

# Fighting Holocaust fatigue

*Dr. Ruth: 'You have to stand up and be counted'*

"I don't consider myself a Holocaust survivor, I'm an orphan of the Holocaust," said Dr. Ruth Westheimer to the varied audience packing Bloor Cinema late last week.

Westheimer was in town for the Toronto launch of a series of Holocaust memoirs from the Azrieli Foundation (the books were launched in Montreal last month), but those accustomed to her frank talks about sex were in for a much more serious affair as she discussed her experience as a girl during the Second World War.

"We're delighted to have Dr. Ruth. There's a lot of mainstream appeal because she is a Holocaust survivor, and we want to reach out beyond the Jewish community, too, because these stories are important for everyone to know," said Naomi Azrieli, chair and executive director of the Azrieli Foundation, which has published the first five of 170 Holocaust memoirs by survivors who made their way to Canada.

"We decided to do something as downtown and mainstream as we could do," Azrieli explained. "We're not in Thornhill in the Jewish community centre and it's not ritzy."

With barely an empty seat in the theatre, Westheimer stressed the importance of keeping the past alive and of challenging "Holocaust fatigue," the notion that too much emphasis is put on the Holocaust.

"The one thing that I learned from coming out of Nazi Germany was that you have to stand up and be counted for what you believe in," Westheimer said. "I think that helps me somewhat in that other area of my expertise."

While the events and memoirs are meant to appeal to the greater community, Azrieli noted that, with an estimated 125,000 descendents of Holocaust survivors in the Toronto area, the local Jewish community is directly and personally touched by their project.

■ The Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs is available for free at [azrielifoundation.org/memoirs](http://azrielifoundation.org/memoirs).

*David Hamilton, National Post*