which for most of my life has been hulking, topless whites. Spare me blond, bacon-colored men and their tedious brags about how much their ancestors flourished on the Mayflower, I say! Give me a man whose eyebrows you could jump in to hide from Hitler.

This is it, I told myself. My last non-Jew, or at least the last person I date who only interacts with Judaism as a meme.

But of course, he wasn't.

My dad called me on a Friday afternoon. "What are you up to tonight?" he asked, timidly. "Maybe go to synagogue!" he said, in the half-hopeful cadence of an owner coaxing a cat to piss in a box. "Check out some cool services!" But that night I had other plans. I had plans to go axe-throwing with a former Evangelical.

This time I had been actively deluding myself. I was burnt out on paying \$36 for singles dinners in synagogue basements and tired of limiting my dating app preferences to Jews Only. My evidence that this man was Jewish was that he had the first name of a Torah patriarch, and brown hair. Case closed, I thought. He was certainly loitering around Sinai! Wrong again. As we trotted through Union Square on our second date, I tried interfaith dialogue.

"Practically, Christianity and Judaism share, like, tons," I babbled. "The Old Testament! The power of good works! Loving and praising one god!"

"Jenny," he said. "You are describing Judaism."

Nevertheless, we went axe-throwing.

Axe-throwing is where you go to a dungeon-like space and pay all of your money to throw rusty blades at a wall. It is bowling, for people who are so cynical about the American healthcare system that they want to demonstrate its uselessness. I was paralyzed with anxiety. The non-Jew might as well have taken me golfing on top of an active volcano. "This would never have happened with a Jew," I seethed, even though that's definitely not true.

Axe-throwing, I felt, demonstrated exactly why I needed to lie down in a JCC parking lot and wait for a man or the elements to take me. I was taught to treat my safety as a family heirloom that had been carried around Europe, across an ocean, and through depressions and wars. I was taught that caution was a sacred value, a Jewish value. Flinging knives for sport felt like not quite in the spirit of that.

As kabalat Shabbat services across Manhattan swung open their arks and sang "Aleinu l'shabeiach," I released dozens of axes and knives in the direction of the wall. Their dull blades thudded around me, and I

screamed the scream of a woman who might want to learn piano some day. I am forgetting where I came from, I thought, as an instructor showed how to throw multiple axes at once. Someone shove a *shmurah* matzah in my mouth and lock me in a room with a copy of "The Chosen," stat.

I never went out with that non-Jew again. But I've gone out with others, from time to time, the way a red wine snob might occasionally sample a Sancerre. Now that I've acknowledged that this is a habit, I try to at least lean into it. "Tell me more about being *Catholic*," I say to the boy I'm seeing as we walk past a church, stretching out the word so it has three syllables, like *riding crop*. I prick up my ears for stories about the tasting the blood of Christ, about the violent nuns, about a sense of great beauty, just out of reach.

"Jenny," he says, patiently. "I told you, I'm not Catholic. I was just raised Catholic."

"Okay," I say, playing along. "But you're *Christian*."

And he explains again that he isn't Christian, he isn't anything at all. That he stopped going to church, and stopped being a Christian. I say, "You can't just stop" and he says, "Yes, you can."

And I think about how it would feel to be able to just stop, just opt out. To let a part of yourself end. How things would be different if Judaism was something that you could slip off like a dress. I've never seen that. However you practice, whatever you believe, and whoever you marry, you will always have this special disaster – the world will not let you wrest from yourself this thing that you are.

I look at the man. We have lots in common even though he dropped his religion like an Apple airpod and I could no more easily stop being Jewish than replace my blood with buttercream.

"This is it," I think to myself, as I move closer to him. "My very last non-Jew."

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