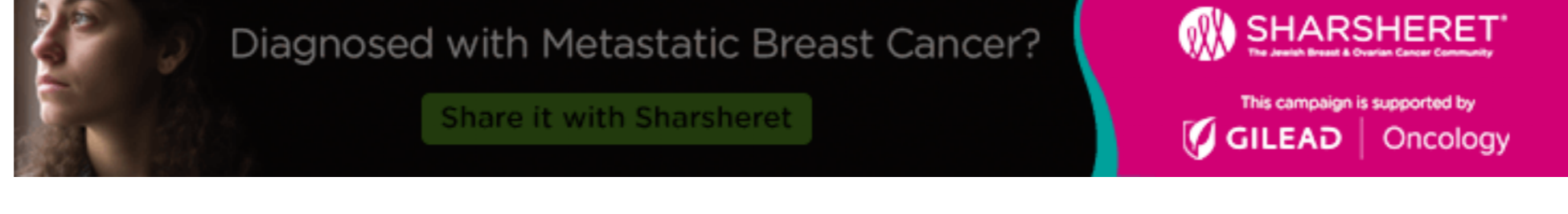


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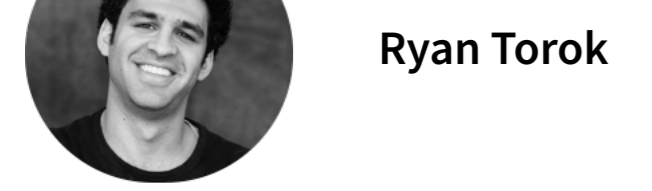
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Carolyn Siegel: Humanizing Holocaust History

Carolyn Siegel is on a mission to gather testimony from the last generation that will have had real-life, personal interactions with the increasingly shrinking population of Holocaust survivors.



Ryan Torok

April 3, 2024

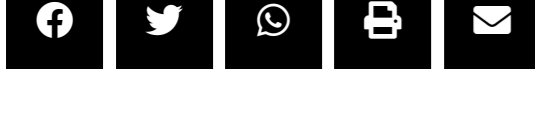


Photo by @zushagoldin



Carolyn Siegel is on a mission to gather testimony from the last generation that will have had real-life, personal interactions with the increasingly shrinking population of Holocaust survivors.

The San Fernando Valley-based marketing consultant is the founder of "If You Heard What I Heard," a nonprofit initiative launched in April 2021 that films grandchildren of Holocaust survivors — known as "3Gs," meaning third generation — retelling their grandparents' stories.

"Because I am a 3G myself, and a storyteller in my career, those two things lend themselves well to filming these interviews and asking the questions, because I empathize with the position the interviewees are in," Siegel, 41, said during a recent phone interview. "When an interviewee says, 'They always said to 'never forget,'" I understand that. I feel that obligation, too."

Siegel's credits the inspiration of her work to her grandparents, both survivors, as well as to the early days of the pandemic, when a local synagogue was vandalized during the unrest associated with George Floyd's murder. It occurred to her that the more people were aware of what survivors had experienced, the less antisemitism would persist — thus the name of her organization.

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"I think it's made it even more obvious why our work is important and why telling these stories is so critical," Siegel said. "It's not just the massacre that happened on Oct. 7 — it's the aftermath of that massacre. The global rise of antisemitism we've seen since then is why these stories must be told."

To date, Siegel has recorded 50 interviews, 47 of which are currently available for viewing on her website, <http://ifyouheardwhatheard.com>. There's video of music manager Scooter Braun recounting his Hungarian-born grandmother's deportation to Auschwitz; of actor Josh Gad discussing what his Polish grandfather endured at a forced labor camp; and Emily Kane Miller recounting the story of her grandmother, Yetta Kane, working with a group of partisans. These, among other testimonies, are viewable on the website. (Full disclosure: Siegel interviewed my sister about our grandmother, an Auschwitz survivor, for the project.)

Meanwhile, there's a waitlist of hundreds of 3Gs wanting to share their grandparents' stories with Siegel.

Since its inception, "If You Heard What I Heard" has largely been a one-woman show. Siegel conducts the interview in the interviewee's home, bringing along nothing more than an iPhone and a tripod. She has no film crew, and the only production support she gets is from a small team of film editors, who help her trim hours of video from each interview to more watchable clips lasting approximately 30 minutes.

The no-frills clips are exclusively the grandchildren speaking into the camera and sharing their grandparents' stories. The few production flourishes include photographs of the survivors that are woven into each video.

But despite limited resources, Siegel is doing more than gathering 3G testimony. She's creating a community that expands with each additional recorded interview while providing a template for how to keep survivor testimony alive and relevant for future generations.

"I started this as a grandkid of survivors thinking we're losing touch with these stories," she said. "And if we lose touch with these stories, they'll get lost, and they've always told us, 'We can't forget.'"

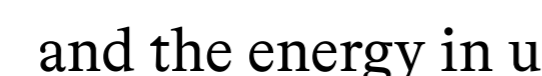
As part of this process, she's partnered with similarly minded synagogues and organizations, and she routinely holds social events designed for young professionals. These events include a [May 8 concert with performer Matisyahu](#) that will raise funds and awareness for her growing organization.

"We're building a community of young Jews who are proud to come together and celebrate Jewish life," she said, "and we're doing it in a way that's cool."

Courtesy IYHWIH

Siegel likes to say the third generation — her generation — is living proof of their grandparents' resilience. Thus, the onus is on them to preserve and retell these stories, she said.

"As we know, the Holocaust survivor generation is sadly dying out, and if you're not going to hear firsthand testimony from a survivor, you're absolutely going to hear the story from someone like me, or from any of the other interviewees on the site," Siegel said. "We're not going to let these stories die. We have the fight and the energy in us, among our generation, to ensure these stories live on."

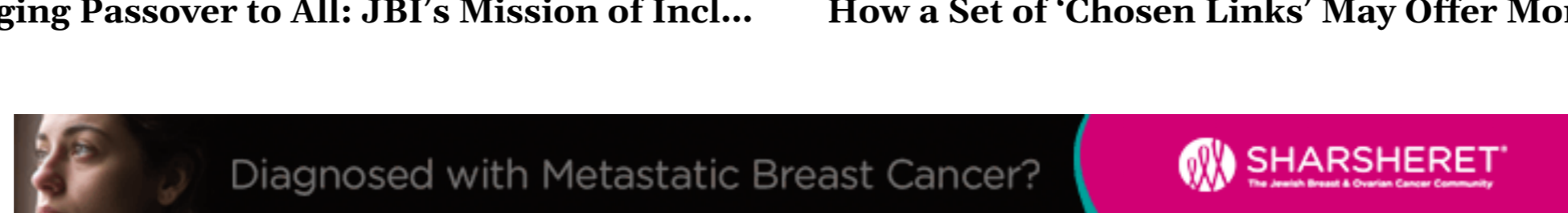


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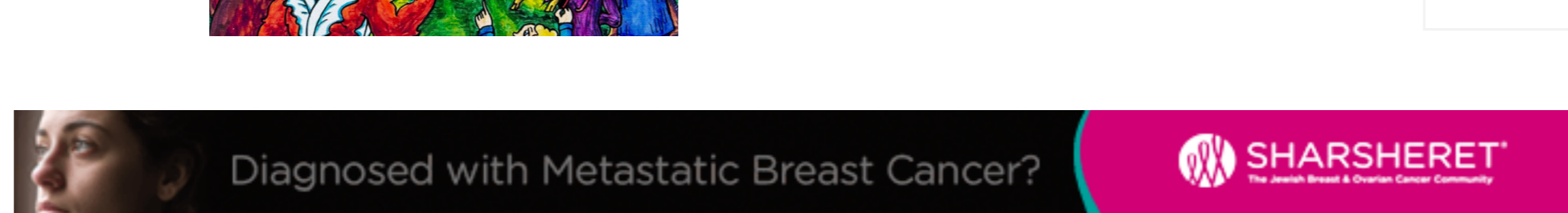
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