This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection post-Holocaust interview with Ruth Cohen, and this is track number two.

You were talking about your grandchildren and going to the Holocaust Museum.

Right.

I was wondering-- and we'll talk about the Holocaust Museum in a while. Do you feel that you are two different people, one on the outside to the public and one on the inside?

Not really. Not really, because I don't-- I really, really don't live in the Holocaust. I live here. And I know that some people always talk about it, always remember it, always everything. Everything connected with today is connected with yesterday, and somehow I don't. I don't know why, but I don't.

But what I did want to mention was that my granddaughter's bat mitzvah-- I didn't know about this until a year ago or so-- two years, a year and a half ago-- about sharing the bat mitzvah or bar mitzvah. No one told me about it until I found out. And then my granddaughter last January mentioned my brother and the two children who we had adopted. She-- what is it called-- sharing her bat mitzvah with them, and then my other grandson who was bar mitzvah'd in July mentioned four of my cousins.

And now my youngest granddaughter will mention some others, and then we'll find some other children to share to make sure that all my family had sort of a bar mitzvah.

Yes.

A bar mitzvah-- because this is done at services.

Yes. Yes. do you read a lot about the Holocaust?

No, I don't.

Purposefully not?

Purposefully not.

It's too painful?

Yes, and I don't want to see any movies either.

[TELEPHONE RINGS]

I hope my husband can answer it. I just don't need the-- I don't need to live it-- to relive it. I also don't talk about it at the Museum ever. In other words, I'm first person or any of that, I just won't do.

You have not done first person.

No, and I won't. I couldn't.

And why is that?

Because I don't feel like sitting there and crying.

Oh, OK, because you know that's what you would do.

Don't you see what-- I did-- my grandson's fifth grade teacher pleaded with me to come and talk. So I gave in, and I regretted it, because there were 20 children who watched me cry. And what for? Let them learn it from somebody else.

Objectively, you mean?

Right, or else somebody doesn't else who doesn't sit and cry. Plenty of people manage to do that. I don't know how. So I just don't want to have them see my pain and be in pain because of that. There's no need for it, as far as I'm concerned. There is a need to talk about it, but I don't have to be the one to do it. There are lots of people.

Did you ever need any counseling?

For that? No. I really feel--

You thought you handled it?

Right.

What were your thoughts during the Eichmann trial?

Hope that they will get as well as the Demjanjuk trial or any of the others. But those were the main ones. Oh, I'm very happy to see that people are punished for their atrocities. There's no question about it. I just don't feel like reliving things constantly, so I don't. Right or wrong, that's the way I am.

That's who you are.

But you said you do feel at this point very American.

Oh, yes. I have for the longest time-- a Jewish American.

A Jewish American, yeah.

And how religious was your home when you were raising your children?

The same as now. We're traditional. We travel on Shabbat.

But you observe Shabbat in the sense of--

We observe Shabbat. We have Shabbat dinner here every Friday night with my family and friends. And we all go to services. Not all the time, but at times. We don't travel on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And we have a strictly kosher home.

And did your father keep up his observance?

Yes.

He did.

As I said, not to the same extent, and I can't even tell you to what extent he did not, but it was not the same as when we were at home. He wasn't as strict about it. He put on tefillin every morning. I don't remember him going to services at night. He said what's going on at home? But we did belong to a shul even while he was alive.

What about your feelings about being Jewish-- that you had to go through these terrible tragedies and terrible losses because--

I'm proud to be Jewish.

And even so.

Absolutely.

Even so.

I wouldn't be anything else.

Even though you lost so much.

Absolutely. I can't think of anything else that I would want to be. I feel our religion is fine, except for some little things.

Do you have many non-Jewish friends?

Not here. Interesting. In New York I did.

Did they ask you? Did you tell them about your life story? If they asked me, I told them. As I said I never--

Bring it up.

I might bring up that I was--

Yeah.

--that I was in concentration camp, if the subject comes up or if-- but I don't go saying my name is Ruth Cohen. I'm a Holocaust survivor.

Did you get a number?

No, I didn't. Nobody in that lager had a number. We were there to-- we were in the Vernichtungslager, not in an Arbeitslager. I don't even know what to call it. That--

Section?

That 130 block section was strictly for Vernichtung, not for work. I was the only one. I and these few kids were the only ones who worked.

As messengers, you're talking about. As messengers.

Right, nobody else worked.

The others didn't work.

No, my sister worked, but she was-- very interesting thing happened as we walked into our barracks. This was when we first got there the first day. As we walked in, my sister and I, a woman came to greet us-- greet her, and they hugged and kissed. They were in camp together in 1938. In summer camp.

In a summer camp.

Right. She was from Slovakia, and we were from Hungary at that time. And she is the one who got me the job to be a messenger girl, and she had my sister help her with her cleaning and whatever often. So we were very lucky about that.

Were you ever physically abused in any of those camps?

No.

You were not. You weren't beaten or anything--

Nobody there was. She must have been this Blockalteste, because she was there from '40 or so. Who knows where she was. She never talked to us. But we were not.

You were not.

No. Nobody was. You were abused emotionally.

Yes, but I meant physically.

No.

No beatings?

No we were not. Not that-- when we stood on Zahlappell and somebody wanted to use his leash-- not his leash, his whip. Didn't just use it but for no reason, or nobody got beaten. Emotionally was a different story.

Yes, of course.

In the-- as we were standing by the gate, we the children--

The messengers.

And we all spoke German. The SS guys were talking purposefully loudly, telling us-- not telling us, telling each other horror stories. So we heard them.

To frighten you, you mean?

So to let them suffer a little. It wasn't a question of frightening. It was a question of torturing. They were talking about this person got killed that way or this person got--

I see.

Just so that we heard it. Yeah, they weren't nice people. But that was the kind of abuse that we suffered.

Do you find that you've changed as you've gotten older? Do you think more about the war as you get older-- have gotten older?

No. I said I don't want to read about it. I don't want any association with it that will remind me of it. And when we talk about the Holocaust Museum--

Well, let's talk about the Holocaust Museum. When did you first go to the Museum?

Oh.

You first experience.

I went there before I got here.

Moved here.

Yeah, once. Because a friend of ours donated a large sum of money, and he invited friends and family for a tour-- a complete tour.

And your thoughts then?

I still can't take it. Then they were the same as now. I don't look at certain things. I don't partake in certain-- I don't really go to the third floor. I don't really go to the fourth floor. The second floor, much-- the second floor, yes. I even worked there. But the third and fourth are kind of out for me. I don't-- we don't.

What kind of work do you do for the Museum?

I work on the fifth floor in the archives. I do translation.

In what languages?

Now Hungarian, but I was doing Yiddish also.

Oh, really?

I can do both. But before that, I was doing transliteration of stories such as mine, and they were very difficult.

Too painful?

Yes. And for a while I was bringing my writing home and typed it out at home, and then I stopped, because I tended to do it in the evening. And I just decided not to do it. As I said, I really don't need to torture myself.

So you are not-- you're not doing the translating at the moment?

No.

Because it was too painful.

Yeah. But I do translations, and the translations are OK.

You do translations?

At the Museum.

You do?

Yeah.

But I misunderstood you. I thought you said you don't do it anymore.

No, no, transliterations of the--

Transliterations, I'm sorry.

Right.

Transliterations.

Of stories.

Yeah. What are your impressions of the non-Jewish volunteers at the Museum?

Oh, the non-Jewish volunteers I admire amazingly, not necessarily the non-Jewish workers.

You make a distinction.

Yes. The volunteers do it because they want to be there for a reason. They want to-- I suppose there are many reasons for it, one of which is to learn. One is to give, and self-satisfaction, which is the same thing as giving. But the non-Jewish workers I don't think have the kind of understanding of what transpired for them to be in certain roles. My feeling.

Do they just need more training, is that what you--

More learning.

More learning.

More comprehension, more understanding, more caring, more feeling, which I don't know whether the feeling part is possible. But somehow the people who volunteer are a different breed. I'm talking about the non-Jewish--

Non-Jewish volunteers. Yeah. Are you a member of any of the survivor groups-- outside groups?

I just joined the--

The local Holocaust survivors?

Right, the JCC. That's it.

So you go to their meetings?

Sometimes. I never was-- I never joined any groups of my hometown, which existed in New York. And that's all I'm a member of. Actually, that's all I'm a member of. I don't join groups.

You're not a joiner?

No. I'm a do-er. I'm not a joiner.

If you meet other survivors here in Washington, would you encourage them to work at the Museum?

I would, of course.

You would?

Sure. I think it's quite gratifying if you find the right thing to do.

So your feeling when you walk through the door when you come into the building. Do you have any visceral feeling when you walk in?

I now do, because I just had-- we just had a lecture about the building, which I never bothered to really learn about and find out about. It's quite amazing. So now I'm looking around to see. You're talking about the architectural part of the building.

Right, right, right.

Did anything strike you that you learned?

Well, yeah.

Anything specific that you--

Specifically, the way it was designed. I can't remember the name of the person that designed it.

James Freed.

Right. Amazing, all the thought that went into it. The separation of the different areas and the entrance hall on, what is it, 14th Street?

Or 15th Street? The side where the Washington Monument is, or the 14th Street?

Amazing, I think. I always liked it, but I didn't know what it was liking. And the outside architecture means so much more to me now than it did before. I think I should do that with every volunteer who signs up to--

To have them take that tour.

I think so.

Yeah.

But this wasn't even a tour-- at the membership meeting two weeks ago. This was a lecture.

Are you part of the volunteer writing group?

Yes, I am. I am. I did join the group. Yes, I am.

So you've done some writing my your experiences?

I did, but I don't-- I joined after they finished all the books.

Books, yeah.

Right. So now whatever writing I have is just loosely done. But some things--

Now what kind-- what do you write about?

About my life in the past and--

During the war.

-- my childhood and during the war. Yes. I think two or three of my papers are on the internet now, or are going to be. I don't know if it's started already.

Yeah.

I have a whole bunch.

Were you in any way active in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States when you were younger? I mean, here

your civil rights were taken away from you and your family, and even more than that, of course.

No, I was, but not as a member of anything. I mean, we did a lot of marching, and we did a lot of--

You did?

Yeah, both my husband and I and my children, too. My youngest son, especially, would be-- not especially, but not the oldest, but the youngest would be-- the oldest one wouldn't be. He lives in Georgia, [INAUDIBLE].

Oh, yeah. But you feel you have more knowledge because of what-- or more affinity for this because of what you lived through, being deprived of your civil rights?

No, also that's the way I was raised. I was raised that way by my parents from early childhood. I was raised that way.

Do you ever have feelings of anger that you had to go through and had the losses that you've had?

I don't-- I can't say what I-- yeah, I do. I can't say that it's anger, but of course, I lost my mother. I lost my father because of it. I lost my brother and my family. How can you not be? But I'm not angry. I'm not hateful. Absolutely not. Whereas I have friends who were terribly hateful, but--

These are friends who are survivors?

Yes, of course. Of course.

Have the lessons been learned?

No. Have they been? No. Look what's happening now in our country and everywhere in the whole world. That angers me.

That angry.

I get rather angry and frustrated about our country at this point, and about the world at this point. That includes not only Israel, but other parts of the world.

So why hasn't the world learned? Who knows. Will the world ever learn? No, because we say and then we do.

Right.

Do you feel a need to bear witness to this?

I do, but I can't go so far as to sit there and talk about it in public. I just can't. My friends in Boston went from school to school to talk to children. I couldn't understand how they could do it, and I still can't. I can somewhat understand it, because maybe my female friend survived with her parents. And my male friend survived with his mother, who died maybe 10, 11 years ago. So that might make it easier, but I'm not sure. Because there are people who didn't survive with family and can also do it. I can't.

Did your sister have children?

No.

Oh, she did not? OK. Well, is there any message you would want to leave to your grandchildren? Anything you want to say especially to them?

Well, I've said many things to them, but-- live in a much better world than we have now. Much better, and do whatever

you can to make it so. And I hope they will.

I hope so, too.

Some of them will. Some of them will, I know. Some of them, I don't know.

Anything you wanted to add before we close? Is there anything else you want--

Just what I said. I would love to see the world a much better place--

Yeah, yeah.

--for the future, for children-- for everybody.

Right.

And what to do about it? I don't know. I'm not that smart. Smarter people than I don't know what to do.

Well, thank you very, very much for doing this interview.

Thank you. Thank you. I think that alone will have helped maybe someone 100 years from now--

Listening to this.

Yeah.

Is that why you were willing to do--

Yeah, of course.

For future--

Right. Right.

Well, again, thank you for doing it. This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Ruth Cohen.