

1
00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:04,170

2
00:00:04,170 --> 00:00:07,710
This is a United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum

3
00:00:07,710 --> 00:00:10,230
interview with Christine
Cohen conducted

4
00:00:10,230 --> 00:00:14,190
by Margaret Garrett
on January 5, 1997

5
00:00:14,190 --> 00:00:19,230
in Bethesda, Maryland,
tape 3, side A. Mrs. Cohen,

6
00:00:19,230 --> 00:00:21,270
on the videotape that
you loaned to me,

7
00:00:21,270 --> 00:00:24,690
you were talking about watching
war movies and the effect that

8
00:00:24,690 --> 00:00:25,410
has on you.

9
00:00:25,410 --> 00:00:26,980
Can you talk about that?

10
00:00:26,980 --> 00:00:28,350
Yes.

11
00:00:28,350 --> 00:00:31,740
When I say war movies, I
don't mean the Hollywood--

12
00:00:31,740 --> 00:00:35,760

there are 10 American
soldiers and 3,000 Germans,

13
00:00:35,760 --> 00:00:36,420
and they win.

14
00:00:36,420 --> 00:00:38,430
I don't mean that sort
of Hollywood movie.

15
00:00:38,430 --> 00:00:42,150
I'm talking about
the documentaries

16
00:00:42,150 --> 00:00:45,720
and the real movies, something
like Schindler's List,

17
00:00:45,720 --> 00:00:50,740
which comes as close to being
not Hollywood as can be.

18
00:00:50,740 --> 00:00:52,620
It all upsets me.

19
00:00:52,620 --> 00:00:56,760
Everything, I try to see
everything on the war

20
00:00:56,760 --> 00:00:58,710
or read everything
about the war.

21
00:00:58,710 --> 00:01:05,040
And I know I'll be very upset,
but it's almost like I cannot

22
00:01:05,040 --> 00:01:05,790
stop.

23
00:01:05,790 --> 00:01:08,140
I have to do it.

24

00:01:08,140 --> 00:01:09,810

It's a very, very
strange feeling.

25

00:01:09,810 --> 00:01:12,970

And then I'm sad for
days, but I have to do it.

26

00:01:12,970 --> 00:01:16,050

How do you feel as you watch it?

27

00:01:16,050 --> 00:01:18,660

I relate everything
to me, I guess.

28

00:01:18,660 --> 00:01:21,510

29

00:01:21,510 --> 00:01:24,000

I see someone in a
concentration camp.

30

00:01:24,000 --> 00:01:28,910

I think that could very
well be my family, I guess.

31

00:01:28,910 --> 00:01:31,890

And I make it personal.

32

00:01:31,890 --> 00:01:37,530

I guess, every war film,
I kind of make personal.

33

00:01:37,530 --> 00:01:40,620

And how do you feel
after you watch it?

34

00:01:40,620 --> 00:01:42,040

Very, very badly.

35

00:01:42,040 --> 00:01:46,170

I try to do something

fun, just forget about it,

36
00:01:46,170 --> 00:01:48,660
but you don't forget.

37
00:01:48,660 --> 00:01:51,280
But you continue to
be drawn to watch--

38
00:01:51,280 --> 00:01:52,258
Yes, yes.

39
00:01:52,258 --> 00:01:53,550
--movies even though you know--

40
00:01:53,550 --> 00:01:54,450
Even though I know--

41
00:01:54,450 --> 00:01:54,950
--after.

42
00:01:54,950 --> 00:01:55,680
Uh-huh.

43
00:01:55,680 --> 00:01:57,870
It's almost like a drug.

44
00:01:57,870 --> 00:01:58,800
You're drawn to it.

45
00:01:58,800 --> 00:02:00,070
You know you shouldn't.

46
00:02:00,070 --> 00:02:02,070
And my husband keeps
telling me, don't watch it.

47
00:02:02,070 --> 00:02:03,270
You will be upset.

48
00:02:03,270 --> 00:02:05,250

And I tell him I have to.

49

00:02:05,250 --> 00:02:10,770

And I don't know that he
understands, but I have to,

50

00:02:10,770 --> 00:02:11,360

and I do.

51

00:02:11,360 --> 00:02:16,610

52

00:02:16,610 --> 00:02:19,780

And it's not just movie,
anything, written material.

53

00:02:19,780 --> 00:02:22,270

Anything, I feel
like I need to know.

54

00:02:22,270 --> 00:02:24,530

So you also read about the war--

55

00:02:24,530 --> 00:02:25,210

Oh, yes.

56

00:02:25,210 --> 00:02:26,918

--and about the
concentration camps and--

57

00:02:26,918 --> 00:02:27,720

Yes, yes.

58

00:02:27,720 --> 00:02:31,040

--about other
people's experiences?

59

00:02:31,040 --> 00:02:31,580

Yes.

60

00:02:31,580 --> 00:02:33,260

Yes, I do.

61
00:02:33,260 --> 00:02:36,740
I feel like, the more I know--

62
00:02:36,740 --> 00:02:40,640
I guess, I think maybe--

63
00:02:40,640 --> 00:02:42,830
I think it will have a
healing effect on me,

64
00:02:42,830 --> 00:02:44,010
but it doesn't really.

65
00:02:44,010 --> 00:02:46,920
But I keep thinking, the more
I know, the better I'll feel.

66
00:02:46,920 --> 00:02:47,840
But I don't.

67
00:02:47,840 --> 00:02:50,540
Do you know any other survivors?

68
00:02:50,540 --> 00:02:52,760
Or do you talk to
other survivors at all?

69
00:02:52,760 --> 00:02:56,120
Well, my cousin for
one in San Antonio.

70
00:02:56,120 --> 00:03:01,250
But she's very difficult
to talk to about it

71
00:03:01,250 --> 00:03:04,440
because she lives in the past.

72
00:03:04,440 --> 00:03:09,325
I at least try to make an
attempt at being in the future

73
00:03:09,325 --> 00:03:10,430
or now.

74
00:03:10,430 --> 00:03:16,640
She lives in the past, and
only her experience counts.

75
00:03:16,640 --> 00:03:19,580
So it's very difficult
to talk to her about it.

76
00:03:19,580 --> 00:03:22,400
So you don't feel that you
really have rapport with here?

77
00:03:22,400 --> 00:03:25,640
Not in that sense.

78
00:03:25,640 --> 00:03:29,050
In fact, I try to avoid that
subject because she just

79
00:03:29,050 --> 00:03:31,100
falls to pieces.

80
00:03:31,100 --> 00:03:32,570
So that just makes it worse.

81
00:03:32,570 --> 00:03:33,350
Yes.

82
00:03:33,350 --> 00:03:35,690
So I can't talk to her.

83
00:03:35,690 --> 00:03:39,180
And in San Antonio, there
are not that many survivors.

84
00:03:39,180 --> 00:03:40,310
There are some.

85

00:03:40,310 --> 00:03:45,010

There's a group out I'll bet
you Once a year I see them

86

00:03:45,010 --> 00:03:50,270

when they have Yom HaShoah where
you light the candles in April

87

00:03:50,270 --> 00:03:53,750

for the 6 million Jews,
and you have the service.

88

00:03:53,750 --> 00:03:55,130

Once a year, I see them.

89

00:03:55,130 --> 00:03:57,890

They usually have the service
at one of the synagogues.

90

00:03:57,890 --> 00:04:00,890

And I light the candle
with the other people.

91

00:04:00,890 --> 00:04:04,130

And I would venture a
guess that there may be,

92

00:04:04,130 --> 00:04:07,880

in the city of San Antonio,
maybe 25 of them left

93

00:04:07,880 --> 00:04:09,430

at the most.

94

00:04:09,430 --> 00:04:10,670

So it's not that many people.

95

00:04:10,670 --> 00:04:15,020

And most of them are of
my mother's generation.

96

00:04:15,020 --> 00:04:16,819

So I wouldn't know
them well anyway.

97
00:04:16,819 --> 00:04:20,089

98
00:04:20,089 --> 00:04:23,120
So is your family observant?

99
00:04:23,120 --> 00:04:24,420
My family, as in--

100
00:04:24,420 --> 00:04:24,920
Now.

101
00:04:24,920 --> 00:04:25,190
--me and--

102
00:04:25,190 --> 00:04:25,690
Yes.

103
00:04:25,690 --> 00:04:28,100

104
00:04:28,100 --> 00:04:33,140
My husband-- it's not so much
observant as traditional.

105
00:04:33,140 --> 00:04:36,330
My husband grew up
in an orthodox home.

106
00:04:36,330 --> 00:04:39,780
He got away from it
when he went to college.

107
00:04:39,780 --> 00:04:43,040
And, when I came, because
we weren't observant,

108
00:04:43,040 --> 00:04:47,010
we ended up in a Reform

temple with the Reform.

109
00:04:47,010 --> 00:04:49,310
And I felt I fitted in.

110
00:04:49,310 --> 00:04:51,470
He never felt he did.

111
00:04:51,470 --> 00:04:54,020
My children, so we
sort of went the middle

112
00:04:54,020 --> 00:04:58,170
of the road conservative.

113
00:04:58,170 --> 00:05:00,790
My children were very
comfortable there.

114
00:05:00,790 --> 00:05:01,920
And they grew up.

115
00:05:01,920 --> 00:05:03,250
My son was bar mitzvahed.

116
00:05:03,250 --> 00:05:06,990
My daughter didn't want
to have a bat mitzvah,

117
00:05:06,990 --> 00:05:08,865
but she went to Hebrew
school and all that.

118
00:05:08,865 --> 00:05:11,750

119
00:05:11,750 --> 00:05:13,160
And now that
they're grown, we're

120
00:05:13,160 --> 00:05:16,250
back at the orthodox, which

doesn't mean a thing to me

121
00:05:16,250 --> 00:05:18,380
because I am not that--

122
00:05:18,380 --> 00:05:21,140
I'm observant in a sense,
only because I know

123
00:05:21,140 --> 00:05:23,030
it's important to my family.

124
00:05:23,030 --> 00:05:26,762
The holidays, once a year, twice
a year, I go to the synagogue.

125
00:05:26,762 --> 00:05:28,220
Your family, you
mean your husband?

126
00:05:28,220 --> 00:05:31,550
My husband and my children
and especially my son.

127
00:05:31,550 --> 00:05:35,030
My son is the one
probably that--

128
00:05:35,030 --> 00:05:38,510
my husband does all that
because he grew up with it.

129
00:05:38,510 --> 00:05:39,290
It's tradition.

130
00:05:39,290 --> 00:05:41,150
It's what's expected of him.

131
00:05:41,150 --> 00:05:46,130
I do it because of
him because I still--

132

00:05:46,130 --> 00:05:48,680
the symbols don't
mean anything to me.

133
00:05:48,680 --> 00:05:51,470
None of it means
anything to me because I

134
00:05:51,470 --> 00:05:53,390
didn't grow up with it.

135
00:05:53,390 --> 00:05:56,870
But I wanted my children to
have the Jewish education.

136
00:05:56,870 --> 00:06:02,180
And my daughter, I'm sure
it means something to her.

137
00:06:02,180 --> 00:06:06,000
But, to my son, it's very,
very important, very,

138
00:06:06,000 --> 00:06:08,570
very, very important.

139
00:06:08,570 --> 00:06:12,440
I don't mean he's
religious and [INAUDIBLE]..

140
00:06:12,440 --> 00:06:16,310
He may go to the synagogues twice
a year, but Jewish symbols,

141
00:06:16,310 --> 00:06:20,840
Jewish way of life, holidays,
whatever means a lot to him.

142
00:06:20,840 --> 00:06:24,110
In fact, for the last
three years, he's been--

143
00:06:24,110 --> 00:06:25,892

when he's out of
school in the summer--

144
00:06:25,892 --> 00:06:27,350
he's still at the
university-- he's

145
00:06:27,350 --> 00:06:31,250
been a counselor at
Camp Young Judaea

146
00:06:31,250 --> 00:06:35,280
where they really observe
the laws and all that.

147
00:06:35,280 --> 00:06:38,800
But we do it.

148
00:06:38,800 --> 00:06:42,440
And, like I said, I do it
because of the children.

149
00:06:42,440 --> 00:06:45,080
My husband does it because
it's expected of him.

150
00:06:45,080 --> 00:06:48,830
But you wanted your children
to have the education?

151
00:06:48,830 --> 00:06:50,390
Absolutely.

152
00:06:50,390 --> 00:06:52,670
Why did you feel so
strongly about it?

153
00:06:52,670 --> 00:06:57,780
Because all of this doesn't
mean that much to me

154
00:06:57,780 --> 00:07:00,460
because I wasn't exposed

to it, but I'm thinking,

155
00:07:00,460 --> 00:07:02,550
well, maybe if I was, it would.

156
00:07:02,550 --> 00:07:05,730
And also it doesn't
mean that Judaism

157
00:07:05,730 --> 00:07:08,050
doesn't mean much to me.

158
00:07:08,050 --> 00:07:12,590
It means everything to
me because I was Jewish.

159
00:07:12,590 --> 00:07:13,728
I come from Jews.

160
00:07:13,728 --> 00:07:14,895
And that's why they're dead.

161
00:07:14,895 --> 00:07:17,940

162
00:07:17,940 --> 00:07:19,718
And I guess I feel
none of the symbols

163
00:07:19,718 --> 00:07:20,760
are going to bring them--

164
00:07:20,760 --> 00:07:22,710
with me, it's like
one-track mind.

165
00:07:22,710 --> 00:07:26,850
Everything goes back to the
fact that my family is dead.

166
00:07:26,850 --> 00:07:32,040
We suffered along with

everybody else that was Jewish.

167

00:07:32,040 --> 00:07:34,110

And lighting a candle
on Friday night

168

00:07:34,110 --> 00:07:36,288

is not going to bring them back.

169

00:07:36,288 --> 00:07:37,830

It's not going to
do anything for me.

170

00:07:37,830 --> 00:07:40,000

That's why it doesn't
mean anything to me.

171

00:07:40,000 --> 00:07:44,235

But I don't want my
children to feel that way.

172

00:07:44,235 --> 00:07:46,882

So you think maybe they
will have something--

173

00:07:46,882 --> 00:07:47,965

They will have something--

174

00:07:47,965 --> 00:07:48,673

--that you don't.

175

00:07:48,673 --> 00:07:50,680

--that I don't.

176

00:07:50,680 --> 00:07:53,500

They should have the
opportunity to have that.

177

00:07:53,500 --> 00:07:55,540

There's no reason for
them not to have it

178

00:07:55,540 --> 00:07:57,790
because I'm bitter about it.

179
00:07:57,790 --> 00:08:00,650
I'm bitter to the point
where I feel like, well,

180
00:08:00,650 --> 00:08:03,220
if they weren't Jewish,
they would be alive.

181
00:08:03,220 --> 00:08:05,170
So why should I
light that candle?

182
00:08:05,170 --> 00:08:08,230
But I do it because
of the children.

183
00:08:08,230 --> 00:08:10,120
Is it hard for you to do?

184
00:08:10,120 --> 00:08:11,020
No, no, no, no.

185
00:08:11,020 --> 00:08:12,980
The traditions, some
of them are nice.

186
00:08:12,980 --> 00:08:15,070
Some of them I think
are ridiculous.

187
00:08:15,070 --> 00:08:18,460
Like, now that we belong
to the orthodox synagogue

188
00:08:18,460 --> 00:08:20,140
with the women sitting
here, men sitting

189
00:08:20,140 --> 00:08:23,170
here, that's ridiculous,

but it doesn't bother me

190
00:08:23,170 --> 00:08:25,090
because I'm not doing it for me.

191
00:08:25,090 --> 00:08:28,000
I'd be happy never to
go to the synagogue.

192
00:08:28,000 --> 00:08:30,520
I would be just as happy,
but I like the tradition.

193
00:08:30,520 --> 00:08:34,510
I like having the kids come
home and family and friends

194
00:08:34,510 --> 00:08:35,590
for dinner, all that.

195
00:08:35,590 --> 00:08:37,960
That part of it, I like.

196
00:08:37,960 --> 00:08:40,570
So it's not hard for me.

197
00:08:40,570 --> 00:08:44,260
But it's like my husband
expects me to truly

198
00:08:44,260 --> 00:08:47,860
believe, to truly follow, like
if we're in the synagogue--

199
00:08:47,860 --> 00:08:49,630
not that he is that--

200
00:08:49,630 --> 00:08:52,390
he does it-- my
husband does things

201
00:08:52,390 --> 00:08:54,310

that are expected of him.

202

00:08:54,310 --> 00:08:56,830

So, when we're at the synagogue,
I'm supposed to follow.

203

00:08:56,830 --> 00:08:58,690

I'm supposed to feel something.

204

00:08:58,690 --> 00:09:01,100

Well, I don't.

205

00:09:01,100 --> 00:09:06,380

The only redeeming
quality there is is we

206

00:09:06,380 --> 00:09:08,300

have a wonderful rabbi.

207

00:09:08,300 --> 00:09:14,620

Even though he's orthodox, he's
very, very flexible, I guess,

208

00:09:14,620 --> 00:09:16,120

for lack of a better word.

209

00:09:16,120 --> 00:09:20,080

And we can really talk about
anything and everything.

210

00:09:20,080 --> 00:09:21,670

And he's a wonderful man.

211

00:09:21,670 --> 00:09:26,260

And even the Reform Jews
belong to the orthodox

212

00:09:26,260 --> 00:09:28,090

because of the rabbi.

213

00:09:28,090 --> 00:09:32,500

So that part is OK.

214
00:09:32,500 --> 00:09:38,020
But, again, it's almost
as if, sometimes, I

215
00:09:38,020 --> 00:09:40,690
think I wish I
wasn't born Jewish,

216
00:09:40,690 --> 00:09:44,993
even though I'm not hiding
the fact that I'm Jewish.

217
00:09:44,993 --> 00:09:46,660
But, if I wasn't
Jewish, I wouldn't have

218
00:09:46,660 --> 00:09:48,850
had to go through all this.

219
00:09:48,850 --> 00:09:51,550
And I can't help it, and it kind
of spills onto the religion.

220
00:09:51,550 --> 00:09:55,860

221
00:09:55,860 --> 00:09:58,560
And if you don't grow up with--

222
00:09:58,560 --> 00:10:01,710
I suppose-- of course, I got
away from the church thing,

223
00:10:01,710 --> 00:10:06,000
but I'll go to a
wedding in a church.

224
00:10:06,000 --> 00:10:09,430
And those symbols
still mean more to me.

225

00:10:09,430 --> 00:10:12,790
Because, in your
childhood, you had--

226
00:10:12,790 --> 00:10:15,550
I don't feel
uncomfortable in a church.

227
00:10:15,550 --> 00:10:18,310
When we belonged to
the Reform synagogue,

228
00:10:18,310 --> 00:10:19,960
my husband didn't
want to because there

229
00:10:19,960 --> 00:10:21,130
was an organ there.

230
00:10:21,130 --> 00:10:22,800
He says that's like a church.

231
00:10:22,800 --> 00:10:25,083
I said that's what made
me feel comfortable.

232
00:10:25,083 --> 00:10:28,950

233
00:10:28,950 --> 00:10:33,800
And so religion is another--

234
00:10:33,800 --> 00:10:38,930
it's almost like it's a
casualty of all of that.

235
00:10:38,930 --> 00:10:43,295
And like I almost resent
the whole religion because--

236
00:10:43,295 --> 00:10:46,475

237

00:10:46,475 --> 00:10:50,370

I mean, when I think about it,
you can't blame the religion.

238

00:10:50,370 --> 00:10:55,025

But it's like, why couldn't
I be one of the others?

239

00:10:55,025 --> 00:10:58,490

240

00:10:58,490 --> 00:11:01,090

And that's basically what
I live with every day.

241

00:11:01,090 --> 00:11:04,390

I'm not saying I think
about it 24 hours a day,

242

00:11:04,390 --> 00:11:07,390

but, when I do think about
it, that's what I think.

243

00:11:07,390 --> 00:11:12,330

244

00:11:12,330 --> 00:11:16,424

Well, you've told
us quite a bit.

245

00:11:16,424 --> 00:11:17,340

Thank you.

246

00:11:17,340 --> 00:11:17,840

I hope so.

247

00:11:17,840 --> 00:11:19,160

Yes, you have.

248

00:11:19,160 --> 00:11:21,840

And it's very important.

249

00:11:21,840 --> 00:11:23,400

So thank you very much--

250

00:11:23,400 --> 00:11:23,900

Thank you.

251

00:11:23,900 --> 00:11:25,590

--for talking with us.

252

00:11:25,590 --> 00:11:29,510

This concludes the United
States Holocaust Memorial Museum

253

00:11:29,510 --> 00:11:32,440

interview with Christine Cohen.

254

00:11:32,440 --> 00:11:34,000