

# Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies

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## Beginning the Second Phase

By 2001 we will have entered the second phase of the Video Archive's mission.

During the first phase we established the protocols and standards for videotaping and cataloging Holocaust testimonies, and we conducted a program of systematic recording, first in North America, then in Israel, Western Europe, and South America. Modest taping projects in Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus followed. We also found videotaping partners in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The number of witnesses recorded by Yale and its affiliate projects totals more than 4,000. We will continue to welcome witnesses to our studio at Yale.

During these years we accomplished many other tasks. We pioneered the on-line cataloging of the testimonies. Anyone interested in our collection can search the databases from any place in the world to locate testimonies relevant to their interests. On-line summaries assist in deciding which testimonies should be viewed at Yale.

Copies of the video testimonies are available in local repositories in areas where we have worked with affiliate projects. Among these are the French National Archives in Paris, the Wannsee House Museum in Berlin, the National Sound Archives in London, the University of Haifa, and the Baltimore Hebrew University.

We have sponsored conferences (see p.3), helped found an international journal, *Studies on the Audio-Visual Testimony of Victims of the Nazi Crimes and Genocides*, created short programs for classroom use, and provided reference information to scholars, teachers and students, as well as organizational advice and interviewer-training to the more than thirty affiliate projects.

Our mission in the second phase extends this work but adds several new and crucial features. We must complete the on-line cataloging of approximately 1,500 interviews. Many of these are not in English and therefore require extra attention.

Five years ago we conducted a preservation assessment of the collection, realizing that many of the video recordings were approaching twenty years of age. After consultation with the foremost experts in the field, we embarked on a preservation project with funds raised by Alan Fortunoff and Joshua Greene. We have completed preservation procedures and transferred to a more current format all the tapes recorded at Yale between 1979 and 1990. This essential—and expensive—work will continue. Last year our holdings were placed in a new state-of-the-art storage facility which will appreciably increase their life span.

Our mission in the second phase, while including cataloging and preservation, will emphasize the pedagogical use of the testimonies and issues linked to their dissemination. We

## W i t n e s s Voices from the Holocaust

Edited by Joshua M. Greene and Shiva Kumar  
in consultation with Joanne Weiner Rudof

Foreword by Lawrence L. Langer

In Association with The Fortunoff Video Archive  
for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University

THE FREE PRESS

wish to encourage questions concerning public education and the role new media should play.

The Archivist's column describes the many and varied research projects of visitors who view testimonies at Yale. This guidance and reference work is steadily increasing, as is the number of publications that rely on our collection.

We have already taken the important step of producing a documentary based on our tapes. On May 1st, at 10 PM EST, many PBS affiliate stations will broadcast *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust* (see back cover). A book of the same title, containing additional testimony excerpts and essays, has been published by the Free Press.

We will continue to record the testimonies of special or under-represented groups. The Milan Šimečka Foundation in Bratislava has asked us to partner an ongoing project recording Roma survivors. Moreover, in pursuit of our pedagogical mission, we plan to interview important researchers and teachers in Holocaust studies, both here and abroad. We cannot ourselves train much-needed teachers, but we can produce a number of inspiring video programs in which members of this pioneering generation discuss their work.

The task still before us includes assuring the financial stability of the Fortunoff Video Archive by adding \$2 million to its endowment. We hope to achieve this aim by our twentieth anniversary—which coincides with Yale's Tercentenary. I am happy to announce major gifts to the endowment from the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation and Darrell Ross.

We hope you will stay in touch with us. We are always ready to talk with those who wish to have additional information, utilize our facilities, or support our mission in any other way.

Geoffrey Hartman

*Sterling Professor Emeritus, English and Comparative Literature  
Project Director and Faculty Advisor*

### Affiliate Projects

**Belgium**—*Fondation Auschwitz* has published three volumes of an international journal entitled *Études sur le témoignage audiovisuel des victimes des crimes et génocides nazis*. The only one in this field, the new periodical provides an important forum for the exchange of ideas and information.

*Fondation Auschwitz* continues to videotape witness testimony and send copies to Yale. They have recorded the accounts of over one hundred survivors and witnesses.

The second and third International Audio-Visual Meetings on Testimony of Survivors of the Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camps were held in Brussels sponsored by the *Fondation*, in partnership with *Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Déportation* (France) in May 1996 and in June 1998. Conference participants came from the United States, Israel, Brazil, France, Belgium, Germany, England, Italy, Greece, and Canada. Many are associated with projects we initiated. Both sets of conference papers were published by *Fondation Auschwitz*, the second in No. 3 of the International Journal.

**Czech Republic**—In cooperation with *Nadace Film & Sociologie*, nineteen witness accounts were recorded in Prague with assistance from the Czech Independent Television Company, Ltd. These include accounts of Roma survivors.

**Germany**—Our joint project with the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies at the University of Potsdam has been completed. Seventy-seven witness testimonies were recorded. Copies of the testimonies are both at Yale and the Wannsee House Museum in Berlin. Two volumes based on the work of this project have been published by Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg under the title *Archiv der Erinnerung: Interviews mit Überlebenden der Shoah*. Volume I, edited by Cathy Gelbin, Eva Lezzi, Geoffrey Hartman, and Julius H. Schoeps, *Videographierte Lebenserzählungen und ihre Interpretationen*, is a collection of essays discussing the testimonies and related topics. Volume II, edited by Sonja Miltenberger, *Kommentierter Katalog*, is an annotated catalog.

**Israel**—We continue to work with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) to videotape Israeli survivors. Nathan Beyrak has been coordinating our project in Israel for over fifteen years, first at Beth Hatefusoth and Masuah, and more recently with the USHMM. Almost 500 witness accounts have been recorded with a focus on less documented experiences.

**New York**—Our partnership with the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust produced almost 600 testimonies with the assistance of Selfhelp Community Services. The Museum opened in 1997. Testimony excerpts are integrated in the exhibit area dealing with the Holocaust. The effectiveness of the witness accounts is evident when observing Museum visitors who are clearly engaged and moved by them.



Peter Salner, Martin Butora and Ingrid Antalova of the Milan Šimečka Foundation project present a copy of her testimony to a survivor in Bratislava

**Slovakia**—The Milan Šimečka Foundation in Bratislava has recorded 110 survivor and witness accounts in Bratislava, Košice, and other cities in Slovakia. A volume entitled *Prežili Holokaust* by Peter Salner was published in Bratislava by *Veda Vydavateľstvo Slovenskej Akadémie Vied*. Based on the testimonies recorded by the joint project, the book contains a brief history of the Jewish community in Slovakia, the experiences of those in the independent republic established by Nazi Germany, and conditions in the camps. The author uses the testimonies to address the questions of how “these traumatic experiences have often been passed on to the consciousness of the post-war generation.” He concludes that “Slovak society as a whole perceives this phenomenon as a closed chapter of its history” and “it seems very likely that different understanding of the past tragic events may become a source of conflicting relations between the Jewish community and the majority population in Slovakia.” Ingrid Antalova, the project coordinator, is presently recording testimonies of Roma survivors, and we plan to assist with the continuation of this effort. Martin Butora, our former project coordinator and Director of the Milan Šimečka Foundation is now the Slovak Ambassador to the United States.

**University of Michigan, Dearborn**—*On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* by Henry Greenspan, one of the principals of the Dearborn project, was published in 1998 (Praeger: Westport, CT). Professor Greenspan’s observations and analyses are an important contribution to the literature on the genre of Holocaust testimonies. A volume edited by Professor Greenspan and Professor Sidney Bolkosky, the coordinator of this videotaping project for over fifteen years, tentatively called *Holocaust Survivors and their Listeners: Testimonies, Interviews, Encounters* will be published by New York University Press in the United States and by Macmillan in the United Kingdom. The volume includes essays by principals of the Fortunoff Video Archive.

### *Holocaust Education/Prejudice Reduction Program*

Chaired by Marvin and Murray Lender and Geoffrey Hartman, this program serves as a resource to fourteen school systems in the greater New Haven area. In 1999 an Advisory Council, chaired by Professor Gordon Geballe and Barbara Segaloff, was formed with the goal of expanding the number of teachers and students served by the program. Since 1988 several hundred greater New Haven area teachers from public and private schools have participated in local workshops and lecture series, five day courses at Facing History and Ourselves, and a three week summer program in Eastern Europe and Israel led by Vladka Meed and sponsored by the Jewish Labor Committee. Programs attended by several thousand students have included school visits by authors, survivors, and performers. A CES (Area Cooperative Educational Services) promotes the program through its network and has served as a host for many events. Teacher visits to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were organized in 1997, 1998, and 1999. These included pre-trip orientations and sessions with Museum staff and scholars in Washington.



*Searching for Memory and Justice: The Holocaust and Apartheid Conference, February 1998*

### *Conferences*

The Video Archive's Fifteenth Anniversary conference took place February 8-10, 1998. Entitled "Searching for Memory and Justice: The Holocaust and Apartheid," it was co-sponsored by the Yale Law Schools's Orville H. Schell Jr. Center for International Human Rights. South African speakers included a representative of the Minister of Justice of South Africa, Justices of the Constitutional Court, Commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, scholars, human rights workers, and former victims. Holocaust scholars from Canada, Israel, France, Germany, Belgium and the United States presented papers. The conference program included video testimony excerpts from the Fortunoff Video Archive and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa, as well as videotape excerpts from the Eichmann trial and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "Remnants," a dramatic reading based on survivor testimony, was performed by its author Henry Greenspan.

A new program of testimony excerpts was prepared for the

conference. The Video Archive also mounted an exhibit at Sterling Memorial Library in conjunction with the conference that included materials from the rich holdings of many Yale Library collections.

Professors Robert Burt and Harold Hongju Koh were the Law School organizers. Major funding for the conference was received from the Charles H. Revson Foundation, Alan M. Fortunoff, the Orville H. Schell, Jr. Center for International Human Rights, and the Kempt Fund.

### *Other Scholarly Activities*

Many researchers delivered papers at conferences based on their work at the Video Archive. Principals of the Video Archive presented papers at the Social Science History Association, the University of Antwerp, Colgate, Cornell, Notre Dame, New York University, Emory, the Tauber Institute, Brandeis, Boston University, Haifa University, University of Chicago, University of Utah, Georgetown, Ben Gurion University, Wissenschaftskolleg (Berlin), the Einstein Forum (Berlin), the International Study Group for Trauma, Violence, and Genocide (Cologne, Germany), the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, Gallaudet University, UC Berkeley, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Association for Moving Image Archivists, and the Max Planck Institute for History (Göttingen, Germany). Dr. Dori Laub is presently the acting Director of Yale's Center for International and Area Studies Genocide Program.

Interlibrary loans of testimonies have been made to Emory, San Francisco State, UC Santa Cruz, St. Cloud, and Dartmouth to support undergraduate courses in which the study of testimonies is essential.

### *Publications*

Our website ([www.library.yale.edu/testimonies](http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies)) has won several awards and continues to evolve as we update it. We recently added a section entitled "New in 2000" with details on *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*, the documentary and the Free Press book.

Essays by principals of the Video Archive were published in journals such as *Studies on the Audio-Visual Testimony of Victims of the Nazi Crimes and Genocide* (Nos. 1, 2, and 3), *Partisan Review* (Winter 1998), *Raritan* (XIX:3, Winter 2000), *Journal of Psychoanalysis*, and in the books *Encyclopedia of Genocide* and *The Holocaust and History*.

A broadcast on German public radio focused on the Video Archive and included excerpts from testimonies in English translated to German, and in German, recorded both at Yale and in Germany. The office of Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy of Rhode Island used written testimony excerpts for a conference and a poster concerning human rights abuses. During one of Professor Hartman's visits to Germany and Austria, several newspaper articles about the Video Archive were published in the *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten, Berlin Tagesspiegel*, and the bulletin *Gedenkdienst* in Vienna.

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*Robert A. Burt is the Alexander M. Bickel Professor of Law at Yale University. He was an organizer of the 1998 conference "Searching for Memory and Justice: The Holocaust and Apartheid."*

For the past three years, I have taught a law school seminar with James Ponet, the Yale Hillel Rabbi, entitled "The Book of Job and Injustice." In considering the relationship between God and mankind, Biblical texts—like secular texts on political theory—offer answers to questions about the status of the relationship between Authority and its subjects: questions about the justifications for obeying Authority (fear of its awesome, uncontrollable power? respect for its moral legitimacy?), about the obligations, if any, owed from Authority to its subjects, about the consequences of breaches in these obligations for the continued relationship between subjects and Authority. Of all Biblical texts, the Book of Job most directly and disturbingly raises these questions. This text, moreover, presents these questions with special power because it is not an abstract philosophic disquisition on theodicy but the lament and complaint of a recognizable (if unusually eloquent) human being. Reading this text, we hear Job struggling to make sense, to find solace, and to endure the terrible injustice inflicted on him and his family.

The Holocaust raises the same abstract questions with the same disturbing force. The intentional extermination by a democratically elected government of a group among its own citizenry is as deep a betrayal of the supposed moral structure of the relationship between recognized Authority and its subjects as God's inexplicable, clearly unjust agreement with Satan to inflict torture on Job and assassinate his children. The videotaped testimony of Holocaust survivors bring these questions into focus—gives them a human face—even more vividly than Job's appearance in the Biblical text. In the final weeks of the seminar, we view the testimony of Leon S., who speaks of the comfort available to him from his persistent religious faith, and of other survivors who subsequently testified in war crimes trials and had differing attitudes about these formal efforts toward accountability. In this witness our students find themselves drawn—with a depth and personal urgency beyond the reach of any abstract classroom discussion—into confrontation with ultimate questions about the origins of injustice and the possibility of restorative justice.

*Jared Stark is Assistant Professor of Literary Cultures at New York University. He worked at the Video Archive while a graduate student in Comparative Literature at Yale. He is the editor of No Common Place: The Holocaust Testimony of Alina Bacall-Zwirn (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1999).*

April 21, 1993. It is fifty years ago this month that the last survivors of the Warsaw ghetto were sent to the camps and Alina is in New Haven with her daughter, Sophia, to tell her story. Weeks of anxious waiting have led up to these two hours, and before that years of uncertainty about whether this story would ever be recorded. There is some agony in the fact that Alina's first husband, whom she married in the Warsaw ghetto

and who also survived the camps, died without having recorded a public testimony. There is also some sense of impropriety because the task of testimony now falls on Alina, who for so many years resisted speaking of the Holocaust, while her husband sought in vain to find an audience for their story.

As she begins to speak, her memories overwhelm her, and within minutes she has jumped from her childhood in Warsaw to 1942, when three-quarters of the population of the Warsaw ghetto, over a quarter of a million Jews, were sent to the camps. Under the pressure of this catastrophic history, chronology collapses. Dana Kline, one of the two interviewers, poses a question carefully phrased to avoid dictating the shape of the testimony: "Before that happened, and we will spend a lot of time talking about that today, could you tell us a little bit more about your family?" In her tone and in her words, Dana Kline lets the witness know that today she can tell her story in her own way, in her own time, that the interviewers will be guided by Alina's sense of what matters. But at the same time the question relieves the pressure of the moment. It asks Alina to listen to herself; it gives her the choice to rewind or fast forward, to slow down or speed up the pace of her story. Above all, it bears witness to the interviewers' commitment to patience. This commitment is crucial not only because anything less might lead the witness to yield to an interviewer's spoken or unspoken suggestions or expectations, but because the interviewers will be our first guides in understanding how to listen to this testimony, this voice, this history. Through their questions and reactions, they embody the mandate of the Fortunoff Video Archive: "The interview belongs to the witness" (Joanne Rudof). It is this mandate—this responsibility—that allows Alina to speak in the face of traumatic memories that threaten to return her to the site of disaster, that allows her to testify to a history perforated with silences, with betrayals, with collapse. And perhaps most crucially, it is this mandate that has allowed the Archive to become a place where not only cold facts are recorded, but where another history is told—the history of the impact of the Holocaust on memory, on community, on the survivor.

On every level of its practice, the Archive insists that the history of the Holocaust cannot be transmitted without taking into account the history of its aftermath, the history of survival. And it insists that this history involves not only the survivors, but also we who attempt to hear the survivors' testimony, and who, in so doing, become responsible for "the future of memory" (to recall the title of one of the Archive's important conferences). It was for this reason that the Archive and its lessons were central to me as I worked with Alina on the published version of her testimony, *No Common Place: The Holocaust Testimony of Alina Bacall-Zwirn*. And it is for this reason that the Archive will continue to be a crucial site in the unending attempt to learn not only the facts, but which facts matter, and why.

*Lawrence L. Langer is Emeritus Professor of English at Simmons College. Among his books are Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays, The*

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Game Continues: Chess in the Art of Samuel Bak, Landscapes of Jewish Experience and Preempting the Holocaust. *He has been listening to survivors and witnesses for more than fifteen years, both on videotape and in television studios at Yale and in Massachusetts.*

**A** recurrent worry of audiences who attend lectures on Holocaust themes and raise questions afterwards is what will happen to our study of the subject when the last Holocaust survivor dies. Many believe the time is nearly upon us, though in fact that moment lies several decades in the future. But this is a minor mistake. The deeper misconception behind this concern is that historical inquiry relies on the survival of those who experienced the events being investigated. What follows from this supposition is the fear—and no one should belittle it—that after the last survivor of Auschwitz and places like it has died, we will have lost our access to the horrors of the camps and to the ordeal of those who outlived them, to say nothing of those who did not.

It is a legitimate anxiety, but a misguided one. I still recall the day many years ago when I read in local news reports that the last American Civil War veteran had died. But it never occurred to me then—or to anyone who reported the detail, as far as I know—that history had suffered a fatal blow. Civil War studies continued undiminished after that final loss, and indeed more books have been written in English about Abraham Lincoln than about any other world figure. Why is it that no one expects or requires the living presence of parties to other historical moments in order to grasp their importance, while so many express apprehensions about irrevocable forfeit when we raise the issue of Holocaust memory?

One answer is that many people genuinely believe that the most reliable trustees to the truth of the Holocaust are those who endured it. This is far from a frivolous claim. The depth and scope of Holocaust atrocity, the particulars of the cruelty, are more than most imaginations can manage. After the war, a majority of those who were forced to confront these minutiae greeted them with doubt or disbelief, then filed them in the archive of amnesia. The main role of those who outlived the Holocaust is that they represent echoes of probability; their voices remind us that they witnessed what our minds are loath to imagine. They invite us to listen to their testimonies until we pierce the surface of their stories and hear the discords beneath. But the impact of their narratives no longer requires their living presence. Today we have not only hundreds of written memoirs documenting their experience, but also thousands of videotaped accounts that are timeless records not subject to mortal decay. If Boris Pasternak was correct when he defined immortality in his novel *Doctor Zhivago* as “you in others,” then the stories of those who returned from the Holocaust are deathless—provided they reach a living audience.

Thus the problem is not what will happen to Holocaust memory once the last survivor has died, but what will happen to survivor testimonies if they are ignored. Left to languish unasimilated in archives, they might as well not exist. They contain an urgent plea to historians and readers to redefine traditional notions of how history is written or read. Unquestionably it is essential to know how those in power used or—in the case of

the Holocaust—abused their authority to organize and execute their criminal intentions. But it is equally imperative to gain a sense of how such misuse of power inflicted on victims a daily ordeal that is not recorded in reports or official communications. Any nuanced view of the extermination of European Jewry must include a portrayal of how the victimized experienced their persecution. If a careful study of the routing of the trains carrying their cargo to the death camps, of their dates of departure and times of arrival, provides us with crucial evidence about the unfolding and implementation of the killing process, testimony from those who were forced to make that unholy journey furnishes equally vital details about the process of being killed.

Historians have granted a kind of immortality to certain key documents that enlighten us about progress toward a “Final Solution” of the Jewish question: the minutes of the Wannsee Conference; the Jaeger report (enumerating executions by Einsatzkommando 3 after the invasion of the Soviet Union); the Korherr report (a survey of victim deaths by Himmler’s statistician); the Broad report (written by former SS guard Pery Broad in British captivity after the war about the gassings in Auschwitz); even the self-serving autobiography of former Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Hoess, written in prison before his execution. All have been authored by men who enjoyed power under the Nazi regime. Used judiciously, they enhance our understanding of the German program of mass murder. But exactly the same can be said about the testimonies of those who were lucky enough to have escaped that doom. Granting their voices an equivalent immortality should not be seen as a sentimental homage to a kind of mystical suffering, but as a necessary gesture to history. Their spoken record, used judiciously, extends and sometimes qualifies the written one, in ways that no other source can supply. Once this is accepted as axiomatic truth, no one will have to worry about what may happen after the last Holocaust survivor dies.

*Ingrid Antalova is the Director of the Milan Šimečka Foundation in Bratislava, Slovakia. She is program manager of our affiliate project and is presently videotaping the accounts of Roma survivors.*

**T**he Romanies have lived on the territory of the present Slovakia for almost eight centuries. The non-agrarian character of the community prevented their integration with the majority ethnic group. In 1918 Slovakia became a part of the Czechoslovak Republic which was a democratic state.

The establishment of the Slovak State on March 14, 1939, as a satellite state of Nazi Germany marked the end of pluralistic democracy and the beginning of the totalitarian, fascist government. Antisemitic laws impacted all 89,000 Jews, while the Romanies were divided into two categories. Some general regulations (e.g. exclusion from armed military service) affected all 100,000 Romanies, 37,000 of whom were defined in June 1940 as Gypsy. Two types of forced labor institutions were established: labor centers for Jews and work regiments for social misfits, as Gypsies without work were classified. In November 1944 some labor regiments were confined to camps. Due to

inadequate food and sanitary installations, a typhus epidemic occurred which was followed by a mass killing of sick prisoners. Romanies outside the labor regiments were subject to regulations restraining their freedom of movement.

After the defeat of the Slovak National Uprising, from autumn 1944 to spring 1945, the regime came under the direct control of the German occupation forces. Assisted by local collaborators, it completed the so-called "solution to the Jewish question." The remaining Slovak Jews were deported. In several places inhabitants of Roma settlements were murdered in mass killings by special SS units. From the regions of southern and southeastern Slovakia (at that time annexed to Hungary), Romanies were deported, mostly to Dachau.

The research project of the Milan Šimečka Foundation focusing on the Roma Holocaust addresses many previously unanswered questions. Above all, it supplements the strictly factual aspects of the anti-Roma decrees and regulations with the individual stories of the survivors, thus "unveiling" the previously unrecognized Roma Holocaust to the Slovak public in the hope that many of the present problems of the Roma community can be addressed.

*The following is a translated excerpt of one of the Roma survivors videotaped by the Milan Šimečka Foundation.*

#### Ján K.

I will tell you a story, a story about what I learned after a long time when my father had been long dead. Until now I do not know, where he is buried. I only guess it. It is a pity that I do not know it. They took them, the Romanies, from Detva, they went on foot above the Hrohy hills, they followed the path up to Zvolen. They were not only Romanies from Dúbravy, but also from Bzov. In the same number, I think twenty-two and here in Dúbravy they are seventeen. It is just my rough guess. So, they took those Romanies from Bzovy and from Dúbravy, too. They were heading to the castle in Zvolen. Not far from the Zvolen castle there was a bridge, which had been blown up during the Uprising, I knew the bridge, when I used to go to the partisans. And then the Germans made the Romanies repair the bridge. They worked there, repaired the wooden beams, etc. It was early morning, here I have some notes. A grave-digger from Zvolen witnessed to have heard loud shooting at the Jewish cemetery early morning at four. And weeping. Terrible weeping. This means they forced them to dig their own graves and after this they shot them dead by machine-fire. And so my belief that my father had died in Kremnička, on Nemecká, was not confirmed. The Romanies from Dúbravy were murdered straight at the Jewish cemetery in Zvolen. They found one bag and a pipe in it. I have not succeeded to get the pipe back from the museum. I have tried several times, wrote letters... I know, my uncle, who used to work as a smith in Zelobudza, had such a bag. And he always had that pipe and a tobacco-bag with him. The tobacco-bag was decorated with straps. It was a leather-bag and he always had food and that pipe and the tobacco-bag in it. And this particular bag was found at the Jewish cemetery. It was found at the exhumation.

And now I am asking why did they not give me that bag? I explained them in detail, that I remembered it from my childhood. They did not give me back the bag, they wrote me a letter saying that they do not know anything about any bag. But they found it, I know, because my mother was asked to come to the exhumation, whether she could recognize her husband. And from what my mother said, I remember, they found there a white jacket and a vest and my mother saw there was a rotten skeleton and the rest of my father's clothes in the grave. At the exhumation. So this was the result. I would never have gone to the Jewish cemetery. Not far from Polana there is a tombstone saying something else, but I do not believe it. I believe one thing—that it was at the Jewish cemetery in Zvolen, where they killed the Romanies from Dúbravy and Bzovce. At that Jewish cemetery it was.

*Robert Kraft is Chair of the Psychology Department at Otterbein College in Columbus, Ohio. He has been visiting the Video Archive since 1993 viewing testimonies for his work on memory. He recently completed a book based on his research.*

As I study oral testimony of those who lived through the Holocaust, I become increasingly aware of how much more there is to know. At the same time, my peripheral vision of world events tells me that I am not alone. Recent reports in leading journals and newspapers continue to teach the informed public how much there is to learn.

Consider just the past three years. In February of 1997, the Secretary of State of the United States found out that she is the grandchild of Jews who perished in the Holocaust. In the spring of that year, the notorious Fascist group, the Ustashe, re-emerged as a political force in Croatia. That summer Swiss banks acknowledged that they hold tens of millions of dollars belonging to European Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. An initial list of dormant Swiss bank accounts was first published in July of 1997, more than fifty-two years after the end of World War II. That same month an Italian military court convicted two Nazi officers, Erich Priebeke and Karl Hass, for their role in a massacre of more than 300 people more than fifty years earlier. News stories dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust from 1998 and 1999 are equally extensive.

The video testimony of Robert K., who lived through the Holocaust as a young child, explains: "Once in a while I hear someone say, 'Aren't you a little obsessed with the Holocaust?' And my response to that is, 'I think the Holocaust is obsessed with us. That the stories follow you, no matter what.'" Another witness, Isabella L., says, "For those who think that it happened long ago, it happened yesterday," referring not only to the painful vividness of Holocaust memory, but to real events in her own life. In January of 1945, Isabella and three of her sisters escaped their captors during a death march from Auschwitz. In the confusion that followed, their oldest sister became separated from them, and they never saw her again. Years later, Isabella met one of the women who had helped her at Auschwitz and only then learned of her sister's death in Bergen-Belsen. "Thirty years later, I found out what happened, what really happened to

my sister," Isabella says. "Not thirty, it must have been more than that, thirty-five or more years. So it happened yesterday."

What is not so apparent from the many news reports is that in addition to shaping the contours of political history, each reported event connects directly to the lives of those who survived the Holocaust—and to their families. Listening to oral testimony reminds us that the stories underlying the news reports are stories of individual lives.

The great value of oral testimony is that it communicates the events of the Holocaust directly and personally, unedited and unstructured. Witnesses are not actors; their stories are not scripted. Witnesses speak from memory, and in many cases, the interview is the first time for extended recall. After viewing just a few cases, observers can detect the distinctive strengths of oral testimony: thoughts, emotions, and personal events in vivid detail, information that cannot be gathered from documents or represented in the broad strokes of statistics or even depicted in films. Oral testimony gives a face and a voice to individuals who otherwise would not be seen or heard, providing what Giampiero Carocci calls "little history."

When critiquing oral testimony, some may question the representativeness of the witnesses. Are those who give testimony different? Are they more obsessed, more articulate, more talkative, less likely to have betrayed others, better able to remember events? The simple answer is: No. Paradoxically, the Fortunoff Video Archive contains oral testimony from those who did not give testimony. A person who decides, at long last, to give testimony for the first time in 1998 may not have talked at length about the Holocaust for more than 50 years. Many witnesses are reluctant historians, resisting the giving of testimony until many years after the events.

In the testimonies I have studied, people came from nine different European countries, originally speaking ten different languages, ranging in age when World War II started from infancy to forty-three, ranging in age when giving testimony from forty to ninety-five. They varied in economic background, level of education, religiousness, language, and culture.

Oral testimony can serve as a type of historical document, but its extraordinary strength is in transforming historical facts into compelling narratives. Through careful study of Holocaust testimonies, we can view one individual in relation to other individuals, and we can begin to understand both the personal tragedies and the enormity of the collective atrocity. In this way, oral testimony integrates psychology and history: the study of the individual and patterns of the past. Ultimately, oral testimonies available in archives will communicate the events of the Holocaust so that the detailed reality of the horrors will not transmogrify into myth.

*Marion Lear Swaybill is an Emmy award-winning producer and production executive. From 1981 to 1991 she was Director of Acquisitions and Co-Productions at WNET/13 in New York, where she programmed over 150 hours of Holocaust related films.*

I had a boss in the mid-80s who regarded me as WNET's "guardian of Jewish culture." I acknowledged the fine line

between being praised and being patronized. I chose praised. I was privileged to be working for public broadcasting in those days and enormously proud of the work we did in program acquisitions. We had passion for good ideas and good storytelling. We had money to buy programs and we spent it well.

Over ten years we acquired more than 150 hours of documentaries and dramas about the Nazi era and the Holocaust. From Miriam Abramovitz' deeply moving personal narrative, *As If It Were Yesterday*, to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's elegant series *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, we were determined to give expression to as many voices as possible.

Nothing I looked at over the years prepared me for the profound experience I had working on *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*. Edith P., Martin S., Renee H., Helen K., Joseph K., simply took my breath away. Listening to their testimonies, I felt I was hearing about the Holocaust for the first time. Speaking straight to camera, unprompted, spontaneous and wholly uncensored, their voices came from unimaginable depths. Given the selective and manipulative nature of filmmaking, it was hard to imagine how we could preserve their integrity and at the same time make a film.

One thing was clear to me—as Executive Producer of *Witness* I had a tremendous responsibility to get it right.

I sought advice from two friends—one a brilliant scholar of the Holocaust and son of surviving victims, the other an exceptionally gifted feature film editor and narrative storyteller. I screened several favorite films and some new ones. I read Lawrence Langer's remarkable book *Holocaust Testimonies* and later talked with him. Finally, Langer's simple reference to Holocaust testimonies as "human documents rather than merely historical ones" expressed the essence of our challenge.

Rather than a comprehensive history, it was important that *Witness* be a chronicle of human experience within the historic context. Individual voices would comprise the building blocks of the film. Together they would tell a complete and undiminished story. No voice would be taken out of context or used to shock, particularly when describing the horrific moments so tempting to filmmakers. We would not attempt to soften the edges with editorial and/or editing contrivances. We would honor the purity and power of the storyteller.

Months after *Witness* was finished I read Charlotte Delbo's extraordinary memoir, *Auschwitz and After*. In "Poupette," a section of *The Measure of Our Days*, she writes:

Step out of history  
to enter life  
just try that all of you  
you'll get it then.

I hope when people see *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*, Delbo rings true—that by honoring our storytellers, we have enabled the viewer to "enter life" and "get it."

*Ulrich Baer is Assistant Professor of German Literature at New York University. He is editor of Niemand zeugt fuer den Zeugen: Erin-*

nerungskultur und historische Verantwortung nach der Shoah (*Nobody Bears Witness for the Witness: Memorial Culture and Historical Responsibility After the Shoah*) published in Frankfurt by Suhrkamp. Professor Baer is a frequent contributor to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Germany's largest daily paper.

I have been able to learn from survivor testimonies at Yale in three capacities: as a PH.D. student in Comparative Literature when I translated German and French testimonies, as a researcher when writing the introduction to an edited collection of essays on testimony published in Germany by Suhrkamp Verlag, and as a professor at NYU in an undergraduate class, "Representations of the Holocaust," and a graduate seminar, "Poetics of Witnessing." My lasting sense from this involvement is one of profound incompleteness. Reflecting back on these experiences, I have a sense of having been privy to stories and accounts of suffering to which I have not been able to respond adequately. On a purely professional and intellectual level as teacher, writer, or researcher, I feel reasonably confident that in my reliance on testimonies I achieved the intended results. I could counter the sense of anonymity one sometimes encounters in fact-based historical accounts of the catastrophe, and demonstrate to my students how the truth of history and the truth of personal experience are neither mutually exclusive nor always coincide. On an emotional level, however, I feel that every time I used a testimony in writing, teaching, or research, I was left with a further obligation to respond and to become a recipient and addressee of the testimony beyond whatever "use" I made of the testimony in my work. I have learned how a Holocaust survivor's testimony, in an unsettling way, might exceed not only the specificity of the survivor—by becoming more significant than a personal memory would—but might also become part of the listener's self-understanding: how one is traversed and touched, against one's will and beyond one's deliberate or unwitting efforts to master this story, by the testimony.

When I introduced taped testimonies into the classroom, I had already discussed Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies* and several essays on the specific challenges posed by listening to survivors. As the semester advanced, we read and discussed history books, fictional narratives, and written survivor accounts. I arranged my reading lists in order to create an atmosphere where details about the Holocaust could be discussed without either numbing the students or downplaying the gravity of the catastrophe for the sake of a more objective, less emotionally encumbered grasp of the material. My efforts to create a context for discussion before I screened the first videos in the classroom resulted from my own ongoing experiences in viewing testimonies.

As a translator, sitting in front of a monitor which links me to a world utterly alien to me via the headphone cables, often side-by-side with one or two other silent listeners, I had remembered that listening to testimonies felt profoundly isolating. When I volunteered at the Fortunoff Archive, I often tried to chat at least briefly with Joanne Rudof or Debra Bush before leaving, since I had the impression that only they could possibly

understand what I had just heard. Once I had left the Archive and would encounter a fellow student or friend, I usually omitted mentioning how I had spent the last few hours. How could I convey to them, who had just been "outside," what I had just seen and heard without being inadequate to either the testimony or the accidentally encountered person? Over the course of several years, however, I became gradually aware of how important and quasi-therapeutic a human context, a group, a possibility of sharing these isolating stories was for me. At conceivably ill-suited social occasions (for what occasion would have been an appropriate context to discuss testimonies besides the Archive or the classroom), I found myself overwhelmed with the stories to which I had become a secondary witness, and which I had carried with me without yet imparting them to anyone. I do mean that I "found myself" in this position: I had the distinct need to tell someone about what I had seen and heard over the last few months, as if these stories had now become ready to be shared.

While studying at Yale, I translated a number of Gypsy survivors' testimonies recorded in Austria. Several survivors were wary about depositing their testimonies in a publicly accessible archive, fearing retribution by Neo-Nazis today. Others emphasized that they had never spoken to anyone about their experiences, and I sensed that I had become the sole addressee for these stories. Although I was aware that my experience listening to testimonies was not unique, I felt that it had become my responsibility to remember these stories. This realization seemed to engulf me quite suddenly whenever a mildly interested or sympathetic listener would ask what I was doing at Yale. I would surprise myself with the amount of detailed information I had retained and with my own sharing of these stories with a "third party" as if these re-tellings would constitute a somewhat adequate response to stories of irreparable loss.

In order to prevent my students from being overburdened by the testimonies, I introduced them into my classroom only after a climate had been established. In my teaching experience, video testimonies have a startling effect of immediacy in a seminar focused primarily on textual sources. There was usually an initial silence followed by verbal expressions of being disturbed or even shocked. Yet since the students knew we were participants in the effort to examine the possibilities of representing the Holocaust or the specific challenges of testimony, they were able to discuss the testimonies, including their own responses of speechlessness, in the class.

I schedule a screening of testimonies to be followed immediately by a relatively non-directed discussion of the students' immediate responses. When the class reconvenes the same week, I make general observations about the testimonies we saw together, and initiate a discussion of the questions raised by the testimonies, hoping to alleviate the sense of receiving a story for which there is no proper context in which to share it with others, and to pass it on.

Much of my teaching time dealing with the video testimonies is spent examining the literal and the symbolic future of the archives; the students are challenged to consider the fate

Recently everyone has done a great deal of "looking back" as we entered a new century and a new millennium. This has provided both an opportunity and a challenge to reflect on the events of the twentieth century. It has also increased awareness of the passing of generations, particularly those who lived through the World Wars. This once again emphasizes the importance of the work of the Video Archive.

"Searching for Memory and Justice," our 1998 Fifteenth Anniversary conference offered a unique opportunity for examining and discussing the impact and memory of two different traumatic histories. There was no intent or effort to make comparisons; the goal was to learn from each other. By the end of the conference, the participants developed a sense of community and of learning together. The personal accounts of torture and death under apartheid of Pius Langa, Albie Sachs, Mbasa Mxenge and those on the videotapes were a forceful reminder that we have a great deal to learn from all victims of oppressive governments that legally inflict such suffering upon their own citizens.

Lawrence Langer writes about the importance of our collection as the witnesses pass from the scene. I would like to remember here one survivor whose death in 1996 was of particular import to the Video Archive, William Rosenberg. Willy, as we affectionately knew him, was a driving force behind the Holocaust Survivors Film Project. After the project came to Yale, he remained an important participant. He was president of the New Haven survivors group and we could always count on him for support. He lives on in our memory and his story lives on as well in his testimony.

During my more than fifteen years at the Video Archive, I have been continually surprised by the variety of our visitors and the expansive range of their research topics. Our youngest viewers were in the fifth grade. Their curiosity and fervor were just as great as that of many senior scholars. This year we received an application for authorization to publish testimony excerpts from a group of middle school students that was producing a radio show for broadcast throughout their school system. In addition to teachers, students, and academics, our visitors have included performance musicians, music composers, artists, architects, poets, novelists, children's writers, attorneys, physicians, pharmacologists, dramaturges, playwrights, actors, documentarians, filmmakers, legislators, and reporters, all of whom were working on topics stimulated by their professional interests.

Among the publications which recently incorporated materials from our collection are Christopher R. Browning's forthcoming *Nazi Policy, Jewish Labor, German Killers* (tentative title); Judah Cohen's essay, "Disembodied Music: The Orchestra in Auschwitz," included in a University of Mississippi Press book edited by Judith S. Neulander; S. Lillian Kremer's *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination*; Allan Levine's *Fugitives of the Forest*; and Vera Schwarcz's *Bridge across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory*. Scores of scholars have included testimony excerpts in papers delivered at academic conferences.

This research is possible only if there is intellectual access to the testimonies. Almost 2,500 testimonies have been cataloged to date. A grant from Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation enabled us to significantly increase the pace of the cataloging during the last five years. Some 1,500 testimonies

have yet to be cataloged. We will continue to make progress in this work after expiration of the grant funding.

Our communications have changed with the expansion of email and the Internet. Our website generates a large amount of email and we now receive many more inquiries via email than via telephone or conventional mail. More than 200 websites feature links to ours.

Since 1996, I have been working with Joshua Greene and Shiva Kumar to produce a documentary comprised of excerpts from nineteen testimonies, illustrated by documentary footage, photographs, and documents. *Witness: Voices from the Holocaust*, will be nationally broadcast by PBS on Yom Hashoah, May 1 at 10 PM EST. Connecticut Public Television is the presenting station. Many screenings have been held and if anyone is interested in holding such a local event, contact the Video Archive. The Free Press has just published a book of the same title containing additional excerpts from those in the documentary and nine other witnesses. Again, I want to point out that these projects could not have been completed if we had not had the means to identify appropriate topics in the witness accounts using our databases. One aspect of this project was soliciting personal photographs and documents from those whose testimonies are excerpted in *Witness*. Looking at these precious remnants—the faces of boys and their teacher in a cheder, formal portraits of parents, children, and grandparents in their best dress—was yet another jarring reminder of all that was lost.

I have derived tremendous personal satisfaction assisting many people who visit the Video Archive. Many undergraduate students, from Yale and elsewhere, arrive with preconceived notions which are often not only naive, but simply uninformed, based largely on popular myths about the Holocaust. I teach them how to use the databases to choose testimonies relevant to their topics. I also assist them in using the bibliographic databases to locate print resources for their work. While that task is somewhat mechanical (although intuition and knowledge are vital for successful searches), the results are not. Once students have viewed witness testimonies, they begin to understand the reality of life in ghettos and camps, in hiding, and with the partisans. They often discard former beliefs. They are sadder but wiser; their papers reflect this metamorphosis.

I was privileged to be with our affiliate project in Bratislava, the Milan Šimečka Foundation, at a celebration of the publication of Peter Salner's book based on their testimonies. It was attended by many survivors. In Slovakia, so recently dominated by the former Soviet Union where the telling of history served political ends rather than a search for truth, our project may have been the first public recognition of their suffering as Jews. I quickly realized how my presence as a representative of the Fortunoff Video Archive and of Yale reinforced their sense of validation. I was embarrassed by their effusive gratitude since I felt they had given so much to our project. However, I appreciated what had been accomplished beyond the addition of valuable testimonies to our collection, and on a personal level, how their lives were brightened a bit knowing that in the United States, at Yale, scholars and students would hear their stories now and for generations to come.

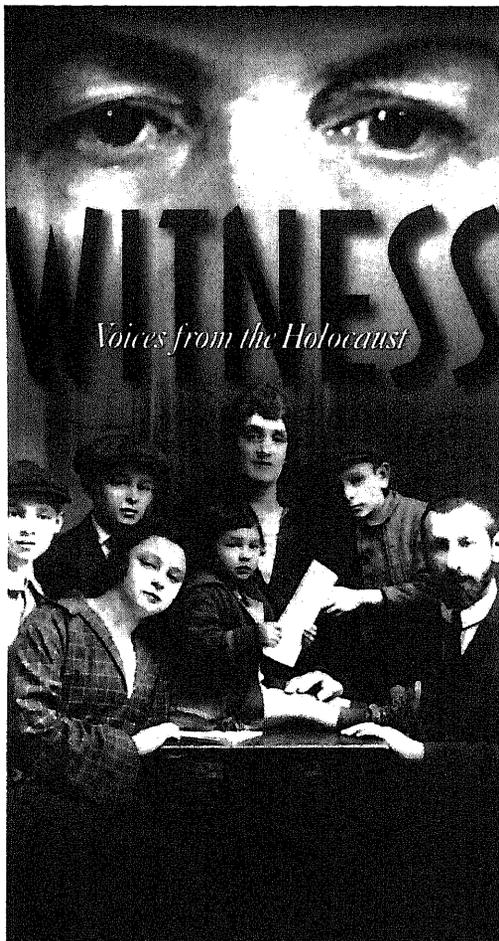
Joanne Weiner Rudof

## Reflections

*continued from page 8*

and function of an archive if they were not viewing these tapes and, by extension, if nobody carries out research.

Their own viewing and studying of survivor testimonies thus becomes part of the archives' project and destination, and their obligation – now from within the testimonies' appeal for a receptive listener – is fused with a reflection on how and what they might learn from viewing these testimonies. One of the objectives of the class is to realize that some witnesses, like the Gypsy survivors whose testimonies I translated, are speaking into the camera as if it were the only and terribly insufficient addressee. As viewers, the students are made aware of how the initially neutral objectives of studying history 'from below,' of supplementing written history with oral sources, and of attaching a face to the anonymous masses yield to the moral obligation to reflect on the way in which this history is linked to them as viewers in the present.



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Those interested in learning more about the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies can visit our website at [www.library.yale.edu/testimonies](http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies) or contact us at [fortunoff.archive@yale.edu](mailto:fortunoff.archive@yale.edu), or P.O. Box 208240, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-8240 (Tel. 203-432-1879). Gifts or pledges payable to Yale University are tax deductible and may be sent to the Fortunoff Video Archive.

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