

Last Friday I spent the day preparing for Shabbat. One of the few perks of being professionally unemployed is if I want to spend the whole day making Shabbat dinner from scratch, I can! I dutifully seasoned the chicken, cut the potatoes and let my challah rise for the required two hours. Now, my story tonight is really in the challah. The recipe I was using was from the Hillel director's wife at Cornell- Mindy Rosenthal. Her challah has 3 secret ingredients (which make it the best challah I have ever eaten) and if I may brag for a moment, she has only shared her recipe with a select few people. So what I'm here to talk to you about tonight is how I came to possess Mindy Rosenthal's challah recipe.

You may be surprised to know that this journey started several years ago, when I was a freshman in high school. I had just moved to Glencoe and was starting mid year at New Trier. I was coming from a small, private, Episcopalian school in Toronto, Canada so you can imagine the social shock I received from beginning at an institution like New Trier. I will spare you the sad details of my awkward time in high school, but needless to say I decided that finding a welcoming Jewish population would be positive for me at a time when I had no roots. So, as my family searched that semester for a synagogue to join, it made sense to find a temple where I would know people in my confirmation class. I had befriended some fellow Jewish Trevians and, after polling them on where their families belonged, decided that North Shore Congregation Israel would be a good place to start. I fell in love with NSCI from the moment my family attended the new member barbeque. After all, when I saw Rabbi Mason rocking out on the electric guitar I thought, "who *wouldn't* want to join this place"? And starting with my first Lasky retreat, this synagogue became my home. I attended Friday night services almost weekly, was a participant in confirmation and later seminar classes, and became involved with the youth group. This is where I met my best friends, learned the most about myself, and where I chose to dedicate a large portion of my high school time and energy eventually serving as Programming chair of the TYG my senior year. I also formed extremely close relationships with the staff of NSCI, including Neil, Cantor Cohn and the Rabbis. They were, and continue to be, exceptional role models for me and they all undeniably have shaped who I am today. It is common in Judaism for community to play a large role in one's Jewish identity and that could not be any truer for me. Coming from such a fulfilling Jewish background and being such an involved member of our temple community, there was no question as to whether or not I wanted to maintain this connection to Judaism in college. It would be difficult to say that my college application process was impacted by a campus's Jewish life (or lack thereof) as I applied early (and only) to Cornell University. But it is important to note that I was familiar enough with Cornell at the time to know that they had a strong Hillel.

During the summer before college started, I received a letter from a current member of the Jewish Student Union inviting me to check out what Hillel had to offer. I felt instantly welcomed and once again knew that the most logical place to find roots in an unknown setting would be Judaism. I will never forget my first Friday night in college. I was so intent on going to services that I rounded up several friends and hall mates to trek down the hill from our dorms to where services were held. We were introduced to Ed Rosenthal, Executive Director of Cornell Hillel, and, after lighting candles and singing Shalom Aleichem together, separated into Reform, Conservative and Orthodox minyans. After services everyone came back together for Shabbat Dinner at

the Kosher dining hall. That night, the group of people I sat with became fast friends and we continued to meet up every Friday for services and dinner throughout most of our four years. And while the bonds I formed with my roommates, my classmates and my a cappella friends were all strong and important, it was these friends, my Jewish friends, who were like my family. It was these friends who showed up at my dorm second semester, when services had not yet started because of Greek Rush, to form a minyan with me so that I could say Kaddish for my dad. And on our *last* Friday night of college, the Friday night of graduation weekend, these same friends, who I met that *first* Friday night, hosted a special Shabbat dinner for us and our families.

But my Jewish life at Cornell wasn't just about my friends. With the support of many people, including the executive director and his family who attended Keshet services weekly, I became President of Keshet my sophomore year (Keshet is the reform Jewish student group on campus). The largest part of this responsibility was leading Friday night services and High Holiday services. I spent the entire summer leading up to my sophomore year preparing for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This was an experience like no other. Standing up in front of hundreds of Reform peers, faculty and community members and attempting to lead them in prayer was not only daunting, but felt wrong in some way. Who was I, a college sophomore to think that I could do a Rabbi's job on the holiest days of the year? But Cornell Hillel believes in student empowerment, and that meant doing the best job that I could. Nobody seemed to be phased by the idea that I was not, in fact, a rabbi. And while this was quite overwhelming, it also gave me a huge source of pride. I led High Holiday services at Cornell for four years. It included everything from giving a d'var torah to chanting Kol Nidre and it was *amazing*.

And given my involvement in Jewish life at Cornell, I became quite close with Rabbi Rosenthal and his wife, as well as the rest of the Hillel staff. My relationships with adults in the Cornell Hillel community also impacted my Jewish experience. Rabbi Ed served as a reference for me, had me over to their home on holidays I spent at Cornell, advised me on classes to take- the list goes on. The Rosenthal family was like my surrogate family throughout college. And the other Hillel staff members and rabbis worked with me, taught me, and helped me whenever I needed anything.

I would not have changed a single thing about my Jewish circumstances in high school, college or to date. I have been incredibly lucky to have had positive Jewish role models, both here and at Cornell, and positive Jewish opportunities, both in TYG and Keshet. The one thing I can say for sure is that I urge ALL of you to consider how being Jewish will be a part of your time in college, and for those of you who have time left in high school, high school. Being a part of a Jewish community has been the most fulfilling thing for me and I can not imagine what my life would be like had I not chosen to, or been able to, pursue these experiences. And honestly right now the only thing I am thinking about differently is whether or not I want "being Jewish" to be solely a part of my identity or also a part of my career. And until that elusive "career" comes about, I am going to continue to spend my Fridays preparing for Shabbat. Which brings me back to that recipe. Every week Mindy made three challot for Shabbat. She kept two at home and brought one, without fail, to Keshet services- certainly one of our "legs up" on the other minyans. Rabbi Ed recently switched positions to become the Executive Director of the Hillels of Tampa Bay (if any of you are considering schools in that area PLEASE

let me know and I will put you in touch with him) and during my last visit to Ithaca, I went to lunch with him and Mindy. I explained to them how much of an impact they had on me while I was at Cornell and how sad I was for future Cornellians who would not have the opportunity to experience their family's warmth and generosity. I told them how much I had learned by being pushed to do things outside of my comfort zone and how lucky I felt to have had their support during my time in college. And just before we parted ways Mindy reached into her purse and took out a freshly baked challah. She knew how much I loved it and how much I had been missing it since graduation from Cornell. Attached to the challah was her secret recipe so that I could go on to convince other people to love Shabbat the way I do. And if I may brag one more time, the guests at my dinner last Friday LOVED Shabbat.