

I really had no idea what to expect. I had heard stories but I figured they were exaggerated. How bad could it be? I had never really experienced anything similar so I prepared for the worst. After transferring to San Diego State, I spent my first spring semester studying abroad in Jerusalem. My first and last Spring semester at SDSU was the only exposure I had to what so many have said is one of the most anti-Semitic campuses in the nation. I never understood where that title came from as someone so involved with Jewish student life. We had (and still have) a vibrant, proud Jewish community on campus whether it be at Hillel, Chabad, Students Supporting Israel, or Alpha Epsilon Pi-The Jewish fraternity. I could not understand why anyone would think that a Jewish student wouldn't feel safe at San Diego State. Until this past spring.

I never would have thought that I would find my Zionism in San Diego. Just a year before, I was living in Israel speaking with political leaders, writers, educators, and activists about the State of Israel. I went to museums, cemeteries, and battlegrounds learning about heroes and tragedies. I did my grocery shopping in the shuk, Machane Yehuda. I mourned on Yom Hazikaron and danced in the street on Yom Hatzmaut. Yet, I had never truly experienced anti-Semitism before. I thought I was a Zionist, I loved Israel so much it was a place that I called home, a place that I had yearned to return to. But now I realize that Zionism is so much more than loving Israel.

In my final semester at SDSU I had the experience of walking through campus every day for a week staring down an eight-foot wall covered in hateful things said about people I call family and a place I call home. My close friends were spit on and verbally abused. As terrible as it was to see what I saw and hear what I heard, I learned so much about myself and my

community from this experience. I realized why we have Israel. While I knew that this hate was happening all over the world, I had never truly understood it until I saw it with my own eyes.

I know that anti-Semitism is far from fading, but I feel so lucky to be alive during an era where Israel exists. I have taken for granted my time in the Jewish State. I have taken for granted the safety with which I walked while wearing a kippah. I have taken for granted the Ruach of thousands of people dancing in the streets of Jerusalem, celebrating independence. I have taken for granted the safe haven of the Jewish people.

Though Jews have survived in the diaspora for thousands of years, we have not truly flourished. Israel keeps the world's Jews safe like never before. Finally, the people Israel can defend themselves and have the ability to return to their homeland. The Jewish people deserve more than to just survive and that is what Israel is for. It is where the Jewish people not only survive, but flourish.