

I'm Lee Rosenberg. Today we are interviewing Helen Feig, a Holocaust survivor. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland section.

Helen, we're back now to the story. You have now been in this country for 36 years. You had mentioned you have grown children already. How do you feel that your Holocaust experiences have affected you today?

You mean just today or all the time?

All the time.

Well, I'll tell you how it did. First of all, I happen to be very nervous. It did affect my nerves. Like, I'm very touchy, like now it's getting a little better because I'm a little older. But as I was younger, I was very-- I was very hurt, for any little thing. Because I happen to know I have nobody. And until I got married, I mean I had really nobody. All of a sudden, I saw myself, one person alone in a big, big world.

And then even now, it affects me many, many times. There is sometimes things you want to talk, they have to somebody close. You don't have them. They are gone. And especially, when it comes to holiday, any holiday. It doesn't have to be a particular holiday. Excuse me, your memories are coming back from that home. I am still talking. I know that my home, Craciunesti, is existing. But in a way it's not existing. Nobody is there. The houses are not there.

Our house happens to be still there, because we built it a brand new home in 1935. And some friends of mine were there last year. And they took pictures. And it's still there. But they tell me that the whole place doesn't look the same. The people are not there. The homes are not there. It looks like an entirely world. And I am still talking I like to go home. I want to see it once more. I don't know what it's going to do for me, if I will or I won't.

Then I was ill an awful lot from concentration camp. I had a very nervous stomach. I still have to eat five times a day, because I cannot have an empty stomach. You should excuse me, I throw up if I have an empty stomach. Then from that fall, which I fell down in labor camp, and I was so young. And I didn't take care on it right away. I had three back surgeries. I was in and out in the hospital since after the war, and attacked me when I was very, very young.

And like I told you in the car, before I was pregnant with my first child, I used to get complete crippled. I couldn't walk. And when I gave birth to him already, many, many times I couldn't even pick him up from the crib. And I got married and I used to be in and out in the hospital, or in surgery, or in traction, or in traction, or in surgery. And I still suffer from it. I have to have help. There's certainly things I love to do and I can't do them by myself.

I have all my hands are frozen. My bones are hurting me. I got arthritis in my whole body. I got arthritis. I live on medication. And so my health is not good, OK? And everything came from there. Because we didn't have the proper food. We didn't have the proper clothes. A prisoner has it better than we have it, not just in this country, even in Europe. Because we were treated, animals you treat better than we were treated.

And the other way, we have to live. And we have to keep on going because God left us. And we had to make another generation because we want that Jews should exist. We want them to live. We do not want them that they should disappear from this world. And so this is it.

You have to keep on going.

Yes, you have to keep on going.

Do you think about the Holocaust a lot?

I tell you the honest truth. After I happened to be in 1981 in Jerusalem with my husband, suddenly things came back to me. In all those years, I never talked from Auschwitz. I couldn't talk. It was impossible. I have a cousin that she just died about three months ago. And she told me last year. She said, in all the years I never heard you talking about the

Holocaust. And recently you started giving out your secret.

I couldn't talk. The minute I start talking. I would feel that I would get in a big, big-- it's not called a dream. I don't know how to call it. It's there. I know I was there. I know it's not the story. I have nothing written. Whatever I said, it's all by heart, remembered. It's not put on notes. Because if I would have put it on notes, I would have felt guilty that maybe I put something in there which didn't happen to me. So I didn't want to make notes.

My husband told me someday make notes. I said, no. Maybe I won't remember a place, the name of the place. But I did remember. For many, many years I couldn't remember LA¹/₄bberstedt. At one time, I was trying to think the name where I happened to be. And I couldn't remember it. But it came back to me. And a big, how shall I say, depressed. I would get very depressed. I used to be very close with my mother, even closer than with my father.

And the love which I had with her was a sort of a sisters and mother love. Because I had no sisters. And she tried to give me both love. She had a very good personality. And she happens to be a very smart lady, not because she was my mother. But it was in her, OK? And people, which they knew her, they would tell you this. She was a self-made person. And so am I. I am very much a self-made person.

I learned one thing when I came over to this country. That when I took a job, I mean I had quite a few jobs. I did work. That you never look what another person has or what another person does. You just do what you want to do. And if you could do somebody good, you do it. If you can't do somebody good, don't do bad. And that's the way I live since I came over to this country. And I also was raised in a very good home.

So now it's--

You got to help for other people. That's one of the most important things. The memories are dear. But you cannot live in them forever. You have to live with them, but you got to hide them. Somehow somewhere you must hide them in your heart, because if you're going to take them out every day, it's not going to work. So that's the way it is. I think so. I could be wrong. I don't know.

But it works for you.

It works for me.

That's what the important thing is. So now since you went to Jerusalem, you were talking more and more about--

I start talking more and more about my experience because that night, I mean I happened to be there when we were all there in Yad Vashem. And that night, I'll never forgive and never forget in my whole life. But at that moment of scenery, just to believe it, that I'm going to be there. I couldn't believe it that I'm there. And then the closing night of Jerusalem when Menachem Begin was there. We were 22,000 people from all over the world.

There was never that many people, and the soldiers were all climbing on the top of the roofs and all over the places to watch us. We were afraid. I mean, there's no question that something shouldn't happen to us, I mean some bomb or something. And it was an impossible, an unbelievable thing. And then everything came back to me. And I want that the world should know about it. That's why I came. You asked me that or you didn't. You want to ask me that?

Yeah. You feel that it's important.

It's very important that this Holocaust thing shouldn't happen. I'm not going to say it's going to happen to the next generation. But in another generation and another generation, so those tapes are very important and it's very important that the children in school should learn all about that. It shouldn't be forgotten. And people don't have to have hate because one of them is Jewish, and one of them is Protestant, and one of them is Catholic or one of them is Christian. We are all people.

I mean, we just have a different religion. But we are people. And every person is a person.

Do you think that what you went through in the Holocaust has contributed to the feelings that you have today that people are all people?

Positive. Positive. But I'm going to tell you now something. And I don't care if it's going to be on tape. And it's written in the Torah too. I mean I'm not going to change the world. And antisemitism is going to exist forever. And nobody's going to be able to change that. But we have to watch out that the people should know what happened to us. It shouldn't happen to them. God forbid again and again.

Helen, what do you think it was? Was there any one particular thing that helped you get through those years?

Yes.

What was it?

I happened to be only one child and I was brought up in a very good manner. I had everything. I was raised and born in Europe. I had everything just like my children have, except I didn't have a television because television didn't exist at that time. I did not miss nothing in this world. I did miss after the war was over. And I think, excuse me I slipped here. What was the question?

About what had happened to make you survive this, gave you your strength.

Yeah. Well, I think that God left from one family, not from all the families, he left somebody that I mean I was just one. My parents didn't have no more children. I was the only one child. So I guess that God gave me the strength, the energy, the willing. I had the will. I had a willing too. Because if I wouldn't have had the willing, I wouldn't be here today. I would have been probably burnt like the rest of them are.

And so I was a survivor. That this generation shouldn't be destroyed. That I mean, I have two children, which they I hope are going to have children, and so it's going to be another generation. And so God did it. In the beginning, I didn't believe that there was a God because my parents were very good people, and so was other parents, and other people. They were honest people. And God shouldn't have done what he did. I mean tiny little children, my young cousins, tiny kids which they used to live across the street. They were killed. They were burned. What did they do? They didn't do anything wrong.

But in the other way that God had, I guess he had some people which he wanted they should live, and not to destroy the whole family or the whole generation. So that's all I could say.

And what do you think would be an appropriate way to commemorate those people who didn't live?

Appropriate way? Appropriate way would be that like you kids belong to the second generation, which I think it's a good way to remember those people, because any other way they are not going to be remembered by nobody. Let's say that we all are going to die out. I mean we are not too many left. And who's going to remember them people? Who will? Nobody.

I mean, my kids are not even going to say, well, my mother had an aunt or an uncle or a cousin or whatever. I mean they're not going to say it. But if you kids are going to keep it up, and then maybe your children are going to keep it up, I see that's the only reason I could see that it would be remembered. There is not any other way it should be remembered.

Now, OK, they are saying an [NON-ENGLISH] after the 6 million Jews in my temple. They're not saying it in all the temples. It happened in our temple in Green Road Synagogue they are saying it. Because all those people come from the same place. OK? So they are remembered. Now, that's the only way those people could be remembered. You have another solution, you could say it.

I'm interested in hearing what your opinions are.

Well, that's what my opinion is. I mean that's the way I feel about it.

All right. And then what do you think out of everything that you've gone through, what made you decide that you wanted to share this experience today?

What? OK. First of all, I'm coming back to that story which I just said. I didn't want that the Holocaust should be forgotten. That's the first subject. The second subject is that I read and I heard it in the news that a few years ago, if you remember correct, they said it didn't exist, the Holocaust. It's not true. It was written in books, in big colleges. So it's a lie. They are liars.

They killed 6 million. They killed our parents. They killed our cousins, our uncles, our aunts, our little tiny kids. It's a lie. So I want them to know that it wasn't a lie that those people are existing here. And they're telling the truth. Everything they are saying is the truth. So that should not be forgotten.

If anybody is going to say from now in 20 years, maybe we are not going to be around or in 50 years, it's not true, it was a story put together, there is going to be tapes or books that you're going to be able to take out and prove it. There was a Holocaust. And so this is what made me come and say too.

And I feel that I owe this. That if God was good enough to leave me alive, and I should be a survivor what I went through. After all, I just saw myself one person alone in the world, with not having nobody. And God gave me all to be. I wasn't smart enough to run away from the camp. I wasn't smart enough from the labor camp not to stay where they put me to work, that I shouldn't get tuberculosis in my lungs. God gave me all that in my mind to do it. And with my will, I did it. But he encouraged me. He told me.

So all that will be on tape, and some day somebody is going to take out that tape and prove this to the world. And that's what made me come.

Helen, do you have a personal message that you'd like to share with us regarding the Holocaust?

A personal message, let me see. Yes, I do have a personal message. I wish that the younger generation, like you and maybe your children, I mean you don't have a third generation yet. But there is a second generation, and I hope there is going to be more than in Cleveland. I hope there is all over a second generation that you kids should not forget that your grandparents, some of your grandparents and relatives, were those which they were killed between the 6 million Jews. Which it's a true story. It's not a put up story. To be remembered, and that should not happen never, never, never, again to no generation. And not just no Jews, to nobody, to no human beings should that happen what happened to us. And that's my message to the world.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with us today, Helen?

Yeah, what would you like me to share with you today? I want to thank for everybody who did that. That they decide to do tapes from Holocaust people. And to the younger generation, I have a message they should work very hard, and they shouldn't neglect it. Because we people are going to be gone pretty soon. And I'm going to try and encourage my children to try and be active and work, and to the world I'm going to send a big message. It was a Holocaust.

People are trying to say it wasn't. It's not true. There was a Holocaust. 6 million Jews were killed for no reason, honest people, nice people, good people. And that should never, never, never happen again to no people. And I want to thank you for doing all the work, whoever started the Holocaust and everything.

And that's my name is Helen Feig. And that's all. What else shall I say?

Thank you, Helen, very much for sharing all of your experiences with us today. This is Lee Rosenberg. Our Holocaust survivor today has been Helen Feig. This project is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland

section. That's it.

OK.

That's very good.