

The Jewish Sorority Girl Life at the University of Kentucky

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My decision to attend The University of Kentucky was because I had a gut feeling that the university I had previously decided to attend was not the one for me. I wanted to attend a university where I felt the people were friendly and welcoming and The University of Kentucky fit this requirement for me. I also felt that UK would better prepare me for medical school and provide me with more academic and extracurricular opportunities than my initial choice. This helped me to feel more comfortable with my new choice of attending a southern university.

Since my twin sister was in a sorority at Indiana University, she encouraged me to rush and I thought nothing about the fact that I was about to be talking to hundreds of girls who have never met a Jewish person in their entire life. I remember calling my mom up after the first day and telling her how at some houses I said that I was Jewish and talked about my experience being a counselor at a Jewish summer camp. She immediately told me not to talk about being Jewish or else I would get cut. I was surprised to hear this because everyone I talked to seemed super supportive and genuinely interested in my religion. The next couple of days of recruitment I made sure not to talk about being Jewish and left out the part about working at a Jewish summer camp.

By the end of the week I found my home in my sorority, Alpha Delta Pi. I had talked to the chaplain of the sorority twice in that week and loved her charisma and her sweet personality. She was, and still is, possibly the nicest girl I have ever met. At the time when I was rushing, I did not know what a

chaplain was. Later, I found out that she is in charge of all of the religious events that go on within the sorority including prayer before meetings and bible study groups.

Joining a sorority on a campus that is known for being Christian was unsettling at first. But, I loved how every single girl I met was so friendly and welcoming as well as being academically driven. Academics is an important part of why I am at the University of Kentucky, so joining a sorority filled with academically driven and genuinely sweet girls initially helped to outweigh some of my discomfort. We pray as a chapter, and in the beginning it made me feel super uncomfortable. My friends would ask me to go to church with them, and I would just kindly say no thank you. I have had experiences at the University of Kentucky where I have been walking to class and there have been people trying to hand me mini New Testament books, or sweet southern girls asking me to join their bible study.

Sophomore year, there was one girl who stopped me at night while I was walking back from the library to my sorority house. She asked me if I wanted to join her bible study. I said no thank you, but she continued to ask me about my relationship with G-d. Although, as a Jew, I believe in G-d, I had never thought about my relationship with G-d.

Something about her continuing to ask me about my relationship with G-d and obviously hinting to come to bible study made me angry and confused. At this point, I had only been to Hillel a couple times but did not spend much time there. I was living in the sorority house with 40 other girls who were mostly religious and Christian with bible quotes artistically painted on canvases around their room. Not only was I exposed to these bible verses in the house, but on Instagram; the other girls in the house would post pictures with



bible verses as captions. I began to realize how uncomfortable and alone I felt.

I always felt like I belonged in my sorority and loved being around my friends, but I began to realize I was not fully comfortable. I began to bring up conversations about religion with some. They all loved asking me questions, and I loved learning about their religion and opinions so I could better understand their points of view. Although having them understand my religion and me learning about

theirs made me feel more comfortable, it also made me feel more confused about my religion and why I didn't seem to have the same passion as other girls did with their faith. I remember one night I was talking to my sister on the phone outside of the sorority house. She could tell I was upset and confused with why I had this uncomfortable feeling towards those that were so outwardly religious.

I was never super religious or involved in youth group growing up in Indianapolis. Yet, there was a large Jewish community around me, and I never realized

how important my faith was to me. I went to Jewish summer camp which made me realize how much I loved being Jewish, but I didn't fully understand how much of my identity revolves around being Jewish until I came to the University of Kentucky.

Halfway through my sophomore year, I found out my house mom was Jewish. Imagine that, the fact that

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had been living in the sorority house for almost an entire semester and I had no idea my house mom was Jewish! I immediately thought back to what her real last name was---Kaplan. Of course!! We call her Mom Kap, so I had never thought about that. When we both found out that we were both Jewish, we immediately hugged each other and happy tears glistened in my eyes. Throughout the second semester I talked to Mom Kap and realized I am probably not the only Jewish girl in a sorority or even on UK's campus feeling this way. That is when

decided to get more involved in Hillel. Not only did I miss being around Jewish people, but I wanted to ensure that Hillel would be a place for Jewish students on UK's campus to come and feel comfortable. I wanted the way Mom Kap helped me during my emotional struggle during sophomore year to be what people could also find at Hillel. Since then, my goal has been to grow the group and form a true Jewish home away from home.

In the end, since there are so few Jewish girls at the University of Kentucky, whenever I am able to find a Jewish girl it makes it that much more special! The ones whom I have stayed close with always agree that even though the selection of NJB's (nice Jewish boys) here are limited, we have loved our Jewish experience at the University of Kentucky and would not change anything about it. Sometimes I will see a girl with a computer sticker that has something to do with Israel, Hebrew, or Judaism. I immediately ask her if she is Jewish. Though this may be creepy to some, it has been a way that I have found so many other Jewish students on campus. Whenever you meet one Jewish student, they are bound to know at least one other Jewish student whom you did not know previously.

Another way I find other Jewish students is because Eli Capiluto, the president of UK is Jewish. For Rosh Hashanah every year, he invites all of the Jewish people in the area and at the university to his house to celebrate. Whenever I finally meet a new Jewish student, there is a special bond we immediately have when we find out we are both Jewish. I have amazing

Jewish friends in three different sororities on campus and many more who are not in Greek life. I have a newfound appreciation for other people's religion and religious beliefs. After being at the University of Kentucky, I have begun to look up to those who are passionate about being involved in their faith and who find comfort in their beliefs.

I am lucky and happy to be able to say that I have never once felt any anti-Semitism at

the University of Kentucky and especially none in my sorority. I have never been around more supportive girls that truly bring out the best in me. They all think it is great that I have gotten more involved with my faith and love to see me grow in my Jewish identity. This year, I am serving as the president of Hillel and I am excited for how the Jewish community and Hillel will continue to grow in the years to come. Participation in Hillel has doubled since my freshman year, and I have high hopes of it doubling in the next year again. I can truly say that coming down south has made me closer to my religion than ever before. This year at Yom Kippur was the first year that I have ever fasted. I never realized how the absence of a Jewish community would help me deepen and explore my own relationship with Judaism. Nor did I realize how meeting others with a strong faith, would help me to discover my own. ■



Amy is a senior at the University of Kentucky from Carmel, Indiana majoring in Human Nutrition and minoring in Chemistry. Besides being involved in her sorority and being president of Kentucky's Hillel, she is involved with Service Corps and Relay for Life. Amy also has plans to go to medical school next year.