

Bridge Four

Interview with my Mom: Marla Schacter

Hailey Hanson

In my interview, with my mother we discussed her experiences with discrimination and hate in Canada. We talked over FaceTime about different issues relating to prejudice that she felt growing up in Canada and different hate crimes she has been hearing about in the recent news. It was interesting for me to hear about her opinions on the levels of discrimination she faces, as a Jewish woman, in Canada and how it's has changed over time. We had somewhat varying opinions, despite being in similar circumstances at this time, but it was also an insight into discrimination she had faced that my family had never really discussed. The main thing that stuck out to me was her emphasis on how the previous discrimination she encountered was to someone's face, but also at the same time far more subtle and hidden. Someone would find out that you were Jewish and begin to act differently. Possibly even not hire you or invite you to events, clubs etc. Compared to today, face to face prejudice in subtle ways is far less common. Usually, hate today is either more anonymous, or if it is face to face it is far more violent or aggressive. This change will be important when I continue to figure out how hate crime has changed throughout the past few years. What specifics have hidden discrimination and hate become public?

I think doing an interview over FaceTime was actually a pretty effective way to perform an interview. It feels personal, because you can still feel and hear that person, but the screen presents a level of separation that I think aided in my mothers honesty and comfort. In this case, if she had really wanted to, my mom could have just hung up abruptly if she had gotten very

upset or uncomfortable. At the same time, the separation through the screen makes both able to talk easily, but not feel the same weight and pressure as sitting together physically. It alleviates much of the pressure about the way you are sitting, your body language etc. because it is far less apparent to someone who can usually just see a small image of your face. Sometimes it is much more awkward to speak about difficult things in person, although important, and it becomes easier to feel some sense of security through this separation. I'm curious whether sitting down and performing this interview in person would have affected the answers my mother gave me. Would it have felt less casual perhaps? I think it may have.

Transcript:

Starting with the main topic of hate crime in my research, have you every heard about, seen or experienced hate crime that has affected yourself or your community? It doesn't have to be violent crime by the way.

I have heard of hate crime around...in different parts of Canada.... Particularly towards Jews by damaging synagogue tomb stones. Um, I have also recently heard of some hate crime towards Muslim people walking in the city and I'm trying to remember where the crime took place because she was wearing her burka she was being yelled at by people to go home.. to ..and very aggressive just walking down the street. So she started becoming very intimidated just going outside. Um, there was a really bad story in the paper this weekend about a 9 year old girl from Syria who committed suicide in Calgary. She was bullied at the school and she was coming

home from school telling her parents that she was very very upset and because they are not part of the community I think they didn't know what to do or who to reach out to. Plus English is not their first language. So I think the decision was made, and I'm not quite sure how it was made to move her to another school. These kids told her that she could never escape, that she was ugly and that she would never be able to escape this problem and that she should really just kill herself, and unfortunately that's what happened. So now the community there is trying to understand how they make sure that they get information out to these new Syrian refugees about how they can get help. Counselling, what they can do. And they're sort of saying you know we take responsibility for this as well, right.

Yes, because also the school probably should have addressed it.

And the school is, of course, denying. Saying we didn't know anything about it, we never saw anything. You know really drives me crazy how the school systems works. Because they didn't see it, it didn't happen. But I mean that's clearly not what's going on. So that was really awful to hear about that this weekend.

Um.... You know when I was growing up there were lesser forms of discrimination but you didn't see it so blatantly as we are seeing it now.

Why do you think it's become worse now?

Yeah, I sort of feel it's a combination of things. I think somehow there is more... we are living in a society that's much more openly, um, what's a good word for it. I mean the communities are much more openly diverse, whereas we used to live in communities that were much more homogenous. So people didn't see differences as easily and I think that the differences are way more apparent to people and unfortunately I think people like to see, they see that they are different and that difference really upsets certain people. I think some people even feel that they are, or have been pushed out of jobs because of the fact that we've been, you know bringing in refugees and more different people with different diversities and um, there's been a push, maybe it's right or wrong, but there's been a push and certainly a lot of discussion around it in press that we need to level the playing field and that people should be open to hiring, you know whether it's women or racial minorities. And so I think some people are getting angry that they are not getting work, or have been pushed out of something. I also think that there is way more discussion about it in the press, as well as on social media. So it's being discussed more openly. And certainly hate crime has become a real thing on social media because people are certainly not able to be seen. So they can say some pretty terrible things. And now we've taken it to the next step of, not only can people say it and be hidden, now people feel like they need to express it and they don't care that they're being seen expressing it. So we are almost taking it up a notch, to the next level.

One of the issues I discuss in my paper, is that because the media portrays mostly the person who's committed the crime, over the victims it has caused more copycat crimes. It makes the person who committed the crime, for the community with the perpetrators

beliefs, to be an almost martyr like or heroic figure to them. They're getting this sort of fame from it.

I also think that by the press focusing so much on it, I realize it's probably good to let people know it's happening but at the same time I think it actually produces a copycat. Where somebody gets inspired and thinks, yeah I can do that to. I can do that. I'm so mad I'm going to do the same thing.

For example, with the recent attack in New Zealand it has been discussed that the media should be focusing most of it's time on the members of the Mosque and the victims rather than spending majority of it on the perpetrator.

Yes, I think there is some truth to that

I think there is also a whole surge, and it was maybe a left wing surge on free speech, you know that people can be and do what they want to be. And be and do who they are, without feeling. You know I don't know feeling that they can't be themselves and so now you've got the right wing side, which also believes that they have access to free speech, which I guess they do. But it's very complicated the whole notion of, when is it, you know when are you crossing boundaries into ugly racial hate, or hate of any sort. Yeah

Do you think that hearing about hate crimes, whether or not it be in Toronto or somewhere else has affected you or made you nervous?

Um, I;m not. I would say I;m not particularly nervous, but I think that's because I;m not.

Although I might be Jewish I;m not, I would never be recognized as such. I think when I;m out walking around, right.

You don't think you would be recognized as Jewish?

Right, I don't think I would necessarily be recognized and there would be hate, you know hate towards me. Right. Um, having said that, I guess and maybe I don't live in a community where I feel that. I don't feel nervous about that, but um. It was interesting when I was in _____ this week, ugh they asked me, a whole bunch of them asked me what Schacter, what nationality that was and I was like Jewish. And they were like ooh. And so I had, we had two or three discussions with staff there about what Judaism is and how it's a culture and a religion and they really had no understanding and had not been taught about what Judaism is and yet there is a huge Jewish community in _____. Really, it was interesting. Yeah, I don't normally do that, I don't normally say. I just so oh it's Canadian.

That Schacter is Canadian?

No, I just say I'm Canadian. Sometimes I will say my grandparents are from Ukraine, the Russian Ukraine area, but anyway I mentioned it and it was really interesting were I had different conversations

It's interesting that you said that you think that people don't recognize you as Jewish in Toronto. Because I would think that they would, but they just don't care.

Well, yeah I think that's true. I don't think a lot of people do though! No, no no, I don't think the average person necessarily recognizes me as Jewish in Toronto, I don't believe that. I think they're is so much diversity here people don't really notice.

I agree, because it's diverse in Toronto. But if you were to go to places that are less diverse or more politically tense people would be more likely to notice?

I agree, but I don't think they would recognize me as Jewish. I think they would just recognize me as not.... Because I'm still white and they don't really recognize that there... they don't know. First of all, people who are usually full of hate really can't recognize a Jewish person, unless they're wearing certain clothing, right. I don't believe... because they're so uneducated that they seriously have no idea. I really believe that it's all an educational thing.

I think that, whereas I having grown up in a Jewish community, I can recognize someone else as Jewish.

Random conversation....

However, let me say, there's another form of hate that I am very familiar with. When I was growing up, um there are communities, and they are well educated communities that would know that I was Jewish. And I have still felt, at times like I was not really welcome in this house for example or the minute I said my name and introduced myself there was a coolness that came upon people. And I knew right off that they were prejudiced. I have felt that before. Many times. Yeah. Um, but that's different because you see they... No, because they were taught not to be outwardly racist, right. But there was a, oh wow, how did this person get invited to this event and you could tell a shutdown. So there might be a mother and a father, the mother talking and then the father full on, full shutdown. Like very friendly at first and then I... unfriendly. So that happened a lot when I was a kid and when I was like your age. And I also met people who I was working with who would say very derogatory things about Jews in front of my. They had no idea I was Jewish, just terrible things, and I would have to say something. So I did experience it, a lot of it firsthand, but it wasn't the same as what we recognize as hate crime right now, right. You're not afraid for your life, you're just trying to educate people and the worst they would do in those days would be maybe not hire you. Which is bad, they wouldn't hire you, or maybe invite you to a party or allow you to join a club. But now it's extremely frightening for some people, because it's uh... I guess people are much more open and..well maybe they might use a gun or use a knife. Or they may actually destroy something, right. That's what we are afraid of now.

In my research, a majority of hate crimes, at least in NYC are graffiti.

Yeah, but again that graffiti isn't done to someones face. It's bad, right, but I used to get it right to my face, I'm not saying that doesn't still exist. But what I was saying is what you would find is ohh, and then not an invitation or not a hire. Or, and it was all very very under the table. Very low-key, not openly discussed.