

## The Peale, Baltimore

*Out of the Blocks* Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the *Out of the Blocks* website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>

*Out of the Blocks* is supported by PRX and produced with grant funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cohen Opportunity Fund, The Hoffberger Foundation, Patricia and Mark Joseph, The Shelter Foundation, The Kenneth S Battye Charitable Trust, The Sana and Andy Brooks Family Fund, The Muse Web Foundation, and the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund, creator of the Baker Artist Portfolios



Yitzy Childress:

... ziti, macaroni and cheese, eggplant Parmesan. All made in house. Pretzels, knishes, knishes go really quick. I'm Yitzy Childress, at 6313 Reisterstown Road. And I'm a counter boy, I interface with customers. And suffer the brunt of all the shortcomings of the entire system.

Pickup or delivery? Do you want to leave a tip for the driver? Okay. Thank you. Bye. So growing up here, I was raised an Orthodox Jew. And where we are, we're on the line right between the Orthodox community and the black community. And I always felt like there was this line that I shouldn't cross because it was someone else's community across that line. And growing up I realized that it's because I didn't have good racial understanding of different peoples because I was raised so sheltered. But just when I was young, I felt like I was approaching here, and there was just this wall on this block specifically.

## The Peale, Baltimore

*Out of the Blocks* Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the *Out of the Blocks* website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>

*Out of the Blocks is supported by PRX and produced with grant funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cohen Opportunity Fund, The Hoffberger Foundation, Patricia and Mark Joseph, The Shelter Foundation, The Kenneth S Battye Charitable Trust, The Sana and Andy Brooks Family Fund, The Muse Web Foundation, and the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund, creator of the Baker Artist Portfolios*

I mean, even when I was 19, I'm 26 now. Even when I was 19, I was still very ingrained in the community. It wasn't everyone, it was just myself and my Jews. And it wasn't until after that, when I stopped practicing, that I really started becoming comfortable with this idea that we share, we share a space with a lot of different people. And it's not supposed to be... There's not supposed to be a wall there. I thought I wanted to be a rabbi, a priest in the Jewish faith. And one of the things that I was doing towards that end, it's a local program where they have young kids being mentored by older kids, but in large groups. So they send all the kids on a day trip.

And so I went on one of those and I got four of the brightest middle-school kids just in my group. And these kids asked me all the standard faith questions. If there is a God, why does bad stuff happen, assorted others. And I smiled and gave all the answers that I had been trained with since I was very young. And then after that experience, I felt... I don't know exactly how to describe this feeling just started welling up from deep in my gut. It didn't feel right that I was giving such young, moldable minds this rote answer. When I hadn't really thought about it that deeply yet. That's what I had been told by rote. Well, this is why we do these things. But I never really believed it. And it was going on this and trying to teach that to other kids, was my awakening to actually look at it and question it.

Speaker 2:

Where are you at right now with faith and organized religion and stuff?

Yitzy Childress:

Comfortably agnostic. I'm okay with the idea that there could be a God. And I'm okay with people practicing whatever they're cool with. I just like being respectful, and not having to worry about what the invisible guy in the sky might be thinking about what I'm doing.

It's kind of like being in a mafia. It's kind of exactly what it is. You stay in good graces with the heads, right? They got you taken care of. Don't worry. Don't even think about leaving. And that sort of fear of leaving. They don't threaten to cut off your knee caps, but they threaten to cut off your... You spiritually. I have severed ties with the man who was my rabbi, and lost his graces to keep with metaphor.

Speaker 2:

And yet you have effectively stepped away.

Yitzy Childress:

I like to think in a sense I have. Except here I am working in a Jewish owned store that is the center of the Jewish world on this block who basically... I have stepped away in one sense, but in the other sense,

## The Peale, Baltimore

*Out of the Blocks* Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the *Out of the Blocks* website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>

*Out of the Blocks is supported by PRX and produced with grant funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cohen Opportunity Fund, The Hoffberger Foundation, Patricia and Mark Joseph, The Shelter Foundation, The Kenneth S Battye Charitable Trust, The Sana and Andy Brooks Family Fund, The Muse Web Foundation, and the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund, creator of the Baker Artist Portfolios*

I live right here on this block. Right. Middle Pikesville. But I would rather start to foster a relationship with a larger, global community.

Speaker 2:

I imagine the great irony though, is that you probably never feel quite so Jewish as when you start hanging out with non Jews, right? People outside the community, right? When everybody else is around you Jewish, well, then you don't feel like, you don't really feel that identity so much.

Yitzy Childress:

Yes. I never thought about that, but very, very true. I'm the token Jew in a lot of my circles.