

ZE'EV REMER

Naivety

Naivety is defined as a lack of wisdom, experience, or judgment. Before entering college, I was a self-confident person, but I had little real-world experience. My grandfather, a Holocaust survivor who came to America in search of a new life free from hate and violence, often shared stories of his past. From an early age, I understood that my people were a marginalized group, yet my community instilled in me the belief that we should never play the victim card. His resilience taught me that strength comes from perseverance, from holding onto one's identity despite the hardships.

I grew up in a two-parent household, surrounded by a like-minded community that reinforced my values and beliefs. As a star player on my high school basketball team, I received interest from several secular colleges, presenting me with an opportunity that would take me far beyond my comfort zone. At the time, my confidence remained unshaken—I believed I was ready for any challenge. However, I was unaware of just how transformative this transition would be.

My first day on campus was a Friday—an action-packed day filled with meeting my roommates, teammates, and trying to settle into what would be my new home for the next four years. But as the sun began to set, a familiar unease crept in. The thought of spending Shabbat alone, in a place where no one shared my traditions or understood their significance, felt overwhelming. I made an excuse to my roommates, got in my car, and drove home.

Freshman year continued to challenge me in ways I hadn't anticipated. I struggled with balancing basketball and my religious observance, navigating games scheduled on Shabbat and explaining my restrictions to new roommates, unsure whether they would be accommodating. A car accident and the end of a three-year relationship only added to the weight I carried. For someone who once thought he had life figured out, I suddenly felt lost.

By the time I returned for my sophomore year, I was eager to turn the page. I believed the worst was behind me, that I had finally begun to settle in. But then, the unimaginable happened. On October 7th, the Jewish people faced an atrocity unlike anything seen since the Holocaust. The world as I knew it changed in an instant. I felt helpless, hopeless—school and athletics no longer seemed to matter.

What shook me even more was the reaction across America and on my own campus. Watching classmates and peers justify or even celebrate the acts of terror against innocent Jewish civilians was both mind-boggling and painful. My grandfather had always spoken of resilience, of the importance of holding onto one's identity even when the world seems to turn against you. I had never truly understood what he meant—until now.

For the first time in my life, I was genuinely afraid to be Jewish. But through that fear, I also began to understand my grandfather's unwavering strength. He had survived unthinkable horrors yet never wavered in his faith or identity. And now, in my own way, I was facing a defining moment. The naivety I carried into college had faded. In its place, a new understanding had taken root—one of resilience, responsibility, and the unbreakable will to stand strong in the face of adversity.