Washington State JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Dee Simon

SUMMARY

Dee Simon, who was previously the executive director of Seattle's Holocaust Center for Humanity, has dedicated her career to education, advocacy, and combating bigotry through the power of Holocaust testimony and inclusive programs. Her journey from growing up in desegregated schools in California to leading statewide Holocaust education initiatives in Washington reflects both personal conviction and visionary leadership.

Arlene Cohen: Good morning. My name is Arlene Cohen, and Susan Weingarten is with me. We're both members of the Archives and Research Committee of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. Today is August 22nd, 2023. And this is an oral history interview with Dr. Simon, the executive director of Seattle's Holocaust Center for Humanity. We're all speaking from Seattle, Washington. This interview is part of a interview series documenting professional and lay leadership roles in the Seattle Jewish community. We're especially concentrating on the issues of antisemitism, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. This interview will become part of the Jewish Memory Archive of the Washington State Jewish Historical Society. We're conducting this interview remotely using Zoom. Dennis Barnes is hosting and assisting with the technical parts of this interview, though he does not appear. All right.

Susan Weingarten: And so to begin, Dee, please give your name when and where you were born, where you grew up, and the date of, I guess, the date of birth, if you don't mind. Yeah.

Dee Simon: Yeah. My name is Dee, which is short for Delilah. Simon and I was born on March 6th, 1956, in Haifa, Israel.

Susan Weingarten: And how would you spell Delilah?

Dee Simon: Delilah [spells out].

Susan Weingarten: Thank you. How has your family background influenced your life and career choice?

Dee Simon: Well, that's a good question. So, um. my mother was a Holocaust survivor from the Czech Republic, and so she was also a mischling. Her mother was Catholic and her father was Jewish. And so she was half and half and experienced a lot of discrimination before the war even started, because she was half Jewish and half non-Jewish. And then when, of course, the war started and eventually she was identified as Jewish, she was sent to a camp. And so my mother experienced a great deal of hate in her life because of who she was. Um, my father, um, his family were many, many generations in Acre, Israel, which is just south of the Lebanon border. And so, um, during his life, he experienced a lot of hate coming from the Arab community towards his Jewish family because they were one of the only Jewish families in Acre at the time. And so he experienced a great deal of discrimination. And then, of course, when Israel became a country, it was almost like reverse discrimination or discrimination all over again, because he was Sephardic and Mizrahi and from this region of the world and spoke Arabic, so, and was dark skinned. So he experienced a great deal of discrimination as well. So I think that set me up for really, um, understanding what discrimination felt like from their perspective. Um, they both escaped their worlds. My mother escaped Europe, my father left Israel and came to America. And I think all of that played a huge role in the decision to work for an organization that fights hate.

Arlene Cohen: A quick question-you were born in Israel. So did they go back to Israel?

Dee Simon: No, no, they left Israel when I was five.

Arlene Cohen: Oh, okay. Okay. Uh, okay. Where have you lived and what brought you to Seattle?

Dee Simon: Um, I was, I grew up in Altadena, California, which is right near Pasadena, and Altadena was or that whole section of California was also very segregated. Um, and, you know, there was one street called Lake Avenue that divided the African American and Asian community from the white community. And so, um, I think that helped to guide me in my life choice as well. And, um, and it was very plain to see the difference between the two sides of town. As I was growing up and my family lived on the, um, less privileged side of town. So that made it even more obvious to me.

Susan Weingarten: Okay. Please describe your educational and professional background and what aspect of these experiences has been the most valuable.

Dee Simon: All right. Well, I'm probably going to give you an answer you haven't heard before. Um, so growing up in Altadena or Pasadena, um, in the sixth grade, uh, desegregation started and the buses started moving all over where I was going to school. And the whole tenor of our school changed. Um, and I would say that the, the whole desegregation of Pasadena schools was very influential in my life and also the lives of most of my friends at that time. Um, it forced us to get along with people that we didn't know to, um, to eventually find commonalities. It wasn't easy at first. I think at first, because of our parental, many of the people's parental influence, there was a lot of prejudice and hate and misunderstanding, and it really wasn't until we were, um, seniors and juniors and seniors in high school did we actually start to really see each other as just people. And it took that long. And I think, um, a lot of it had to do with pride, and a lot of it had to do with the times, you know, the, the, the, um, Panther movement and all the different movements that were going on at the time made it difficult for us to connect, actually, um, and it took a while. So anyway, so I think that that, that part of my education influenced me a great deal because I understood that it isn't easy and that people have prejudiced and hate in their minds, even though they don't feel it or believe it or understand it. Even it was sort of fed to us at an early age. So I think that influenced me, and in that it made me understand the nature and difficulty in combating what hate looks like. Um, I went on to go to USC. That was extremely privileged feeling. And, um, and it was almost like, um, a complete turnaround because after the experience of high school going almost to an all white, affluent business school was was like stepping back in time and realizing that the people around me hadn't had the same experience that I had. And, um, recognizing the scope, I guess, of the work that was needed was then made clear to me, I think, because of my schooling.

Arlene Cohen: Well, how did you happen to pick USC?

Dee Simon: Well, um, my family was an immigrant family, so we weren't didn't have a lot of money. And I think it was very important to me to get a job that would pay for my myself, that would pay for me, that I wouldn't have to depend on someone or, you know, just be very self. assured and responsible for myself. And so I wanted a degree that would translate into a good paying job right away. And so that seemed to be business and accounting, and that was really it. It wasn't a passion. It was more of a practicality.

Susan Weingarten: And what brought you to Seattle?

Dee Simon: So I didn't come to Seattle until 1990. So I was in my 30s and I came because actually I loved the weather. I loved the the hiking, the you know, if you lived in LA, you had to drive six hours to get to mammoth to go skiing. I love skiing, hiking, camping, all those things. And it was very difficult to do in Los Angeles. And so, um, I had saved enough money to make a move and I moved to Seattle without I just knew one person and I didn't have a job. And so I was one of those, um, oh, I don't know what was his name. There was a reporter from the Seattle Times or the P-I who used to bash people from California who came up and changed Seattle. I was one of those people.

Arlene Cohen: They wanted you to stay down there. I remember the signs that said, don't come up here if you're from the South.

Dee Simon: Yes, exactly, exactly. I was one of those people.

Arlene Cohen: What were you doing in California and what led you to the Holocaust Center?

Dee Simon: Um, really? Nothing in California led me there. I came here, um, and I was working for a tech company, and then, um, I met my husband. We got married, we had a daughter. And at this time, I was feeling really thinking about my career the whole time, and I wasn't thinking about much else. And then, um, my husband had a cleaning person who'd been with him for many years before we got married and continued to to clean our house. And one time she was at our house and, um, I was holding my

daughter, who was about six months old and she was engaged to someone and she had some reservations about him. So I said, well, why don't you invite him to our house for dinner and we can just chat and we'll tell you what we think. And she said, oh, he'd never step foot in a Jew's house. And so immediately, I think that was an epiphany for me. Um, here I was holding my baby, who was innocent, um, being a child of a survivor and my father's experience and, and all of a sudden, it was the epiphany was, I have to do something about this. I can't just continue to think that it's going to take care of itself, or someone else is going to do the work. I have to figure out how to do the work. And so, um, I started looking for an organization that was doing, uh, work in fighting hate, and I found the Holocaust Center. And at that point it was called the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center. Very long name and, um. And it was just a group of Holocaust survivors, really, who were speaking in schools. They, um, had heard about Holocaust denial and said "no one is going to deny my life". And so they began speaking in schools and their grandchildren's schools and, you know, just very small and, um, but, you know, as I volunteered and helped them with their books and helped them with other things, um, I realized that they had teeth that that they were making a difference, that when they were speaking in schools, the students were affected, the students were moved. The letters we got, the the way the students walked up to them, it was just it was very evident that this storytelling was a secret. It was like a like a secret waiting to come out that had to be done. That this was the way to really reach people through empathy and storytelling. And so I joined the organization and was blown away by how many students they reached every year. Just the sheer numbers and, and then I volunteered for many years and was on the board. I became president of the board and served, I think, four years as-four terms as president of the board. And then eventually, when the job became available, they asked me if I wanted it and I said, yes, you know. So at that time, um, the woman who was executive director was Laurie Warshaw Cohen, in partnership co-executive directors with Miriam Greenbaum. And so Miriam Greenbaum left, and I took her spot. And then eventually, um, and that was in 2006. And then, um, eventually Laurie stepped down and I was the only, um, executive director.

Susan Weingarten: Uh, can you describe now the mission of the Holocaust Center. And your job.

Dee Simon: Yeah. The mission of the Holocaust Center, um, is to teach the Holocaust, teach the lessons of the Holocaust, um, to inspire students of all ages to confront bigotry and indifference, promote human dignity, and take action. So, um, my role in that, in the center is to really guide the board and the staff and the donors and the volunteers guide everyone into not only seeing our vision, but accomplishing our vision and our mission. So I really I feel like I am the guiding person. I just, you know, make sure that everything is on track, that we have a strategic plan that we're following through with it. Um, and that when things come up that are new, we can pivot and change. And I think that's one of the things I love the most about my job is that I'm able to wear many different hats and, um, look to the future and build. Always looking forward. And so we started with, um, five employees, I think four when I came on board and now we have 16. Um, we started without a museum and now we have a museum. Um, we started with no state funding and now we have significant state funding. So I think, you know, the idea of just looking ahead all the time and understanding what the organization needs to move forward is my job.

Arlene Cohen: You said take action. Some examples of the kind of action your people take. Your your your taking.

Dee Simon: Yeah. Um, I think first of all, taking action. People who volunteer with us the docents, the speakers and the speakers bureau, the people who serve on the board, the people who work the front desk at the museum. All those people that volunteer for us are taking action because they're supporting our work. They're fighting hate in their own way through our museum. Um, and what we teach the public about fighting hate is very simple, really. It starts with the pyramid of hate. And if you think of a pyramid, you know you've got this pyramid. And up at the top is genocide. The bottom or the base of the pyramid is the things that you and I see every day scapegoating, jokes, stereotyping, bullying, just, you know, discrimination, all this stuff that we see, we have the power to stop. And if you stop the base, you can't build a pyramid and you prevent genocide. So what we teach our students and everyone else is to do just that every single day. Think about, look around you and think about what you can do. And you know, some of our students say things like, oh, I'm going to have lunch with the girl that no one will sit with. I'm like, victory! That is exactly what we're talking about. Small acts of kindness, empathy, speaking up for others. That's the way we hope people will take action after they learn about the Holocaust.

Susan Weingarten: So if am I correct in my memory that you have also worked with the Seattle police and you have also gone down to Olympia, Washington trying to encourage Holocaust ed in the public schools?

Dee Simon: Yes. So our when when we built our museum in 2016, excuse me 15 we opened the door doors, um, that gave us the opportunity to serve the community and not only students five through K. Now we have the opportunity to educate, um, the community and adults as well in a different way. And so one of the programs we initiated was the Law Enforcement and Society program, which basically educates police officers and trains them to look at their jobs very differently and question, how did police officers in Nazi Germany go from protecting their citizens to killing them? What was that slippery slope? And so we started by just training the Seattle Police Department, and that was 1300 officers. And then now we have a contract with the state. So we are training all 11,000 Washington State police officers. So the program has really grown. Yeah.

Susan Weingarten: And and, uh, in Olympia.

Dee Simon: Yes. And in Olympia, we we have lobbied many times for many different things. Um, back before I even started, uh, we lobbied for, uh, they lobbied for, uh, to encourage Holocaust education. So there was an encouragement, a legal encouragement for teachers to do it. We went back and asked for small amounts of funding over the years to fund the surviving excuse me, the survivor encyclopedia. Um, we went back last year and asked for funding, and this year we're going back to Olympia to ask for a requirement. So ninth and 10th grade students would be required to study it in US history, um, civics and other aligned courses. So that's something that we're fighting for this year in Olympia. Yeah.

Arlene Cohen: And I was just- have you gotten pushback right now? You know, they're talking about critical race theory and all kinds of other things that are attacking the educational system. Have you seen any pushback on teaching?

Dee Simon: We, um, so it was interesting when the, you know, the whole ethnic studies programs really sort of came out of the George Floyd riots and the Black Lives Matter movement and the understanding that we needed to to change the way we educate our students about American history. Um, what we realized pretty early on the Holocaust Center was that ethnic studies wasn't our place. That it not that it isn't a Jewish place. It is a Jewish place. I think Jews should be considered ethnic, you know, an ethnic group within ethnic studies. But we at the Holocaust Center felt like that wasn't our space because it really talked about people's experience in America. And, um, ethnic studies does. It really concentrates on on the American experience. And we felt like we have our own lane, which is Holocaust education. What happened in the Holocaust in Europe And also we obviously teach about the impact it had on America. But, um. We didn't feel like we needed to push our way into ethnic studies. We felt like we could. Actually walk in our own lane. And that's what we've done. So we don't lobby as a, as an organization, uh, in ethnic studies, we lobby as a Holocaust organ- Holocaust and genocide organization. So it's...

Arlene Cohen: And looking at the curriculum. Being sure that that kind of education is in the curriculum.

Dee Simon: Yes. And we and our education is not only history. So we do teach obviously the history of the Holocaust, but we do it in a lens that allows people to see today in a very critical way. You know, we promote critical thinking. So, for example, one of the classes that we teach is in is in conjunction with the Literacy project. And what we do there is we talk about how do you teach in teacher training programs? We talk about how do you teach students to understand the difference between fact and opinion. Right. Very critical. That was a problem back in the day, right? Fact and ideology. Um, we have classes on how to have difficult conversations in the classroom. The classrooms are really a reflection of our society. Our society is extremely polarized right now, and that just is magnified within classrooms across our state. And so we have classes to teach teachers how to navigate that, um, divide, how to have critical conversations in the classroom. Um, so we take the lessons of the Holocaust. We teach them, but then we expand them. We might teach about propaganda in the Holocaust. And and that's when we talk about media literacy. We might, you know, so so the Holocaust is really a lens through which we allow students to see the world they live in, in a very critical way, and then give them the tools they need to take the action that we talked about. You know, the tools they need to do something. So it's not only history, civics, social studies, you know, all the different categories. Language arts. It's a lot about social emotional learning. And um, so I think I think it's been very well received in the schools because our curriculum and our guidelines allow teachers to teach it in many different subjects and also to check standards boxes. Um, so a teacher would normally come and take a class from us and we train over a thousand teachers a year, and that teacher would then go and, um, use our curriculum to teach the subject. Then they might have a speaker, they might bring a trunk into their classroom, they might participate in the writing art film contest. You know, there's many different ways they might send their students to our student Leadership board if the student is engaged and wants more. So. So there's many different points in which teachers can engage in many different ways that they can stay with us. You know, we send teachers to Europe for training to Poland. Um, we have programs that send them to different institutions like the Washington, um, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington so they can learn more. So we, um, we really promote our teachers in a way that I think other organizations don't. And everything we do is free. So, uh, that's enticing.

Susan Weingarten: And can you describe a little bit the teaching trunks?

Dee Simon: Sure. So, um, this is funny. I actually created the first teaching trunk when I was a volunteer back in the 1990s. And when I looked back, you know, we weren't using computers that much. It was posters and glue, and that's very funny. But now, uh, we have, the trunks come in their fifth or sixth grade middle school and high school trunks. And each of the different kinds of the three different kinds have different reading levels for students who have different abilities within that range. They, um, they travel to schools, teachers borrow them for three weeks, and during that three week period, um, they have activities and all kinds of things that students can do within the trunk activities. There's a box with replica artifacts and activities to go along with that. Um, so it's exploratory learning, if you will. And, um, it's very popular. And it was so popular that we just couldn't keep up with the number of trunks that people were asking for. And there were waiting lists. So we eventually created book sets. So a book set

could be if a teacher, for example, in high school, is teaching Elie Wiesel's Night, um, she can order a whole box as many copies of Elie Wiesel's Night as she needs with activities and discussion questions and all kinds of things to go with that.

Arlene Cohen: If you reach out to rural areas, um, or do you do people come to you? Do teachers come to you? How do you work to get your audience?

Dee Simon: That's a really good question. Um, so we primarily are feet on the ground. So we have two educators, people who had been teachers for many years and taught the Holocaust, who now work for the center. Um, our director of education, Paul Regelbrugge, and Branda Anderson, who is the learning specialist. And both of them go out into the schools and the school districts primarily, and get the school districts to adopt our programs district wide. And that's been our tactic. We also work with OSPI very closely to do, um, professional development programs through OSPI. So the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will send a, you know, sends out a opportunities list of classes that teachers can take to get their accreditation. And we are on that list. And so we do a lot of professional development training through the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Um, so we're we're it's basically a word of mouth also with teachers. And often what we see is if a teacher teaches it, the students really love the experience. They dig deep into the lesson, they internalize the stories, and the students love it. So if there's an elective, the electives often fill up. And so if a teacher teaches it, she knows how enthusiastic the students are. And so she'll teach it year after year and then be more engaged with us to go deeper. And that's when we, you know, when teachers want to go deeper, that's when we send them to Poland. And that's when we do the other programs. We understood very early on that when we built our museum, that we were never going to reach 50,000 students within our four walls, that it was very important to keep our outreach work current and to keep our outreach work growing. And so we are now in every corner of the state rural communities, Moses Lake, Grandview, you name it, we're out there. And it's because I think we maintained that effort of outreach. Instead of building a huge museum and spending all our resources, um, on bricks and mortar. So we we really made that decision early on. And I think for us, it was a good decision.

Arlene Cohen: Are you getting any pushback?

Dee Simon: Yes. Of course. Um, the pushback sometimes we hear- so we have a about a 50 member, um, teacher advisory board. They're called educators for change. And those teachers represent teachers from all across Washington state and some outside of Washington state, actually. And they advise us and tell us what's happening in their districts, what's happening in their schools, what students are feeling. And, um, often in some towns, they tell us that the obstacle, the biggest obstacle for them is their administrators and their administrators are, you know, again, it's the it's the polarized community. The administrators are either afraid of the Israel-Palestinian issue and getting involved in that arena, and then sometimes they're concerned about white supremacists or neo-Nazis actually, that live in their areas. And so, you know, so on both extremes of the political spectrum, um, teachers and we can experience pushback. Um, we have been very lucky because we have had minimal pushback, because the Holocaust is really a bipartisan issue. Um, a lot of people remember their grandfathers fighting in World War II or, you know, whatever. And so it's not a Republican or a Democratic issue. It's not a conservative or liberal story. It's history. And so I think we have been lucky in that we're not, um, we're not categorized as critical race theory or anything like that, regardless of where we are.

Arlene Cohen: Um, okay. Thank you. Please comment on which organizations the Holocaust Center coordinates with to address humanitarian issues.

Dee Simon: Sure. Well, we we work very closely with all the Jewish organizations. So the Federation, the ADL, um AJC we work closely with JCC. We work closely with a lot of Jewish organizations. Um, outside of- and by that I mean we do programs together, um, the leadership of the organizations come together to, um, work together in the community as one voice for the Jewish community. So we we work very closely with Jewish organizations. We also work with, outside of the Jewish realm, we work-we have worked in the past with the tribes. We have worked with um, and still do work with the Northwest African American Museum, with Wing Luke, Densho. Um, we've worked with Bosnian and Rwandan communities. So we're we're pretty much, I would say every year there's new partnerships and new adventures and old ones that we maintain. So, um, there's constant partnerships. Um, and I think part of that is that we understand we can do more if we do things together. Um, but it's almost like my I want to, you know, admit that it's a lot like my, uh, high school or elementary school experience where it takes time. And I think that as organizations, the best thing we can do is continue those partnerships year after year after year. Um, not one offs. So for me, those deeper partnerships are critical.

Susan Weingarten: Can you briefly comment on your lunch and learn series?

Dee Simon: Sure. So when COVID happened, well before COVID, we had a once a month, or maybe it was once a month, lunch and learn programs where people would come into our museum and we would have guest speakers and authors and different

people presenting different perspectives on genocide come in and speak, and we would get maybe about 30 to 40 people. I think it was a it was a big event, maybe 50 in our space, um, for the lunch and learns. When COVID happened, we didn't waste any time. I think it was-we started in April of 2020 to take these lunch and learn programs on Zoom, and in no time at all, we could have as many as 600 people tuning in to a lunch and learn. And primarily because they were at home, you know, And there was there wasn't a lot to do. Um, we also we were able to get sponsors like Verizon to sponsor a series of lunch and learns. We were able to get some of the top scholars from around the country because they didn't have to leave home. And the we were also able to partner with other organizations. So if we did, for example, a program on the Cambodian genocide, we could partner with Cambodian organizations in the community and the Wing Luke and other organizations. So we were always able to find partners. And that was really sometimes a way that we built our partnerships was to to have them co-sponsor a lunch and learn and get their audiences to watch. Um, then when COVID ended, we decided to maintain the program. And I would say on the average we get about 200 viewers, um, to our lunch and learn programs now.

Susan Weingarten: Well, thank you. Um, just to give some examples of the speakers for your lunch and learn program.

Dee Simon: Sure, we've had district directors. Uh uh, diversity, equity and inclusion directors from different school districts come together and talk about the challenges for DEI work in the schools. Um, we've had many Holocaust survivors and also children and grandchildren of survivors tell their family stories. Um, we've had people who've experienced other genocides. We've had Rohingya, we've had Rwandan, we've had Cambodian, we've had, um, Uyghur. We've had many, many different, uh, speakers talk about their experiences, um, globally. And we've had Holocaust scholars speaking on specific subjects like, um, Holocaust by Bullets, the Einsatzgruppen, and that that kind of scholarly work in a sort of deeper scholarly work. The, T4 program, the disabled program, and how that worked during the Holocaust. And, you know, just many, many scholars over the years. So that's sort of what we do. It's mostly focused on, um, Holocaust history and current history, current genocide history.

Arlene Cohen: It sounds like, you know, you're bringing people in from other places besides Washington. Do you go out and support and promote this kind of stuff in other states, or are you pretty much working in Washington?

Dee Simon: We're pretty much working in the Pacific Northwest. So we have programs in, uh, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, um, British Columbia. So we're really Northwest, I would say primarily. Um, most regions have their own Holocaust centers. And so we do work closely with other centers. I'm on the board of the International Association of Holocaust Organizations, and so our board meets regularly. I usually lead the director's session, so that would be a session of directors from museums, Holocaust museums all over the country. And we meet regularly. Um, so really keeping a tab on what's happening in the industry, what's happening in regions. You know, when I look at our region, it's very different than any other region in the United States or the world. Um, so talking about our differences, talking about the challenges of Holocaust mandates. Um, you know, just many, many different topics that we share and have a great deal in common with other organizations. But but we we don't go into their territories and they don't go into ours [laughs].

Arlene Cohen: How is how is yours different? How is our region different? I'm curious.

Dee Simon: When I compare our organization to, say Florida or Tennessee or some of those very conservative, um, sections of the country. They are facing critical race theory. They're facing books, Holocaust books being taken off library shelves. They've- one museum had, uh, was ordered to put to not allow students to see a certain aspect of their museum, and they had to build a wall to, to hide part of their museum. Um, you know, they're facing, uh, conservative issues that we don't face. On the other hand, we face liberal issues, you know, with the with, um, uh, sort of extreme thoughts about how every Jew is somehow connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or, you know, just antisemitism from a liberal perspective. We see that where they don't um, I would say that's the starkest difference is really the political arenas we work in and how their school boards are run. Their school boards are very activist, parent run organizations. And ours are not quite that, not not quite there. So it's it's very different.

Arlene Cohen: Okay. Another question. What local humanitarian incidents have inspired the Holocaust Center to take action and what action did the center take?

Dee Simon: Over the years there's been a lot. Um, I would say the refugee crisis when we were putting children in cages and, you know, that was during the Trump administration. That was a situation that we had to speak out against. Um, I would say most of our protests are not statements. So we, um, the board has given me the authority to decide when and how to make a statement on behalf of the center. Um, and I and I use it very sparingly, that power very sparingly, because I think that, you know, when when incidents happen, so many organizations jump in and make statements, but they're doing nothing about it. And and that is not I don't think that's helpful. I don't think that's taking action. Um, and so we have been very, I've been very careful about when to speak, how to speak, making sure it's in our lane, that it's actually relates to our work. Um, and also making sure that we give people the tools they need to, to, to, to be helpful. So when the George Floyd incident happened, we did make a statement and we

did give people resources that they could, you know, that they could move forward with. So I feel that if you make too many statements, you're not heard, you know, and if you, if you are careful and make the right statements at the right time, you're more likely to be heard.

Susan Weingarten: Um. What- you may have touched on this already, but what do you feel is the greatest accomplishment slash accomplishments of the Holocaust Center?

Dee Simon: I think the greatest accomplishment is, uh, the ability to impact each and every student we reach. So for me, it's not enough to engage students. I can engage students by having them read a book. Great to take the next step and have them think about what they've read, have them self-identify and take that identity self-identity and transfer it into another person's story. Creating empathy, creating compassion, creating the ability for students to see others as they see themselves, I think is our greatest accomplishment. Um, the second, the second would be simply the the number of students we've reached over the years. It has been hundreds of thousands. And I think seeing, you know, 20 years- oh, this is a perfect example. When we first approached OSPI, we were testifying in front of the House Education Hearing Committee for something we were lobbying for, and someone came to speak on our behalf. And it was a person who was the director of social studies for OSPI. And so after he spoke very eloquently on our behalf, I walked up to him and thanked him for speaking for us. And he said, "I had to. When I was in high school, I heard a survivor, Pete Metzler, speak and it changed my life. That's why I'm doing this work I'm doing today". And so we see that all the time, you know, students making incredible decisions as they grow because they didn't forget the lesson. So I would say that that is our accomplishment.

Susan Weingarten: Which goes along with your sticker, change begins with me.

Dee Simon: Exactly.

Susan Weingarten: In what direction do you see the Holocaust Center heading in the future?

Dee Simon: Um, I would like to see us expand on genocide education in general, not just the Holocaust. I would like to see us, um, have more resources on other genocides. Um, not to focus on them, but just to universalize the message more. I think that would be helpful to our students. We have a lot of students who are refugees in Washington state and working or immigrant families or, you know, children who have experienced similar things, um, with similar discriminations. And it would be wonderful to widen our net and make them feel like this is also their story. Um, so I think broadening our messaging to a way, in a way that's more inclusive is where I would like to see us go. And I think that's, um, actually already started. We're building a genocide wall within our museum to acknowledge this. The universal stories. Um, you know, it's not to say that the Holocaust isn't unique. I don't mean to to minimize it. The Holocaust was a unique experience, but we can't identify with the students if we constantly call it a unique experience. So, um, so I think it's important to to do that in the future. Um, I would like to see us expand and get to the point where every student in Washington state graduates with Holocaust education. That would be the ultimate goal.

Arlene Cohen: Yeah, I- when you say Holocaust and genocide, I think, you know, the context is a little is different, but it really is the same thing. You know, it's people killing people and drawing that together, I think is really important.

Susan Weingarten: Because they're different.

Arlene Cohen: Yeah. Yeah.

Dee Simon: Because of who they are.

Arlene Cohen: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

Susan Weingarten: What else happened?

Arlene Cohen: Uh, yeah. Please share what you enjoy most. I think you talked on it. Talked about it at the beginning, but what do you enjoy most on a personal level when you're not working?

Dee Simon: Oh, spending time with family is number one. Um, hiking. I love to hike. Camp. Um, reading. Um. And I love to entertain. Um, so cooking and having people over for dinner and friends and conversation.

Susan Weingarten: We're we're ready any time [laughs].

Arlene Cohen: Right [laughs] that sounds wonderful. Yeah, that's really neat. Well, do you have anything to add?

Dee Simon: No. I'm really grateful that you gave me the opportunity to to tell you our story. My story too, I guess. Thank you.

Susan Weingarten: Yes. Um. Well, uh, we thank you for taking the time, for sharing your experiences and your connections to the Holocaust Center and continued success. And, uh, and we say goodbye.

Dee Simon: Thank you. Goodbye and thank you.