

Growing up a conservative Jew in Johnson County, Kansas, I never saw myself as particularly diverse. Everyone else I interacted with in all the major places in my life, to be precise, Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy, Ohev Sholom Synagogue, and the Jewish Community Center, was also a Jew living in Kansas, besides my atheist art teacher, so I thought that most people were Kansan Jews. And even though I went to summer camps in places such as Wisconsin, Colorado, and Oklahoma, where I met people who weren't from Kansas, everyone at those camps was Jewish, too. So if you had told me that only about 2.2% the people in America and 0.7% of those in Kansas are Jewish, according to the Jewish Virtual Library, I probably wouldn't have believed you. It wasn't until I started going to Korean Heritage Camp with my family so my Korean-adopted brother would know about his heritage that I met people who weren't Jewish. Apart from the shock of being surrounded by people who didn't look like me, but instead looked like my brother, who usually stood out in the Midwestern Jewish community we inhabited, it was surprising to find that the people at the camp weren't Jewish. There were atheists, Buddhists, and all sorts of Christians. The food served in the cafeteria wasn't kosher, which meant that I couldn't eat any of the meat the camp served, and couldn't even have the soup because it was probably made out of chicken broth. Instead of saying a bracha, or Hebrew blessing, before eating, many families said grace or nothing at all, and the Friday night dinner didn't have candles, wine, and challah, two loaves of braided bread that Jews traditionally eat over the course of Shabbos, but just the same food that was served every other day. People wrote, played the radio, and drove on Saturday, and, to my surprise, when I explained that I couldn't watch tv on Saturday because it was Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath that lasts from sundown on Friday night until the time on

Saturday night when three stars are out, I was asked what that was. I had never been in an environment where people didn't at least know about Judaism and Jewish rituals, even if they didn't follow them, and it opened my eyes to the fact that maybe most people don't live the way my family does. So, while for my brother Korean Heritage Camp was a place to go to be like everyone else, for me, it was a chance to learn about differences both racial and religious, and to realize that 'normal' can mean different things to different people. There are all different kinds of people in the world, and learning about the way they live can not only broaden your horizons but make you appreciate the uniqueness of the way you live.