

Dr. Dori Laub, co-founder of the Fortunoff Archive, dies at 81



June 29, 2018

Dr. Dori Laub, one of the founders of the [Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies](#) [1], died on June 23, 2018, in Woodbridge, Connecticut.

Dr. Laub and Laurel Vlock, a New Haven television producer, began videotaping Holocaust survivors in May 1979 in what became the Holocaust Survivors Film Project (HSFP). In 1981, the HSFP tapes were deposited at Yale where they formed the initial collection of the Fortunoff Archive.

“We are deeply saddened by the news of Dori’s death,” said Stephen Naron, director of the Fortunoff Archive. “Dori’s work was groundbreaking and critical to the archive’s growth and success today. At 81, he was still active professionally and contributed regularly to our work by sharing his experience and advice. His presence will be sorely missed.”

Dr. Laub participated in 134 testimony taping sessions for the HSFP and the Fortunoff Archive as well as for other independent projects. He also trained interviewers for affiliated projects in the U.S. Israel, Canada, and Europe. His unique perspective as a survivor and clinical psychiatrist shaped the archive’s distinctive methodology, with a focus on empathic listening rather than journalistic interviews.

“He never called them interviews,” said Joanne Weiner Rudof, the collection’s archivist from 1984 to 2017. “He asked very few questions, made minimal intervention. We never used questionnaires. His goal was to create a trust relationship and to follow the survivor’s story, not to lead it. It’s much harder because you have to have confidence in the process and the survivor’s ability to tell their own story.”

Born in Czernowitz, Romania, in 1937, Dr. Laub was deported in 1942 with his parents to Transnistria, a region of the Ukraine between the Bug and Dniester Rivers that was conquered by the Germans and Romanians in 1941. His father disappeared during a German raid prior to liberation by the Soviets. Dr. Laub and his mother were reunited with his grandparents who had survived in Czernowitz. They emigrated to Israel in 1950 where Dr. Laub attended medical school, graduating in 1963.

He maintained an active private practice focused on survivors of trauma and was a clinical professor of psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine. He also co-founded the [Genocide Studies Program](#) [2] at Yale’s MacMillan Center, served as its acting director in 2003 and as deputy director for the past 20 years.

“Dr. Dori Laub was an inspiration,” said Ben Kiernan, A. Whitney Griswold Professor of History and the program’s founding director. “He demonstrated an intense scholarly and human interest not only in the devastation wreaked by the Nazi Holocaust but also in the impact of many other genocides on their victims around the world. And he

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was a pre-eminent scholar of trauma who also fostered a multidisciplinary interest in the study of genocide through history, sociology, religion, anthropology, political science, law, medicine, and photography. He will be greatly missed by many colleagues and former students in a variety of fields.”

Read [Dr. Laub's online obituary here](#) [3]. Hear him talk about empathic listening in this [video excerpt](#) [4].

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