



## My Story



Name: **András H**

Gender: **male**

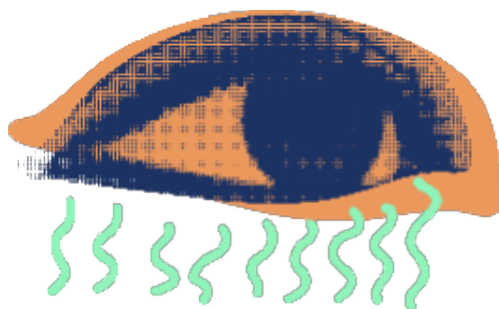
Country of residence: **Hungary**

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My name is András Himmler, and I was born in Budapest in 2003. I spent a significant part of my life – precisely sixteen years – within the walls of the Lauder Kindergarten and School. Currently I am a university student at the National Film School at IADT in Ireland.

From as early as kindergarten, I knew: we were Jewish. And at the time, in that environment, it felt completely natural. (Of course, I probably only came to understand what that truly meant, after my years at Lauder – but more on that later.) What I remember clearly is that we lit Shabbat candles every week, and celebrated all the other holidays too: we played dreidel at Hanukkah, had lunch in the sukkah set up in the garden during Sukkot, prepared fruit platters for Tu B'shvat, baked matzah at Passover, and so on. This tradition continued at school, but one important thing must be noted: we were never raised to be religious. It never mattered what or how much someone believed – what mattered was the sense of community. We shared these moments, we experienced them together, not alone.



The paragraph above perhaps explains why I see Judaism as a community experience rather than as a religion. After all, the community speaks to young children and teenagers just as much as it does to young adults, the elderly, or even the oldest generation, the Holocaust survivors. In my view, this is one of Judaism's unique and most important core values: that it never lets go. Of course, a person might decide to step away a little, to retreat into the background and become a passive observer, as we are undoubtedly talking about an extremely intense, sometimes even overly close-knit environment. And then comes the but. Because one can always rejoin: all it takes is attending a Jewish-themed event. And such an event could be anything from a synagogue visit to a Jewish restaurant, theatre, museum, concert, or camp.



As I mentioned earlier, life within the walls of Lauder felt so natural that, somewhat surprisingly, I never felt the need to seek out other Jewish communities: I did not attend any camps or youth organisations. In fact, alongside secondary school, I performed in several theatres, so interestingly, I spent a significant part of my time outside Lauder in an environment that, while not Jewish, was very knowledgeable about Judaism. In short: I never really reflected on what Judaism meant to me, or how I defined myself both within and outside the community.

Then came the difficult part: I decided to start my university studies in Dublin. Many people said many different things, but when it came to Judaism and Israel, there was consensus: best not to bring it up, because, well, you never know... I had not even spent two months there when Hamas began its barbaric massacre. I sat in my room, feeling helpless. What was I supposed to do? How should I react to the radical anti-Israel sentiment, the boycott movements based on false arguments, the flood of disinformation, and the sudden surge in antisemitism? For the first time in my life, I felt afraid to be Jewish – at least openly. I would take off my Star of David necklace, listen in silence to infuriating comments about the war, light Hanukkah candles behind closed curtains, avoid speaking loudly about Israel, and hesitate to say aloud: I am Jewish. I felt I had to justify myself; to explain something to a hostile environment that rejected it without a second thought. This situation forced me to take a strong stand on current political issues – something I usually avoid doing consciously in other areas of life. But at that time, I felt I had to defend myself, my friends, and my community – and this was the only way.

As summer approached I increasingly felt the need to reconnect with my Judaism. I missed the familiar environment. Above all, I missed what we call Jewish humour – which I never really believed existed, until then... And I missed all the little things that, as an active participant in a community, one barely notices – but the absence of which feels like a tremendous loss. The solution quickly came to me: I needed to make music! After all, singing together has a long-standing tradition in Jewish culture, and I had plenty of experience from the years I had spent performing at BBYO events in Hungary. So the idea was born: to apply to Szarvas, Europe's largest Jewish youth camp. It soon became clear that this genre – known as songleading – was tailor-made for me. I could draw on all those years spent in Jewish communities, and everything I did felt natural. As a result, this year I work as the head songleader at Szarvas Camp, collaborating with several other organisations, and I even had the opportunity to attend the Songleader Boot Camp in the United States.



Now, as a second-year university student – partly as a result of my experiences over the summer – I decided that my elective documentary project would focus on Judaism. More specifically, on demystifying it: showing that not every Jew keeps kosher or goes to synagogue on Fridays. And that – in my belief – does not make them any less Jewish than those who follow the Orthodox path. Because there are as many interpretations as there are individuals. That is why the title of the film is My People.

As for the future... There is one thing I know for certain: Judaism will always play a key role in my life. I cannot yet say exactly in what form or to what extent – but it will always be there. And so will I.

[YouTube](#)

