

INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH SWEET

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**Transcending Trauma Project
Council for Relationships
4025 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104**

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INT: Okay, today's date is November 26, 2017, and I am interviewing Elizabeth Sweet. She was interviewed when she was fourteen years old for the project, and this is an updated interview. She's a grandchild of survivors. Elizabeth, I just want to ask you, to get your consent online for this, do you agree to use this for research purposes?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

INT: Okay, and do you agree to use your own name?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

INT: Are you okay for it to go into the archives?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

INT: Okay, wonderful, thank you. I'd like to start with asking you where you are now, what you're doing now. Last time I talked to you, you were in eighth grade. How old are you now?

ELIZABETH: I am now 32, about to turn 33. I am living in Washington D.C. I'm working for a non-profit doing IT work, working on a database and managing a team of people who work on that system. I attended college at Bowdoin College in Maine, in Brunswick, and then I spent two years after that living in the Republic of the Marshall Islands. I spent a year as a volunteer teacher, and then a year working for a local non-profit there.

INT: Oh my goodness. How old were you when you did that?

ELIZABETH: Right after college, so however one is right after college, 22, 21.

INT: Where are the Marshall Islands? They're like in the middle of the Pacific, right?

ELIZABETH: Yes, absolutely. They're about five hours west of Hawaii. They are between Hawaii and Guam. The way I always think about it, if you look at the point of New Zealand and go up to the Equator, that's where they are located.

INT: Wow. And why the Marshall Islands?

ELIZABETH: After being in Maine for four years, one of my criteria for where to go next was someplace warm, so the Equator was a good fit for that.

INT: (Laughs)

ELIZABETH: I really wanted a place...I felt like I had had a really privileged upbringing outside of Philadelphia, and then going to college, and I just wanted to go and learn about the rest of the world and do something that wasn't necessarily just about myself for a few years.

INT: That's wonderful. So you must have been about 21 or something like that.

ELIZABETH: Yeah. 2007 was when I went out.

INT: So you just went off at 21 to the Marshall Islands.

ELIZABETH: It was with a program, so there were about 40 of us who went out together. I lived on the main island, so I was a little bit less isolated than other people. I went out and had my own classroom. I had 120 third graders divided into four classes.

INT: Wow, that's fantastic.

ELIZABETH: I learned a lot about classroom management, but it was a good experience.

INT: That's fantastic. You were there for a couple of years?

ELIZABETH: Yeah, so I spent one year teaching, and then I had started volunteering with this local women's non-profit there, and then I spent the next year working with them. I managed one of the projects, which was an early childhood education project, where they sent women out into the community to work with young mothers to help jumpstart education, because that really wasn't happening there. Kids didn't start learning much until they got into the classroom. Except that there were some who did, so you ended up with really disparate education tracks going on. So it was sort of to jumpstart that community. And then I also did a lot of bookkeeping for them, and I did a lot of grant writing. As the only native English speaker in the area, it helped a lot to do the grant writing.

INT: That's amazing. Was there anything unsettling about it for you? It certainly would have been, I would think, a culture shock, coming from...

ELIZABETH: It was an extreme culture change. There was a lot that I had to act differently. There was a lot of cultural behavioral things that I needed to learn. It was something as silly as when you go to the restaurant, women sit at the tables, they don't sit at the bar. Something as silly as that. Okay, now that's a new thing to learn. You had to have your knees and shoulders covered at all times, and no pants, except eventually we found the American places you could go and wear pants. It was definitely a culture change, and to be surrounded by children all the time speaking a language that I didn't speak most of the time, it was a real interesting experience.

INT: Did you learn the language at all?

ELIZABETH: I learned some. I don't have a great ear for languages, so it wasn't as easy for me, and I was in a community where I didn't have to. It wasn't required in the same way, but I definitely learned some pieces.

INT: That sounds amazing. So you were there from the age of 21 to 23 or so.

ELIZABETH: Yes. I arrived in 2007, and I left in 2009.

INT: Okay, great. And then what did you do after that?

ELIZABETH: It took a while to readjust to life in the States after that, so I lived at home for a bit and did odd jobs. And then I moved up to Boston in 2010 and started working at a non-profit up there. I moved to Boston because it was where I had a lot of friends from college and I had a lot of ties up there, so I started working at a non-profit up there in 2011 and spent about four years up there.

INT: What was the non-profit, can I ask?

ELIZABETH: It was called Facing History and Ourselves.

INT: What is that about?

ELIZABETH: It was started in Brookline, Massachusetts, which is actually one of the largest Jewish populations in the country, and one of the most Jewish neighborhoods in the country. It reminded me a lot of parts of Bala Cynwyd. It was very comfortable to be there. They realized there's this Jewish school...I mean, not Jewish school, but this incredible Jewish population at the school, but no one was teaching the Holocaust, and they felt that that was a real missed opportunity. So the founder of the organization built a curriculum to teach the Holocaust, and they created a book called *Holocaust and Human Behavior*, and teaching guides around it, and everything. The mission of the organization is to use lessons of history to help promote a better future. A lot of the language that has come out of upstanders versus bystanders, they were real-

INT: Trailblazers.

ELIZABETH: They started a lot of that movement around stuff, which was just really cool to see. They now work on the Armenian genocide. They've done work on Nanjing, and a bunch of other things as well.

INT: This is exactly one of the questions we wanted to ask, is the impact of the Holocaust on the third generation. And here you find yourself...first you go off to the Marshall Islands, and then you go to a non-profit that works directly with this question of teaching the Holocaust. Of all the non-profits...I mean, I understand from what you said that you went to Boston because you had a community of friends there from I guess from your time in Maine at Bowdoin, but of all non-profits you could choose, you chose that

one.

ELIZABETH: (Laughs) Yes. I think what was really interesting is growing up outside...you know, in the community in the Main Line of Philadelphia, I was one of the least Jewish kids religiously. There were a lot of families who went to synagogue every week, or multiple times a week, there were Orthodox families, but I had this heritage. I felt like I was culturally Jewish, and that a lot of them had more American, you know, their family had left before the Holocaust. What I found once I was in Maine and once I was in the Marshall Islands was that it wasn't as common. It was a thing that was actually different. Growing up, everyone knew, oh, right now it's Passover (laughs), okay, everyone is going to be out of school. It was a part of life, and it was having to tell people, "No, Passover is coming up!" And someone goes, "What's that?" Oh yeah, got to explain these things now. And Passover is my favorite holiday. So when I was in the Marshall Islands my mother actually shipped my matzah so I could make a seder for everybody (laughs), so I got matzah shipped to me in the Marshall Islands to make a seder, and we did a seder as a group, and I made matzah ball soup and all those wonderful things.

It was something that I realized was more part of my identity the further I walked away from where I grew up, is that it was something that was different. It was different; it was something that was important to me. I made sure that I went to seders in college and stuff like that. If you had asked me in high school if that's what I would be doing, it was important for me to find that. It was true once I was in Massachusetts as well. There was an air of comfort again about being in this Jewish community and being at this organization that was doing this incredible work. They'd bring Holocaust survivors to schools and have them speak to students and all of that. At that point both of my grandparents had already passed away, but it was still this connection to my heritage and my history that I really appreciated and felt very comfortable with, and once again we got off for Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah (laughs). The organization closed. It was like, oh yeah, this is familiar, this is comfortable. I think that was what I really learned through that time, was that even if it's not something where I celebrate the religious part of it, or go there, there's a sense of community I get and a sense of familiarity, where this is comfortable, this is home, knowing about these things and being in these communities and people who are doing this type of work.

INT: Can you give us the name of that again? I didn't catch it the first time, the name of that non-profit.

ELIZABETH: Facing History and Ourselves.

INT: Okay, thank you. After that...you were in Boston for several years, and then where did you go?

ELIZABETH: And then I moved to D.C., and I actually remained working for the organization in Boston for about a year, close to a year after I left, I was just working remotely. I really felt like it was time for me to move on from Boston. I loved being in

Boston, but it was sort of enough. It was a long enough commute to come home. I felt like I wanted to be closer to my family. It was just a little bit too inconvenient. I'd always, always wanted to move to Washington D.C. It was sort of my dream from being a child.

INT: Really? How come?

ELIZABETH: I decided to go do that. It was close enough that I wasn't living in Philadelphia, but I still could get home to Philadelphia in a very short amount of time, so it was convenient that way, and I felt like if anything was going on with the family I could get home. Being an only child, I feel like I need to be close by at times. And then there was, just I loved the fact that it was a low city. I don't like cities where I feel like the buildings are collapsing on top of me. So it was a city, and I got the vibrancy of city life, but you could still see open space and open sky and everything. So I just fell in love with it.

INT: Was it the political aspect of it as well, or no?

ELIZABETH: No, I just like the feel of the city (laughs).

INT: Just the way it was built, the way it was laid out.

ELIZABETH: Yeah, because of the way it was built, the way the culture felt in it, the way it felt like communities within it. The other thing about Boston is I felt it was a really segregated city. There were parts that were one way, and there were other areas which were one way, where in Philadelphia you're walking down the street and the nicest part is you'll still see people of all types, and that sort of has that similar vibe in Washington.

INT: And that's important to you as well.

ELIZABETH: Mm-hm.

INT: And the non-profit that you work for now?

ELIZABETH: I work for the Pew Charitable Trusts.

INT: And you do IT for them.

ELIZABETH: I do IT for them.

INT: Did you go on to graduate school at any point?

ELIZABETH: I did not, no. I sort of fell into...I started at Facing History just doing basic development (inaudible) fundraising, you know, assistant work, and then they were working on changing what database they worked on, and they asked if I was interested in working at it, and I sort of fell into this world of IT and databases because I think I have a

very logical mind, and I think that type of stuff just was an easy transition for me. (Inaudible) fell into.

INT: And you translated that into the Pew Charitable Trusts work as well.

ELIZABETH: Exactly. I'm working on the same database, yeah.

INT: Oh, I see. Do you like your job?

ELIZABETH: I do. It's a little bit stressful at times, but I think it's really nice. I spent a little bit of time in between, less than four months, working for another type of non-profit. It was also an educational non-profit that I jumped into after leaving Facing History, but it was really sales based, and I felt like we were making money...even though the money then went back into funding new curriculum and stuff, it just felt very strange to me to be in the business of sales and trying to drive up prices and trying to drive down costs. It was just a really alien environment. Even though it was going back to work and not going in anyone's pocket, I just didn't feel comfortable in that. And so that's one of the reasons I picked Pew. They do some really interesting work on a wide range of topics, and it felt much more familiar where there were programmatic work and money coming in the door, and money going out the door, in terms of grants, but not that sort of let's figure out how to make these books cost as little as possible in order to make more money, which then maybe goes back to education work. So I found that I really like that traditional non-profit. It was strange for me to jump from out of education, because I felt like I had been in that realm for so long, between teaching and then working with the early childhood education program, and then working at Facing History, where the whole focus was education, it was hard to leave that, but I really love the different things that Pew is doing and the different ways they're tackling issues, so many different ones, and I felt like it was nice to be somewhere where I really felt like a difference was being made again.

INT: Oh, that's great. Could you give us an example of just a couple of those that are important to you?

ELIZABETH: Yeah, absolutely. They tend to pick orphans issues, so something where no one's doing similar work on that topic, so it might be a topic that other people are doing that they try to take a slightly different bend, and everything must have a win-able goal. So they'll work on a project for just a few years, and then maybe renew it if the goal (inaudible) or things aren't moving forward. But it's some real interesting stuff. One of my favorite projects is on (inaudible) and how we can solve some of those. There's some work going on (inaudible) and antibiotic resistance and state pension funds. So it really sort of runs the gamut of whatever is out there (laughs).

INT: It's a wide range.

ELIZABETH: A very wide range, which is really cool.

INT: Keeps it interesting. Could you tell us a little bit about where you are demographically as far as are you married, are you partnered, do you have children?

ELIZABETH: I'm single. That hasn't been the focus for me. Right now my focus really has been on moving my career forward and sort of finding the place I wanted. Ever since I moved to Boston I always felt like I was a temporary Boston resident. I was never going to put down my permanent roots there. But now that I'm in D.C. I'm feeling like I finally have (inaudible) roots somewhere (laughs), so that's nice.

INT: Tell me about your family. We've interviewed everyone in your family. Well, not everyone, but we interviewed your grandparents. We were fortunate to do that. I interviewed both of them, actually, and I interviewed your mom and your dad, and you are an only child. I'm wondering if you can tell us where your parents are now, in the sense of what they're doing in the world right now.

ELIZABETH: They are both retired. They are living outside of Philadelphia. My mother's background is in social work and psychotherapy, and my dad is a scientist. He's retired, but I don't think anyone is ever an officially retired scientist. He's still doing some interesting work with...similar work that I think that I will end up in long-term, which is working on boards and working with the Delaware Valley Science Fair, and just being involved in the community of science, even though he's no longer actually working in the field.

INT: And they're still married.

ELIZABETH: Yeah, still married, still living outside the city.

INT: Would you say that you had any religious affiliation at this point?

ELIZABETH: Probably not. I would say I am culturally Jewish, because that's probably the stronger part of my identity. But my dad and his entire family is not. They grew up Protestant, I couldn't even tell you what kind (laughs). I never grew up going to synagogue, going to church, going anywhere and having that sort of religious, but it's really important for me to celebrate each holiday. So we do Chanukah, we do Christmas, we do Passover, we do Easter, and those are really important to me about bringing the family together. In the Marshall Islands, it is an incredibly Christian country, so I ended up going to church a lot. I couldn't understand a lot of church, but it was really interesting to have that different experience, but it's certainly not something that I've continued.

INT: Would you say that you believe in a higher power or a God?

ELIZABETH: Probably not. I mean, I think that there are probably stronger forces at play in the world than just humans, but I don't think there's any sort of direct power, no.

INT: What about organizational involvement? Do you belong to any kinds of volunteer

activities or organizational work?

ELIZABETH: Primarily it's just the non-profits I work for. I will do volunteer work on community based, but there's no place I sort of have maintained a membership of.

INT: Do you remember what year your grandparents died? I think your grandmother died first.

ELIZABETH: Yeah, she died first. I want to say I was in high school. It was either tenth or eleventh grade, so that would be 2000, 2001.

INT: And your grandfather? These are your maternal-

ELIZABETH: Yes, maternal. 2005, 2006.

INT: Okay, a few years after your grandmother.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

INT: Are your other grandparents alive, your father's parents?

ELIZABETH: No, my grandfather on my father's side died when I was in...so 1994, 1995, when I was in elementary school. And my grandmother lived to 97 and passed away in 2008, I believe.

INT: Wow, 97, that's amazing.

ELIZABETH: Yeah.

INT: Now we want to move onto descriptions of your family members. How would you describe your mother, just in a few adjectives?

ELIZABETH: A few adjectives. Strong, opinionated, and very generous, kind and caring.

INT: And your dad?

ELIZABETH: Practical, very generous as well, very scientific, very thoughtful and contemplative.

INT: How would you describe yourself?

ELIZABETH: Very practical and logical. I feel like I am someone who has my feet always 100% on the ground and have since I was a child. And I would say very smart, the whole family I think very smart and very thoughtful and caring.

INT: And why do you think you're a person who's always had your feet on the ground? Could you say more about that?

ELIZABETH: I think it's a few things. I think that part of it is just my nature and how I am wired, but I think part of it is that's just been a focus of mine. I'm not a big long-term strategic thinker. That's something I've had to work and grow at, but it's very much what's the next thing, how do we get this, how do we organize, how do we keep things in order? That's always been a strong part of my personality.

INT: And how would you describe your maternal grandparents?

ELIZABETH: It's been really interesting, because as a child I had a very loving relationship with both of them. I felt completely adored through my life. I felt completely adored by both of them.

INT: That's great.

ELIZABETH: Being the only child of an only child of an only child. There was a lot of love going around, and that was really nice. I had a wonderful relationship with my grandmother. We would cook together, we would bake together. I learned how to make food. I remember laying out all the pierogies on the counter, and we'd sit and cut them together, and I'd get the dough because I was a spoiled little grandchild (laughs). But we'd sit and cut them and put them together. Anything I wanted she would do for me. I felt incredibly loved and cared for. She moved...they were living in New York when I was born. That's where my mom grew up. By about middle school my grandmother had moved down to be closer to us. My grandfather was still living there. They were still married but they were separated. So she had moved to be closer to us. I got a lot of time with her, and that was really special to me, to be able to be near her, have her at concerts for school, have her come to events. It was a lot of family time together. Being a very small family, my dad has one brother, and I unfortunately never see those cousins, having my grandparents around was always really important to me. I had a really good relationship with her.

INT: And what about your grandfather?

ELIZABETH: My grandfather was a little bit different. I think I had a really good relationship with him as a child. He certainly cared for me a lot and would do things for me, but I was never close to him as I was with my grandmother. But as I grew up, grew older, and particularly once my grandmother passed away, he moved in with us for a little bit. And he was kind of a pain in the neck. He was a very spoiled man who sort of wanted to be the center of attention. I remember we would play card games together, and that was something we always did, but he eventually would just keep changing the rules so that whatever he had in his hand he would win.

INT: (Laughs) wow.

ELIZABETH: Which was pretty funny (laughs). So the rules would keep changing so that he would win. It was a different type of cheating than I was used to, but that's fine.

INT: (Laughs)

ELIZABETH: He never really grew up, I think. I think he was really sort of arrested in his development that way. I mean, he certainly cared for me, would do anything for me, was never particularly mean or hurtful to me other than trying to win at cards (laughs). It was all very innocuous stuff like that, but once I got old enough to see that stuff, it changed it a little bit from being, oh, this is my grandparent who is on this pedestal and can do no wrong, to, okay, you're kind of a pain in the neck right now (laughs). I don't want to spend time with you at this moment. So I distanced myself a little bit from him, but I still loved him, he very much cared about me, but he became much more difficult as he got older and particularly once my grandmother passed.

INT: What do you remember about your mother's relationship with her parents? What did you remember observing when you were living together with them?

ELIZABETH: Well, my grandmother, right before, when she got really sick before she died, she was living with us as well, and that was a hard time. I had just learned to drive around that time, so often, because we needed someone to stay at home, I was the one going out and running the errands after school and picking up the groceries on the way home, and it really changed family dynamics. My mother had a rough relationship with her parents growing up and had a lot of periods where she felt like she needed to get away and things, is what she's told me. But she was really close to them, they mattered a lot to her, and she was never going to walk away and abandon them, even if they were driving her nuts, which they could do. And so that was really important for me to see. Even though you may not love all parts of your family, they're still your family and you still have to be there for them.

She had, towards the end, a very close relationship with my grandmother. My grandmother was incredibly reliant on her to do the day-to-day care. They got pretty close. I mean, they've always been close, but they had a very... I think towards the end a lot of the nonsense really fell away.

It was very different with my grandfather, where as he got more difficult, he took a lot of that out on my mom, and would be really mean and say some very harsh things to her, that she wasn't taking care of him, that she wasn't the child he wanted, and stuff like that, which was sort of really hard to see and watch. And so she ended up with a different relationship, but she never stopped taking care of him. It was just rather than driving up to the home every single day, she'd go a few times a week and have someone else come the rest of the time and pay for someone else to show up. (Laughs) It didn't go directly on her.

INT: It sounds like she needed to titrate her time with him a little bit.

ELIZABETH: Mm-hm, yeah.

INT: And your father's relationship with your maternal grandparents?

ELIZABETH: He was wonderful to them. He was incredibly caring and would do a lot for them. At various times having two sick people in the house who couldn't take care of themselves, he was extraordinarily caring, would pick her up, carry her down the stairs, would help navigate her around, was just incredibly caring and loving and willing to have them around. I think he had a good relationship with both of them. But once again, he was working full-time at that time, so he couldn't go out every single day to see them and stuff. It was a little bit different.

INT: And what did your grandparents die from?

ELIZABETH: My grandmother died from ovarian cancer, and my grandfather died from congestive heart failure.

INT: And how old were they about when they died, do you know?

ELIZABETH: My grandmother was in her late 70s, mid to late 70s, don't remember the exact. And my grandfather was 86.

INT: How are you doing so far? Are you okay?

ELIZABETH: I'm fine, yeah.

INT: I wanted to ask you about your memories about your grandparents. Particularly we're interested in any particular stories about the war that had an impact on you. If I could just ask you, sort of in a nutshell I guess, what were your grandmother's experiences and then what were your grandfather's experiences that you know of?

ELIZABETH: Most of what I know...as a child I knew that they were in the war, and it took me actually a little bit to pick up that the war meant the Holocaust. (Laughs) I started learning about the Holocaust, and it was like, oh yeah, that's the same thing.

INT: So it was referred to as "the war" for you?

ELIZABETH: It was referred to as "the war," yeah. That's how it was referred to in the family. I certainly learned generalizations from my grandparents themselves, but a lot of the details I actually learned from my mother. I think it was a way to sort of have it be a step removed. But my grandmother grew up in a village, and her family was somewhat wealthy. So her mother had been put in an institution at some point because she had lost a lot of children. So this was before the war, but she had lost a lot of children, so she was hospitalized at the time when everything started in Poland. They were both in Poland.

INT: She was hospitalized due to mental health issues, depression?

ELIZABETH: Mental health issues because, yeah, depression. I'm going to guess depression. (Laughs) If I had lost a lot of children I'd be depressed. (Inaudible.) Her mother had been put away, so she was living primarily with her grandparents on their farm, but her father was somewhat well-to-do. So she grew up very much with her grandparents. And what I remember about her experiences is that she...and this I learned primarily from my mom, was that she came home from school one day and the neighbor told her, "Don't go back to the farm. The Germans are there." And she hid in the woods and heard her grandparents, the shots ring out. And then she was taken in by a neighbor and she had, because she was a little bit more educated, she had gone to Catholic schools. So she spent the rest of the war masquerading as a Catholic. She didn't have a lot of the traditional Jewish features, not...it would be a little bit more easy to tell. She looked...little button nose and things like that. She spoke Polish fluently and she knew a lot of prayers from being in Catholic school, so she spent the war masquerading as a Catholic. She lived with families as a servant girl, spent time pretending that she was slightly mentally disabled so that people would leave her alone more. She looked very unkempt so that people would leave her alone. She had been raped by a battalion of soldiers at one point, and I think that was before she moved on. But she spent the war in Poland hiding, but not in hiding, but hiding in plain sight. I think most of the people who hired her had no idea that she was Jewish.

INT: When you know that story, that she would, as you say, masquerade as a non-Jew, and she would hide in plain sight, and her language ability and so on, what does that say about her to you? What do you take away from that?

ELIZABETH: I think a lot of it...part of it's luck. A lot of people...this is also something I felt in Facing History: some of these people survived because of some dumb luck in place (laughs); not all of it was abilities and stuff. The fact that she had a family and knew this stuff. She was incredibly bright and incredibly smart and she had a lot of life skills for somebody who probably wouldn't have needed them, and I think that is something I've really taken from her. This is somebody who had the strength to figure out by herself as a young teenager how to survive. There were people who helped along the way, as you need to have in any of these survival stories. You can't always do it yourself, but there was a grit. And that was something I saw throughout my life with her. She seemed really fragile in a lot of ways. She was very childlike, and very minor things would just absolutely delight her (laughs). She sort of had that child wonderment. But there was a real hanging onto life, and a "I'm going to survive" instinct that I think was somewhat masked by some of her day-to-day characteristics.

INT: When you say childlike wonder, can you give me some examples?

ELIZABETH: When I was a kid it would just be anything would just be the most delightful thing, and she'd be so excited by small things. I remember as a kid she would take me to the King of Prussia Mall. We'd go on the train or the bus to the King of Prussia Mall. And there was one day where I got to eat ice cream and soft pretzels and that was my meal for the day. (Laughs) It was like, yeah, that's fine. She enjoyed things the kids would enjoy, she would run around on parks, she would climb monkey bars. She

just had a lot of childlike qualities. When she was sick and on a lot of pain medication, that really came out, where the smallest thing would make her crack up for days, and she just found it hilarious. A lot of that joy didn't totally go away, which was really remarkable.

INT: What do you think the impact of the Holocaust was on her though?

ELIZABETH: There was a lot. There was a lot of pain, there was a lot of inability to trust. I remember as a child, if I wanted to go out with friends, it was, "Oh, well that's scary" and whatever. There was a lot of fear and a lot of trepidation about a lot, and distrust of the system and distrust of the world really, and wanting to keep people safe and protected. I think that was a real strong thing that got passed down to me.

INT: Do you think she was hyper vigilant as far as your safety, her daughter's safety, well, the whole family's safety?

ELIZABETH: Yeah, absolutely. I remember she moved into an apartment building in Ardmore, and it was, "I refuse to live on the first floor because someone can get in. The second floor you can still climb up. The fourth floor someone can climb down from the building. We have to be on the third floor." It was like, okay.

INT: That's what she needed to feel safe.

ELIZABETH: Fine, if that's where we need to be, that's the floor we can be on. There was a lot of... And, you know, Ardmore, it was a lovely place to be. It was not the middle of New York City, it was not Brooklyn, but still it was, okay, here's the way people can get in, and now it's just part of the way she reacted to the world.

INT: Elizabeth, did she tell you any stories personally, or did she avoid the topic?

ELIZABETH: She told me a bit, but it was very general, so I didn't hear specific stories, I heard more general: "Oh yes, when I was a child I grew up on a farm." There were some of those, but the stories themselves, it came down more... she talked a little bit about how she met my grandfather after the war. As soon as the war ended, then the stories were allowed to be told of: "Here's how we were in the camps, and he was the most handsome one, and here's how I met him." It wasn't not talked about, but the stories of the war themselves were not talked about.

INT: So those you learned from your mother.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

INT: And did you ask your mother, or did she just talk about it periodically?

ELIZABETH: There was a combination, I think, but there's some where I learned sort of hearing about it, but other ones where I asked and said, "Now I want to know more

about this.” I think it was a real combination of both.

INT: So you don’t feel like it was told to you indiscriminately or at times when you didn’t really want to hear it, you sort of had to hear it.

ELIZABETH: No.

INT: Nothing like that.

ELIZABETH: I think that’s something my mother really wanted to make sure, because from what she’s told me about her childhood, it was told somewhat indiscriminately, or at times where it maybe was trying to be a lesson that necessarily wasn’t a safe...wasn’t appropriate reaction to. But for me, I think she made sure that the way I learned about it was very different than the way she did.

INT: And so you never really sat down with your grandmother and asked her questions.

ELIZABETH: No.

INT: Did you feel like it was just a forbidden topic and you-

ELIZABETH: I think part of it was by the time I felt old enough to really have that conversation was when she had already started to deteriorate and was when she was very sick, so it wasn’t necessarily...you know, I didn’t feel like it was appropriate. Her mind wasn’t there and I didn’t want her to be in more pain (laughs) with any of that. Honestly, we have the recordings, and I’ve read some of the transcripts from the first time and that was a way for me to learn some of that stuff as well.

INT: Yeah, I wanted to ask you, did you get a chance to read the transcripts or hear the interviews?

ELIZABETH: I haven’t read all of them and I haven’t heard them, but I’ve seen parts of them, yes.

INT: Now, what about your grandfather? Did he talk about the war at all, and how did you learn about-

ELIZABETH: He talked a little bit, probably a little bit more than my grandmother, but it was also very general. He wasn’t a great storyteller, so everything was a little bit all over the place (laughs) when he would tell a story. But I certainly...I learned where he grew up, I learned a lot about his childhood, where he...there’s a story where he was one of many children, he lived in a small village. As a way I describe it to people who don’t know history is, imagine *Fiddler On the Roof*, that’s the village (laughs), small little village that was all Jewish, which I think was a little bit different than my grandmother who was closer to a city. He was the youngest of I want to say nine. There were a lot of them.

INT: Wow.

ELIZABETH: But he was a little bit of a stinker probably. He loved chicken, so I knew the story that he was little and he decided to save the chicken from being eaten and make it into a pet chicken, so it lived in the attic and had no feathers. I knew those stories (laughs) about him, and the things that helped (inaudible) personality, and I knew that he and his brother had survived together and that they went to go find...I didn't know why when I was a child why they ended up in Russia, but they ended up in Russia during the war, and I found out later it was because they went to go look for their brother who had joined the Communist movement, he was a little bit older. But they ended up in the work camps in Russia.

INT: Right, but he escaped the concentration camps. He didn't-

ELIZABETH: Yes, he escaped the concentration camps and was in a work camp, and it's probably (inaudible) to say ran out because he did have more of the traditional Jewish features (laughs), but once again I think was (inaudible). But I did also see that clean...he had an incredible survival streak, and I think that's something I've seen in all survivors. They cling to stuff and they survive things that other people wouldn't.

INT: Why do you think he had that? What was it about him that was-

ELIZABETH: I'm not sure. I think part of it was that it was him and his brother together, so I think they sort of did that to each other and sort of helped each other support along. I think that he was a bit selfish, and so he was, "I want to live for myself, and I want to have that." And I think that served him well to sort of be thinking about himself a lot, so I think that was probably a trait that helped him survive.

INT: And the impact on him. What do you think was the impact on him?

ELIZABETH: Well, I think there was a lot. I think both of them, honestly, had health impacts, which, I mean, I think that (laughs) their health...and I think his was much worse. He wore a lot of shoes that didn't fit, and you could tell once you tried to get him shoes later in life, and stuff. So there was a lot of health impact. And I think that there was...I think it helped sort of solidify some of the stuff of yes, I should be selfish, yes, I should take care of myself. He was rather sensitive at times too, where if something's going wrong he would get very upset, disproportionate at times to what was happening, where he would just start crying and being upset about stuff. That was going on, and I think that was both of them, where they felt the weight of the world on them. He wasn't as fearful as my grandmother. He sort of still would go out. But he had his community and the places he was comfortable, and he was very happy going to those places and nowhere else. He didn't sort of venture beyond that, which is why he stayed in New York for so many years, I think beyond when my grandmother. He eventually did move after my grandmother passed to Philadelphia to be with us, and into a home there.

INT: But he stayed in Brooklyn-

ELIZABETH: He stayed in Brooklyn much longer than she did.

INT: Jewish community.

ELIZABETH: Yeah, in the Jewish community in Brighton Beach where he was very comfortable.

INT: And did he tell you stories? Not really.

ELIZABETH: He did not, not much. I knew general stuff that he was in Russia and things like that, and we had some family in Russia from one of the older brothers that came over when I was in elementary school. They moved from Russia to Israel and then to the States. And so I sort of knew that piece of it to some degree, but not the details of his experience.

INT: Are there are stories that you heard either through your grandparents or through your mother that made a particular impact on you, that you kind of took into your own life? We call them transformative-

ELIZABETH: I think learning how my grandmother's resourcefulness, how she used what she knew and blended in, I think that really had an impact personally on how I saw her, but also on myself, of like, okay, is that something that I could do, or what would I do in these circumstances? And knowing that there were people who helped her along the way, and people who said, "I'm standing up and doing something," I think that was fairly impactful to me.

INT: How do you feel about being a grandchild of survivors? (Pause) I guess that's a...well, I'm just going to ask you. How do you feel about that? What does it mean to you?

ELIZABETH: Yeah, it's definitely a real central part of my identity. Particularly as I've grown up I've seen...I do identify as Jewish, even though I don't identify as religiously Jewish. And I think that...once I started moving outside the community I was really familiar with, I realized that I had a very different experience being Jewish than people who were not grandchildren of survivors. There was a real divide there that I think I had not seen as a child. You know, the people whose family had gotten out before the war or were not affected by it for whatever reason, because of where they were, there was a real difference between how we looked at the world, what was important to us.

INT: What are those differences?

ELIZABETH: I think there's a lot more of a cultural...like focusing on we need to keep the cultural traditions alive and the things that matter. I also think that there's a difference in how I see family. I have a lot of fake family. There's a lot of people who weren't related to me who I still consider family. I think that's a very traditional trait of Holocaust survivors, where they created, wherever they moved to, created a brand new community,

because most of the families were gone.

INT: They didn't have.

ELIZABETH: They didn't have the family, so they created this new family. So I have a lot of aunts who are not aunts (laughs), or very distantly removed aunts who are aunts and stuff like that. I think that's something my parents have certainly brought down, that's something I've brought down, just sort of family is what you make of it. There's certainly the ones you're born into, but there's a lot of people who you might not be related to who become family. And I think that's very different to people who grew up with large families and sort of have that more American experience. I think there's a different relationship with food and culture. I certainly know how to make a lot of the stuff, and I make traditional Passover dishes, and I make matzah ball soup anytime I don't feel well (laughs). I don't know that most...not all Americans...more American families do. It's something that once you meet...it's a way to tie you to other people. When I was in Boston working at the organization, most of the families there were not children of or grandchildren of survivors, but there were a few who were, and it was pretty easy to pick them out.

INT: Some radar there.

ELIZABETH: The radar, yeah. There was a radar of being able to figure out who was there in their relationships. And I felt a lot of affinity for the Holocaust survivors themselves who would stop by and stuff. It was a real interesting place to be working, and I felt like really enhanced my understanding of that experience.

INT: Your relationships with your mother and father, could you describe those? That's one part I haven't talked to you about.

ELIZABETH: Yeah. I feel really close to my family. I think part of it is the fact that we sort of have that tie of this importance of family and how cherished family can be. I think part of it is being an only child of an only child. And I think part of it is, you know, just the way we get along very well. I have really good relationships. I talk to my parents on the phone just about every single day, or I text them if I don't. I come home fairly frequently. They have a place in Delaware that I go to in during the summer every other weekend or so. And it was hard being in Boston and feeling like there would be months going by where I wouldn't see them, and being far away. So I feel really, really close to them. We do a lot of things together as a family. We do a lot of events together and it's a lot of shared responsibilities. My mom's had some health issues, and I feel like I need to be able to be close and be here and be a family unit. (Inaudible)

INT: I'm sorry to hear that about your mother. Is she okay?

ELIZABETH: Yeah. So, when my grandmother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, a few years after that my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. She's fully recovered from that, but since then she's had a heart attack while we were traveling in Italy, which

was so much fun (laughs). So there's just been a bunch of stuff where we've been together as a family, and I really feel like...She had a surgery when I was in the Marshall Islands, and it was really hard to be that far away and not be able to be there and be a support. I feel very close to both my parents, but I do have a different relationship with each of them. My mom and I, I think, have a lot in common. As I grew up, she was working but only part time, so we had a lot of time together. And there's a lot of stuff which I learn from her, but I can interpret things that I think other people can't because I'm her daughter (laughs). So there's times where I just want to be able to be there. I know other people are doing their best to take care of her, but I know I can do it better, so I feel like I should be there.

INT: How do you tease out the impact of the Holocaust on this family closeness that you have, versus the only child of an only child of an only child? Because I think your grandmother also, because her mother lost all those other siblings, she wound up being an only child as well.

ELIZABETH: Yes, she was.

INT: So it's three generations. I just know from people I know in my life who were only children for various reasons, they were sort of adultified in a way. They would be with their parents a lot more than families with siblings, so they would be privy to more adult conversations, or...not necessarily inappropriately, but they're just more part of the group, you know what I mean, than going off and...

ELIZABETH: I think there's definitely a degree of that. Particularly when I came back from the Marshall Islands and was living at home was around the time everyone was deciding about social security, so I knew a lot about social security for a 24-year-old (laughs). So there was some of that stuff. Not inappropriate, but still just not relevant necessarily to my choices. But I knew a lot about social security at that time.

INT: I guess my question is, how much of your family closeness is related to that only child of an only child of an only child thing, and how much of it is, if you can even tease it out, is Holocaust impact?

ELIZABETH: I'm not sure if I can totally tease it out, but I think that it's both. I think that we would be close if we didn't have this, but I think that the feeling of needing to be there for family comes a lot from the Holocaust experience, and I think the feeling that I need to be there for extended family comes from that. My parents have a fair number of friends who I consider aunts and uncles, some who I even call aunt and uncle. But they're all getting older, and as they start having health problems and stuff, I'm like, okay, so you're all moving to the same area so I can take care of all of you, right? (laughs) I feel like this is my duty, is to sort of take care of that family, and I think a lot of that comes from the Holocaust experience of wanting to create that community that is your family unit.

INT: So that would be a definite impact on you.

ELIZABETH: Yeah.

INT: What about messages you got from your grandparents? What were the messages about the Holocaust, or any messages about the meaning of life or the importance of things or values that you feel they specifically passed down to you?

ELIZABETH: I think the kindness and the needing to think about others besides yourself, I think comes, and wanting to sort of...caring about strangers who are in poor circumstances, or poorer circumstances, I think a lot of that comes from that upbringing, although I would say part of it also comes from my dad's Protestant upbringing as well, you know, wanting to help others. I think there's a lot of that, of that sort of you don't think just about yourself but think about the world and care about others in the world. That was something I felt very strongly about with my grandmother, in particular that that was a key value of hers, was caring about community and people. And I think that's been very much carried down.

And then the fact that it's not...one interesting one was sort of relationship to money. I always felt like it was never one person's money, it was family (laughs). Whatever you needed, it's what you did. I got an allowance as a kid and whatever, but I can save most of it away because I was a little bit frugal (laughs). Once again that practical piece came out. I think a lot of it was whatever you need you give to others, particularly in the family. It's not, this is mine, therefore I can't share it, which being an only child was a good counterpoint. As an only child, it's your stuff, it's your stuff, it's your stuff, because you're the only one who has it (laughs). You're not getting things handed down and shared in the same way. So knowing that that value of having to give back, and that it is sort of that communal, I think was a real good counterbalance and a lot of how I became who I am today.

INT: That's great. What is important to you in life? What are the most important things to you, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Family I think would be number one. Whatever you define family as, it doesn't have to actually be the people related to you. That would be sort of the top. And then caring for others. That's I think a lot of why I end up in the non-profit space. I don't think I would have been happy in a corporate environment, and I have tried to stray away from that, and I'm just not happy there. I want to be in a community of people who are like-minded and want to give back to the world in some way or another, even if it's for a paycheck, but you're usually getting a paycheck that's a little bit less than if you worked somewhere else. You might have better hours or whatever. But a lot of it's about the mission and caring about what's going on, and that's something that's really important to me, is finding a place where I do care about the mission and have that sense of going back. So I think the fact that I ended up in the non-profit world is just really key to how I grew up and my experience.

INT: It makes sense. It makes sense coming from where you came from. The impact on your mother, we didn't talk about that. I'm jumping around a little bit here, but I'm

realizing I forgot to ask you about that. What do you think the impact of being a child of survivors was on her?

ELIZABETH: I think it was really hard. I think it was being a child of survivors, being a child of immigrants, having to navigate the world. She's talked about it a lot. As a therapist, she does do a lot of talking and we're a talk processing family for the most part, so we talk about a lot of these things. I think that it was really hard and it required her to grow up really fast, and I think it really influenced the way she raised me, of what she wanted to keep in terms of what her parents taught her, of that infinite love that no matter what I will care about you, I will love you, while also some of the fear, trying to put that a little bit further away. I was a really, really skittish child and really, you know...it was very susceptible to the fear (laughs). So she tried very hard to keep that away. But I think there was a lot of how she parented and how she raised me that was either a positive or a "I don't want to do that, I'm going to be very restrictive about that," which is why I think she was sort of that intermediate storyteller, and wanted to be deciding when I was learning things that wasn't a out of anger or out of fear that was [why] she was telling me; it was because it was the right time, or something I was interested [in], or relevant to what I was learning about.

INT: So what I'm hearing you say is that it was really hard for her growing up with two survivor parents, and there was also being a child of immigrants as she had to sort of navigate the world for them in a way. Do you think the stories that she heard were hard on her? I mean, do you think that the Holocaust affected her?

ELIZABETH: I think it was, to some degree. She also not only heard stories of her parents, but heard stories of their friends and their families, and sort of got a different...you know, heard more because of that. And I think she felt the weight of that, of having to sort of help them navigate the world, knowing that that was their experience of how to handle certain situations or circumstances, based on previous experiences they had had, of, no, it's okay to go do this, I learned this in school, therefore we can have this conversation with the police or with whoever. You can trust these people, or things like that. She definitely did learn about...I think having that extended family of everyone there was really important, and something that she had tried to carry on. I think that obligation to family. One of my mother's good friends, her husband had passed away, her daughter had passed away, her grandchildren had both passed away, and so she didn't really have any family left. And so my mother, towards the end of her life, even though this aunt was in Montreal, spent a lot of time going up and helping take care of her and stuff. It was that, I don't have to, but this is my family. I'm not related, but this is my family, I need to be there even though I may not like this person right now.

INT: Very giving and very committed it sounds like.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

INT: We just have a few more questions. Do you think that the Holocaust could happen again?

ELIZABETH: I absolutely do. I don't know if it would happen necessarily on that scale, but I think we're seeing a lot of it. If you think even of something like the Armenian genocide, yes, it wasn't the same scale. I think it's human nature to pinpoint people and decide that they are scapegoats for whatever reason, and that someone is better because of whatever reason, something that you can easily differentiate. I don't know that it would necessarily be targeted towards Jews in the same way, but I still think that there's a lot of anti-Semitism, there's a lot of lack of understanding, and I think stuff like this is still going on and could definitely happen again.

INT: Do you have an optimistic view of the world today? What are some of your political views and how do you view the world today?

ELIZABETH: I'm definitely not that optimistic at the moment. There's a lot of horrible things going on, both internationally and domestically. The United States, I think that there's an incredible rise in hate crimes that's really hard to watch and hard to see. I feel a little bit in a liberal bubble in D.C., despite the fact that the President and everyone else lives there. It's still one of the most liberal cities in the country. I think that there's a lot going on. I sort of hope that this is the last rise before a lot of this stuff is shut down, or that it's at least bringing it to the surface so that we can maybe deal with some of it. You know, the marches in South Carolina and in Virginia and all that, I hope that some of this stuff brings it to light that you can... people realize that this stuff still exists, white nationalist and all of that. You see it abroad in what happened in Ukraine and in other places, in Africa, some of the cleansing that's happened. I hope that this sort of is the last hurrah, at least in the States, and brings a lot of it to light, and then we can deal with it. But it's certainly hard to watch.

INT: Yeah, it is. How do you cope with difficult times in your life? What are some of your coping strategies, would you say?

ELIZABETH: A lot of it is spending time with family and talking and going back to family. Some of it is just, okay, how do I deal with the moment? If it's a direct crisis moment of things, I tend to go into a bit of an auto pilot mode of, here's what needs to happen, here's what we need to do, here's what's the next steps we have to take. Very much I think that survival, okay, things are going wrong, let's figure out what it is. I was cooking and I lit a pan on fire, because [I] burned oil. It was okay. I waited downstairs. Okay, it stinks still. Let's clean that up. Let's do that. And then after, I realized I burned my hand. I was like, ahhhh! Now I'm going to cry. (laughs)

INT: (Laughs) So you cope first.

ELIZABETH: I cope first, I get through what needs to happen in the moment, and then I sort of deal with it later. I think it is an effective use of denial, how you get through the moment, and then you can cope with it once you're no longer in the moment. But that's sort of how I respond to crises, actually things whether it's, you know, my boss was recently let go, so okay, how do we sort of... what do we need to do, how do we (inaudible) access, what do we need to handle there, and then, okay, now I have to deal

with the fact that my boss isn't there anymore, type of thing. Something even as minor as that. The bigger things going on in the world, I think you find your community, you talk about that type of stuff, and you keep soldiering on.

INT: Who is your community, would you say?

ELIZABETH: I have I think it's a very remote but very close group of friends. There's a few people that I've met at different stages in my life, friends from middle school that I grew up with, friends from college, friends from being in the Marshall Islands, friends from being in Boston, none of whom are where they used to be. So we're a little bit removed, but it's good to reach out to those people and sort of have those discussions when you need it.

INT: And you stay in touch with all of them.

ELIZABETH: Yup.

INT: Would you consider yourself to be an optimistic person or a pessimistic person, just in general?

ELIZABETH: I think I am optimistic with a heavy dose of cynicism (laughs). I try to sort of see the best, I sort of hope for the best, but plan for the worst. So I don't necessarily have a negative outlook, but I definitely want to...you know, okay, that would be a great thing to happen, but if it doesn't, here's the other extra plans we can put in place. I want to be optimistic, but I think life has cut it down a little bit at times.

INT: One of my last questions is, what are your goals for yourself in your life, where do you see yourself headed ten years from now, or even five years from now?

ELIZABETH: I'm really not sure. I don't tend to do a lot of long-term goal planning. It feels like it doesn't actually ever end up that way. The journey I'm on tends to be a little bit more useful. I love being in D.C., I want to stay in D.C., I just recently purchased an apartment in D.C...

INT: Oh, great.

ELIZABETH: So I want to stay there. I have some little short-term plans for how to improve that. But I just want to be happy and satisfied with my life. I want to make sure that I'm getting the things out of it that I want, whatever those are at that time. I know what my needs are will change over time. I just want to make sure I keep that sense of community, keep that sense of feeling like I am grounded and solid somewhere and have the support system around me, but what happiness looks like I think will change over time.

INT: Is there anything that you would like to add to this interview that I haven't asked you? Anything you think would be important to add at this time to what we've talked

about, about your grandparents, your parents, yourself, the Holocaust?

ELIZABETH: I'm trying to think. I think one of the things that was really interesting for me was when we started learning about the Holocaust in school, and sort of what I learned when, and how that was really when I brought...like learned more about my grandparents who watched that opportunity of here's what other stories looked like, was like. I think it was sort of like, okay, was this their experience, was this their experience, and then trying to fit into buckets, and then realizing there is no bucket. It's all... (laughs) There's maybe stuff that ties them together, but everyone's story was unique. And I think that having that in the classroom was really important to sort of get that, okay, let's talk about this and what it looks like. And then, that really brought a lot of stuff out. I think we did parts of it throughout school, but really in high school is where we did a concentrated let's look at global history time period, at least in the Pennsylvania education system. And that's where I think I really learned a lot about the details that I may not have put together before that.

INT: Sort of the backdrop of where your grandparents were.

ELIZABETH: Exactly. The backdrop, and then that brought out a lot of, let me ask some questions and actually get some details of what really happened. I knew that general sort of sketch, but I didn't know some of the missing pieces. That was really interesting. I think there was a lot as a child of putting it together myself, and never really getting that full sketch, putting pieces in place. And I think once I got that backdrop, everything started to make more sense. It was a lot of putting pieces of the puzzle together as a child, without sort of having that full context.

INT: That's really interesting, because a lot of children of survivors, for example, say a similar thing, where they say that they would just get bits and pieces of stories, and they never really had a timeline or any kind of coherent narrative of first this happened, then that happened.

ELIZABETH: Exactly, and that's how I felt as a child too. I had the broad sketch of they were in Poland, then the war happened and your grandmother stayed in Poland, your grandfather was in Russia, then they went to Germany, then they...I sort of had that very broad sketch, but they were bits and pieces, but I didn't know where they fit in the timeline. Getting that broader backdrop and then sort of having the transcripts and sort of knowing that more coherent history I think really helped.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to add, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: No, I think that was it.

INT: That's really great. We really appreciate your being willing to be re-interviewed for this update. Once it's transcribed we'll send you a, I guess via Dropbox or something like that, the interview and the transcript. And I will send you an updated consent form as well.

ELIZABETH: Great, thank you.

INT: Thank you very much. Take good care, bye-bye.

ELIZABETH: You too, bye-bye.