

Tell me. Can you reflect a little bit on your own childhood? Did you feel that you had lost your childhood?

I definitely feel that I lost my childhood. And in no other time did I feel that as when my daughter was born. When my daughter was born, I felt like God gave me another chance to experience a childhood, even though it's not my own. I used to play with her toys that many times I said to myself, I wonder if this is normal? But I felt such a thirst, such a craving to play with a doll, to manipulate her toys, to sew dresses for the doll, to sew clothing for that doll.

There were times that I must admit that when I went to buy her a toy-- and this is I'm sure she will forgive me-- was more so because I wanted it as much as I wanted to buy it for her. There was such a gap left open in my early years that I feel I was given another chance through my children to experience a normal childhood. And every aspect of it was like a breath of fresh air. It satisfied me. It satisfied a need that I could never put into words. Because how can a mature person say, Oh, I feel like being a child? This certainly I knew was not acceptable at any time in our society. However, I thank God that no one questioned my inner feelings, because my inner feelings were being fulfilled by this.

First of all, I named my first daughter after my Bubbe Leah. I named her Leah. Her name is Lisa. And to me she was the joy of my life. That having her was fulfilling with my Bubbe's name, having her was fulfilling a childhood loss. Having her filled up every gap that was missing from my life, from my puzzle. And you know I went into my profession as an adult. I only got my BA degree in 1976. After my children went off to school, I decided to go back to school too.

Yeah, but today that's not an unusual thing for anybody.

But for me-- And I had a choice of picking anything I wanted because when you're out of high school you pick a career, you're young and what do we say, youth is wasted on the young. I was a very a mature individual and I could have chosen any other profession, but I wanted to pick elementary and early childhood. I wanted to have a look at experts who describe children's behaviors, who describe children's development and what effects it can have on an individual. And that to me meant the whole world.

And it served a dual purpose. It served a purpose that it fulfilled my desire to look into my own early childhood. And it fulfilled my desire to enter a classroom and say, hey Hitler, you lost. I won. I am looking at children of all colors, so there. It gave me a satisfaction that I could feel. And feelings are the ones that keep us going. Don't kid yourself. So to me it was a triumph beyond anybody's imagination.

You achieved all that you wanted.

I achieved everything that I wanted. I kept silent all these years until I was in a social situation and I overheard people saying, the Holocaust never happened. How could that happen? How could people survive such a trauma? It probably never happened. And this is when, although I was too civilized to give them a piece of my mind because when you're out socially you naturally do not behave in a manner that is not acceptable to the social situation, but I was mad. I was mad and I was hurt. And this is when the seed was planted in my mind. Hey, Rose, you're not only a survivor you are a witness. You were there. And how dare they think otherwise?

Do you think that if this happens now with the plethora of Holocaust denial that exists today that you would even think twice about answering them back on it?

You know, there is one thing that we must always remember. First of all, we must teach our children mutual respect. We must teach our children multicultural heritages so that they will know what to expect one from the other. And at the same time, we must not be silent to those who attack us. We have to respect everyone, but we need to demand respect in return. I am angry. It's too bad that it took so many years but it was circumstances that brought me to this point. Circumstances of how ignorant people can be.

Even in Germany after the war they didn't see anything. They didn't smell anything. And as a result, they didn't know anything. Shame on them. It was all a lie. They saw everything, they smelled everything and did nothing about it.

And they were silent.

And they were silent. And silence is the worst enemy. We are human beings. The Nazi era was-- I can't even call it animalistic. Animals only kill when they're hungry. How many times I watch these shows on television about nature. It's amazing. They only kill when they're hungry. But here one group of individuals picked out another group to torment, to torture, to burn, to experiment only because they were Jewish and for no other reason?

Well, I was a witness to all that. And when I'm in the classroom, I teach a bilingual class now, would you believe it of Polish children, Polish immigrants that just came to the United States this past August? And every day we have some kind of an expressive interaction of how we need to behave to one another. Do we persecute people on the basis of how they look or do we look at people on the inside how they are?

So in a way I think I survived for a purpose. I survived for a purpose. I am now married. I have a wonderful husband. He survived under similar circumstances. I picked him at age 18 right out of high school and I must be a very perceptive individual because we're now married 38 years. He is not only my husband in every way but he's my best friend.

I have two beautiful children, my daughter Lisa who is an occupational therapist at Columbia Presbyterian. She's married. She has a son named Corey who was 4 and 1/2 and a little girl named Robin who is a year and a half. I have a son Alan, Alan Jay, who is named after my Zeda that was burned in the gas chambers. He's married to my daughter-in-law, Joyce, and they have three children. The oldest is Jessica who is five and Heather is three. And they just had a little boy named David Jeremy. And he has a degree in computer science. My son-in-law, Merrill. Merrill is also a computer scientist and he's a graphic arts. They live in Bergenfield. My son lives in Richboro, Pennsylvania.

Tell me a little about your parents.

My parents. When we came to America in 1951, we were detained at Ellis Island. I'm also a product of Ellis Island. You know when I took a course in photography here at Kean we needed to review different pictures of different times in America. And when they were reviewing naturally times of the Holocaust, so I said I'm a Holocaust survivor. Then the review reviewing times of Ellis Island of the early immigrants. I said, I'm a product of Ellis Island. And my professor said to me-- and he envisions Ellis Island people only from the 20s-- and he said, Rose, if you tell me that you're 85 years old I will flunk you on this course. I said, no, no, no. I'm not 85. Because we were the last of the Ellis Island people.

And my father, during the war, must have had some kind of infection of the lungs because a spot remained on his lungs. So that's why they detained us at Ellis Island to see if the spot did not change size. So they quarantined us for a few weeks. And if that spot on his lungs had changed size, they were going to deport us. So again I'm here by sheer miracle.

After we got off from Ellis Island we came to New York and we went to the HIAS. And because my father's sister, her name was Dora Sarajev, she lived in Reading, Pennsylvania, she was the one that brought us to America. The HIAS could not help us with anything. We had \$0.25 to our name. The people that came here without being requested by relatives, they were given jobs and apartments and the kids were sent off to school.

So the only way the HIAS would help us was for my aunt to say that she cannot support us. And she was a very respected individual in Reading, Pennsylvania. Her children were educated and she was a very from high society, let's put it this way. So my father said to her, tell the HIAS that you can't help us. They will help us. So she said, Moishele, if I tell them that I brought you here to America and I'm going to dump you on the taxpayers' backs, they will crucify me in Reading. So please don't embarrass me. Come back to Reading with us and we'll see what we can do for you.

We went back to Reading with them. Reading is a small town. She had eight children, by the way. And she had a few girls that did not get married. My sister Sarah at the time was already 20 years old, my Sister Jean was 18, I was 15 and a half, and Phyllis was 12 and 1/2, almost 13. So my father went to work and they got my sister Sarah and my sister Jean a job in the same shop because my father was a tailor, by the way, an expert tailor. When he made a piece of work, it was to be admired.

Because I saw tailor on the questionnaire, and you told me that he ran a general food store. He was tailor here.

He was a tailor at home too. But he was working as a tailor and then helping out in the business. He could have worked for Pierre Cardin and be the master craftsman because when he made a garment, a garment that was to be admired. So we came to Reading there. And my sister said we're going to be spinsters just like her children. We don't want to sit here and have no social life. We want to go back to New York and be with our greener friends-- greener are the refugee friends. That's where we want to be.

And my sister Sarah nudged him and nudged him and nudged him every morning. Finally he said, all right, all right. I'm going to New York. He went to New York. And he some friends helped him find an apartment. And we got on the bus and moved to New York. We got to New York. My father got a job in a sweatshop and my sister Sarah and sister Jean also. And I had to get working papers because I wasn't 16 yet. And I went to work there too. And Phyllis started high school during the day, but we went to high school at night. And I graduated Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn.

And after I was after I graduated, I met-- Well, this is another story how I met my husband. I was going with somebody else at the time and he too came from similar circumstances as a survivor. But he came here, his mother had tuberculosis and--

You're talking now about your future husband,

No.

The other fellow.

The other fellow, right. And he was adopted. The mother said, I can't leave Germany but I want my children to, so he came here and he wanted to go visit these parents that adopted him and his sister. And he said would I mind staying home, and I said, no, of course not, and my sister's sister-in-law made a New Year's Eve party, and she said to me, why don't you come over? I hear that your boyfriend went to visit his adoptive parents. I said, no, I promised him I'll stay home. She said, please come. They're only married people here. Don't worry. The only two people I invited were Brenda and Moishe-- that's my husband and his sister and they live in Jersey. They'll never get here. It was a blizzard outside.

And who do you think walks in at midnight? No, 11 o'clock, just before midnight. Brenda and Moishe. Well, I took one look at him and it was love at first sight. He was the handsomest guy I have ever seen in my life anyway. And he didn't call me for four months because he felt he wasn't making enough money. That was his excuse. Meanwhile, I graduated high school, and in the 50s I did something very brazen. I called up his sister and invited her to my graduation party. And I said, by the way if Moishe isn't doing anything, bring him too.

And sure enough, they both showed up.

You were a feminist before there were feminists.

I was a feminist before there was feminism. Wait. And then my other boyfriend called me the next day because he was away on business again. And Moishe already asked me out for the following day. And when he called me, guess what I had a nerve to tell this person on the phone? I'm sorry, but I met someone else, and if it doesn't work out, maybe we can pick up where we left off. Now I ask you, is that feminism? Is that being a feminist or what? I must have heard it in the movie, because I would not that sophisticated. But to get the courage--

You certainly made the point.

Right.

Poor guy.

And that was in May and in August we got engaged and we got married January 21, 1956. And Lisa was born 10

months later, which in itself was a miracle because we had no way of knowing what the war did to our bodies because we were malnourished the whole time. and then when my children went off to school I decided-- Then my mother said to me, you know you finished high school. None of the greener are doing that. Why don't you try and go to college?

And I met Moishe already and I said, Ma-- And you know where we come from we don't talk back to our elders. We don't. If mother says something we listen. And my mother was a very strong woman. So I said to Moishe, you know, Moishe, when you come here from Jersey, let's spend a little time with Mother each time in the kitchen so that she can see what a wonderful guy you are. P.S. I got the courage and I said to my mother, Ma, if you let me marry Moishe, I promise you one day I will go back to college. And that's what stuck in my mind not to go back on my word.

All right, going back a little bit after we get back to New York. So my father worked. He got sick right away. Apparently that spot inflamed itself. It was cancer of the lungs. And exactly to the year he died. He was 49 years old. My sister Sarah was planning to be married. He died five days before her wedding. Didn't live to see any one of us, any kind of naches. And after we got off from she got up from shiva we had a chupah in the house and Sarah and Sam were married. He is buried on Staten Island. 49 years old.

But he got you here and your lives are different because of it.

He did.

And your mother.

My mother. My mother. The war took a great toll on her. And she developed osteoporosis. And it's no wonder, no wonder. But she worked and she thrived. And she raised my brother-- my brother was five years old when my father died. And the osteoporosis became very severe. She suffered with it quite a few years and then she developed Parkinson's. And three years ago-- she was nine years bedridden-- and three years ago she died.

I want to ask you one thing in conclusion. When you were in the forest, when you were in hiding, living from day to day, did you as a child, as a very young child, believe that you would come through?

Well you know children can fantasize. But we've heard so many times the people around us saying, [SPEAKING HEBREW]. Let at least one person survive to tell.

Yeah.

And towards the end of the war, which we didn't know was going to be the end, as I got older, I was already beginning to believe that probably only one person will survive but who will that be? Which one of us will that be? So it was like a game we were playing, which one of us will it be that will survive to be a witness to this monstrous war? I mean for a nation to set up crematoriums and gas chambers for this only reason to torture and torment and burn people, the world must never forget that. And with my last breath I will see to it that I ring those bells. We must never forget.

And when someone is attacking us verbally, like lately at Kean College with that group, we need to respond. We are a nation. We have our own country. We are no longer gypsies. We are willing to give respect to anyone but we must have it in return, even if we have to demand it. We are a proud nation. We have a country called Israel that blossoms from the driest desert.

Oh by the way, my husband has a brother in Israel who went there on the exodus. He forged his father's name when he was only 15 at the DP camps because he too said, if you want to wait around here for another Hitler go right ahead. I am going to Israel. And he truly deserves the label "Israeli" because every piece of ground you walk on he was part of regaining it. There's a pride that warms our hearts. We cherish him.

He's still alive.

He's still alive. He's married to a Sabra. He has three children. He has a son and two daughters. One daughter finished

the army. She's married. She has three children. Son just came out of the army and his youngest daughter just came out of the army. And they visited us frequently here. And we are extremely proud of the land called Israel because it gives us respect all over the world. And let's face it, we're the only democratic country in that area. We are a source of pride not just to ourselves but to everyone else concerned.

That's right. One final question. I keep saying this will be the last one, but I just want to take advantage of a minute or so that we have left. Did you talk to your children about your experiences from the very beginning, when they were able to understand? Or did you have to wait?

I could not verbalize it. I could not verbalize it. The point really came about when I heard people denying that the Holocaust happened.

So that was the catalyst.

That was the catalyst that made me come out. And you have no idea how much better I feel. I should have done that a long time ago. But either I didn't have the courage, but who is to tell how the inner emotions guide a person? But now I'm happy to say I am a survivor and I am a witness to the Holocaust.

I'm glad. I'm glad you are here to say it. And I think what you have to say needs really to be heard. And I hope it will be heard. I hope this tape will be played for others.

I hope that my children and grandchildren this will be a source of knowing where they came from.

I'm sure with you there they will. Thank you very much.