

## GENERATION TO GENERATION: A DISCUSSION WITH CHILDREN OF JEWISH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

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### ABSTRACT

Five San Francisco Bay Area children of survivors discussed how growing up in a survivor family has affected them. They reflected on when they first recalled hearing about the Holocaust in their family and how they felt then, how the Holocaust affected their childhood, what later led them to get connected with other children of survivors, and the positive impact their parents' Holocaust experience had on them. Some of the common themes they discussed include the sense of being different from others, fear of non-Jews, trying to protect their parents from more pain and wanting somehow to make up for their parents' suffering, conflictual relationships with their parents today, feeling the loss of grandparents they never knew, having a keen sensitivity to other people's suffering, and actively fighting social injustice around the world.

The Holocaust has created a complex legacy for the second generation, the children of survivors, who inherited the Holocaust directly from their own parents who survived it. Whether or not the Holocaust was talked about in the family, children of survivors somehow always knew about it. It somehow seemed to always reverberate in the family, and while some children had vivid dreams of horror and death, most always sensed their parents' pain and knew not to cause them any more.

Most children of survivors also felt apart and different from their peers while growing up. Even if they were not born abroad after the war, they *felt* European and often felt alienated from the "regular American kids" whose families seemed so different in custom and outlook. Those American kids seemed, to children of survivors, so carefree, so complacent—and were often envied. For children of survivors to speak to these others about the Holocaust or themselves or their parents was to risk not being understood, being seen as strange, and perhaps most of all, to end up feeling alone and unvalued.

But how can anyone begin to understand the unthinkable, unimaginable, unfathomable that was the Holocaust, particularly if your own parents were among the very few who survived? As children, our parents often loomed larger than life. They had come back from the dead,

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