



April 2022

Dear Bronfman community:

My name is Josie Reich. I am a 2021 Bronfman fellow, and I want to tell you a story.

Two years ago, a senior left my school, claiming she was ostracized by her peers and the school for her minority political beliefs. I suddenly became aware of students laughing at her name in the halls and teachers admonishing the positions she holds.

Her opinions did deeply offend me, but so did the disrespect. I agreed with the majority opinion but was uncomfortable with its power and homogeneity. The question I started asking then has stayed with me: *how can we disagree without alienating each other?*

This fall, I completed a research paper on political polarization. I found that interacting across party lines — simply being friends with someone who thinks differently — is key to reducing polarization. It turns out that personal connection allows for nuance, and nuance breaks stereotypes. Without stereotypes, it is very hard to demonize and dismiss.

In my own experience, the seed for realizing this approach was planted at Bronfman. **At Bronfman, I met Jewish teenagers with entirely foreign value systems and especially thoughtful opinions that they were eager to share.** I found myself discussing belonging, war, domesticity, abortion, stoicism, media, geography, infinity, fashion, decision-making, Judaism, and spirituality.



Above: Josie playing the guitar for the Bronfman Arts Track.

The other Bronfman fellows showed me how each of their social, geographical, and familial backgrounds shaped who they were and how they thought. In those conversations, I didn't feel difference, I felt connection. That's what was lacking in the heated political debates I'd previously thought to be productive: a reason to look beyond polarity and see humanity. One fellow explained to me why he follows the strictest Jewish laws despite holding modern ideals they contradict. Another described how his cultural history influenced his beliefs about guns.

(Turn page.)



We miss so much when we don't make room for disagreement. **My experience at Bronfman truly gave me a greater ability to approach others with understanding, respect, and curiosity.**

I'm making a personally meaningful donation in gratitude for this opportunity, and I urge you to join me in supporting The Bronfman Fellowship's annual campaign. Thank you for being a part of this community with me.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Josie Reich". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Josie Reich ('21)

P.S. - To donate, please visit www.bronfman.org/donate; or mail a check, made out to The Bronfman Fellowship, to The Bronfman Fellowship, PO Box 632, White Plains, NY 10602.