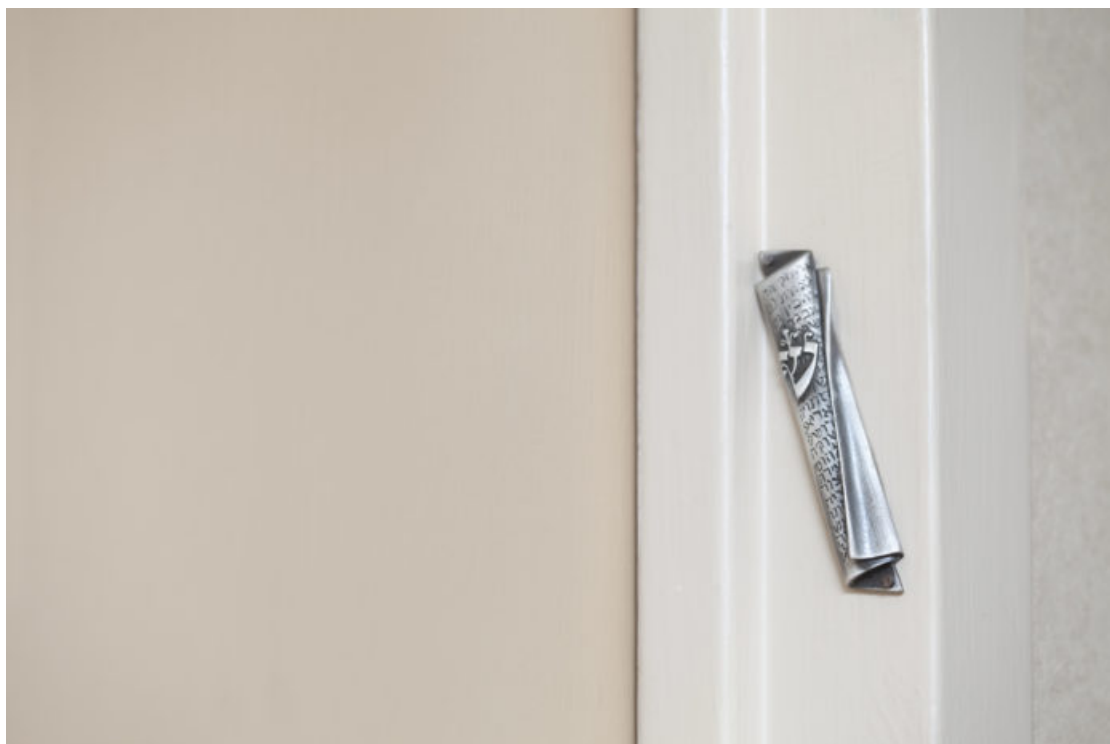


MSU Student Educates Perpetrator Who Stole Her Mezuzah

By **Maddy Gun** - 02/04/2020 5:00 PM



Maddy Gun takes action to educate the suspect who stole her mezuzah from her doorpost on campus.

I am the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor. At 8 years old, my grandfather was hiding in the woods for more than two years with his brother, who was 18. The rest of their family perished. To this day, my grandfather speaks about his story of survival in order to educate others. Through his story, I've learned the value of standing up for my beliefs as well as the importance of education.

My grandfather always ends his speech by saying, "You cannot be a bystander." These words have resonated with me, and after experiencing blatant anti-Semitism on campus, I knew I could not just be a bystander.

This past semester, as I moved into my apartment at Michigan State University in East Lansing, one of the things I was most excited to do was to hang a mezuzah, a blessing of the home, on my doorpost.

Growing up, I was taught about the importance of Judaism and how I should feel proud to be a Jew, so hanging up a mezuzah was natural for me. However, a couple

weeks later, I came back to my apartment to find my mezuzah ripped off my doorpost and stolen.

At first, I was unsure of how to react. Was I supposed to be scared? Maybe this was a joke? But then I realized that this was intentional, and I had to act.

The first thing I did was ask the apartment manager to check the video footage to identify the perpetrator. Then I filed a police report, a draining process that took many weeks of follow up to keep the investigation moving forward. The apartment manager eventually located the footage, which required reviewing multiple cameras over the course of more weeks.

After quite some time and well into the middle of the semester, the case was finally delivered to the detective bureau, which reviewed the footage, conducted interviews within my apartment complex and identified a male student at Michigan State University as the suspect. The semester drew to a close, and I had to decide whether to pursue criminal charges against the suspect.

I felt similarly to my grandfather about the power of education and decided to pursue a rehabilitative route instead of the criminal justice system. I set up a meeting with MSU's Hillel director, the Chabad rabbi, the suspect and me. Meeting face-to-face with the perpetrator, I told him how his actions had not only impacted me but also the greater Jewish community at MSU, as someone else in my apartment building took their mezuzah down out of fear.

I then asked if he would be willing to take a guided tour of the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills and, upon his return, write a reflection about what he learned. He immediately agreed to take the educational route and toured the museum a few weeks later. He also compensated me for the cost of my vandalized and stolen mezuzah. While he never sent me his written reflections, my hope is that through this process, he understands the impact and hurt his actions caused.

This experience also taught me the importance of community. I am grateful to the East Lansing Police Department, MSU Hillel and MSU Chabad Student Center as well as to the team at StandWithUs.

I am also delighted to share that I have since hung a new mezuzah on my doorpost and am prouder than ever to showcase my Judaism to the world. I hope that my story can inspire others to stand up and speak out.

***Maddy Gun** is the StandWithUs Emerson Fellow at Michigan State University. She shared her story in front of 550 student and community attendees at the StandWithUs “Israel in Focus” International Conference Jan. 17-19 in Los Angeles.*

Maddy Gun

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