Speaker 1: So how about telling me about your first day in this job?

Speaker 2: Okay. So it's a slightly tricky question. So right now, I work at Extend, which is a nonprofit organization I started as a senior at Swarthmore, and we run educational programming in Israel-Palestine, mainly for American Jewish organizations, but also for other groups. And we try to create a sort of balanced, comprehensive program where people are hearing from both Israeli and Palestinian school, society, political, business, human rights leaders. So it's difficult to sort of find the intellectual middle ground there and to sort of run a program that balances out the enormously wide range of perspectives that you find.

So did I have a first day? I don't know. I can tell you about the first ... The first program we ran was in June 2013, just about two weeks after I graduated Swarthmore. And something happened on that trip that taught me a lot about this sort of work.

So me and my partner who started the organization with me had scheduled out a very specific five days of experiences in Israel and Palestine, and we were really proud of the range of the people that we'd gotten to sign up to do this inaugural tour for us. And on the last night we were in Ramallah, and we were at this beautiful outdoor bar, it was the summer, gorgeous evening. And we had set this time aside, just for reflection for the 12 groups of people in program. We were just gonna sit around, have some beers and talk about, "What did we learn? What changed? How did the way that we relate to this region emotionally, intellectually, culturally develop in these five days?"

What we hadn't realized was that that night was the final for Arab Idol, the largest singing contest in the Middle East and North Africa. And it just so happened that a Palestinian speaker was in the final round. And slowly, as we kind of started having this conversation, the bar just filled up and filled up and filled up. And suddenly it was so packed you could hardly move, no one could hear anything, and everyone was cheering, cheering, cheering as this Palestinian speaker who'd come from Gaza in the final round, as he ultimately took the world by storm and he won Arab Idol. And it was ...

In a country that doesn't have, often politically or culturally, so many reasons or so many opportunities to be recognized and to be celebrated, this was like the greatest celebration. It was as if the New York Yankees won the World Series three times in a row. I've been in New York for those parades — back in the days when the Yankees actually won the World Series. And Ramallah was like that 10 times over. Everyone honking.

I remember some of the people in the program who had sort of been most ... they've been sort of the most skeptical to listening to views different than their own. I remember this one kid sticking his head out of the top of a taxi cab that was driving through the streets of Ramallah, honking. I remember this kid yelling, "YEAH!" Right? I remember thinking, "Okay, as the program leader, I really want this kid to put his head back inside the taxi, but I think this is also one of the most unique of cultural exchange I could have ever hoped for for this young man. So I'm not gonna tell him to put his head back inside the taxi."

So, that was an important experience and just sort of learning that you can't always choose the moments that change the way that people think and feel.

Speaker 1: Right. There's a kind of serendipity that happens that's very tough to plan. In fact, might not have happened if you'd actually tried to plan too much.