

Who Am I?  
By Lucy Calderon

I am a politically informed, socially aware, liberal-minded 18 year-old, plucked from the melting pot of New York City at the tender age of six, transplanted to the Bible Belt of Kentucky.

I endure many hardships as a Jew growing up in the South, but find my voice through writing and activism. I am a writer, an editor, a teen counselor for Planned Parenthood, a sister, a daughter, a friend.

I have been steadfast in my determination to one day become a lobbyist in Washington, D.C., fighting for women's reproductive health rights.

I was relatively certain that, in order to achieve my goals, I would attend college in Washington, D.C., thereby shining my light as the brightest college intern on Capitol Hill, thus bringing me closer to my destiny.

But on October 26, 2018, as I headed home from the last of my seven college tours, that vision became clouded.

As I sat in the airport terminal with my dad, my body reverberated stronger than the phone in my hand that displayed The New York Times headline: *11 Killed in Pittsburgh Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged With 29 Counts.*

I reflected on my own experiences as a Jew in Kentucky.

I became a Bat Mitzvah almost five years ago. On one of the the happiest days of my life, I entered my synagogue on a quiet Louisville, Saturday morning, much like a Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

On October 26, 2018, those American Jews, just like me, attended their synagogue to celebrate Shabbat and the naming of a new baby in the world, except, at least 11 of them did not survive the celebration.

Would I now be afraid to attend my place of worship? I had always prided myself on how I openly expressed my Judaism. I am the regional Shlichah for BBYO (in charge of Judaic programming for B'Nai Brith Youth Organization). I am the midwest intern for StandWithUs, an international, Israel educational organization. For a moment, all I wanted to do was hide.

Taking Holocaust at my school this year, I learned the history of antisemitism. It was gradual, and didn't jump head-first into the execution of Jews. It started with simple hate, treating Jews as "other." I replayed little moments in my head where I had been treated as "other." I came to the frightening realization that these moments had serious potential to erupt into the horrific tragedy which took place at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh.

And just like that, activism took a backseat to cultural awareness. My first responsibility is to align myself with an institution of higher learning that sees diversity and inclusiveness as one of its top priorities, wherever that may be.

Just two months after an ignorant gunman took the lives of 11 innocent people, I am still me. I was plucked from New York City and planted in Kentucky where I blossomed. I am a writer. I am an activist. I am comfortable with the uncertainty of my future.