J. Stanger Ross:	00:00:00	Let's see. Okay, there we go. So now it's recording. So usually we start by just situating ourselves so that if this digital file gets lost from everything else, they'll just know what's going on by turning it on. So I'm Jordan Stanger Ross at the University of Victoria with the Defying Hatred Project. And I'm sitting here with Phyllis Senese in her home at 1865 Ventura Way in Victoria or Saanich?
Phyllis Senese:	00:00:25	Victoria.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:00:25	Victoria. And we're doing an interview for the Defying Hatred Project. Um, we talked in advance about there being three, three major themes to the, to the interview. The first being kind of biographical. How did, how, I'm asking folks, how did you end up involved in memorial or educational work around the Shoah? And then, uh, the second is to talk about the nature of that work. And then the third is to discuss ideas a bit. What... What do you think this work is for? What do you think it accomplishes? What's good- examples of good work and, and less good work? Um, generally I'm pretty quiet in these interviews. I find that folks have, have a lot to say. So I'm, I'm... And that's great, I'm learning a lot from them. So, I'm, I'm just happy to start with that first broad topic, however you want to approach it. So what how, how did your life lead you to be working in the area?
Phyllis Senese:	00:01:33	It started when I was very young. Um, it probably was early fifties that I saw pictures in a history book that was in our house... pictures from the Second World War and specifically a picture, I'm guessing it probably was from Auschwitz. It's a very well known photograph of men in tier bunk beds staring out at the camera. And I couldn't understand... Really what I was seeing because what struck me was their eyes, a kind of deadness, and I wasn't used to seeing pictures like that. And my mother would explain to me, in very general terms, what it was about and that, that sparked a curiosity that just stayed with me. So that through junior high school, through high school, um, I was reading books about the Second World War, about the Shoah, sort of very broad, mainly trying to understand how it could have happened. That was what really puzzled me when I was very young was, "How could this have happened?" And I knew about perhaps not antisemitism specifically, but I knew that there were groups in society that were typically called names, pushed to the margins, people that others made bad jokes about, but I didn't have a vocabulary for it. So it was, it was basically that kind of, um, questioning that got me going and it just stayed with me. Um, I didn't have any courses at university. They just didn't exist about the Shoah. When it came

into discussion, it was always tangential, except for one course. It was an American colonial history course. And Jill Conway was the professor and she had us reading, um, along with our history, a variety of sociology books, articles. And one of them was about survivors and survivor guilt, uh, which was for me, a new dimension. But that was about it in terms of, um, undergraduate or graduate even graduate work. But the questions stayed with me. So when I began to teach, uh, even as a graduate student doing lectures, uh, I in Canadian history, I would always bring in the Japanese experience and I would talk about the Shoah, all of which completely both baffled and amazed my students because they'd never heard of either. And I can remember one evening it when I was still in Toronto at-lecturing at Atkinson College at York, during the break a Japanese Canadian came up to me and, and, uh, kind of whispered that, "My family was part of that story and we, we went on an extended vacation." And that's all he wanted to say was just, you know, I know what you're talking about, but he didn't want to discuss it any further. So I think that was another dimension that I found interesting was the silence around a lot of these questions that people who had experienced them didn't want to talk about them. And that basically gave everybody else permission never to talk about it either. Um, and I just kept up that pattern of including these kinds topics, uh, in my courses when I started teaching at UVic and by the late eighties, um, having sort of been plugging holes in the department, we had no one, for example, teaching the history of women in Canada. So I invented a course and taught it for several years. Then we hired Lynne, so I could pass that off. And I decided at that point, I'd like to try a course on racism and antisemitism in Canadian history, just to see how it would work and what kind of reception it got. So I had to go and make notes because I couldn't remember. That started in the fall of 1987 as a special topics course and it went really well. So I offered it again the next year and it stayed as a, a half year course until 1995-96, when it became a year long course. I had decided there was just too much material and my students wanted more. So I, I began with actually two sections because the, the student demand was so, so huge. Then after it had been going for about a year or so, and the department had to face the question, could I devote that much of my teaching load just to one course and began to say, "Maybe we need to pull back a bit." But at that point, Continuing Studies stepped in and said, we want this course, so we'll pay for one section because we're starting a diploma course on international relations and we want this as part of our package. So I taught it as two, two sections of a full year course, um, until 2000. At that point I was looking towards early retirement and I went to half-time

teaching. So we split the course again into two parts with 1900 as a dividing line. And I would teach the first half in the fall, and then a sessional would teach the second half in the winter term. And that kept running until I left and you arrived.

J. Stanger Ross:	00:08:35	Mhmm.
Phyllis Senese:	00:08:35	While all that was going on, I was also doing talks at, um, local churches or anybody that wanted to hear about it. One of the people who knew about what I doing was Doug Beardsley from the English department and he had become friends with Peter Gary, who had recently arrived in Victoria. And one of the things, um, well two things came out of that. One was a course that Doug set up in the English department looking at the Shoa and the three of us initially team taught it. I would start the course with a number of lectures to set the historical context and particularly the long history of antisemitism, which never gets talked about enough I think. And, and people need to be not just aware of it, but almost, um, jolted by it. So that was what I would do. Then Doug would do a section on looking at various literary works that the students would be reading. And then Peter would end the course with memoire and the, the Holocaust survivors' perspective. Um, and again, that ran until Doug retired. And, uh, which was about the same time I did. Peter didn't continue participating throughout the whole history of the course because he got busy with other projects. One of the projects Peter got involved with was he began to speak at high schools here in Victoria and up-island, on the sunshine coast, about his own life, his own experiences and that got bigger and bigger and bigger. Um, the, there was a publication that was put together here in Victoria by a number of survivors who basically had a chapter about their experiences. So there was, there were a lot of things happening, but it was also clear that the, the older generation of survivors were starting to die off. Um, one of the things that Peter then did was found the [organization] . And through Doug, he had invited me to participate in that. And I've been doing that ever since. Um, well we [cough] excuse me. What we focused on was the high school education aspect . There were other things that were being done at the same time. Many of them were just one time events. One of them that, that I thought was very powerful was a day long [event] at Vic High with Peter and a couple of other survivors. And then some aboriginal elders who had experienced the residential schools. There was a general assembly where they all spoke and then the students were divided up into smaller study groups and each group met with a survivor and an elder and talked about those experiences. And

		that would have been something I think that would have been great to carry on. Um, that raised issues that got bigger and bigger later on. Um... So I guess that's how I got started and what kinds of things I was doing. I participated in the Kristallnacht observation at the synagogue, uh, at the, um, Shoah memorial at the cemetery. Uh, and that lasted until just the last couple of years.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:13:11	I'm curious about your experience over time, so as you've described, so, um, starting, I guess from the beginning of the biographical sketch that you provided, so in the 1950s as you started to develop an interest in the topic, you said there wasn't formal education. Was this something, was it a topic you could talk about with your family? Was it a topic you could talk about with your friends? How did that interest of yours fit into other people's views of the, or willingness to talk about the topic?
Phyllis Senese:	00:13:53	I think it was mostly a solitary kind of, um... Activity because my mother was interested in history and she and I would often talk about it. My father less so, because he really wasn't interested in, in history and didn't have much time. Uh, but it wasn't something that any of my friends were interested in or even my teachers. Um, so it was, it was a pretty solitary thing. And when I started doing more and more work in my lectures on the Shoah, uh, on the Japanese experience, uh, basically I went and did the learning from ground zero on my own. And, um...
J. Stanger Ross:	00:14:53	And you were growing up- Did you say you were growing up in Toronto and did you do your schooling there?
Phyllis Senese:	00:14:57	I did my, no, I did my university undergraduate and PhD in Toronto. My undergraduate degree was in, uh, his-modern history at U of T. And then I did my PhD at York. I was in the first class of PhD students at York... So yeah, it was mostly just on my own.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:15:28	Yeah. And you mentioned in one of your classes there was a kind of, um, adjacent reading to help you, I guess, understand colonial history. So then w- at that point was that, was that a graduate seminar, did you say?
Phyllis Senese:	00:15:44	No, it was a fourth year.
New Speaker:	00:15:44	An undergrad? A fourth year class. So was that a context where now folks were talking about the, the Holocaust, you know, whether you're... the other students in the class had...

Phyllis Senese:	00:15:55	Not really.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:15:55	Yeah.
Phyllis Senese:	00:15:56	It was, it was a topic in a series of topics.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:16:00	Uh huh.
Phyllis Senese:	00:16:00	And um, it's very, it's a, it's an ironic situation because, uh, I was at university college, in the college system of Toronto, and that was a predominantly Jewish college. The rest of them were church affiliated. And even among my, my friends at the college, the Shoah was not a big topic of discussion. Um, now, many of them, one of my classmates was Rosie Silberman, who is justice Rosalie Silberman Abella on the Supreme Court, a survivor or the child of survivors herself born in a camp, in Germany. But it was not something that was talked about. I think it was part of that, that era of silence. And it's only as you get into the 70s that more and more work in a kind of public way is being done about Holocaust education. So for example, there's the big week-long Holocaust education program that's been running in Toronto for decades. Um, but those, those come later, I think the fifties and sixties were, here as in many parts of Europe, it was still time for silence. And it's the, the, the younger generation that become unafraid of speaking that starts turning things around. You can see the same kind of pattern in Canada with the various ethnic communities. Um, let's not talk about our experiences our past. Um, but then by the sixties and seventies, you get a younger generation, so they no, we're gonna talk about it. Um, so it's, it's part of that whole late sixties, early seventies era of change. And I think the, the history of the show on response to it is very much rooted in that, that context.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:18:30	When you finished your phd in...
Phyllis Senese:	00:18:33	'76.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:18:34	And then did you come directly out here or...
Phyllis Senese:	00:18:38	I finished my comps and all my coursework in '72 and that's when I started at UVIC.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:18:46	Okay.
Phyllis Senese:	00:18:47	It was still the days when, I think I was probably one of the last people hired without a completed PhD. And that was what took

me four years to finish it because I was teaching. And each year it seemed I had a new course to get moving into the system. So it was a, it was a slow process.

J. Stanger Ross:	00:19:10	Yeah. And you s- you started teaching these topics in the eight-, in the late eighties, in '87?
Phyllis Senese:	00:19:18	As a s- as a separate course-
J. Stanger Ross:	00:19:21	As a s- But you'd been uh-
Phyllis Senese:	00:19:21	I'd been weaving it into my-
J. Stanger Ross:	00:19:23	Weaving it in-
Phyllis Senese:	00:19:23	My general Canadian history course.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:19:26	So from the 70s onward, you been te- from the 70s to the early 2000s, in one way or another, you'd been teaching the topic.
Phyllis Senese:	00:19:34	Right.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:19:34	So initially you said students were kind of, what were those and what were those responses in those early years? In the 70s when you'd do a lecture or two, or a reading on...
Phyllis Senese:	00:19:49	Their, their reaction was sort of like mine when I was, when I was younger of how could this be happening in Canada? How could this be happening in the world and why haven't I heard about it? And that last response was the one that I got typically every year, right 'til I retired, um, at least one person, and it was usually many more, every year on the course evaluation would write, "I'm very angry that nobody ever talked about this before now. I'm a fourth year student. How come nobody ever talked about this subject before now?" and "I want more." Um, and that was, that was, that was a typical reaction. They also, especially when I went to a year long course, um, students had more time through their reading, through their own research projects, to get more emotionally engaged. And they found that very hard too, I think they had always thought of history as something that you keep at arm's length. And it had never been for many of them, taught in a way that seemed relevant to their own time, to their own lives. And that showed up in the course evaluations too. It got to the point where I would tell them at the beginning of the year that this course is going to depress you and by March you're going to feel like you're in a very black

		place because of the material. That's normal. And that's something you can learn from. Think about your reactions.
J. Stanger Ross:	[00:21:56]()	In this, in the ear- the earliest period of your teaching, when it was completely new information to folks, did you ever get negative reactions? I don't mean to your teaching, I mean, but to the topic were people ever...
New Speaker:	[00:22:10]()	No, no. The most reaction I ever got that was critical was from students who grew up in an evangelical Christian family and were still involved in their own churches because one of the things I did, um... I had always talked about the long history of antisemitism. But once I got to a year long course, I had a bit more space. And I talked very specifically about how Christianity emerges out of Judaism. The quarrels between two groups of Jews initially and the relationship of that to the Roman empire and how what is happening at the time and then when Christian scriptures are being written is very critical to understanding why antisemitism is so deeply rooted in Western culture. And I found that there were some evangelical background students who were very uneasy about looking at church history critically. And the idea that Jesus had been a Jew was something that to them was incomprehensible. And I did find that with the long explanation, I would sometimes be able to engage with these students. Sometimes they didn't want to talk about it, but the ones that did, uh, in the end would say, well, "I can't agree with everything you say, but I understand what you're trying to show us and that makes sense to me but I'm not sure about the church history." And of course, most of them know nothing about church history in that period. It seems for many of them, it starts with Martin Luther and the reformation, and that's real Christianity. Whereas the earlier versions and the Papal versions are not legitimate. And that was how I think they'd cope with the, um, the ideas that they, they found just too, too much strained, their, their own comprehension. But I didn't have anybody, um... that was hostile. The day [redacted] at Vic High, there was a little group of boys who were in grades 11 and 12 who were self-styled neo-Nazis who kept trying to disrupt the event all day long.
J. Stanger Ross:	[00:25:26]()	This was the one with the residential school survivors.
New Speaker:	[00:25:29]()	Yes. And, um, seeing them operate that day, I expected that they might show up for my class and I was, I was waiting every year to see if, if somebody like that is going to show up to take the course with the intention of disrupting it, but they never did.

J. Stanger Ross:	00:25:51	What did they do ?
Phyllis Senese:	00:25:53	Oh, they would just jump to their feet and start interrupting speakers. And particularly the, the Holocaust survivors, it was, you know, "It's all a fraud. It's all been invented, you know, the, the Jews just want to make money." Um, they didn't attack the resi-, the residential school survivors in the same way. They were really focused on the, the Jewish survivors.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:26:20	And how, how was that handled?
Phyllis Senese:	00:26:23	We left it to the student body to handle and the, the student council executive already had so much experience with these fellows that they, they just simply shut them out. You know, we're not going to listen to you and no, you can't have the microphone and no, you can't participate.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:26:43	Hmm.
Phyllis Senese:	00:26:44	Um, this is not your event. This is a different event. Um, there were some that showed up when we used to have the [event] at the UVIC Auditorium. So there were a couple of years when men from the Jewish community would come and stand guard, as it were, as the high school students were arriving and, and filing into the auditorium. And a couple of times there were, um, verbal confrontations, but that was all very short lived. So there wasn't, there wasn't the kind of backlash that I know has occurred at other universities, both in Canada and elsewhere. Um... The [organization] has done a number of times, put on, um, events at UVIC to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January. But again, it was, it was not, uh, something that was disrupted by anybody.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:27:57	I'm curious about the syllabus of that course that you taught, which I inherited. And I think at that time I didn't know that there was a filing cabinet where we could learn from one another. So I just invented mine whole cloth. But so I'm curious to how that, the different elements of that course came together.
Phyllis Senese:	00:28:21	It was probably a reflection, most of all of my own preoccupations of trying to understand something. So I, for example, with the year long course on racism and antisemitism in the early part of the course, I would do what I called a Judaism 101, Christianity 101, and Islam 101. And what are these traditions? What are the, what are the central core

elements of these traditions and then how have they intersected over time. So that, that was part of, um, my own preoccupation and it seemed to me that it was, it was going to be difficult for students to understand how something like racism, something like antisemitism, any form of hate could be deeply rooted in a society and continue for a very long time. So we would spend time talking for example, about the concept of the other. And for many of them that was a new idea. Now it's very commonplace, but in the eighties and nineties, it wasn't, um, my objective was to get them to see it as a kind of dynamic thing and how it could be changing its shape, its form, but the core reamined the same then with Canadian history it was a matter of finding what is available that will give them a sense of how these concepts have operated in Canadian history. Um, I'd liked also to use literature, so sometimes I'd throw in a novel, um, because it really illustrated something. Um, so it was just a question of, of in way trial and error, of the Canadian history material, what's available, what is out there, what's accessible.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:30:47 You were teaching, in effect, some ancient history. And then you were teaching, you were teaching some Holocaust in that course?

Phyllis Senese: 00:30:56 Oh yeah. Yeah.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:30:57 So how did, um, so that, so you were teaching some European history?

Phyllis Senese: 00:31:02 I was teaching world history.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:31:03 Yeah.

Phyllis Senese: 00:31:04 That was again, one of my, yeah, one of my own hobby horses was that, uh, I didn't think students could really appreciate the complexity of Canadian history without understanding where it fit into a much larger historical context. So whether I was talking about the Shoah or I was talking about the fur trade, I was also always talking about it in a global context. So they got ancient history, religious history, European history, American history, British history- and how does this all play out here?

J. Stanger Ross: 00:31:52 Mm hmm. And what were your core? Uh, did you have a.. [laughs] I've become unduly focused! But I think folks will be interested. Uh, maybe we should, uh, I dunno if you'd be able to share some syllabi or whether the department still has it, but we could archive them with the, uh...

Phyllis Senese:	00:32:10	Yeah, they should, they should still have them.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:32:11	Yeah. Um, with your permission, we'll talk about that after. But um, so what were the touchstones in Canadian history? You know, once you had done all that contextual work, what were the, how did you anchor or connect the work you had done on the origins of those religions and European history of violence and how did you bring those to Canada for your students?
Phyllis Senese:	00:32:41	I used the idea of cultural baggage. When Europeans go out and start colonizing what are they bringing with them? And there's usually a great deal of emphasis on economics. For example, the economics of the fur trade or institutions. Where do our government institutions come from? Why did Canadian institutions develop the way they did, and the Americans coming from the same route go a different way? So in addition to those kinds of more, I would say traditional, ways of looking at it, I really centered it on the focus of cultural baggage. What else are they bringing? What ideas, what attitudes? So for example, one of... A book that I, I quite liked was a book on European history, um, and the name of the author has escaped me, but it's the making of Europe. And essentially the argument there was how the Indigenous cultures of Europe are gradually overwhelmed by the Franco Germanic. And there were some wonderful quotations from documents, um, 13th, 14th century, that sounded like Nazi propaganda. And I would take the, the specific names out and then I would read it to my students and I would then say who is speaking about whom? And they would say, oh, it's, it's some Nazi propagandist writing about Jews in the 1930s. No, it's the Poles writing about Germans in the 13th century, or some other kind of example. That was a way of getting them to see that the ideas and attitudes are very old when they come to Canada. And with it, you then can look at colonialism and say, why, why Europeans treated the Indigenous population in a certain way. It's because they have a history. They practiced in Europe, uh, eliminating minorities, assimilating them, overwhelming their languages, their religions. Homo- trying to homogenize them, um, and to, to a certain degree, they are successful. In a certain degree, there's a resistance that still continues. But they bring that frame of mind with them, that attitude, that this is an appropriate way to behave. It's not something they invent in North America because they need to figure out how to operate. They come with a, with a set of ideas.
J. Stanger Ross:	00:36:06	And is it just kind of, I guess, I think squaring the circle, I'm not sure. Uh, um, is it, is it the argument of the course? Is it your

argument that antisemitism, or hatred of Jews, is a kind of core constitutive element of that cultural baggage?

Phyllis Senese: 00:36:26

Oh Yes. One of the things I tried exploring with them at the beginning of the course was language and how we use language. Um, and how the word antisemitism came into existence. That there is, there exists before that word a hatred of Jews. And what is Marr trying to say when he says, "No, I'm not, I don't hate Jews for religious reasons. I hate them because I'm a racist. I'm a scientific racist." Um, what does he mean when he says that? Alright, let's, let's open that up a bit more. When he says he's this kind of modern, scientific racist, look at what he says about Jews. What is different about that than someone writing in the 12th century? Is there a fundamental difference? And when you unpack it, the answer is no. He's looking for a way to say, I'm not one of those old fogies and I'm not religious. I'm a modern, secular person. But how do I talk about this topic? I have already have a framework. I already have a language. Oh, I'll invent a new word but it's an a new word that says the same thing. Um, I guess what it comes, came down to was I didn't see any distinction between saying that up to him, it's hatred of Jews, and then it's something different, because if you look at the long history of hatred of Jews, it's got political elements, economic elements, social elements, not just religious. So it's much more complicated. And, um, what I, I guess all of that was trying to reinforce with them over and over again that the idea of hate, uh, is not something new. It can take different forms. And we don't have language, um, to, to cover the nuances because racism, again, it's a 19th century concept and it's a false concept, but we haven't invented language to cover it. Um...

J. Stanger Ross: 00:39:16

I wonder if I'm, uh, it's, uh, I mean I think we're, we're close to having done this, but I just want to give an opportunity explicitly, I guess, you know, I envision students using this, um, interview and courses and, uh, the Germanic studi- Holocaust studies program, as well as in our department. So I guess if you were to make your argument about the long history of antisemitism and its importance to understanding 20th century history, important to understanding Canada today and so on. You, yeah, I don't know if you're prepared to kind of just, um, uh, lay that out. But if you were to, to make that argument for future students who might encounter, uh, uh, this, this, um, tape... What would it be?

Phyllis Senese: 00:40:17

I guess it would come back to the, the very simple notion that you cannot understand Canada in isolation from world history. Um, if you were, if you look at something like the, the anti-

Japanese hysteria of post Pearl Harbor, that, that and take away the element of, of war, the underlying hatred of "the Asian," doesn't just come into existence in 1941. It has a long history and it has a history that predates Canada's engagement with Asia. Um, one of the interesting courses that we did in the history department, uh, back in the 70s was a team taught course in world history. Five of us were involved and we each lectured on our countries, our specialties. So we had British history, Canadian history, European history, American history, Russian history, Chinese history. And for a number of weeks, each of us lectured on how our part of the world had engaged with the rest of it. Each week there was a seminar and each of us had, I think had two or three seminars. We would read the books along with the students so that we were doing the course essentially with them not just popping in and out to, to lecture. And, um, that course was, I think for me also very important in framing how I looked at Canadian history because doing it that way you could see that you can't talk about it in isolation.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:42:32 Just to push a little on this, I guess...

Phyllis Senese: 00:42:35 Keep going!

J. Stanger Ross: 00:42:35 So what about a student who says, "Sure, yeah. You know, I take, um, I take world history courses at UVIC and I, I think about Canada in a global context, but antisemitism isn't a major theme of those courses. It doesn't seem to be a theme of world history. This is a ti-, a major theme of world history, it's a tiny group and it's small in Canada, small elsewhere. Why should I think antisemitism is a big part of seeing Canada in a, in a world historical context?"

Phyllis Senese: 00:43:04 Because antisemitism is there and it should be in those courses. Um, for example, in the 1930s in Japan, um, it has no resident Jewish population. It has a transient Jewish population connected with business trade and so on... Um, virulent antisemitism where the Jew is a cutout, a stand-in for the United States. Soviet propaganda, again, the Jew becomes the symbol of something else. Uh, in a lot of their propaganda. Again, it was the United States, but it could be Western Europe. Uh, it could be a, um, uh, a European leader. Um, you simply have to make the accusation, say the word Jew and it is accepted as an explanation. Well, where does that come from? That kind of thing is very important in world history because you can have, um, and we've seen more recent in more recent times, where was it... Malaysia. Um, again, all of a sudden a flare up of denunciation of Jews. And when you have simple stereotypes like the Jews have all the money, the Jews control

the media, then you never have to make an argument about a particular situation. You just throw out the stereotype and people respond to it because it's so embedded in, in the history. Um, there is a long history of antisemitism thriving in a country where Jews have been expelled. You have England as a good example, they're expelled and yet antisemitism in the literature, in the poetry, in the politics continues because it's handy. It, it makes it possible to talk in code, um, that everybody else understands. Everybody knows that the Jews are this, that, and the other. And you can, you can see the same thing happening with other groups. Um, the way the Japanese are demonized in, um, and the Chinese, but more so the Japanese, they're the ones who are the threat, they're going to take your jobs, they're going to buy out your stores, they're going to corrupt your women. Um, that's classic. You find the same thing being said in Greek and Roman Times about their "other." Um, so there are these stereotypical frameworks that have been created over time for the "other," whatever the, or whoever the "other" is. So antisemitism is always there. And what we call racism is always there.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:46:25 And is it... I mean, I'm thinking also of, I think, uh, other, um, talks I've heard you give, um, but, um, is, is your argument that, um, the rel-, the relation of Judaism to Christianity, um, establishes Jews as, um, uh, foundational to how Christian and modern culture generates these forms of hate? That is, that it's not just pervasive, but that it's somehow foundational to how, uh, these or, or is it rather that you see this as an example among many, a pervasive example? Like is it a, is it a germ of something or a seed of something or is it...

Phyllis Senese: 00:47:19 It's a cornerstone of Christianity because of the, the way in which, and the time that the larger context of the conflict between the greater Jewish community and the Jews who are committed to this new prophet. Um, the way that plays out, the context, so that, that you find in the writing of the Gospels, which are written, um, two to three... begin to be written two to three generations after the events. They're based on oral histories that have been accumulated and then written down. Um, there is the foundation of many of the stereotypes, um, and in the way the language is used. So you find the best example is John's Gospel. He explicitly blames the Jews and makes the link that the Jews are the children of the devil. The Jews killed God. If you're capable of killing God, then you're capable of any monstrosity, any evil. And once you in in a sense sanctify that idea by making it an element of the Gospel, you can see in the other parts of the Gospel Stories, the other stereotypes emerging. Um, the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. How

is it done? It's done by a kiss in a context where a kiss between two men would be extraordinary, would be condemned. Here is a very intimate act that leads to death. Not only does he betray, but he gets money. So the imagery of Jews being evil and associating that with money is a very early Christian stereotype, which for that early church was not just a mean thing to say, it was something they believed to be true. And so that gets written in. But the way it's written in provides a way of then saying, 10 years down the road, a hundred years, a thousand years, "the evil Jew" and "money," which is probably the most familiar stereotype.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:50:29 And it, it, it also helps us understand European colonialism or, uh, the actions of the Canadian state in the 1940s undertaken against Japanese Canadians?

Phyllis Senese: 00:50:49 I think it does because if you look at the history of, the parallel history of what we call racism, uh, you see the same methods, the same way of, um, inventing a stereotype. It also has a long history. And so in the case of the Japanese Canadians, there is such a, and there are individuals in BC who play on preexisting stereotypes about the Japanese and like the Jews, they are very much associated with a quest for economic power. Um, and because they have military strength as a nation, they are seen as a military threat. The Jews don't have a, a nation. They don't have an army, so they operate in the dark, the shadows, but they're every bit as powerful. And, um, you have people in BC whipping up that kind of hatred. You don't have a lot of people and you certainly have very few in government saying, "Let's, let's step back. Let's just, what exactly is the situation in BC? What kind of threat is there?" The assumption is, without any evidence: there is a real danger to the country, to national security, from this population. You have the same response in Hawaii. So I, I think the parallels are, are, are very real and that was something I wanted students to see that these kinds of phenomena don't operate in isolation, but they, they kind of flow in and out of each other. And the, the lines of argument, the way of thinking about one group can be easily applied in another situation to a different group.

J. Stanger Ross: 00:53:07 Great. Okay. I think we've covered that and I think that'll be a great, a great, uh, gift to future listeners. So thank you. Let's go to the volunteer work outside of the university that you did. So can you sketch that for me? So in a little more detail, the, the, your involvement in the [events] [redacted] when you started presenting there and just your history of, I guess, volunteerism, or activism in, in the area of Holocaust education outside of your day job.

Phyllis Senese: 00:53:41

Um, well I guess the main one was, was getting involved in the early nineties, meeting Peter Gary and getting involved with the, the, the events he was holding that began before he actually worked with some others to create the [organization] [redacted]. He was a survivor who was liberated at Bergen Belsen on his 21st birthday, barely alive. And his experiences had left him very traumatized and the Holocaust was not something he could talk about until he got to his seventies. And then he felt an urgency that "I've got to talk about this now, because how long do I have left?" Um, so I got involved in the [organization] [redacted], I'll use the short title, from the beginning. And my involvement varied from year to year. Um, almost every year I would give a talk about the historical context and again, try to set that in the context of a very old established hatred that, the Nazis come to power in 1933, but that is not the beginning of antisemitism. Hitler doesn't invent anything in terms of antisemitism. He takes what's already there a further step and you need to understand that. So that was probably my most consistent contribution to the, to the [events] [redacted] was to make that connection for them. And to talk about the, the Ho-, the, the way in which, um, stereotypes play into the success of the Holocaust. Why is it that so many people believe this Nazi propaganda, whether it's in Germany or some other country that they've overrun? Why is it that they find people in many places to support them, uh, support the, the whole mechanism? Why doesn't the resistance, for example, bomb trains or blow up the train lines heading out of France towards death camps? Why is it not a priority at that time? How do the Nazis implement this program? And that I used to, both in my courses and at [events] [redacted], I would talk about how the law is used, how you can manipulate a legal system to do something quite different from what it had been doing and who makes that possible. So it'd be that kind of historical context. Um, and usually depending on the program, which varied from year to year, there would, that would then be followed by a survivor who talked about their experiences. So they wouldn't have to worry about trying to explain the bigger picture. They could focus on what happened to them in Belgium as a child, or what happened, what happened to them in Poland. Um, because that was, that was the thing that students really wanted to hear, was the survivor. But we always felt they needed a context. And if you look at the BC curriculum, there isn't much there. And in this period, history ceased to become... Uh, history ceased to be a required subject in the BC high school curriculum. So you have, you have very few students now actually taking a history course where they would encounter these kinds of issues. They might encounter them in some other way, in a different course,

but not, not history. So that was the biggest thing I was involved in with was the, the um, the [events] , the planning of it, um, the organization. The [organization] also got involved, I guess it would be the late nineties... might be a bit earlier in, um, an active role in the Kristallnacht remembrance at the synagogue. And also the memorial at the cemetery on... In-, usually in the spring. I gave a series of lectures on the Shoa at Holy Cross Church. Again, it was, uh, the first lecture was on the history of the, the, the complicity of Christianity and the Holocaust. And there was, uh, an adult Catholic audience who were very receptive. Of course we had at that time in Victoria, a very progressive Catholic bishop. Um, so it was that kind of cohort that would come to the lectures. Um, one of the men in the community who is no longer alive, uh, was a stringer for the Canadian Jewish News. And he, um, I had taped th-, somebody had taped those lectures. He listened to the tapes and asked if he could write an article for the Canadian Jewish news about my series of lectures. And I said, "Sure, you know, if you have questions, just give me a call." He called me back a few weeks later and said, "I wrote the article and I submitted it and the editor wouldn't print it. He said it would be too controversial," the kinds of things I said, uh, and he was "worried about the response it might create in Toronto," which I thought was very interesting because I wasn't saying anything that wasn't, um, that was really revolutionary or, or, uh, it was the kind of thing that, uh, anybody studying church history had been saying for a long time. And there had been, um, one of the things I had emphasized in those lectures was the, the Christians who came, who's who, who stepped forward after the war, because there were very, very few before the war, particularly theologians who had in any way condemned antisemitism. Probably the most well known in the pre-war period would have been an Englishman, Gordon Parks. Um, he.. not Gordon, James Parks. Uh, he had very explicitly talked about Christianity's role in, not only the foundation of antisemitism, but the perpetuation of it. After the war, you get a lot of examination of conscience by Christian communities, the most dramatic being the Lutherans, of course with the German connection, they had the, the largest questions to deal with and eventually come to repudiate Martin Luther. Because of course... His antisemitistic... His antisemitic rants against the Jews because they didn't turn to his brand of Christianity so enraged him that even the Nazis regaled him as, um, sort of the father of their ideas. Those were not novel concepts. And many of the churches and many theologians in the post war period, um, really examined Christianity in a, in a very, not just critical way, but in a very blunt way, which I talked about in those lectures. And, um, so I'm not sure why the editor found it... That it would be too controversial... Um, it's, it's the

		Christian theologians who are, and, and Christian writers who, I think, wrote some of the best argumentation against distinguishing hatred of the Jews pre Wilhelm Maar and antisemitism. And um, [coughs] excuse me, they were the ones who I think wrote the most pointed criticisms of trying to distinguish the two and that they aren't, they're not two different things. It's the same thing in a different disguise.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:03:51	I'm going to try to draw you back to the, to the kind of nuts and bolts of the volunteer work you did. But I feel like Lynne would be disappointed with me if I didn't ask, and maybe this is the right time to ask... So are you a member of a faith community? Do you have a, is there a, is, is, is there any part of your engagement with these topics that comes from your involvement in a church or...
Phyllis Senese:	01:04:21	No. Well, yes and no. Um... I guess to the extent that my one of my earliest questions of how could this have happened, who, who let this happen, um, I have a better understanding of that now and in particular the role that Christianity plays. Um... I did not experience in any church context, any institutional context, expressions of antisemitism. I did, um, I did experience it both directly and indirectly from individuals... In our family there was an an incident, where my brother, who is six years younger, he and two other children were playing together, one of them was Jewish. There was an argument about something that they were doing and not my brother, but the third child said to the Jewish child when she couldn't get her own way in the argument, uh, she just snapped at him, "Well, you killed Christ." Um, she was a Catholic. So I knew from experience that churches and church people harbored these kinds of attitudes and sometimes displayed them. Uh, my own, my own religious background is very mixed. Um, but I haven't been affiliated with any, any religion for 25, 30 years. And I, I think antisemitism was one of the things that, um... Was the, the straw that broke the camel's back. The refusal, the refusal to really engage as an institution with that past, was something that I couldn't, I couldn't accept Christianity taking that perspective that... you know It was, it was like so many other issues that are now boiling over in, in various churches that they don't want to talk about or deal with. So, no, I haven't been engaged in any faith community.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:07:22	So when you gave those lectures to... At the Catholic Church that you mentioned, um,
Phyllis Senese:	01:07:27	Holy Cross.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:07:28	Holy Cross. That- you weren't at- as a member or, uh...

Phyllis Senese:	01:07:33	I was at the time.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:07:34	Okay.
Phyllis Senese:	01:07:35	Um, and uh... It was just something I thought we needed to do. I also, at Holy Cross, one of the, one of the survivors who came to the [event] ███████, who was a close friend of Peter Gary's, was a man who had, who was Polish, a Polish Catholic, who had been rounded up for political reasons and thrown into Auschwitz and survived. And he would come to give, uh, talks here in other places and he would wear a replica of his prisoners uniform. And I had him come and give a talk at Holy Cross. So I, I, as I was in the process of myself disengaging, I still wanted the church to have to face some of these issues.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:08:45	So back to, um, you had some involvement organizationally also, in addition to speaking, you also had some, um, role on the board of the, of the [organization] ████.
Phyllis Senese:	01:09:01	David Katz and I were co-presidents in... Somewhere in the nineties for a couple of years. I had a-, I had been asked if I would, if I would take on the job and I said I wouldn't do it because I wasn't Jewish. And there had been occasional, uh, remarks made that there were some in the Jewish community who didn't like the idea of non-Jews playing any kind of prominent role in Holocaust education. Um, so David agreed to... That we would, we would be co-presidents, um, most of the time through the, the 90- after David and I finished our term from that point on, the [organization] ████ tended to be organizationally and, and uh, kind of one man operations where the rest of us were regarded as, um, a sounding board, um, discussion group. But ultimately, someone else was taking the leadership of making decisions, which had both good and bad aspects to it. And, um... But my role in those years was mainly being part of this larger group that would meet to discuss what are we going to do at this event. Um, there was a time in the 90s when we were able to get a fair amount of money through, uh, federal and provincial grants for multiculturalism events, uh, anti racism events. And, um, so that gave us the funding to do a lot of things that otherwise would be impossible. And, uh, so my role became one of just sort of participating in a group rather than any kind of leadership, um, through the early two thousands. Um, I guess we're about two- well about 2006, uh, I became treasurer. And, uh, so my responsibilities there were more in terms of managing the accounts, dealing with tax, federal tax reporting, uh, provincial society obligations, um, that kind of thing. But I also continued to participate in discussions

		about what are we going to do, how are we going to do it? And, um, when asked giving, giving a talk [redacted].
J. Stanger Ross:	01:12:11	And the [event] [redacted] continues on or you-, do you remain involved [redacted]?
Phyllis Senese:	01:12:15	Mhmm.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:12:15	Yeah.
Phyllis Senese:	01:12:16	Um, when we had large scale funding we were able to rent the UVIC auditorium and have a day long [event] [redacted] for about 1,100 students. Uh, when we began to lose the funding, we had to go to a different model. And, uh, we got a lot of feedback from teachers saying that a day long event was too much for their students and we could see it, that they would, many of them would disappear at the lunch break and not reappear afterwards. So we went to a model of half-day [events] [redacted] and the Victoria School Board, uh, very generously donated the use of the Oak Bay High auditorium and their, their tech crew. So the, the model that evolved, uh, was, uh, two sessions, morning and afternoon on each of two days. And we also tried to divide it between, um, middle school grades and high school grades. Uh, then we would have at each session, um, I would give the historical background talk and a survivor would speak and then we'd do it again in the afternoon and then two more sessions the next day. And that's, that's what's continued. The numbers are not as great, but we still have about between five and 600 students. Uh, we've also moved it from the spring to the fall, again at the request of teachers. We used to have it usually in, in April when the auditorium at UVIC was between large scale events, the music festival and convocation. There were, there were dates in there that we could, we could book it. So now it's, it's still being held at, at Oak Bay High in their new facility and the school board still very generously allows us to use the space and their technical support.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:14:49	Have you noticed a change in students' engagement or receptiveness over time or...?
Phyllis Senese:	01:14:57	No. Um, the one thing that is consistent is I think that they... Which has become more of a problem is they, they lack the historical context, um, because they don't take history. So that is all new to them. What has remained consistently high is that they're interested most in being able to listen to and then afterwards talk to a survivor, um, because it makes a connection with them. I think at that emotional level in a way that a history

lecture can't. And it's very common when the [event] ██████ ends. Um, students that don't immediately have to run out and jump on a bus, are mobbing the survivor with more- We always have a question and answer period as part of the event, but students tend to be, especially the middle school students, tend to be very shy about asking a question in front of the group, but they'll mob the survivor afterwards to ask the questions. So, um, for them it's a very exhausting process and we, some- depending on who is coming to speak, we have had to sometimes have one survivor speak the first day and someone else the second day because they just can't do two, they're, they're all so elderly now.

J. Stanger Ross: 01:16:43

So what do you think or hope is achieved in these events? What are the, what are the outcomes ██████, or even in your courses, you know, what, what, what's the outcome of it? What's the ideal outcome of education in this area?

Phyllis Senese: 01:17:06

Well, the ideal outcome is that they engage with their own community. Um, when I was teaching, I always told my students that now that you know something, you have responsibility to act out there. This, this is not just a course that you cram information and then when the exam is over, you empty the, the data bank. Um, this is something you need to take out with you and talking with students in that course. And then sometimes meeting them even years after they've had the course. That's what's happened. Um, their engagement may be at a very small level, the level of their own family. But I've had a number of students come up to me ██████, former students who are now teachers in the high schools here in town and say, I'm, you know, I brought my students because I took your course and I know how important this is. Um, when we conclude the [events] ██████, either I do it in my talk or whoever's wrapping up the event does it, but we always tell them that they are now witnesses. You know, you've met a survivor, you've talked with a survivor, you've asked your questions, you've heard their story. You have a responsibility to take that story out there. Go home and tell your family, tell your friends, tell your neighbors, and get engaged because nothing will change if people don't act. And your action could be something very small. For example, if you're with a group of friends and people start telling jokes denigrating Sikhs, you speak up, you say something. You're not a Sikh, but what they're doing is wrong and you know better. So it's, it's that kind of I suppose, outreach that we want them to be engaged in and it's always hard to know how successful it is. But I think they're, what we've done with the [events] ██████ and what the school districts have done in terms of developing anti-bullying,

anti-racism programs, the, the greater effort that's being made now to include more Indigenous elements in education, the new, um, sexual orientation and gender program that's being rolled out in our schools. I think that has a big impact too. And that students, one hopes, that they will start seeing connections between all these lines of action and what the problems are and how we got there with them. That raises a, a question that has been a problem in Holocaust education here and elsewhere. And it was a, a question that really troubled Peter Gary a lot and that is: Should we be speaking only about the Shoah or do we try to relate the Shoah to what else is going on? And that, that's been a divisive issue here in Victoria. Personally I, I think you need both. Um, but I think his fear was that then you get into arguments about equivalency and um, he didn't want the Shoah denigrated in any way or downgraded, which could happen if too much equivalency is built into the comparisons.

J. Stanger Ross: 01:21:48 So we've talked a little bit about this prior to, to meeting also, but I do have an interest in, and I have been asking folks about the divisions in, um, memorial and educational work that's happening in Victoria. So, um, you were there to see a lot of that unfold. Are there two different sets of ideas operating? I'm, I'm trying to leave largely outside of these discussions, except as you or others think is appropriate, I'm trying to leave largely outside of the discussion, the kind of personality or highly personal aspects of disputes and try to get at this question, are there two different visions of how the Holocaust should be remembered or taught and what are those two different visions if there are?

Phyllis Senese: 01:22:45 Well, I think to the extent that there are two different visions, it would be that issue of, of should the Holocaust be examined, memorialized, studied, taught, discussed only on its own or do we say that there are lessons the Holocaust teaches that can be applied in other contexts? Um, I think that's a, a fundamental division. And it... I think it d-, it is displayed in both, um, memorialization and education, but perhaps more so around the issue of memorialization. Um, I don't have enough distance yet to be able to say that that division of ideas about the importance of the Shoah is separated from or can be separated from personalities. Um, I think when you have organizations, any organization in any context, you tend to have people emerge who not only for a vision of, of what the group should achieve, but a vision of what they themselves should achieve. Um, I think personalities do tend to be an issue. And in the, in the experience of any particular group that can loom very large. And the, the, the question of what is our vision can get lost. And, uh, I think that's happened to some extent here in Victoria.

J. Stanger Ross:	01:25:04	And so we have one group that is organizing, Krista- the two major, I guess memorial activities in town, the Shoah project, uh, doing the Kristallnacht and the Yom HaShoah up at the cemetery. And then we have another group that's organizing the [event] in which you're involved. So in terms of this division and I, I, I've absorbed, even though I'm, I'm going to act like I haven't, I have absorbed this idea that personality matters also, but it is, is, is, is the Shoa project and those memorial events do those groups in your view tend, how does that division on, on um, on the sing-, what do we want to say? The singularity of the Holocaust or the value of viewing it, um, in its own terms versus more comparative terms let's say how do those two organizations or the groups or the events that they organize, how do they reflect a division on that topic?
Phyllis Senese:	01:26:24	I'm not sure that, that when it comes to vision, there is a lot of disparity. Um, without going into the personalities and all of that, what happened was a point was reached where the clash of personalities got to be so toxic that the only solution was to split the memorial events away from the organization and our, our charter emphasized education and by that point, those of us who are still involved, were all educators. So the, the simplest solution to the toxic environment was group A, what became the Shoa Project, you take the memorialization because that's what you clearly want do. Um, and we'll continue with education and um, but in terms of vision, I, I don't see a great disparity. I was at the Kristallnacht, not this past fall, but the previous fall. And it seemed to me that the, all of the core material of the event was completely consistent with what had gone on before. And it had the same elements of: these are lessons that can be applied in other contexts. So I didn't see in practice a whole lot of differentiation, nor at Yom HaShoa. So I think in this case, personalities and, and the kinds of toxic relationships that can result, um, that was more of a, an issue than differing visions.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:28:50	Is there any, um, is any of it around the question of what constitutes expertise or who should speak or what constitutes authority in this area?
Phyllis Senese:	01:29:10	It could. Um, and again, I think one of the issues underlying issues that probably nobody really wants to talk about is the question of whether or not these programs, events, should be exclusively or mostly the work of the Jewish community or is there a place for non-Jews to be involved as well? Um, and not necessarily just on the fringes, but at the core. Again, I think that, that would most likely end up being an issue of

personalities too. Because there are, there are some individuals who take the position that by being, by the very fact that they are Jewish lends them a credibility that a non-Jew would not have, they may not have expertise in the sense of knowledge, information, um, but that Jewishness conveys an authority that's important. Um, it's very, it reminds me very much of issues I've been involved with where there is conflict among members of different aboriginal nations. And the question is, "Who's more Indian?" And by being "Indian," that makes me an expert. Um, so there is some of that.

J. Stanger Ross: 01:30:59 Is part of the argument... So there's the kind of, "I'm Jewish" argument, is part of the argument also, is part of this authority contest or authority dispute... Does any of it relate to proximity to the Holocaust, essentially? A personal, a personal proximity to the Holocaust? So that, getting to that question kind of, "Who's more Indian?" That is to say, among Jews, there are differences in how connected they are. Of course there's survivors, then there's...

Phyllis Senese: 01:31:35 Right. That's very much an issue, uh, in, in, in many cases. Um... We're getting to the point now though where the, the, the time gap is we're looking at many generations after the Holocaust and I guess it's still too soon to tell what is the longterm damage, the longterm trauma from generation to generation. When does that peter out or does it ever peter out? Because I think for those who want to claim that by virtue of family proximity to the Holocaust, um, that conveys a certain authority... When, how long can you carry on that argument? If you grew up in a household with grandparents who were survivors and the family dynamic is very much affected by that, that's one kind of experience. But if you never knew those grandparents and you, all you had were family stories, what is your proximity? What if your family got out in time and most of them survived? They are of that generation, but they were able to get out and get to England, get to North America or South America, anywhere where they could be safe. Does that diminish your credibility? Or are they, um, I witnessed several squabbles between survivors. Um, those who were in camps and those who were on the run. Those who were in camps insisted they were the only ones entitled to be called survivors. If you weren't in a camp, if you weren't through that brutal trauma, you were not a survivor. Um, which again, it's, I think that also is a reflection of personalities and the impact of trauma. That "My trauma is so much bigger than anybody else's could ever be." So it, you get many layers around the issue of authority and credibility.

J. Stanger Ross:	01:34:30	And did those issues of proximity to the Holocaust come into play in the, in ultimately the division into two organizations in Victoria?
Phyllis Senese:	01:34:41	Not that, not that it was ever articulated that way. Um, it might've been a... Part of a hidden agenda or subconscious feeling, but it wasn't anything that was articulated, at least not that I ever heard.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:35:04	Okay. I think I've probed that as much as I would [laughs]. Is there anything else we should add to the discussion before we end taping?
Phyllis Senese:	01:35:21	Hmm. Not that I can think of... Other than... I would like to see history brought back to the, the, the, the high school curriculum as a required subject and along with so many other things that the Holocaust be part of that education. Um, I guess I worry that the kind of high speed times we're in, uh, the digital world that we're in, subjects like the Holocaust, antisemitism, racism, these require a lot of time to get at. You can't do it in a tweet. And that's the one thing that we're losing. And I think students at the high school level, at the university level are, are losing the time needed to reflect on, on really deep issues. And these are deep issues. And there are so many other issues that also need to be talked about. How do you prioritize? So I'm glad I'm not having to design curriculum.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:36:50	Okay. Thank you.
Phyllis Senese:	01:36:52	Did you have any other questions?
J. Stanger Ross:	01:36:54	No, I think I, I think I've asked most of what I wanted to ask. Yeah, thank you.
Phyllis Senese:	01:37:00	Oh, you're very welcome.
J. Stanger Ross:	01:37:01	I'll turn off the recorder.