

## Conversation with the past

The world is seeing a rise in racism, nationalism, and populism, fuelled by the political instrumentalisation of issues such as immigration, economic inequalities, and religious differences. In the USA, President Donald Trump continues to spark debate with his divisive positions on immigration and his intention to build a wall at the border with Mexico to keep migrants from Latin America outside the country. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's far-right government is endorsing extreme anti-immigration policies based on the misrepresentation and vilification of migrants coming from Asia and Africa. This widespread resurfacing of racism and nationalism inevitably brings to mind periods in recent history when a similar climate of growing intolerance resulted in the degeneration of politics, such as the rise of Nazifascism in Europe that led to the Holocaust. The publication of the book, *Resilience: one family's story of hope and triumph over evil*, offers the chance to hear the voice of a now retired infectious disease doctor, Judy Stone, reflecting on the importance of educating new generations on the pitfalls of extremism and nationalism, through the history of her Jewish family and the legacy of the trauma of those who survived the Holocaust.

*Resilience* stemmed from conversations that Stone had with relatives who had moved to the USA from Hungary after World War 2. Stone's mother, Magdus, her aunts, Klari, Kati, and Bozsi, and her uncles, Miklos and Sanyi, only started speaking about the dramatic details of their years in Europe late in life. Scarred by their experience during the Holocaust, this generation of Stone's family was understandably reluctant to delve into the tragedy they had witnessed, and at the same time, their silence was intended to protect the younger generations. Like for many other survivors of the Holocaust living in the USA, instrumental in opening the flood gates of memory was a project of the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation, which aimed at showing the value of personal experiences to those who were not aware of what had happened in Europe 50 years before. It was only when Stone listened to her relatives recalling openly what they had lived through in concentration camps that she fully realised the impressive resilience that her family had shown in the face of trauma.

Stone's family originated from the area of Sáránd in north-eastern Hungary, where her maternal grandfather, Mor Ehrenfeld, ran a general store and a tavern, thus being relatively well-off. It is fascinating to read in the book about the happy memories of family life in Sáránd, the visits to the synagogue, cooking kosher food, and the sense of belonging to the local community. Yet, with the death of Stone's grandmother, Anna, and her aunt, Henduka, from typhoid from spoiled food eaten at a

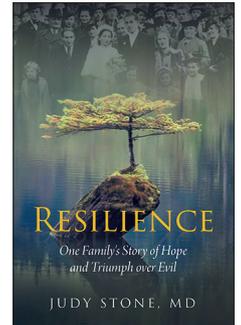
wedding, and the growing antisemitic laws adopted in the 1930s and early 1940s, things started to get worse. The family was progressively stripped of its civil rights and possessions, until in 1944, deportation of the Hungarian Jewish population started. Most of Stone's family members were deported to Auschwitz, where Mor was killed in the gas chamber. Stone's aunts, Kati and Bozsi, and her parents all survived through unspeakable experiences. Refusing the idea of staying in Europe, where antisemitic feelings persisted after the end of World War 2, everyone migrated to the USA. There, through much hard work, many sacrifices, and in some cases hiding their Jewish religion and past experiences, the family managed to make a living and grant a future for the following generation, to which Stone herself belongs.

*Resilience* does not skim over the enduring trauma experienced by Stone's relatives, especially her mother, Magdus, who was forced to abandon her first child to be transported to Auschwitz. In particular, Stone recalls the painful trip to Hungary she did with her mother, and how being back where she had been a girl, finding her house destroyed, and meeting those who might have betrayed them took a heavy toll on Magdus. For Stone's mother, it was incomprehensible, and impossible to accept, the fact that neighbours and friends could have turned their back on the Jewish population and be without remorse. Thus, *Resilience* acts as a reminder of how dangerous it is for any community to allow the rights of others to be dented little by little because of racism and prejudice.

Stone acknowledges that being a doctor and a researcher helped her to approach methodically the work required to join the dots between the different stories she collected. Yet, writing the book has also been a journey of self-discovery that has brought her closer to her native Jewish religion, and made her appreciate the importance of knowing her roots and understanding the value of tolerance. Ultimately, like for any of us, the person she is and the way she treats others has been shaped by the values and experiences that her family transmitted over the years to its younger generations.

Stone's own words encapsulate the value of the book, especially in our troubled times: "My determination to complete this project has been fueled by the rising divisiveness, 'othering,' and fascism that currently envelops our country and Europe. I wanted this story to serve as one more warning. It is my hope that if enough of us speak up, speak out, tell the truth about world history, we will somehow stem the tide of growing hatred".

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