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IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE HOLOCAUST

Mayor Lili Bosse discusses her family history

By Nancy Yeang

Your mother Rose Toren is a Holocaust survivor. In what ways did this influence you?

She was in the death camp Auschwitz, and she lost her family at a very, very young age. She hid out during the very famous death march; when everybody was walking she left the walk and hid in a barn to survive.

[My parents] met in Israel, and after Israel they came to the United States to try and live the American Dream. They had me, and they moved to Beverly Hills because of the schools and the quality of life here. I initially lived in Queens, [N.Y.] and when I was nine years old my parents moved to Beverly Hills. They were hoping to be able to provide the American Dream for me since I was an only child.

[My mom] always instilled in me a sense of a belief that nothing was impossible. That everything is possible and you should never give up. Her words that I have heard as a child up until now as an adult was to never give up no matter what type of roadblocks come before you, to always move ahead. She has always been a very strong role model for me as a woman and having a strong optimistic nature in the face of diversity. To always keep going and not to let anything hold you back. I admire her sense of strength.

You mentioned in your speech that you didn't appreciate how special your parents were when you were a child. When did you start to really understand your family's history and what it meant to you?

As we get older we have a different perspective about the world around us as well as ourselves. When I became a mother myself, I had a whole other perspective about what it's like to be a mother.

As a child, I think my parents were the only ones I knew [who] were not American. My parents

had thick accents and they didn't speak or write well so I felt very alone in that all my other friends' parents were very Americanized.

I think a huge turning point for me was when I went to visit Auschwitz [two years ago with my husband, Jon]. As I walked around and saw the crematoriums and the gas chambers and just stood there on that land, what really stuck with me was that the human spirit, no matter what was being thrown at all the people [who] unfortunately died during the war, they all wanted to survive. Even though their dignity was trying to be taken away from them they had a very strong will to live. By standing on that sacred soil it really changed me in a way that I really understood what people went through when they

were going through such [an] incredible, horrible part of history.

In your speech you say, "We are the six million Jews and they are us." What impact does your family history have on your sons, Andrew and Adam?

They grew up hearing stories from my mother and from my father and they also heard it from me. They also didn't grow up with an extended family because everybody had died in the Holocaust. I think it's something that became the fiber of who they are as well.

They're the next witness to keep this story alive because [we're unfortunately losing] Holocaust survivors due to their age, so it's really up to the next generation, and the generations after that. This is something they will take either to their children, or to their children's children, so I think that it will actually help define who they are.

Tell us about 30 Years After and the Yom Ha'Shoah Remembrance event last Sunday.

[Sunday] was the first time that 30 Years After had done this event. They did it at Nessah Synagogue. The room was full; every seat was taken. People of all ages [attended] which was also really nice, it was multi-generational.

[Other speakers included a Holocaust survivor Eva Brettler, Doctor Ari Babaknia who is the author of, Humanity, Not, and filmmaker Ben-Hur Sephr. Co-sponsors of the event were 30 Years After, Jimena, Nessah, The Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, The Memorah Foundation, and The Righteous Conversations Project.]

Then we did a candle lighting in honor of the six million Jews that perished.

Sam Yebri asked me to speak. [He founded 30 Years After]. It's an organization for Persian American Jews to remember what they went through in Iran with the coming of the Shah, to remember what they as a culture have gone through. [It's] a very similar crossover between immigrants; trying to maintain their culture and their sense of values and family when they are coming to the United States. It's [a] very similar feeling to my parents' generation who were Polish immigrants coming to the United States

I think many of us who come from immigrant backgrounds can really relate to the experience of having parents from different cultures, then coming to America and trying to hold on to your heritage and your culture, and also fitting into the American Dream.

*Mayor Lili Bosse's speech at Nessah Educational and Cultural Center
Yom Ha'Shoah Remembrance Event
April 27, 2014*

When I was running for office three years ago, I spoke at Nessah Synagogue. Some of you may have been there, as I was very choked up standing here. I said then is how I feel now, being here. I felt like I was home, a sense of belonging. I am the only child of Holocaust survivors. My parents were Polish. They were older than my friends' parents. They had accents that my American friends' parents didn't have. They were different.

My mother had a tattooed number on her arm and kids would tease and ask if that was our telephone number.

As a child, I must admit as kids often do, I really didn't appreciate how special my parents were. At times I felt a bit embarrassed by their accents, or by the fact that they didn't write or speak English well.

I had no grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts or uncles. My parents' entire family was murdered by Hitler. I knew we were different so therefore I was different, and being an only child, I carried this alone in my heart.

I grew up hearing the stories of what would have been if my grandparents, aunts, and uncles had survived.

I heard about the Shabbat dinners, the close knit family that my parents themselves had as children, only to be stolen from them by the gas chambers and crematoriums of the concentration camps.

When I ran for office I told everyone that I was an only child of Holocaust survivors. Some people asked me why am I even mentioning it, what does that have to do with serving in political office?

To me, the answer was simple: it had everything to do with it. It had defined me. It has made me who I am to every ounce of the fiber of my being.

My moral compass, my love of community and family is because I am the proud daughter of Holocaust survivors.

Two years ago, my husband Jon and I went to visit Auschwitz. There are no words to express how that moment changed me forever. Standing on that sacred soil, what has imprinted me was that no matter what dignity Hitler tried to take away from the lives of the Jews, we had a will to survive, we did survive, we thrived, and we will never, ever forget.

My parents, as immigrants, sacrificed everything to give me a chance for the American dream. They came to America and had me with the hope that I can lead the life that was taken from them.

As I stand here as Mayor of Beverly Hills, the most world famous city in the world, the only child of Rose and Jack Toren, Holocaust survivors, I thank God every day for the gift that all survivors have given us all.

A chance to honor them in our lifetimes, a chance to look into each other's souls and hearts and see the sparks of life that lost their lives, to that we could continue the flame.

They live in our hearts. They live in each of us every day to every second of every breath we take.

We will always remember. We will never forget. We are the six million Jews and they are us.