

This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Tania Rozmaryn, conducted by Gail Schwartz on February 23, 1997 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is tape number four, side A.

So I came to Yeshiva University, and I graduated. And then I had to take courses in psychology and education in Queens College. At one point, I came, I took an art course, history of art. And I walk in, I see my son there.

And I said, no, you and I are not going to be in the same class. That was later. That was when I worked on my master's. No, not at this point. At this point, I did my degree. And I started teaching at Yeshiva Forest Hills at Dov Revel in Forest Hills, Queens. We had moved to there to a house in Forest Hills. And life was getting a little bit better.

My children attended the Yeshiva of Forrest Hills. And I loved being a teacher. I succeeded so well that a few years later I was voted as the recipient of the Teacher of the Year award by Yeshiva University. And I was teaching at Yeshiva University until '74. In '74, my principal took a position in Flatbush at the Yeshiva of Flatbush. And he asked me to join him. And I went to Flatbush.

And of course, in Flatbush, I taught until 1990, when I came here to Maryland. But in meantime, in '85, I was already an adult, I decided I wanted to make a master's. And I went to Queens College. And I picked my master's. I decided to do a double master-- one in the counselor of education and the other one in the marriage and family counselor, which I graduated, then I practiced marriage a family counseling. But my sons always tease me. They say, mom, you're the only person we know that went from the fourth grade straight to college.

And I lived in New York until 1990. And I have two sons. My oldest son is an electrical engineer. And he moved to Silver Spring 15 years ago. And at this point, he designs telecommunications systems for Howard Hughes' company.

And my youngest son studied medicine at Columbia University. And when he became a surgeon, he decided he wanted to move to this area. And he is now Dr. Leo Rozmaryn. He's quite known in the neighborhood. He is a microvascular hand surgeon and extremities.

So 1990 I decided to move here and be near my children and my grandchildren. And immediately, I was offered the position at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School to continue teaching, which I have accepted. So at this point, I am very happy. I'm very content. And I feel that life has been good to me in spite of all the obstacles.

When your mother came here, or when you got settled here, did you continue to talk about your wartime experiences with her or long distance with your sister?

We always continued talking. And everything what we did and where we went, our food or whatever, we were always reminiscing about home. But most of that my husband and I used to talk with our children.

Our children know all our experiences to the last detail to a point when my son went cross country and then to Vancouver, he went to a kosher butcher to buy some meat to barbecue, he detected in an accent. And then he asked the butcher where you are from. And my son was 18. And he said, well, I'm from Poland, a little town you wouldn't know. He said tell me. Tell me. And the butcher finally told him that he comes from a town called Sosnowiec.

And then my son says to him, oh, you're from Sosnowiec. Do you know the Pilsudskiego Street? Do you remember the yellow roof color? Do you remember the bakeries? And that guy was absolutely astonished.

It so happened that this was my husband's hometown. And my kids know everything. And they are so very much absorbed with the Holocaust in general and what happened to us, in particular, to a point when the Holocaust Museum opened up, I told my sons you have to go. I couldn't go for a year. You have to go see the Holocaust Museum.

My son came back, and he said, mom, well, he said, I wasn't so very much impressed because what you told me and what daddy told us is much more that we see. Of course, it's a wonderful thing to have for people who don't know. But he says for us, you know, we are saturated with it.

It's a matter of fact, when he went for an interview at Columbia, the interviewer said to him, you know, you act like a Holocaust survivor. What is your background? So thank God they're all settled. And I have wonderful grandchildren. And life is good at this point, all we should do is be healthy.

Are there any sights today or sounds or smells that trigger your thoughts about the war?

About the war?

The war years.

Not here. Three years ago, I went with a friend to Poland. I was a little girl in Vilnius [INAUDIBLE]. I heard about Warsaw, Krakow, Budapest, you know? But never did I anticipate that I would go. I took a trip with a friend of mine with a tour to Warsaw, Krakow, Budapest, and Vienna.

And of course, when we went to Krakow, it was very interesting. I went to the Jewish theater there. And we met actors. They are not Jewish. And there's a Jewish community. And now they are waking up.

We met people that didn't know they were Jewish, but the Gentiles that they were saved by, they started dying out. They were afraid they'll go to hell because they are very religious Catholics. So before they die, they told them that they were Jewish children. And now, all of a sudden in the Warsaw, in the Jewish organizations there, you have Polish Jews that are coming now. And they want to go into the fault.

But when we went to Krakow, we went to Auschwitz. And I was never there, fortunately. We walked into Auschwitz. And I says to my friend, I said Malvin, do you smell anything here? She says no, vaguely. I said how many years is it after the war? That place smelled with burnt flesh, still does. I am very careful at home not to burn anything because I know I would go berserk.

Otherwise, fortunately, here no, it doesn't, except nightmares. I wake up. And I'm being chased and all kinds of horrible, horrible nightmares. But I must say, I had help. But at this point, thank God, I got rid of my post-traumatic stress syndrome and off of the anxiety attacks. I know at this point how to control them. So actually, I feel at this point, I'm 68, I feel that if I would take a time in my life where my life was best, I would say this is it.

When your boys were 11 years old, which was the age you were when the war began, was that hard for you? Did it bring back memories for you--

No.

--because they were your age?

No, actually, it didn't. I felt that I did not, except for nightmares, no, I did not because the environment here, the social structure, the political structure, the democracy. In the United States, it's a system that does not remind me of anything that I experienced previously in Europe. I remember my relatives, like I said, every time there is any scare, I mention each and everyone's name because I don't want to forget them.

But otherwise, I feel I was fortunate because, like I said, with all the symptoms that I had suffered, I felt that my life was not ruined by the concentration camp, by the war. My mother, people my mother's age, or people that came here my age and did not pursue an education. I know many people my age that they had married very wealthy husbands. And not anymore, but in the beginning, they started showing off their diamonds and their furs and this. And I said, I pity these women because they have to hold on to something, but it didn't do anything for themselves.

So you see, these people are still in the Holocaust, like my mother and people younger than my mother that their life was broken that where, let's say, in high schools or universities. And they did not pursue. They did not rebuild their lives. They live every day with the Holocaust.

I feel, to me the Holocaust it's the tragedy that I suffered, my family. My father was killed. My brother. And all the close relatives and all the Jewish people, that's why it was so difficult for me to go to the Holocaust Museum. And that's why I hesitated to become a volunteer.

But at this point, I feel that I must because, essentially, I am one of the youngest survivors because all the other survivors that call themselves Holocaust survivors were either hidden, or they were children. Or they suffered in Russia. But to go through ghetto labor camps and concentration camps, I feel that there are not many left. And I feel it's my obligation to volunteer. And I feel that I could contribute to perpetuate the memory of the six million.

So I personally myself, because I had rebuilt my life, I got my education, and it was so satisfying to me that I don't feel that I was totally demolished by the Holocaust, but I see many people who are. And I attribute it to the fact that I was so adamant about getting an education and fulfilling my life with being an educator. And I was very active in the organizations for Hapoel HaMizrachi, President and all kinds of functions. And I was giving lectures.

And then, of course, whenever I was called to represent, to speak about my experiences, I always do. In my school, I do it every year. It's very difficult, but I, on Yom HaShoah, I feel I have to do it. In New York, I was invited to synagogues to speak and adult learning institutions. But personally, I think that I have picked up my pieces, and I have rehabilitated myself well.

Is there anything you wanted to add to your children or grandchildren before we end?

Well, my children, they are religious, modern religious. They live here in Camp Mill. My oldest son has to his credit, he started a synagogue, which is called the Camp Mills Synagogue. He did it single-handedly. And now, they have 250 families. And in the spring, they're going to start to build a real new temple, a real new shul.

They are very, both my sons, hospitable. Their house is always open for company. If anybody moves into the neighborhood, they are how people know that they could call Dr. Leo Rozmaryn and Dr. Jack Rozmaryn. We have someone. We have a family. They are always welcome to eat and to sleep. Always there to cook meals. To take things to help out neighbors.

They are oft, on a Friday night and a Saturday, they are always at least 15, 20 people in the house. So I am within walking distance. And I see all this. And I see my grandchildren. They study at the Hebrew Academy. And also modern religious. My older son went for a year with his graduating class in Israel. And he studies in a Yeshiva.

And my children and my grandchildren, thank God, are going in the right path. But I want to mention one more thing. After the Holocaust, when people survived, most of the Holocaust survivors said if this could have happened to us, we don't want to be Jewish. Like Madeleine Albright's family, they have converted before to Catholicism.

But after the war not everybody took such drastic steps. But people said, what for? I won't convert, but I don't have to. There is no God. I don't believe in God. I am not religious. And I don't want to be religious. I was religious at home with my brother and my father, with the shtreimel and with the kaputa and this. Now, what happened to them? I want nothing to do with religion.

And these people, after the war, whether they had businesses or jobs, they started working on Shabbat and holidays and send the children in public school. And they said this is good. This is what we want. We don't need Yiddish guide. Because if that happened to us, we don't want anymore.

I felt the same way when we came here to the United States. Of course, the whole house was kosher. There was no question about it. And I said, how could I be religious with my father or my family, everybody, where was God? And then I started going to the movies on the Shabbat.

And then I came home one day from the movies on Shabbat, and I said to myself, this is wrong. I am not going to question at this point God. I will just analyze my life now and the future. What will I give the future generation? I will

perpetuate posthumously Hitler's idea of the final solution because what he wanted to do is liquidate the Jewish nation and the Jewish people. If I will go on denying the Jewish existence, denying the Jewish religion, and give my sons a secular education in public schools and the second generation intermarries and the third generation, they are no more Jews.

And that's why I said, I am not going to give Hitler a gift posthumously. I will become more religious, not modern, Orthodox and give my children a religious upbringing. And I have never regretted it because when I meet now with my friends, people that didn't do much for themselves who hardly speak English, their son is a big lawyer married the shiksa from the West. She has grandchildren, nothing in common. And the next generation is finished.

And they all look at me and they said, we were wrong. You made the right choice. And I am very happy I did.

Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

Thank you, Ms. Schwartz.

This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Tania Rozmaryn.