

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Christine Cohen, conducted by Margaret Garrett on January 5, 1997 in Bethesda, Maryland. Tape two, side A. Mrs. Cohen, let's go back to you're talking about the kids at church knowing you were Jewish and saying bad things about you. What was it like in school? Did the children at school know you were Jewish and say anything about it?

Yes, they did. They knew it, and they said things, all sorts of things. I remember the favorite thing was Christ killer, and despite that, I had a circle of friends who we never discussed-- I mean, they knew I was Jewish. But we never discussed it. I never actually would admit to it. It was never a discussion. I had a lot of friends in spite of that.

They were not Jewish?

None of them were Jewish. There was not one Jewish child in my whole school left in Warsaw. There were very few Jews left. I was the only one, and like I said, I had a few close friends. And then when I got older, dating, and all that, I never had a problem. I was very popular.

How did the teachers treat you?

I'm sure their treatment was affected by how they felt, but I honestly don't remember. Because the thing is I was a very good student, so I never had a problem. I had straight A's, and I never had a problem.

So it wasn't a situation, where they would give me a lesser grade, just because I was Jewish. But I'm sure it entered their minds, because the teachers weren't any different than the children. That's where the children got it far from, from parents, from adults.

So I interrupted you. You said, when you started dating, that seemed to go OK.

It went OK, because I was popular. And the people I dated didn't openly act anti-Semitic, but I believe, looking back, I don't know how they felt. But the majority of the children and teenagers, they were anti-Semitic, just like their parents. And they would say things, and when I was little, it hurt. When I was older, it hurt, too, but they were a little more subtle about it.

How did you deal with it?

Actually, I didn't. I didn't deal with it at all. I just was very unhappy and let it go.

Did you talk to your mother about it?

No, because at that point, I knew I was old enough to know that there was no way we could change anything. That's how Poland was.

So you didn't talk to her, and what did that mean to you at that time being Jewish?

Well, I desperately didn't want to be, even at that time.

What did you think it meant to be Jewish?

To be somehow less than someone else, to be less. I wasn't the same. I was trying to be the same, but I wasn't the same. I had, basically, less rights. I was just less. I wasn't a person.

So it didn't have any other meaning for you, or did you have any other understanding of what--

you mean as in I felt Jewish, or Jewish religion, or whatever, no. I desperately, even as a teenager, even as a 16-year-old, when I understood I can't change things, I desperately wanted to be Catholic and not Jewish, until we left Poland.

Until the day we left Poland, I did not want to be Jewish.

So you left Poland when?

1957.

And you were 17.

Uh huh, and I went to Israel. And then I could be Jewish. That's not the reason we went to Israel, but this was the only place we could go in order to leave Poland. What had happened, my parents tried since '45 to leave Poland. But my father being an electrical engineer was involved in a bunch of government projects, and they would let us go.

But they wouldn't let my father go, so they tried to go to Sweden, to Australia. They tried to go everywhere just to leave Poland. They would not let him go, because they needed him. So they would give us a visa for the three of us, and, of course, we didn't want to leave without him.

So finally, in '57, they still didn't want to let him go. I don't exactly remember. But they said that the only place you can go to leave Poland is to Israel, if you're Jewish, and that's it. My parents didn't want to go to Israel. They wanted to come to the United States anywhere, but out of Poland. But they said, that's where you can go, and my father-- I don't know.

They bribed somebody or something. My father got out too, and we moved to Israel. And we lived there for five years, and finally, I was the same as everybody else. And I got over that feeling of trying to hide the fact as if I'm not worthy of something, or I don't know, like I was less than a person. Going to Israel actually helped me.

After that, after we moved out of Israel, I have no problem with being Jewish other than the fact that I feel deprived of my childhood, my family, and everything that everybody has. And even after the war, I feel that intense-- my mother was very intense. She was so overprotective. Everything was so intense, so I even feel that my mother died early because of that.

She still was a young woman. She had so many problems. She had a very high blood pressure, and that was since the war. She didn't take care of herself, and she developed congestive heart failure and died. And all of it was connected with the war, but the biggest tragedy with her is she couldn't hear.

In the '50s, all of a sudden, she went to the theater and lost her hearing. And it was all, again, connected to the war as there were some nerves paralyzed or whatever. This was from the war, and she wore a hearing aid. She could hear, but not very well.

And that affected my life, but I feel that's a direct result of the war. Everything that has happened to me is a direct result of the war. I tried not to be overprotective with my children. I tried very hard to stop myself. I'm beginning to be almost like my mother, so I stopped myself. Because I wasn't.

Everything I do, everything is intense. With me, I'm never truly relaxed, even I could be somewhere having fun. But it's like someone-- I'm standing outside of myself, observing myself. Like, oh, you're having fun. Something bad is going to happen, that sort of thing, and I'm never-- people let themselves go. They truly enjoy life or enjoy something. I'm enjoying it, but observing myself enjoying it. I don't know how else to explain it.

I've never truly, truly relaxed. A little thing, like I love dogs, a lot of people love dogs. But my feeling about dogs, a psychiatrist friend of ours told me one time that the reason I feel the way I do is because I identified with the dogs. And this is true. We can be driving down the street.

I know my husband likes to joke of it. I see a dog on the side of the road, and I just go into hysterics. And my husband says, don't worry. It's a person. I mean, it's a joke, but, of course, [INAUDIBLE]. I see a homeless dog. My whole day, I can't stop thinking about it.

A lot of people love dogs, but this is different. I really think I identify myself with them as helpless creatures that someone throws out, abuses, uses as property, and I guess that's really what I brought from the war. I really think that, and I think, if things go well, something's going to happen. And it's not that I walk around unhappy.

I know how to have fun. I have a lot of friends, and I do fun things. What I do, I'm a travel agent. I enjoy it tremendously. I love traveling. I love dancing. I love all that.

But I don't know why I can't just be myself without, every time, stepping outside of myself and looking at myself, like, what are you doing having fun? You're having fun now. Wait, that sort of thing.

So you're always fearful that it won't last or that something will happen to you.

Mhmm. My husband, when we first got married and he was five minutes late, I didn't think the traffic. I thought he's laying in a ditch somewhere. Same thing with my children. They were always very, very good about calling, if they were late, once they started driving, because they knew how I felt.

I would never think they were irresponsible, or they forgot. Time got away from them. I would think they were dead.

What about when they were little children?

I was overprotective then, because then they allowed me. When they got older, they didn't.

Were you able to stay home with them?

Yes, I did. That's what I chose.

So you didn't have to work?

No, I didn't have-- I don't have to work now either. But now, I want to. I didn't, and I don't want full time anyway. I didn't have to work, and I didn't want to. I wanted to be with them, and I was overprotective as I look back at it. My son who's actually-- you know, he was never a follower, even as a baby. He was more of a leader.

He marches to his own drummer. If the whole world said, do such and such, if he feels it's not right for him, he won't do it. He was always an individual. I remember when he was a little boy, and I used to bring him to playgroups, or birthday parties, or whatever.

All the children were playing together, and these could be kids he grew up with, he knew very well. He would go off and play by himself. He was happy. He amused himself, but I used to push. I would say, Steve, go with the other children, go with the other children, until he was much older.

And a very close friend of mine told me. She says, leave him alone. He will do it when he's ready. Don't push him, but that's what I was doing. And I try to catch myself. Since then, I try to catch myself when I was doing that. He was perfectly happy to be by himself, but I didn't want him to be by myself.

I wanted him to be with other children, and I was always-- when the kids first started playing on the street, when they were old enough, I was there. The other mothers weren't, which in turn made the kids the laughing stock. And that wasn't good. Little things like that. But every time I did something like that, I thought of what my mother did, and I tried not to do it. I said, I'll never do that. And I'm trying.

How was your mother with your children?

Oh, she adored them, but she was just as overprotective of them. I mean, if she didn't-- she would be in the house. Let's see. They were two and three. They were playing in their room. She didn't see them. She went into panic. I remember I went to my brother's wedding.

My daughter was 18. They had a wedding in Maine. His in-laws have a summer home there on a lake, and everybody rented houses around there. And that's where the wedding was, and one was in this house. One in this after the wedding. Let's see.

We went across the lake to visit somebody, and my daughter went with us. She was 18, and my mother was with my brother somewhere. She kept running into the woods. She was panicked, because she couldn't find my daughter. She was with us. She was perfectly safe, and they tried to tell her. But she was just panicking, because she thought something happened to her. She was just with my children.

Is your husband Jewish?

Mhmm.

And how does he deal with the children with your overprotectiveness?

I guess he balances it, and he points it out to me gladly.

How has the war affected you as far as the way you view national events or international events, such as Bosnia? Did you have any reactions to that?

I do, but not the kind that you would expect, that even I would expect, like feeling some kind of bond with them.

Whatever.

I don't, and the thing is maybe it's not a very nice thing to say. But when things happen all over the world, and I realized, today, with the media and everything. Everybody knows about everything, but I'm also convinced the world knows that everybody knew-- maybe not to what extent. But everybody knew the Jews were being killed in Europe, and no one lifted a hand.

And it's terrible, and selfish, and cold as it sounds. Of course, I wouldn't want anything to happen to people anywhere. But I'm almost becoming one of those people, like they didn't help me. Why should I be concerned about someone else? Which is not the feeling I should have.

I know, and I feel guilty about it. It's not that I'm with that sympathy, but not enough to do something about it. Because I feel we were betrayed. It's not going to-- I feel so bitter about what happened. I have pictures of my family, the ones that I did find, in my bedroom. Every morning, I wake up, and I look at my family, the few pictures I have. And I feel like they took them away from me. I never got to know them, like I know there were millions of people in that situation.

But I feel almost like I'm the only one, like my grief is more than anybody else's grief. And the strange thing is, again, when I was growing up, when I was a teenager, I didn't think about all these things. I really didn't. I knew that was my way of life. I didn't have family. So what?

When you were five, you had pretty strong feelings about the little German boy.

But I guess then I buried it.

And does it come out now?

That's funny you should ask. Isn't it? I used to-- and now, they're not close friends. Not because they're German. I used to have my closest friend for years since I got married. It was a girl from Germany, a German girl. The only problem we ever had-- we lived next door to each other. The kids grew up together. In fact, she was the one that told me I was pushing my son.

Did she have a German accent?

Yes, oh yes, she came when I came from-- she came from Germany. She had a German accent. Her name is [? Broonie, ?] Brunhilde. She was married to an American GI.

She came in '63, I guess, and we met in '64. Her baby was a few months old, and she was my next door neighbor in an apartment. I had no children. We met, and both of us were learning how to speak English. We were learning everything.

We sort of hung together, and we became very good friends. And the fact that she was German didn't bother me at all. We could talk about anything. We tried to stay away from the war subject, although, she had told me. The one time that it really hit me was-- a lot of times, we looked through pictures and things. And there was her father in an SS uniform.

That really hit me. I know her mother. I knew her sister. I was very close. My children call her mother Alma, which is a grandmother in German. Because she's a lovely woman. My friend told me that her father was in the SS, that he was the meanest, most twisted person in the world. She said it's a terrible thing to say.

She was a little girl when he died, but she said she was happy when he died. She had a sister with whom I was very, very close to. She since died of cancer. Her sister was-- although, her sister was maybe 10, she was eight. When their father died, he was in the Russian prison, and came back home, and died, whatever.

She said that at the table, she just remembers from a child's point of view. She doesn't know what he did, what he didn't do. From a child's point of view, she said they would sit down at the table for dinner, and one of them would say, pass the salt. And the father would slap them, because children are not supposed to speak, unless spoken to.

She used to say he ran that house, like an SS man. She hated him. She said, it's a terrible thing to say, but I'm glad my father is dead. So I knew her feelings about it, and lately, as a matter of fact, we talk about it more. Her mother was just a housewife who went along with the husband on whatever.

But occasionally, things bothered me, like her mother is very wealthy now. I don't know if she was wealthy before the war. Very, very wealthy. She owns a lot of property. She has a restaurant. She has all kinds of things, and I'm thinking to myself.

And her mother is innocent in all that. She doesn't know. She was a housewife. Her husband probably abused her. From what I gathered, her husband was just awful. Everybody was afraid of him.

I wonder, if he gathered all that wealth, if he got it from the Jews. I couldn't help, but wonder about it. But still, I love my friend, and I love it till today. We're not as close for another reason now. We're still close. I mean, if I really needed something, she would be there for me, and I would be there for her. And her mother is wonderful.

She comes to visit all the time, but there's this barrier between us that, just recently-- the reason were not as close anymore is she divorced and married a man I really don't like to be around. So I see her during the day, but we're not as close as we used to be. And it has nothing to do with her being German. It has to do with her husband, and I love her daughters. They're like my daughters.

They're always there for me. I'm there for them. I mean, the kids grew up together. When my mother died-- well, first of all, my mother loved her too. Even my mother, because she was my best friend, my mother knew her well. She loved my mother.

My mother loved her, and when we moved my mother to the nursing home, though, she came to see her. And my mother, she was one of the few people my mother remembered actually. My mother loved her without reservations, even with all of that. My mother really was a very fair person.

When my mother died, more of it came out, because my brother wrote. Actually, he did it for the unveiling. My brother is a poet, so he wrote something about the Holocaust and all that. I remember, at the funeral, of course, she cried,

because it was my mother. But when they went to the unveiling, she cried.

And then afterwards, she told me, she realized the extent of what happened, but she never felt it so personally, until she heard. Because they read part of it, and, of course, I gave her the booklet. So she read it. She couldn't put it down, and this is the first time, I think, we talked about, actually, what happened. Because up until then, it was sort of taboo.

And how was it talking with her about that?

It was OK. It was OK, because I don't feel any different than my mother did. I love her. She's a wonderful, wonderful friend. The only reason we-- you know, you change. You grow. You sort of grow apart, but it has nothing to do with her being German. If she needed anything, I would be there.

So what about the country Germany? Do you have any feelings about that?

Yes, I do, very strong. Years ago, we went to Israel with our kids. My son was 13. My daughter was 11, and again, this friend of mine, [? Broonie, ?] her kids were the same age. It was two girls, and they grew up, like brothers and sisters.

They were going to visit her mother in Germany with her first husband, so they suggested her mother wanted us to come. So after Israel, we went to Germany for a week. I love her mother. I loved being there. They've got a restaurant. They've got a bowling alley. There was a lot of excitement.

Everything was great, but we were driving. We rented a car, and her husband, who was in the army, knew his way around. Everywhere we stopped, people were so nice to us, asking directions or whatever. Well, she spoke German, so they were very nice, very friendly with the little flowers in the windows.

And everything was perfect and clean. And I'm thinking, I wonder if this is the person who person who killed my father. I wonder if-- I could wait. As much fun as we had, I couldn't wait for the week to be over. When I came home, I told my husband, I never ever want to go to Germany. Not that I blame everybody, not that I blame the country.

But why should I wonder, this person walking around, what did he do to my family, that sort of thing? So I don't ever want to go there again. Now, something I cannot tell her.

Have you gone back to Poland?

Yes, one time, we went. It was just one day on a cruise with the kids, and we stopped for one day. Then I went. There was a travel agent trip for, I think, I went for about eight days, 10 days, and I went. There were 22 travel agents from around the country and was not for spouses, just the travel agents. And we went.

We were in Warsaw. I went back to where I lived in Warsaw. My mother gave me the address, you know, where we lived after the war. We went to the one synagogue that was still there that was rebuilt. I mean, we.

There was another lady that was Jewish in the whole group, but she was born in Houston. But she was the only one, you know, explained, that could, in some way, understand how I felt. So she went with me. We just got friendly. I didn't know her, until we got on the trip.

Everybody else there were travel agents, but they all had ties to Poland. Because they were all descendants of Polish people, not Jewish Polish, and I am saying it for a reason. Anyway, we went to Warsaw. We went to Krakow, where my father was from, and, of course, I went to all the places that I went to.

I have a picture of the hospital, where I was born, still standing. Not functioning as a hospital, but still standing. I knew there was only one, and I knew where the ghetto was. Well, they took us around the former ghetto to show us the monument and all that.

Anyway, we went all over Poland. I love being in Poland, because after all, that's where I was born. I like being able to

speak Polish fluently, and this was right after the changes occurred. And people were just, oh, they couldn't get enough Americans, and then I spoke Polish.

So they are were telling me everything. We went to Auschwitz on one of the excursions, and I knew it would be very tough for me. But I needed to do it, even though my family wasn't in Auschwitz. They were in Treblinka, but there's no difference. Same thing.

It was very difficult for me. After that, I felt like I had worked in the mines for 20 hours. I was physically, emotionally drained. I had to go through it. It was a dark, dingy, rainy day, and I remember one of the agents remarking, oh, it's so depressing with the rain. And I'm thinking to myself, and if it was sunny, would it be less depressing?

But they couldn't feel the way I felt. I walked through the barracks, walked through everything. I tried to feel like-- I try to be one of them, not me. Otherwise, I couldn't. I had to be detached. I wasn't even thinking. I couldn't think. I just went, just like all of them.

Otherwise, I couldn't handle it. We went to the crematoria, and I guess maybe it was to ease the tension. Or maybe that's typical, even of Americans of Polish descent. They started joking there, and like I said, there was another Jewish lady.

But she didn't go through all that, and she didn't say anything. One young man from Philadelphia, who was not Jewish, finally, spoke up, a very sensitive, young man and told them that-- because they all knew about me. I told him, because on a bus going there, we almost had a fight with one agent, which is about the whole thing. So he told them that they were being very insensitive to whatever, because they were laughing.

They were making jokes about the crematoria, about the ovens. Now, this is American agents, and they stopped. But on the way there, one of the agents from Miami-- again, all these people have grandparents from Poland or whatever. They all had Polish ties on that trip. On the way there, we were talking. Oh, as soon as we left the Auschwitz and were on a bus going back to wherever we were going, I see on the side of an apartment building, graffiti.

And there was a hangman's noose, and hang all the Jews. That's what I see when I leave in today's Poland. It kind of cured me of wanting to go back. Anyway, on the way there, one of the agents started to say that in Auschwitz, a lot of Poles died, and this, and that. And I said, yes, we got into a discussion.

She says, well, they died. I don't remember. I had one, but I said something right or wrong. They died for a cause. They were political prisoners, which they were. They stood for something. I said it's all wrong. It's inhumane, but they stood for something.

I said, what did the Jews stand for other than being Jewish? They died, because they were Jewish. And we really got into it. Finally, I figured I'm not going to enlighten her, so I gave it up.

But that was the feeling, so I want to go back to Poland. Because I love the country, and I'm not going to make friends with everybody there anyway. So I don't care. But to Germany, I can't go, because everybody that's the right age-- and I'm not talking about the younger people.

But I see someone in their 70s or older, and I think they killed my father. They killed my grandfather. Maybe they're the ones, and I can't handle it.

What was it like for you going back to Israel?

I lived there. What do you mean back?

No, you said you went back.

Oh, that's right. I went back to Israel. Fun. I thought of it. See, when I lived in Israel, I did not want to leave Israel. I was very happy there, but my parents always wanted to come to the United States. So the only way they could do it is go to

France and wait for a visa or something. So we moved to Paris, and I didn't want to leave Israel.

Well, when I was in Paris, I didn't want to leave. I had even more fun, and then we left. So in Israel, it was just kind of coming home, again, but I treated it more as fun and more showing my children their heritage. But I didn't have any special feelings, like I would want to go and live there. Because I wouldn't, but I like the country. I like going there. I guess getting back to this business of hiding that I was Jewish, I almost feel like Israel liberated me.

I didn't have to be someone else, but it took me many, many years to feel comfortable, confident. There were times, and I'm talking when I was 18, 19, 20. I always felt comfortable with men, because I was very attractive. I was very popular.

I walked into the room. Men looked, but I never felt comfortable. So I felt comfortable about my looks, but I never felt comfortable about anything else. Or confident rather, and there could be a group of people. They were talking about something as silly as a movie, and I always felt that I didn't measure up.

I didn't know. What if I say something wrong? What if it doesn't come out right? That sort of thing, and it took me many years. Now, my husband says, I'm very opinionated, the other way. Now, I'm not afraid to speak in public. I enjoy talking, and I feel good about myself.

But I still have that-- I don't know. --anxiety in me. As much as I try, I tell myself, relax, relax, physically relax. I do biofeedback, because I have migraine headaches. So that's one of the treatments along with my medication. I do take a lot of medication for preventive, so I do biofeedback.

So I relax myself, and I still have that anxiety. I can't get rid of it, and like I said, it took me many, many years to be confident enough. I mean, even 15, 20 years ago, I don't think I could talk to someone. I remember we were at a restaurant, waiting for a table, and a few years ago, someone asked if they could wait there.

And they said then, two minutes later, we started talking about traveling, and they said they want to go to Germany. I take out my card. I handed it to him. I need, any trip arrangements? Call me. And he called me, needless to say, and the guy was laughing.

He said, you know what? One hour with a psychiatrist would cure you of your shyness. He was being funny, but that's what I mean. I would never have done it years ago. I'd wait for someone. Now, I don't wait for someone.

And do you think it's the years in Israel that helped with that?

The helped with it. The Jewish was OK, and then once I came here, I really didn't see that much difference. And, of course, in France, they believe live, and everybody is equal. So once I left Poland, actually, I don't know, if it was Israel, if it was France, if it was America.

All of it together, once I left Poland, I was just as good or better than a lot of people. That's how I felt, and I don't have those feelings anymore. But I don't have feelings of peace, luck. Everything is wonderful. Enjoy the moment. I don't know how to do that.

So it sounds as though that's more worried about something happening to you rather than you're not good enough.

Oh, no, no, I don't have that anymore. Just something happening, taking away what I love, because a lot of it was already taken away from me. That sort of thing.

We have to turn over the tape.

OK.

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Christine Cohen. Tape two, side B. Mrs. Cohen, you said a little while ago that your mother told you more about the period during the war when you asked her, which



was after you were married. What was that like for you, hearing about all of this?

Well, I almost started reliving it for her. It was, like, at that point, I wasn't really thinking as much about me as about her, what she had gone through. After all, the grandparents, and the aunts, and uncles that I lost, I didn't know. But she grew up with them.

She knew them. They were her family, what she had gone through, and I just kept feeling sorry for my mother at that point. That's really mostly what I thought about. Now that my mother is gone, I think about me. But all that time, what my mother had gone through, and it was almost I was obligated to do anything she wanted.

Because she wouldn't have-- not that it was ever implied. My mother never ever made me feel, like, you know, the saying. I carried you, or I saved your life. So now, you have to do such and such. Never ever, but I felt that way. So if she told me to be home at 10:00 when everybody else was home at 1:00, I was home at 10:00 because of what she went through.

You loaned me a tape of a TV program, where your mother had a reunion with her cousin after 44 years of not seeing him. On the tape, I thought you seemed to be protective of your mother.

Yes, as we got older, the roles were reversed, and I tried very hard, although, my mother was very capable almost till the day she died. Very capable of taking care of herself, but my father died in '77. She was left in New York, but, well, she had friends. But she had absolutely no family.

Her hearing was bad, which affected her life greatly. And she had to cope with that, and I always felt bad. When my father died, I tried to get her to move to San Antonio and put deposits on countless apartments. And she wanted to, because she didn't want to be alone.

But at the last minute, she was backed out. My husband couldn't understand it, but I did. After what she went through, she could not depend on anybody. To her, it was frightening, even if it meant depending on me. She didn't drive.

In San Antonio, the only way you get around is driving. In New York City, she had friends. She could pick up. She could get on a bus, on the subway, go wherever she wanted to. She could take care of herself. She didn't have to depend.

Had she moved, she would depend on me for everything, and she couldn't. To her, it was frightening, so I always felt bad that she was there all by herself. And there was nothing I could do. And I guess that's why I felt protective towards her, like I needed to protect her.

Because, at that point, she had such horrible experiences. She needed someone to protect her, to take care of her. And I guess, as I grew more confident in myself, I felt like I could be protecting her, where before, I needed it.

Was her English fluent?

No, because of the-- fluent enough to, where, if she read books, she could understand everything. My mother spoke six languages. But because of her hearing, it wasn't fluent, because she didn't hear the words clearly.

But her hearing impairment started when?

It showed up in the early '50s, but it really started, the damage started during the war.

So when she came to New York, she already had difficulty with hearing, and that interfered.

Yes, even in Israel. That interfered with-- I'm sure after what my mother had gone through, she had that feeling of persecution. I understand it, and that's what made me feel always bad. Because when you came here and people around you are talking, first of all, she always thought someone was plotting against her, and it wasn't paranoia.

I mean, that's how she lived, and then, all of a sudden, she can hear what people are saying. She could hear one on one, talking. But a whole group of people, she didn't hear, and it was very difficult for her.

If the phone rang and someone talked on the phone, if they talked quickly, she couldn't hear or understand. So she felt threatened, and all of these things bothered me. And all of these things, I attribute to the war. It just hurt me to see my mother like that, and then to see her dying and going through the war all over, again, was just horrible.

And I guess that's when my feelings really got intense, because she re-lived that war. She thought Hitler was there, and ever corner, the Germans. When I left her in the nursing home, it was a nice, Jewish nursing home. I was there almost every day. When I was leaving, she was afraid that the Germans-- it broke my heart to leave her.

But I couldn't do anything else. It's as if she-- you know, one time is more than enough to live through it. But she lived through it twice. And since she died, my feeling about the whole thing are more and more intense. I feel robbed of everything, robbed of family, even my mother.

So you're here in Bethesda, visiting family.

Yes, as a matter of fact, that's the cousin that they met on TV on the show.

Yes.

From Richmond. His granddaughter was batmitzvah, so we all met here for batmitzvah.

And how was that for you?

It's wonderful. I had gotten even closer to them since my mother died, because they're the last link to my mother. There's no one left. On my father's side, and I'm talking my natural father, I have family in San Antonio. Not large. Most of them died. I have cousins.

My aunt's died since then. I'm close to them, but not as close to this family. Because my father is almost like a mythical figure to me. I never knew him when my mother is real to me.

She was with me always. In fact, my father, Leon, that she married after the war had a sister in London. She just died a few months ago. I was very close to her. I used to go visit her.

So you had another loss.

Another loss. Just a few months ago, she was going on her way to Bridge, play Bridge, and fell, hit her head, and died. It was a freak accident, but what I'm trying to say, that's Leon's sister. And I felt much closer to them, because Leon, to me, was real. He was my father.

The other one, as wonderful as he was as I hear, it's like reading a story. So I guess that's what-- I mean, I love my family in San Antonio. But I don't have the same feeling, and this family, they're my mother's family. That's all that I have left, so like I said, I'm even closer to them than I was before.

And not only that. Growing up, I must have. I tried not to, but I must have made my children feel like family was all important. Because they seem to-- without really saying too much, they seem to be missing not having extended family, especially my son. He's very family oriented, and he really feels the loss.

My daughter doesn't talk about it, but I'm sure she does too. And it must have been the way I was that they picked up on, because I certainly didn't tell them, by the way, you don't have a great grandfather or something. You don't have whatever, but they picked up on that because of the way I feel.

So you have told them?

As a matter of fact, they were at the-- when we were in the meeting with the cousin, they were in Hollywood, too, with me. They were in the audience.

So they know everything.

They know. They've seen the tape many times. They've read what my brother wrote. My mother never discussed it with them, but they know everything about it. In fact, my son is, right now, at the Holocaust Museum.

Do you talk to other people about it?

Yes, if they ask me. I mean, I don't walk around it, but if they ask me, I tell them.

And is that hard for you, easy for you?

It's not hard for me at all. I feel like, you know, people listen. It happened so many years ago. They weren't in that situation. No one they know was in that situation, so for most people, it's hard to imagine that it really happened. They know something happened, but I think I feel like, if I talk about it, at least, some of it, they will believe. Because I think the world doesn't want to believe it.

It's still hard to believe, and as time goes on, there are less people to say it. So if I say, my mother saw a girl being buried alive, maybe they won't believe the whole thing. But they will believe that they pull a Jewish girl off the train and killed her. And it's not that I'm looking for sympathy. I just feel like people should know, and I have no qualms talking about that.

Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

Well, we were talking about my brother. Even though he was born in '48, it affected him greatly, because my parents were what life made them. And he is a writer. He's very sensitive, very intuitive, and he feels that he felt it for them. He feels it for me that I went through it.

He's a very, very kind, kind person, and he truly feels it almost as if he was there. He never had a grandfather, or a grandmother, or anybody either. And he feels that loss.

When do you think he learned about it? You said that you asked after you were married.

Well, he is eight years younger than I am. He lived with my parents in New York as a teenager, went to school. I measured in those years being inquisitive and being a writer. I'm sure he asked all the time and more questions than I ever did.

So he probably learned in his teenage years, because then he went away to school. And after that, he never lived at home anymore, so I'm sure, most of it, he found out when he was a teenager. And it's something that affected him almost as deeply as it affected me, even though I lived through it, and he didn't.

You showed me some poems that he wrote.

Poems, and he wrote-- he had a couple of short stories published. And now, it's like a booklet. It's a book. And it tells of the family before the war and the war experiences, actually, up until the time my mother died and just the family thing. And he wrote that, too, and I'm sure he's not finished writing. He'll write some more about it.

Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

I can't think of anything, because I think I'll be repeating myself. It's just that, again, I will be repeating myself. It seems like with each day, I live it more and more. And it bothers me, because I have a good life. I have a wonderful husband,

two children. I have a lot of friends. I live in a city I like. I do what I want, and I would like to just enjoy what I have and be happy.

But I can never be completely happy, because I can't let go of this whatever it is inside that's either the threat that something will happen or the regret that something already happened. Regret is not maybe a good word, but the pain that something did happen. And there's no way for me to change it. There are times I think to myself, if I only had one wish, if I could change things, if I could just change that, this would be the only thing I'd want to change in my life.

So it's always with you.

Always, always. I have nightmares at night. I didn't, until my mother died. Now, I have a recurring nightmare that I'm somewhere, and it's not that frightening, like I'm in a forest lost with bears. I'm in a city somewhere. And whether I'm driving, or walking, or whatever, I lost my directions. And I don't know how to get whether it's to a home or the hotel, where I'm at, and I can't find my way back.

Since my mother died, it's a recurring nightmare, and I'm always lost, nothing frightening, not monsters or anything. Just any city, USA, or anywhere else, Pick any city. I'm not in San Antonio. I'm somewhere else.

I don't know where I am, and I'm walking to the hotel. I just left hotel, and I can't find my way back. And I forgot the name of the hotel, or I'm driving back. I can't find my way back, and I usually wake up. But this is just a recurring nightmare.

And it's since your mother died?

Yes.

Before that?

Before that, I didn't have it. Just since my mother died.

And that was a year and a half ago?

She died, this March, will be two years.

So that's a long time.

Mhmm, and my husband keeps saying I need some grief counseling. I probably do, but I keep trying to get myself better on my own. But I may have to give in, because it's always the city's different. The situation is different, but the same is the same.

And the feeling is the same.

The feeling is the same. How am I going to find my way home, but with nothing frightening? Like people after me with guns or something, nothing like that.

But enough to wake you up.

I always wake up, because I never find my way home. So I wake up, but I would say, without exaggeration, three or four times a week. Sometimes, I'm almost afraid to go to sleep, because what if I get lost, where there are people with guns or something? So far, the situation hasn't been threatening.

I'm just lost, but I don't know. But that is really one of the ways in which it's coming out now. I don't know it. It's probably-- I don't know. We probably would need a psychiatrist to figure that one out, but my mother was the one that saved me from all the danger. And now, my mother is gone, so who's going to save me now?

I also notice, over the years, and that's been always as long as I remember. And I don't remember when it started. I don't like loud noises. I hate dark rooms, like I hate this room, dark, narrow. When I hear a fire engine or an ambulance siren, I cringe.

I don't know if it has to do with when they had they made you go in the cellar when they had grades or whatever and the noise. But I'm absolutely frightened of it. I can see it's an ambulance. I can see it's a police car, but I'm still frightened. The noise frightens me incredibly.

Now, is that since your mother died?

Oh no, that's always.

Always.

Always, as long as I remember. That has nothing to do with my mother, because it doesn't have to be an ambulance. It can be a police car chasing somebody. The siren is what just makes me panic, and I will not-- like I'm not claustrophobic or anything. But say, I go to a doctor's office, and they all have these little examining rooms.

I make them leave the door open. An elevator doesn't bother me. I'm not claustrophobic, but I don't like anything dark, dingy, small. My house is practically, completely glassed in. It's very contemporary, so it goes. But that's how I like it, light. But even the darkness doesn't bother me as much as the sirens.

Always, sirens, always, and it not just bothers me. It scares me. Like I said, ambulance, I can see being upset, fire. But if a policeman is chasing somebody, that shouldn't upset me, but it's the noise. Maybe that's what I heard as a little girl. Maybe before there was a raid, there were bombs that they had, these sirens, and everybody went.

Because my mother taught me. We went to hide in the cellar or wherever you hide during that time. So I honestly think that has to do with it, you know? I don't like anything very loud. Like when my kids were growing up, you know, they liked the music loud. It drove me crazy. Not the usual mother crazy, but it really bothered me.

It scared you.

It scared me. Anything loud. I don't like arguments. I try to-- I will do anything to avoid arguments, anything. I'll give in. You want this? Fine, just not to hear arguments, and not that I ever-- I mean, other than, of course, when I said I was little, I think I was abused physically in the sense that I was hit.

Because I have just tremendous fear. If someone ever-- no one ever slapped me. My parents never laid a hand on me, no one. But if someone did, I'd be petrified of any kind of physical violence.

Did you ever spank your children?

Yeah, but on the bottom.

Yeah, you were able to do that.

I was able to do that, but I am absolutely petrified. If I confronted someone, I had a fight with someone on the street. I'd be scared to death that they were going to hit me. I wouldn't die from it. They could maybe slap me, but I'd be scared to death. I'm afraid of any kind of physical pain.

I was able to hit them on the bottom, but believe me, not very hard. And I felt worse. You know, the saying, I feel worse than you do, was true. But my parents never, no matter what I did, of course, they never punished me any way. My mother would promise me, oh, you're going to be grounded.

You're going to do this, that. Half an hour later, she couldn't stand it, and I did what I wanted. So they were lucky that I was a good child, but they spoiled rotten. And I tried not to do that with the kids.

I mean, once I said, you go to your room, I always stop myself from saying, I felt sorry for them. I felt that immediately as soon as I said it. I said, no.

So it was hard for you, but you stuck to your guns.

I did most of the time, we can only be so consistent, but it was very hard for me to follow through with any kind of-- and I'm not talking about spanking or beating, but taking away a privilege or whatever. Very, very hard, and I'm sure there were times when I gave in. But I tried very hard not to do what my mother did, because I was never disciplined after the war. I mean, if I was a bad kid, I could have killed somebody.

There was no discipline, because I could do no wrong, according to both my parents. So I don't remember I was dating somebody they didn't approve, so I was taking piano lessons. And my mother-- it's a long story. But anyway, my mother told me I couldn't date him since they were going to piano lessons. I went out with him.

I snuck out, and my mother was paying the piano teacher for half the year. And I never went for a lesson, and the piano teacher was taking the money. Of course, my mother caught me. The promise is I'll never see him, again, and this, and that. And I'll never leave the house, whatever.

A week later, we went to the coast, because we always went every summer for three months. And he talked his father into bringing him there. There he was, and my mother gave in. And I forget why she didn't want me to see him.

He wasn't a bad guy. I don't even remember, but my mother never, ever-- she never went through with her promise of denying me something. She couldn't. And I don't know, if my dad couldn't either, or because of her, he didn't. But he didn't either.

So you got pretty much what you wanted.

Mhmm, and it's a good thing. Like I said, it's a good thing I never really took advantage of it, but I think I grew up a little mixed up.

Well, it sounds as though this whole experience had many, many, many--

Many.

--different effects on you.

Well, if I think, even that alone, you know, here, first part of the war, I don't know how I was mistreated, but I was mistreated. Then I go on doing whatever I want. There are no boundaries. There's none. No one tells me, you can do this or that. Because I can do anything I want.

That alone doesn't fill you with confidence, and then add to that the noise, the bombs, the hiding, the running, family disappearing at the age of two. If you see your grandparents every day, you kind of know that there's someone there, and all of a sudden, they disappear. My father, until I was two, he was there.

So very frightening, and I guess I never resolved any of it. And I feel like I never will. I never will, because as time goes on, rather than saying, OK, enjoy what you have now. You've lost the-- I try to tell myself, you've lost a lot.

You've lost more than most people, because you start feeling sorry for myself. But then, right now, you have more than most people, which is true. I do. I never had to work. My husband is doing very, very well. I can have anything I want.

I choose to be a travel agent, because I enjoy it. My children are good children. I mean, you know, never gave me

trouble. I have a lot of friends. We have everything. I can leave town any time I want to, and I love to travel. And I can't fully enjoy it.

So it's hard--

It's very hard.

--to fit all the pieces together.

It's very hard, and I think part of my migraines. That's part of my migraines that I've been to. Everybody I go to, a headache clinic, they give me preventive medication. They tried the biofeedback, which is basically relaxation therapy, which helps anything. And I still get them. My mother had terrible migraines after the war, after the war, and I started having migraines when I went to Texas.

I never had any, until I was 22 when I got married. And right before I got married, I had my first migraine, and that made me-- I mean, there were times getting back to the friend that's German, she was next door to me. When my children were little, if I didn't have her help-- I usually had help. But if I didn't have help, they were little. I would wake up, and I wasn't able to function.

Because I couldn't even stand up. I couldn't stand or lie. Truly, truly sick, she would take the children for the day and take care of them. I never had to worry about it. She was always there for me, but that's how I used to be. Since I started going to the head ache clinic, they tried to prevent it as much as possible, and I'm able to at least work, do something.

Because before, I couldn't plan for the next day, because I didn't know what was going to happen. And I'm firmly convinced it has to do with my being so tense all the time. Tension will bring on a migraine.

Sure, so that's another.

Another physical aspect of it. My neck, it's never relaxed. No matter what I do, I feel tense, and it hurts. I'm always tense. I drive. I don't like driving.

Has that always been true that you haven't liked driving?

Whenever I get a chance that someone else is driving, I let them drive. I'm always afraid something will happen. Not that I'm a bad driver.

What about traveling? Do you worry that something will happen, like some people are afraid to fly?

Oh, no, no, no.

So you don't worry that something will happen?

Not that, not when I fly. I the only thing I'm worried about is, if I go, when the children were younger, I left them at home. I worried about them. Now, I worry I have two dogs. I worry about them. Or whoever I leave, like, if I go by myself without my husband, a lot of times, there is a travel agent deal that I go on, and I worry about him too.

I worry about everybody that's left. Not about me. I'm ready for an adventure, and nothing scares me really. I can go myself around the world. That wouldn't bother me, but I worry about the people I left behind, people and dogs.

Is there anything else that you want to tell us?

I can't think of anything right now. I keep harping on that, but it's just like everything is all mixed up. It sounds melodramatic, but it's like a cross to carry, so to speak. Everything is a result of what happened, and I have to live with it.

I guess that's why I've been reluctant to go for counseling, which is not right. I should, because I feel like, what are they going to do? Are going to give me my family back? Are they going to give me my childhood back? They're not, and I realize that's not very bright.

Because you learn to cope with it, because I'm not coping very well. On the outside, I am. Everybody thinks I'm a lot of fun. I go to parties. People like me. People like to be around me. I'm funny. I'm this. I'm that. But on the inside, I'm not that.

I remember we were talking to someone at the office had a baby shower, and one of the girls said something about having positive thoughts. And she said, well, you know, when you're pregnant, how you feel, it will affect the baby if you're very tense or whatever. It will affect the baby. I said, that explains me, and these are people I work with.

The lady at the [? dance ?] agency is a friend of mine for 30 years. We're close friends. She knows me well. She knows my whole history, and they all said-- I said that explains why I'm the way I am. They said, oh, you're a happy person. I said, no, I'm not. I'm very intense, and I'm very-- they couldn't believe it. Because I don't show it.

It explains because of your mother's situation when she was pregnant with you.

Well, that's what I related it to, but the people that know me well don't see me that way.

So you hide it well.

I hide it, which makes it even more difficult. It's like working at it.

Because it's a strain.

It's a strain for me, but that's what I do. Not that I couldn't, but everybody's happy. I don't want them not to be, so I hide it. And it's like almost leading a double life.

Here, I am this person that everybody thinks, oh, she's got a great life, anything she wants. She travels. She's this. She's that. She's got friends, and everybody loves to be around me. And here, I'm this other person. It's really miserable, because I can't relax for one minute.

And people don't know that that's what's going on.

No, and I guess I'm afraid deep down that, if they did, that I'm never relaxed, people wouldn't want to be around me, like they do now. So I show another person to them. That is not to say I have a couple of very close friends. If I'm upset about something specific, I can talk about it, and they're always there for me.

But they want to help me. They want to do something. They can't undo the past. They want me to be happy, so I'm happy to them.

So people want to be around me. Otherwise, I feel like they never want to be around me, which I can understand. If I was around someone that's always unhappy, I wouldn't want to be around them either. I don't want to be around me sometimes.

And what do you do then?

Not much. I think I usually come up with a trip. That usually cures it for a while anyway. You can't escape from yourself, but I love trips. I love going with my husband, but I actually love going by myself. Because I guess for the first time in the last 10 years, I've sort of become more independent.

I was always dependent on somebody. First, it was my mother. Then it was my husband, and then I became



independent. And I feel adventurous that I can do this by myself, that by myself, and I'm not worried about anything. And I just get away from everything. I forget about worrying about anything when I'm by myself.

So you feel sometimes more relaxed when you're by yourself.

Yeah, I do when I'm by myself, because I'm myself. So I try to do stuff. My husband is a CPA. So between January-- as a matter of fact, that's why he left today. January and April 15, he doesn't go anymore. So I'll either go by myself, if it's a travel agent thing, or I have a very good friend who will go with me.

We've gone to London, Paris, just to get away. Because he can't go. Like I said, he's very good. He doesn't mind at all, and then this is a very, very close friend. Another friend, not the German one. And if I feel like sulking, I can sulk. She doesn't. It's fine.

So you can be yourself with her.

I can be myself with her. That's why I like traveling with her. She's not Jewish. We spend all the holidays together. We go over there for Christmas. They come for the Jewish holidays.

We're like one family, the kids and everything. She's really the only one that I can-- she will say-- and you know what? In spite of myself, she usually cheers me up, even though I'm determined to be miserable. Sometimes, I am.

How does she cheer you up?

I don't know. She will just-- she's so positive. I guess that's what I love about her. She's much younger than I am. She has an eight-year-old child. She's 40 now. I call her, sometimes, Pollyanna. I don't mean to make fun of her, but she has such a positive outlook on everything. And she didn't grow up, you know, sheltered and spoiled.

She had a very hard life. She's been married before, very, very hard life. But to her, people are wonderful. Everybody has some redeeming qualities. Every situation has something good in it, and it's not preaching. She truly believes it.

Sometimes, I hate to bring her down, but she's incredible. In fact, when I get upset, my husband will tell me, go over to Elisha, and get some positive from her or whatever. Because she's just very positive, very devoted to her friends, her family.

There's nothing she wouldn't do for me or I for her. But she is completely different than I am in that respect. She sees good in everything. I guess that's why I'm drawn-- I'm actually drawn to people like that.

And like I said, she didn't have an easy life either. I mean, nothing like what I had. But it wasn't like she grew up pampered, and she thinks the world is wonderful. She knows the world is not wonderful, but she's making it that way. And I'd like to be like that.

We have to turn over the tape.