

My name is Isaac Ensel and I have spent my early childhood every Wednesday evening at Hebrew school right down the street. I became a man at this temple at the age of 13, and now I stand in front of you as a legal American adult at 18 years old. My thoughts and views on my religion have changed throughout the years as I grow up, but through it all, it has been fostered by my small-town, Beth Israel, Jewish community.

I am grateful for the kind people who have raised me into my faith through arts and crafts, cooking, and important stories. But I have found **another** important aspect of this temple, and it has to do with outside the building.

Every Saturday my neighbor Al, a retired educator, who lives in the bright yellow house diagonal to me, brings homemade cookies. I mean EVERY Saturday. Like in what neighborhood does this happen? It's incredible, this 80 year old man walks over with a bag of peanut butter, rollo, sugar, snickerdoodle, or mincemeat cookies, (to just name a few). Sometimes he makes new recipes, I tell you they are different types of cookies every week.

During the holiday season when my family and I have our bright white and blue lights up on our porch, I remember him asking me "hey Isaac I just wanted to make sure to check with you guys but if it was ok if the cookies have red and green sprinkles" "omg, of course, no worries I love cookies of all colors, that is totally fine" I said in way to show I just love any kind of cookie. "I feel silly for asking this but what are the Jewish colors?" Please don't worry about it, it's just blue and white. That next Saturday as I got the knock on our big old New England door, stood Al, with homemade cookies with blue and white m&ms.

This reflects the respectful coexistence of our community. Al made sure he was understanding our ways of life. But it never made us different in any way. I have found that this community accepts who I am even when they don't understand it. And this is how our congregation was born in such an area. Although it was different, people accepted such diversity 100 years ago. This is why this community is special. We are surrounded by these people. It is part of the small town Maine culture in Bath.

As I look to the future and search for colleges (I plan to major in something that many Jews actually don't, film production, Anyway) I have come across Hillels with tons of Jewish kids, and when I mention I am from Maine it stirs a type of confusion among them. Through these interactions, I know that these kids never grew up with a (B.B.I.) Bath Beth Israel. My Beth Israel is important to me because it has given me a unique foundation to Judaism inside and outside the temple that I am very grateful for and gives an outlook on my religion that I am very proud of.

For the future of Beth Israel I hope it continues to be an important part of the Bath community. Because when I come back after meeting lots of Jews in college who had grown up in large synagogues in traditional American Jewish areas, I will bring them to my special temple, which has been in a small, shipbuilder town on the coast of Maine, for over 100 years.

Thank You