

# Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale

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## Report of the Advisor

Two and a half years is not a long time. The Yale Video Archive opened its doors officially in October, 1982. The first Archivist was appointed in January, 1983. These years have seen a remarkable development of resources and holdings. The initial deposit of two hundred testimonies by the Holocaust Survivors Film Project in December, 1981, allowed Yale to go forward with the concept of a documentation center devoted to the oral history of the Holocaust. Today the Archive contains five hundred and fifty witness accounts, comprising eight hundred hours of interviews, conducted not only in New Haven, Hartford and other Connecticut towns, but also in New York, California, Chicago, Cleveland and Tel Aviv.

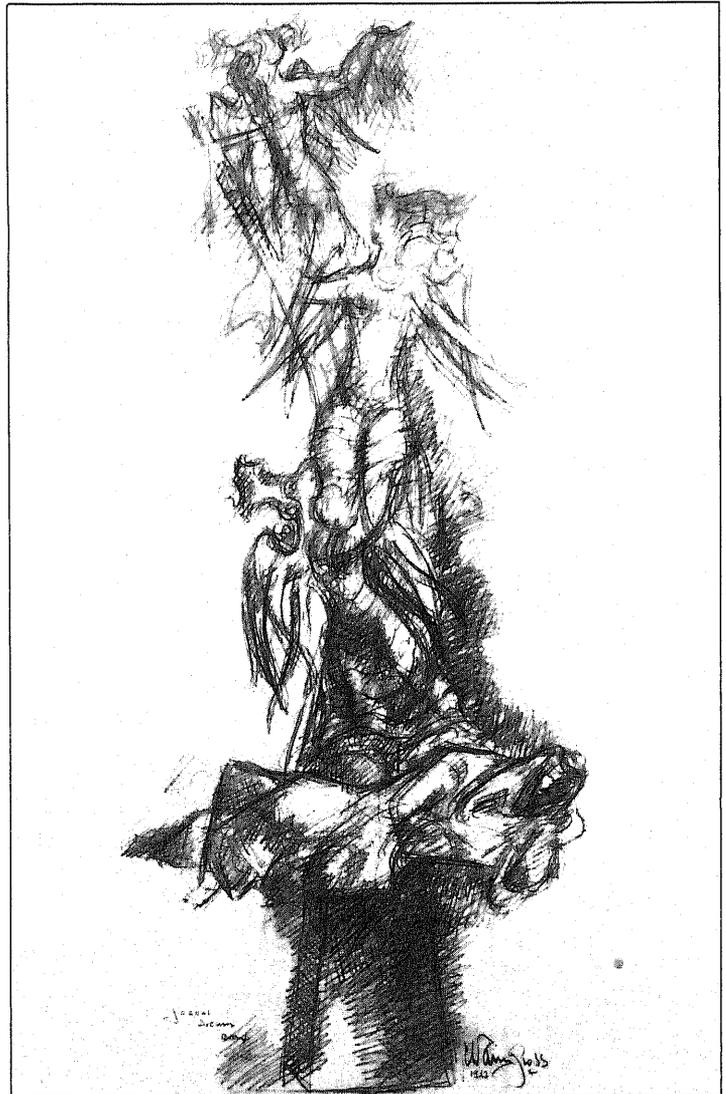
Preserving the stories of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust is the Archive's most urgent task. As one participant said: "It is five minutes to twelve. We speak now or not at all." The losses in the survivor community are serious and on the increase. The *Book of Names* compiled by Benjamin Meed and the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors indicates that there are more than 55,000 survivors still with us in the United States, and we don't know how many in Europe, Israel and South America. We would like to gather the testimonies of just one out of a hundred of these. Will we be able to accomplish this part of our mission?

Videotaping is a technically sensitive process, and interviewing requires not only historical knowledge and listening skills, but empathy and stamina. The support group involved in interviewing cannot tape more than two or three witnesses any given day, so strong and emotionally penetrating are the stories we hear and record. Each testimony is registered and carefully preserved in a temperature and humidity controlled vault. The original tape is of public broadcast quality (3/4 inch), acceptable to television stations now and in the future. Two back-up tapes are made, and these are the ones used by the Archivist as well as by students, researchers and educators who come to our viewing room in Yale's Sterling Memorial Library.

It is not enough to collect the testimonies and assure their preservation. They cannot be allowed to become inert, just another shelved deposit. Each testimony, therefore, will be indexed and time-coded so that historians of the future may study the tapes in their entirety or according to such themes as: types of coping and of resistance; awareness of early anti-Semitic incidents; hopes and fears; the terrible effects of hunger; the life of children in the camps; the role of the doctors; the impact of sudden separation on family members; the part played by religion; acts of human kindness as well as specific incidents of suffering and cruelty. The tapes yield many vivid memories: for example, what happened on Kristallnacht or on the day of

Liberation, or at Auschwitz on the Jewish High Holidays, when an infamous "selection" took place that consigned over fourteen hundred boys to the gas chambers.

The primary purpose of our interviews, which encourage an open-ended, free-flowing testimony, is not to augment the already considerable history detailing these terrible years. Oral history is a matter of memory, reconstruction and imagination. This is not to say that we do not come upon extraordinary incidents which the "objective technique" of written question-



"Rebirth" by Chaim Gross

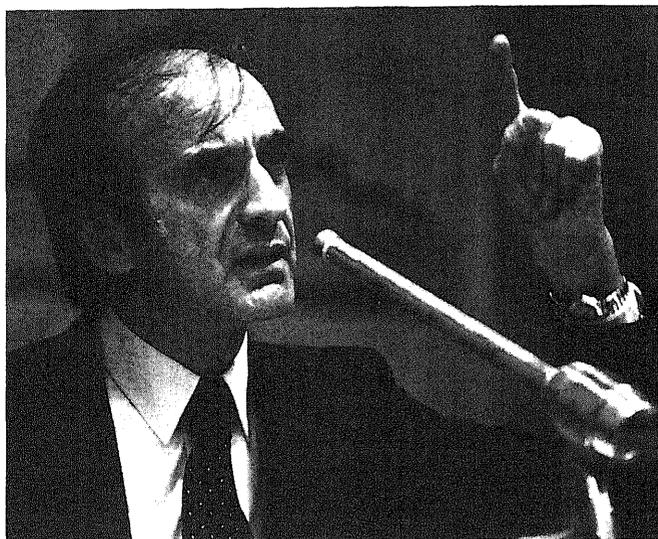
naires may have missed. The tapes are especially valuable, however, in enabling us to capture directly the feelings and attitudes of the survivors—the entire rather than the segmented perspective of each individual. To say that six million were killed, or ninety per cent of a particular town, remains an abstraction. To hear and see even *one* of these testimonies is, in contrast, an evidential and searing encounter. As they tell their story, the survivors are not simply victims: their courage in reliving these painful memories shines through. Their strength communicates itself to us, their resolve that such inhumanity should not happen again. They are bearing witness so that future generations will know what must be known, and in a form that does not degrade the human image. However grim the contents of their own experience, these are people who speak to us directly, in their own voice, and who often speak for an entire family that was destroyed, even for an entire community.

It is our hope that testimonies like these will open the hearts as well as the minds of future generations of young adults. We live in an audiovisual age. These filmed accounts, these living portraits, do not substitute for further inquiry, but lead us more deeply to it, make it inescapable. Yale's purpose in collecting, preserving and indexing them is to help curricular planning and community programs that aim to combat prejudice and defamiation wherever they occur.

We have instituted an annual conference and contracted with the Boston based foundation, Facing History and Ourselves, to review our tapes for their most effective educational use. We are also committed to assisting Museums and Holocaust Centers throughout the country that wish to use edited versions of the tapes. I suspect that educational television will find itself turning to these testimonies as well.

Our Archive would not have come so far without the foresight and assistance of more people than can be mentioned here. First, the survivors and witnesses themselves; then Dr. Dori Laub, Laurel Vlock, William Rosenberg and the Holocaust Survivors Film Project, a New Haven grassroots endeavor that began it all, and won the early support of the New Haven Foundation; Eli Evans and the Charles H. Revson Foundation, whose four-year grant allowed us to place the Archive on a professional basis in Yale's Sterling Memorial Library; the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, under the chairmanship of Elie Wiesel, and its Archives Committee headed by Dr. Hadassah Rosensaft, who recognized our work by making us a temporary national depository for videotaped testimonies. We hope to continue our relationship with the Council and contribute to its Washington Museum. Our Archivist and Manager and the general expertise of the Yale Library staff have also been essential to us. Finally, without our many volunteers, we could not have started and we could not continue.

Let me also pay tribute to our affiliates in many parts of this country and in Israel who have completed what they promised. We will continue to work with them, and are presently looking forward to cooperative projects with the Greater Hartford Jewish Federation and the Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies in Dallas, to mention only two recent affiliates. We have made contacts that may lead to a taping project in Europe.



1982 Conference: Elie Wiesel

We hope to strengthen our relations with the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, the Canadian Jewish Congress and the New York City Holocaust Memorial Commission, while continuing our close cooperation with Selfhelp Community Services in New York, who are planning to tape a number of deaf survivors. If the first two and a half years have been full and productive, the next two and a half will be more challenging still.

Geoffrey H. Hartman

*Conferences:* The Video Archive has convened four annual conferences at Yale: September 26–27, 1981, "Holocaust Trauma: A Working Conference;" November 13–14, 1982, "Knowing and Not Knowing," with a major address by Elie Wiesel; November 5–6, 1983, "The Educational and Research Uses of the Yale Video Archive," with a public lecture by historian Raul Hilberg on "Origins of the Final Solution;" October 28–29, 1984, "Education and the Holocaust: New Responsibilities and Cooperative Ventures." The 1984 conference was attended by representatives of organizations involved in Holocaust education from the United States and Canada, as well as by Yehuda Bauer of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp of the Hague, Netherlands, and Michael Pollak of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. This conference was funded by a grant from the Charles H. Revson Foundation and was sponsored in conjunction with Facing History and Ourselves. A fifth conference is being planned for the fall of 1985. It will help individual teachers to develop curricular resources and to gain the cooperation of local school systems.

*Affiliated Projects:* As part of the Archive's outreach and consultative services, assistance has been given to many organizations. A total of two hundred and thirty-six testimonies have been deposited by the following affiliates: California State University,



1984 Conference Participants: (l. to r.) Geoffrey Hartman; Yehuda Bauer, Director, Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Laurel Vlock; Dr. Dori Laub; Michael Pollak, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris.

Northridge; the Holocaust Education Foundation of Illinois; the National Council of Jewish Women/Cleveland Section; Second Generation of Long Island; and U.C.L.A./1939 Club of Los Angeles. A pilot project of thirty videotaped testimonies has been completed in Israel in cooperation with Beth Hatefusoht and Hebrew University. Both Dr. Dori Laub and Professor Geoffrey Hartman have visited Israel to help establish this program and serve on its steering committee along with noted Israeli scholars and interviewers. The volunteers involved with the project in Israel are planning a second phase. The Video Archive has agreed to contribute the blank tapes and to help in the fund raising so that the project, presently the only videotaping of Holocaust survivors in Israel, can continue.

Selfhelp Community Services of New York, a social service agency, is another vital part of our project. Harriet Friedlander, Adele Friedman and Phyllis Ziman have headed a group of dedicated volunteers which has completed fifty-seven interviews, and will continue their important work for the Video Archive.

*Educational Resources:* Among the materials which the Video Archive has available for loan to educational institutions and community groups are the following. Six edited versions of testimonies, ranging from 30 to 40 minutes in length; *About the Holocaust*, a film produced under the auspices of the New Haven Foundation for the New Haven school system and now distributed nationally by the ADL; and *Those Who Were There*, a film which explains the mission of the Video Archive and the importance of survivor testimonies.

*Courses at Yale:* Robert Liberles, Visiting Professor of Modern Jewish History, has used the Archive for two of his courses. A videotape, edited for Mr. Liberles' course on German Jewish History, helped to demonstrate the experiences of three Jews with different origins. In a second seminar, "Diaries of the Holocaust," the emphasis fell on life in the Nazi ghettos. Stu-

dents viewed tapes in order to compare them with other sources, especially diaries. Important topics studied this way included Kristallnacht, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the fate of Greek Jewry. Professor Shoshana Felman used edited testimonies for a course entitled "Testimony in Literature and Psychoanalysis." A special college seminar, "Oral History and the Holocaust Survivor: Living with the Vanished Past," will be proposed by Dana Kline and Dr. Dori Laub for the Spring of 1986.

*Articles:* For published information on the Video Archive see the following. *The New Journal*, January 15, 1983 (pp. 12-21). *The Jewish Week and American Examiner*, April 27, 1984 (p. 11). *Moment Magazine*, March and April, 1981 (pp. 32-33). *Moment Magazine*, January and February, 1984 (pp. 31-35). *New York Times*, July 8, 1979, September 3, 1979 and December 13, 1981. *Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies*, Spring, 1985 (pp. 14-18). A special Holocaust issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, "On Knowing", edited by Dr. Dori Laub and Nanette Auerhahn and comprising papers presented at the Video Archive's 1983 conference, will appear in the summer of 1985.

*Presentations:* Principals of the Video Archive have been invited to address many school, university, community and scholarly gatherings in the United States, Israel and Europe. Among these have been the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Yale's Sterling Memorial Library Forum, the International Network of Children of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, St. Joseph's University, Hillel Eastern Winter Conference, Yale University School of Medicine's Continuing Education Conference, "Trauma and the Family," and the Fifteenth Annual Scholars' Conference in Philadelphia.

### Jolly Zeleny, *Survivor*

My husband told me he would like to have his testimony recorded, but two weeks later he was diagnosed having a terminal illness. His story will never be told. Now we know that even survivors do not survive forever. History is calling us. History never speaks for itself, only through interpreters, and history is calling us now to testify in the court of conscience.

### Mark Pazniokas, *Hartford Courant Staff Writer*

Abraham Smolar watched and listened Sunday to the videotaped testimony of Holocaust survivors like himself. He is older and not well. He promised he would share his memories, add his testimony to theirs.

But he shook a crooked finger at Professor Geoffrey Hartman, who is helping compile the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony at Yale University, and said he would need lots of time to tell his story.

“I will speak for my entire town,” Smolar said.

Smolar was one of twenty people, many of them Holocaust survivors, to meet at the Greater Hartford Jewish Community Center to consider adding their testimonies to the archives at Yale.

“I am going to give testimony, as much as I remember. I am starting to forget some things, but I am still an archive,” Smolar said tapping his forehead. “They are calling me the town hall.”

### Gabriele Schiff, *Selfhelp Community Services, New York*

Having done interviews in the DP camps after the war, and also for a number of social agencies, this was the only time where there was no set agenda such as providing information for visa and immigration, job applications, restitution or locating a relative. I have a deep feeling of gratitude that the Yale Video Archive allowed me to be an interviewer as well as to relate the story of my late husband. This, for me, was both a release and the opportunity to fulfill an obligation. Many times he told me, the generations that come after us have to *Know*—only then can a recurrence be prevented. He died too early. It was left for me to pass his story into history.

As an interviewer, I was impressed by the friendly, warm surroundings that made the survivor feel at ease from the start. I was aware of the conflict many had and the different reasons which made them want to share their memories. One wanted his children to know and could never bring himself ‘to talk about it.’ One wanted to talk about who survived and who did not. Some were overwhelmingly lonely and simply wanted to talk. There were probably as many reasons as there were witnesses. If we want this history and documentation, we had better collect it now.

### Dr. Jay Katz, *Professor of Law and Psychoanalysis, Yale University*

In recent discussions about the Holocaust Video Project, the “sacredness” of the interview materials has frequently been

impressed on me, with the implied message that these materials should be treated differently from other historical records deposited in libraries. I agree that they are sacred documents—that the spirit of “kiddush hashem” haunts these interviews: they not only speak to memories of the survivors but also to the memory of the millions of our brothers and sisters who perished because they were Jews.

Yet the appeal to sacredness can misguide. Sacredness can lead to censorship, to compromising freedom; in this instance, freedom of inquiry. Sacredness needs to be attended to with care, lest sacredness itself become profaned. I believe that these documents should be widely disseminated and without restrictions. . . . The story of the Holocaust must be widely told . . . out of respect for many basic values: freedom of scientific inquiry, freedom of academic inquiry, and commitment to our Jewish tradition of being witnesses to abuses of freedom.

### Rev. Peter Holroyd, *Chaplain and Teacher, Taft School*

There is so much that can be learned from these tapes. Almost any Holocaust literature mentions the loss of family members—in this testimony the words come alive with new meaning. . . . the way in which the survivor places her arm around her mother, the way her face responds to the memory of the drowning of a new-born baby by an SS man.

A survivor’s memories of escape from a forced march, hiding, being sheltered by a non-Jewish family, deportation, survival itself—these are all vital for educational purposes. The fact that some risked their lives to save others must be discussed.

A non-Jewish bystander searches for understanding and explanation in his own mind. He discusses the need for Holocaust education. His term “the collective crime of silence,” his statement that it is not enough to be a good person, but that one needs also to be able to recognize evil and then to act against it, to be trained to see the signs and to intervene—these validate what I do at Taft School.

### Lawrence Langer, *Alumnae Professor of English, Simmons College, Boston*

[The survivor’s] living presence on the screen establishes a personal confrontation that written memoirs can only occasionally achieve. Here the face and voice of the survivor rivet the audience’s attention to the unfolding story, whose details are so radically unlike the knowledge and experience we bring to the encounter. One needs to study these tapes as one reads a book, before attempting to teach it.

. . . [There are] noticeable differences between written and oral survivor testimony. If confirmed, these differences may turn out to be profoundly significant, for our understanding to date has been based primarily on published memoirs and interpretations of these memoirs.

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Dr. Dori Laub, *Co-Founder, Holocaust Survivors Film Project*  
When I began six years ago with the first four interviews involving the Farband, we could not have imagined how things would evolve. Many in the United States and abroad have joined the project. Universities and other educational institutions are beginning to use the tapes for teaching purposes. All this would not have happened without the determined support and participation of our own survivor group here in New Haven, who gave freely of themselves and their time for something they believed to be right, but could not know how it would develop. I think every one of us today can feel enormously rewarded that the initial effort received so much interest and assistance.

Laurel Vlock, *Co-Founder, Holocaust Survivors Film Project*  
Our cameras were present to record the Present Tense Literary Awards Luncheon sponsored by the American Jewish Congress. It addressed the question, "Holocaust Literature: Will It Ever Stop? Should It?" The panelists were discussing this topic from a dispassionate, literary perspective. Unexpectedly, a member of the audience, who identified herself as an Auschwitz survivor, rose to ask, "Why don't you relate to us? Why don't you help us with our memories?"

Fortunately, the survivors are still among us. Their need and obligation to speak, and ours to listen, does not diminish. At that moment, I had a clear sense of the significance and importance of the work of the Video Archive.

Dana Kline, *Coordinator of Interviewer Training*

I am worried. We will meet tomorrow in New Haven. You will speak of the dark years when European Jewry was systematically being destroyed. Will I know how to hear your words, be sensitive to your silence?

You may wonder what we the interviewers know of your struggle. We have read the history, studied the maps and learned a new vocabulary. But will it be enough? Will you come to trust us, to see we are honoring those who were not permitted to live? Our dialogue will be a way of recording your past.

Images of those years return and revisit you, yet you carry your burden with dignity. Tomorrow you will liberate the words. You will tell us of Vilna or Warsaw or Lodz. We will be able to walk past the courtyards and down narrow streets. Perhaps we will enter a room where a table is set with white cloth and matzah. Your words will take us on a journey back to your life before the catastrophe.

But then you will pause. What remains is so painful. You have come to give your testimony, but you have been silent for so long. Slowly you begin, and begin again. We listen and our questions are few.

Hours pass and the journey comes to a close. Memory has been dislodged from within. You have given life to those who were lost by telling your story and theirs. The camera stops and you are again in New Haven.

We shake hands or embrace. It is difficult to return to ordinary conversation. Much has been stirred. You will wonder if you remembered everything. You have given testimony for those who will come after, and for those who were not there.



*Steven Hess of Rochester, New York and Marion Hess Lewin of Chevy Chase, Maryland being interviewed at Yale by volunteers Barbara Katz and Dana Kline.*

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My work as Archivist begins after the videotaping of each testimony has been completed. My responsibilities center on preserving these testimonies and making them accessible, thus ensuring that they will be used, not only now, but by generations to come.

To best preserve the testimonies, the unedited originals, which have been recorded on  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch broadcast-quality videotapes, are stored in a temperature-controlled vault in Yale's Sterling Memorial Library. Time-coded VHS copies of these unedited tapes are available for use in the Archive. A major concern with regard to the preservation of the tapes is that, since videotape is a relatively new medium, no one is certain of its shelf life; estimates range from twenty-five years. The Archive conducts periodic quality checks of the original tapes and will make copies at the first signs of deterioration; none has been detected to date. It is assumed that with the continuing rapid advances in the field of audio-visual technology, it will be possible to transfer the testimonies to a more permanent medium, such as optical disk, before any significant deterioration has taken place.

The importance of edited testimonies for the education of students and the general public is described elsewhere in this Newsletter. The testimonies are, of course, a valuable resource for individual researchers and students as well. To facilitate access by a broad range of potential viewers, the testimonies are being catalogued and indexed on a number of levels.

In January, 1984, a record for the Video Archive as a whole was entered in the RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) national computer database, alerting researchers throughout the country to the Archive's existence. Records for individual testimonies, including testimony summaries and subject and geographic index terms, are being entered into the same database, making it possible to produce special lists of testimonies which deal with a particular locality or type of experience by combining subject terms (like "child survivor" and "Terezin") on-line. An International Register of testimonies in

the Archive will be published, generated from these RLIN records. The RLIN system allows for the use of a standard format and descriptive language. This standardization could provide a model for similar collections and make communication and cooperation among them all a great deal easier in the future. Its value has been recognized by the Archives Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and by the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at Hebrew University.

For individual testimonies, time-coded descriptions are available at the Archive. If one wanted to go directly to where a particular event, e.g. liberation, is discussed, one could see that it occurs 55 minutes into the testimony and one could proceed to where the "clock" on the tape reads 0:55:00.

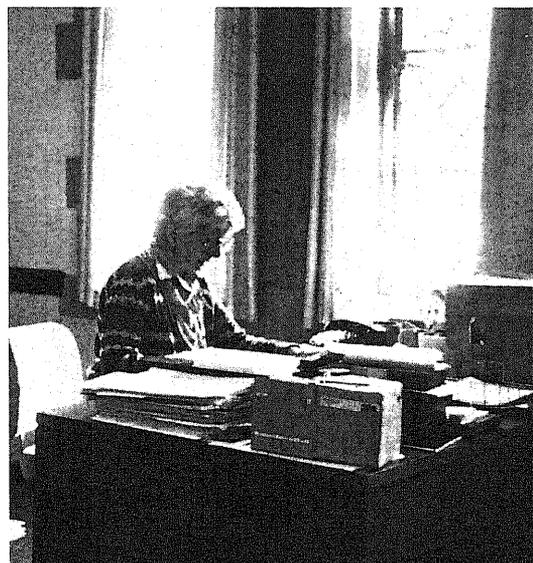
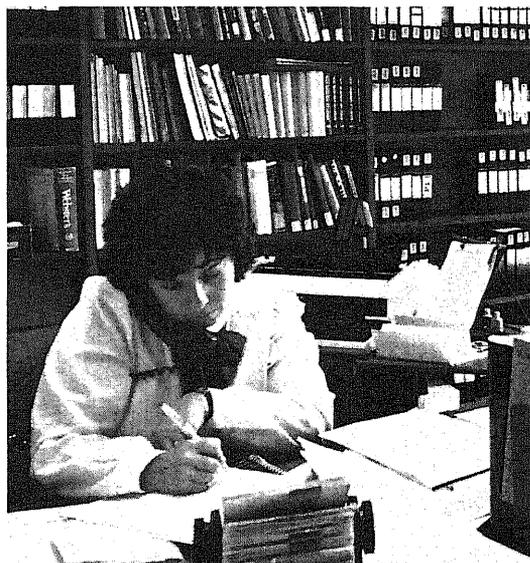
Since the Archive opened to the public, we have had the pleasure of assisting people from a variety of disciplines, including history, psychology, sociology, women's studies, literature, cinematography and religious studies. Not only scholars, but clergy, filmmakers and undergraduates have viewed the testimonies in the Archive. Each person visiting the Archive must complete a Registration/User Form and agree to observe the Archive's rules and regulations, which are intended to safeguard the testimonies and provide guidelines for their appropriate use.

To conclude on a more personal note, I would like to convey the sense of privilege and of inadequacy that I feel in working with the testimonies. The preceding description of the work that I do does not express the profound impact that viewing the testimonies has had, and continues to have, on me. Though fully aware that an abstract or an index cannot begin to do justice to the extraordinary power and unique value of each story entrusted to us, I am grateful for the opportunity to play a small part in the preservation and transmittal of this priceless legacy.

Sandra Rosenstock

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*Joanne Rudof, Manager, in the Video Archive and Anna Greenbaum, Volunteer*



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*We must choose to continue to remember all we can bear, and we must continue to bear all we can know, ever keeping, by an act of intellect and will, the heart and mind open.*

*Only with a heart and mind open, open to the pain of the past, open to the possibility that horror is never asleep, open to the gift of life that is ours, can we gird ourselves to battle bigotry and oppression that always starts close to home even if it does not end there. We must never be paralyzed by the past, but neither can we ignore it, else we will not build a future of decency and freedom.*

A.B. Giamatti, President of Yale  
from an address delivered in Washington D. C.,  
September 19, 1984 at the Holocaust Memorial Council  
Conference on Righteous Gentiles.