

My Jewish Teens Shrugged Off Musk's Nazi Salute — I Wish They Didn't

Three generations of my family carry different scars from the same hatred

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Bright magnets, Toledo Spain. [Deposit subscription DGH](#)

I watch my eighteen-year-old twins under the neon glow of Chicago's 8 Crazy Nights, a Hanukkah pop-up bar. Charlie's voice rises above the festive music, "You have to try these," he insists, sliding a plate of latkes toward his non-Jewish friends with the kind of ease that I never had. Next to him, Thomas points at a staff T-shirt, laughing at its "This is how we Jew it!" slogan without a hint of self-consciousness.

I am beaming with pride as they embrace their Jewish identity.

I remember being their age, carefully hiding my Jewish identity in Melbourne's elite Christian schools. While they were comfortable with their heritage, I hid mine like a secret, afraid that it could spill out at any moment. Every casual reference to their faith makes me hold my breath, waiting for the reaction that never comes.

Three weeks later, back home in Australia, my morning coffee turns bitter as I scroll through my feed. Elon Musk is standing at Capital One Arena, attending President Trump's inauguration, his arm raised in what many saw as a Nazi salute. "This was a fork in the road of human civilization," he declares. The online uproar is palpable, yet Musk brushes off the criticism with a dismissive sleeping emoji: "The 'everyone is Hitler' attack is sooo tired."

I tentatively bring up the incident that evening, my fork pushing my food around my plate. The knot in my stomach feels familiar — it's the same one I carried through high school hallways.

"Was it actually a Nazi salute?" Charlie asks between bites, his tone more curious than concerned.

"Maybe he was just waving?" Thomas suggests, reaching for seconds.

"Don't you worry about what all his followers might think?" I press, memories of hidden bar mitzvah photos and schoolyard taunts flooding back.

Charlie shrugs — a gesture that carries the weight of generations. "It's just Musk being Musk," he says. "He does something provocative, everyone reacts, and then people post memes about it."

Their analysis struck me. No fear. No outrage. Just teenagers parsing another social media moment with the detached pragmatism of their generation. But what terrifies me isn't just Musk's gesture — it's the tens of millions of followers who see his dismissal of antisemitism concerns as just another tweet to scroll past.

Musk's flippant dismissal of antisemitism concerns is part of a troubling global pattern. In Australia, antisemitic incidents surged sixfold in 2023, according to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry. What should feel like a safe suburban life has become increasingly threatening. As Associate Professor David Slucki explains, "[Antisemitism is a very unique form](#) of racism. It's managed to shift its shape depending on the circumstances... adapting itself to the modern world."

I live in a suburban Australian neighborhood, but [recent local incidents](#) paint a chilling picture: synagogues vandalized with Nazi symbols, schools defaced with threatening messages like "Jew die," and cars tagged with hate speech. Since October 7, 2023, these incidents have increased in number and their extremity. This modern hatred operates in two worlds simultaneously — the physical space where synagogues are vandalized and the digital realm where algorithms amplify hate with clinical efficiency.

As my sons prepare for college in two months, the American Jewish Committee's report haunts me: [44% of Jewish college students](#) experienced antisemitism on campus last year.

My grandmother would recognize these shadows. Her voice, preserved in Spielberg's Holocaust documentary, still echoes. She was eighteen — the same age my boys are now — when the Nazis tore her family apart. She lost her parents and watched her younger brother be marched to the gas chambers.

I inherited none of my grandmother's courage. At my Melbourne school, I became an expert in invisibility. I learned to keep my Jewish identity locked away, like the bar mitzvah photos I hid before friends visited. I even learned to laugh at antisemitic jokes; each forced chuckle a betrayal of my grandmother's strength.

While her survival depended on physical hiding, mine relied on social camouflage. I remember those days of keeping my identity a secret. It was a survival mechanism, though it left scars I carry today.

Sadly, thirty years later, I am afraid once more.

My grandmother survived by spotting danger. I survived by hiding. My sons scroll past it, their teenage immunity to fear both blessing and curse.

When I was young, I feared physical bullying and isolation. Today's antisemitism operates on a different scale — global, digital, and far-reaching. The world's richest man can tweet dismissively about a Nazi salute, and millions of people see it as entertainment rather than an issue of grave concern.

The story of my cousin Ya'acov illustrates how quickly this modern landscape can shift. Ya'acov's story is one of the most powerful I know. He's a former Israeli soldier who met Aliya, a Palestinian woman, at a Seeds of Peace Camp in the United States. The camp, founded to bring together young people from conflicting regions, played a pivotal role in shaping their relationship. Despite the vast cultural differences between them, they fell in love. They overcame their backgrounds, their families' expectations, and, in many ways, the narratives of hatred that both Israelis and Palestinians are often taught to believe.

When Ya'acov posted his perspective on the Gaza conflict last year, the video's half-million TikTok views came at the cost of his family connections. Lifelong friends vowed silence; some wished Hamas had taken him. His experience shows how social media can simultaneously amplify our voices and silence our relationships.

My sons scroll through Ya'acov's story like any other content, double-tapping and moving on. When I ask what they think about their cousin's experience, Charlie responds with another shrug. "It was good," offering no other comment.

It's hard not to feel the sting of this indifference. How can they view such a profound moment with such detachment?

Seeking answers, I turned to experts who study the intersection of discrimination and young minds.

"Children exposed to discrimination can experience emotional challenges that affect their self-esteem and ability to form healthy

relationships,” parenting expert Reena B. Patel tells me. I think back to my own childhood, hiding my Jewish identity out of fear. My sons are privileged to grow up in a different world, where they can confidently teach their friends about Hanukkah at a pop-up bar. Yet, I wonder if their nonchalance stems from genuine progress — or if they’re simply desensitized by the constant barrage of online hate.

While Musk casually dismisses Nazi symbolism to his quarter-billion followers, my sons scroll on, unmoved. Is this progress — the ability to shrug off what once terrified us? Or are we watching history repeat itself through notifications and news feeds, one dismissive emoji at a time?

My grandmother’s generation fought visible enemies, while my generation hid from visible hatred. My sons’ generation faces something perhaps more insidious: — the normalization of hatred through digital channels that make it seem less real, less threatening, and less worthy of a response.

In trying to protect my sons while celebrating their heritage, I may have left them vulnerable to hatred’s newest forms. Now, I see that silence has a cost. My grandmother understood this, reliving her pain to ensure her story was heard. My cousin knew it, too, risking everything to speak his truth.

The lights of that Hanukkah bar still glow in my memory, but so too does the growing threat.

My sons must learn that courage is more than proudly wearing their identities. It also requires recognizing hatred, even when wrapped in memes and algorithms. Scrolling is easy; standing up to something is where true courage lies.