

## Syllabus for Volunteer Interviewers

Sept. 11	Orientation	Mrs. Dana Kline
	Explanation of Video Archive of Holocaust Testimonies at Yale.	
Sept. 18	Historical overview	Dr. Rita Botwinick
	Roots of anti-semitism in pre-war Germany.	
Sept. 25	Jewish life in Poland	Dr. Nechama Tec
	"Images Before My Eyes". A movie about Polish Jewry 1864-1939.	
Oct. 2	Interviewing Holocaust Survivors	Dr. Dori Laub
	"Breaking the wall of silence"	
Oct. 9	Survivors address class	To be announced
	Discussion of life in the ghetto and camp.	
Oct. 16	Interviewing Techniques	Ms. Laurel Vlock
	The art of listening.	
Oct. 23	Anatomy of an interview	Kline, Laub, Vlock
	Video tapes used to sensitize students to issues of Holocaust survivors.	

### Required Reading

The War Against the Jews 1933-1945 by Lucy S. Dawidowicz  
Night by Elie Wiesel  
The Survivor An Anatomy of Life in a Death Camp by Terence Des Pres

### Required Interview

A 15 minute indepth interview with anyone. Your choice of topic. Due Oct. 23, 1984.

Mrs. Dana Kline, Instructor



## Questions

### 1. Judgement in question

"How do you feel when you see how much attention - and it's good attention - the Holocaust receives? Does it make you feel a little bit angry or resentful that more wasn't done then? or are you gratified to see this?

"Did people want to hear what you had to say or did you want to talk about your experiences once you came to this country?

"That was a very unkind thing for him to say to you" re: kapo answering question re: where are our parents

### 2. Answer in question

"Were the prisoners young, middle aged or old?" rather than how old were the other prisoners?

"Was the reaction of others similar to yours?" - rather than what was the reaction of others?

"Did your belief in God help you to survive?" (agendized as well)

"Were there provisions in the suitcase?"

### 3. Inappropriate questions:

How did you feel?

What was the worst thing that ever happened to you?

### 4. Irrelevant question?

Were you standing close to the person (episode of SS stepping on woman's foot)

### 5. Inappropriate responses

person meets sister - interviewer intervenes - "It was purely coincidental. - if the interviewer can figure that out, so can the viewer

### 6. Question which conveys inaccurate information

"When was the ghetto established in Amsterdam?

### 7. Awareness of how many questions you are asking - taking leadership away from interviewee

### 8. Small questions (or series of them rather than open ended which covers them all

what work did your father do - how many people in your household- how important was Judaism and religion - what was the age difference between you and your sister - how old were you when you sensed danger (all within 3 minute span)

### 9. Questions with assumptions - So you knew where your father was rather than Did you know where your father was

11. Agendized question or asking the survivor to make a judgement - what do you think of Germans, Poles, etc. What do you think of the convent at Auschwitz - if these are issues with which they wish to deal, they will bring up the subject

12. Hearing vs. witnessing -  
- Rumors -

# Yale Interviewers

Notes for first session of Refresher course

1. Interviewer preparation  
Encyclopedia Judaica  
Marrus  
map work  
political history - Dawidowicz, Marrus  
camps - Dawidowicz, Gilbert, Marrus, Bauer, E.J.  
specific - Germany - Kristallnacht -  
Poland - Warsaw uprising -  
Hungary - Wallenberg -  
ghetto - Judenrat -  
camps - who liberated and when  
corroborate dates  
look ~~at~~ <sup>proofread</sup> ~~check~~
2. Beginning - 10 minutes prior - focus on survivor only <sup>DK</sup>  
MUST GET NAME AND DATE OF BIRTH AND PLACE OF BIRTH
3. Heightened awareness - <sup>ten non re: own voice + answer questions</sup>  
interview - were you aware of the Judenrat? what was your <sup>JR</sup>  
perception of Kapos?
4. Interrupting  
A. use own information when hear something different + non-  
threatening and non-challenging  
B. clarification - get names, dates, place names  
C. refocus - rambling  
<sup>correcting dates, etc</sup>
5. Making statements - even if asked by interviewee, don't!  
drawing conclusions - "you were afraid." - don't  
comforting and commenting - never!  
rephrasing or repeating back what survivor has said - don't
6. Bad questions list - JR
7. Difficult moments - start with DK and <sup>Frank Hogenes</sup> ~~JR~~ <sup>child who had died</sup>
8. Knowledge of own agenda and working with it
9. Assignment - look at own interviews and find the following  
A. points of successful intervention  
B. new entry points, if appropriate  
C. places with inappropriate intervention
10. In writing do at least one of the above for group discussion.

Outline for interviewer training - New York - February 5, 1990

Personal Introductions - Dana Kline  
name, work, why interested in project

✓ Fortunoff Video Archive - Joanne Rudof  
history, affiliate structure, size and scope of collection,  
RLIN and publications, research and educational uses,  
volunteer aspect

✓ Testimony - Dana Kline  
What is it? What it is not, role of interviewee, role of  
interviewer, why people chose to give testimony

✓ A-47 "Renee H. Edited Testimony" 30 min Frances or Irving

Discussion and Questions

Dynamics of an Interview

A. What happens before - Joanne Rudof  
pre-interview administration, pairing of interviewers,  
documentation during an interview, release form — coll 3/24

B. How to prepare for an interview - Dana Kline  
communication with co-interviewer, appropriate reading  
and map work

Lunch - 1/2 hour

C. Interview - Dana Kline JK  
listening, silences, (appropriate and inappropriate  
questions,) behaviors and responses, non-agendized  
and neutral questions, dates, names and places

D. What happens after - Dana Kline

A-50 "Rabbi Baruch G. Edited Testimony"

Discussion and Questions

838 Technical viewing combined with critical analysis of interviewer  
Joanne Rudof - Peter C. unedited testimony

Discussion and Questions

A-61 "Future Imperfect" ← Brang



## Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies

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YALE UNIVERSITY · STERLING MEMORIAL LIBRARY, ROOM 331C · NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06520 · 203 432-1879

### Interviewer Training

Houston, Texas

Professor Geoffrey Hartman, *Advisor*

Yale Trainer - Dana Kline

October 21, 1990

Introduction

Fortunoff Video Archive

"Those Who Were There" (A-8)

About Testimony

View edited testimony - Renee H - A-47

An Interview

- a. Before the interview
- b. Preparing for an interview
- c. Interview proper
- d. After the interview

View edited testimony - Baruch G - A-50

Choosing not to be an interviewer

October 22, 1990

Reactions and Responses

Viewing an unedited testimony - T-838  
starting  
visuals  
tape change  
ending

Edited testimony Rachel G. A- 62

Questions and comments

"Future Imperfect" A-61

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Honorary Board of Consultants

Christopher J. Dodd, *U.S. Senate*; John Hersey, *Yale University*

Raul Hilberg, *University of Vermont*; Lawrence L. Langer, *Simmons College*; Joseph I. Lieberman, *U.S. Senate*; Elie Wiesel, *Boston University*



## Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies

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10th Anniversary · October 1991–October 1992

Professor Geoffrey Hartman, *Advisor*

January 15, 1993

Dear Friends:

It is hard to believe that two years have gone by since we have met as a group for discussion, evaluation and general intellectual stimulation. We have scheduled a series of three meetings for all our volunteer interviewers since we know if we are not growing and improving, we are not doing the best we can as interviewers. The sessions will be on Monday evenings, February 15, March 1 and March 8. The first two will begin at 7:15 at Joanne's house (directions enclosed). The third will be at 6:30 and we invite you that early so we can all have dinner together and schmooze a bit before we get to more serious business.

The February 15th session will be a discussion of Larry Langer's book. We hope most of you own it. If you don't please call the Archive and we will make arrangements for a loan from those of us who do have it. We ask you each to come with one discussion topic based on your reading of the book: a point with which you disagree; anything which strikes you as an experience, observation or conclusion you have had as an interviewer; a topic, conclusion, premise with which you agree and had not thought of before which you find helpful/illuminating/insightful, etc. Please be prepared for an expanded discussion of your topic with everyone. We will use this session to develop questions for Larry who will join us for the third session.

The March 1st session will be a focused discussion of our experiences as interviewers. We ask you to make arrangements to view at least one of the testimonies for which you have been an interviewer (either visit the Archive or call and make arrangements for it to be sent to you for viewing at home). Choose an example from your interviewing experiences which illustrates a difficulty, what you view as a "mistake" on your part as interviewer, a moment where your role as interviewer facilitated the telling of the story, etc. You may want to bring the testimony with you to illustrate your discussion topic for the group. It is difficult to define exactly, but we would like to be able to do some self-evaluation, constructive criticism and offer ideas and thoughts to each other for improving our work. Please also bring questions about why we do what we do, suggestions for the Archive to change or improve, any way we can offer you additional help and/or support. Again, we will try to develop specific questions for Larry.

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January 15, 1993

The March 8th session will be an after-dinner question and answer session with Larry Langer and his thoughts for us regarding the role of interviewers, improving our interviewing techniques and skills, etc.

We really look forward to this series since the our previous ones were so stimulating. You all bring so much to these discussions that we find them a unique learning experience. Please call the Archive so we know who will be attending.

Affectionately,

  
Dana Kline

  
Joanne Rudof

Enc.  
JWR/db



Outline of Refresher Course - Baltimore - 10/20/91

1. Introductory Remarks - Froma Willen
2. Introductory Remarks - Joanne Rudof  
Thanks for Baltimore hospitality, Litmans, extraordinary project - particularly Froma (Secretary wants her to give course to other affiliates) and Netsie, over 100 testimonies received by Yale, quality and commitment, notes during testimony
3. Introductory Remarks - Dana Kline  
Professional volunteer (dress) present professional image  
Time commitment that day - arrive early and allow time to stay with interviewee for coffee, etc. to "debrief" after interview is completed  
Interview preparation -maps, Ency Judaica, political history, book list will be handed out  
Prior to turning on camera - preparation of survivor in terms of exactly what will happen (include information about tape break), focus only on interviewee  
Must get Name, date and place of birth
4. Watch T-743 - Fred O. Directions from JR  
Pass out summary - difference between summary (explain context and purpose) and actual testimony - focus on interview techniques, not narrative (note relationship between narrative and interview techniques and look for that)  
Note: 1. Points of intervention and result of that intervention - anytime interviewers' voices heard. 2. Point(s) where you think intervention should have occurred and did not.

743

1. beginning to a bit after 16 minutes
2. 25 to 33 minutes
3. 39.51 including break
4. 1:03 -1:08  
1:23 - 1:30  
1:55 to end

During lunch focus on difficult moments you have experienced, problems, concerns and questions for discussion immediately after lunch

PM

1. Discuss difficult moments, concerns, problems and questions (if necessary, DK and JR will discuss their own experiences)

1267 Betty D. Dana will give same directions as for AM watching

1. beginning to 6:20
2. 14 to 28
3. 34 to 43
4. silence to ending (Jr verify time of this prior to Sunday)

Summary - LOOK AT YOUR OWN INTERVIEWS - THERE IS NO MORE IMPORTANT  
LEARNING EXPERIENCE - also look at others if helpful  
Hand outs- stress continuing reading (reading list is not even tip  
of the iceberg)

Notes for JWR Refresher Course - Baltimore - 10/20/91

Bring handouts -

1. Reading lists
2. Stepping Over Cockleburs
3. Summaries of Fred O. and Betty D.
5. Tapes - Parallel Paths
  - T-943 - Fred O.
  - T-1267 - Betty D.
6. Books - Larry
  - Guide
  - Northwestern
  - Telling Lives

*Feli*

1. Strengthen historical component

2. beginning

heightened awareness

1) office support

2) reading list

Marras

The Ruins of memory - LL

Focused - involved

→ look at own interviews

→ watch + discuss interviews together

1. find new <sup>entry</sup> points

2. places w/ inappropriate intervention

3. successful intervention

start w/ ~~no~~ DR or IR or both interviews -

not fully realized

Send Larry 3/4 V-MATIC of Bukowski

Shakespearean Tragedy  
Riposte course - Yale

JOANNE WEINER RUDOF,  
*Archivist*  
*Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust*  
*Testimonies*  
*Yale University - USA*

## Shaping Public and Private Memory

### Holocaust Testimonies, Interviews and Documentaries

The Holocaust is «in.» It is difficult to pick up a newspaper in the United States without reading about a Holocaust related topic. There is seldom a week that goes by without at least one book review on the topic in the Sunday *New York Times* or the *New York Review of Books*. American films and television broadcasts not only include shows specific to the Holocaust, but totally unrelated shows expropriate the topic, not always appropriately. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is the «hot ticket» in Washington, DC. In October, 1997, the new «Museum of Jewish Heritage/A Memorial to the Holocaust» opened in New York City to critical acclaim and with tremendous press coverage. The daughter of survivors noted that opening

and in the *New York Times* expressed her malaise.

«When I came to New York in the mid-70's, I often felt alienated from other Jews because of their reactions to my background (suffocating pity, or occasionally, weird hostility). I was also shocked by how little many Jews of my age - even the most educated and sophisticated - knew about the Holocaust.

Then something happened. The Holocaust became the pop metaphor for evil. *Seinfeld* made Mengele jokes. «Schindler's List» became an international hit movie. And Holocaust museums and memorials began popping up all over, not just in cities with large Jewish populations, like Detroit and Houston, but in

more unexpected places like El Paso and Palm Springs.

Of course, over the last 50 years there has been a continuing examination of the Holocaust by scholars, novelists, filmmakers, playwrights, artists, theologians and other intellectuals. But this new populist dissemination was different, with museums often using show-biz techniques to make the difficult information they were presenting accessible to presumably ignorant crowds [...].

Instead of feeling gratified to see my family's secret finally being aired - no, trumpeted - I was dismayed by these clever you-are-there presentations, and by the very idea of the museums themselves. Though the intent, certainly, was to educate and to explore moral choices, weren't these museums playing to the national obsession with victimization and making Holocaust survivors seem like part of the lineup for Oprah? The appeal seemed prurient, titillating, combining the dark thrill of two popular movie genres, horror and war. Wasn't this a cheapening of the Holocaust, giving spectators a rush before they moved on to the National Air and Space Museum?»<sup>1</sup>

Lest I leave you with a false impression, the writer concluded her piece on a very positive note, particularly praising the new museum for the inclusion of testimony. «Survivors' stories play a central role

throughout the museum [...] visitors will [...] hear and see people who lived in the ghettos and camps [...]»<sup>2</sup> However, I do want to address the focus of her malaise, the popularization of the Holocaust. For those of us who have been in the field of Holocaust studies, doing this work, quietly, for many years, this new interest is frightening indeed. It is more than distressing to see the simplification of a complex history: to hear intelligent people form opinions concerning Daniel Goldhagen's book based on the press coverage, never having read the book; to hear about Jerry Seinfeld's Mengele jokes, which strike me as obscene; to receive inquiries from History Channel staff who are knowingly planning to broadcast a «bad» film about the Holocaust followed by a panel discussion, which they hope may ameliorate the distorted, sentimentalized and inaccurate film.

How, you may ask, is all of this relevant to Holocaust testimonies? We have many responsibilities when we videotape the life story of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. I believe the primary responsibility is to allow the witnesses and survivors to tell their own stories, at their own pace, in a narrative form with which they are comfortable. I believe the imposition of an agenda, even the most well intentioned agenda, can ultimately lead to omissions, distortions - both overt and subtle - and material which can mislead the viewer.

For the last few months, a student of my dissertation research at the Fortunoff Video Archive has shared some of experience with me. She had previously viewed several dozen videotapes of survivors which were recorded by an orthodox Jewish organization. She found the accounts to be somewhat uniform since the questions were framed to focus almost solely on ritual and daily observances both before, during, and after the war. This student felt the purpose of recording these testimonies was to confirm that during the Holocaust and afterwards survivors maintained *kashrut*, observed *idays*, prayed, and kept their faith. The student felt the testimonies not only lacked spontaneity, but did not provide an opportunity for the witnesses to make free associations due to the rapid-fire questions posed by the interviewers. She found a marked contrast to many of the testimonies viewed at Yale, where the interviewers played a more passive role, and are empathetic listeners who ask questions primarily to clarify the witness narrative or to remind the witness of something forgotten. There is no attempt to force the testimony into pre-established chronology. Those who talk about holidays or faith do so because it is important to them, not to provide evidence for a pre-established agenda. The formal testimony format, skewed by a set of agenda-determined questions, does not afford the witness the opportunity to really hear the witnesses' stories, and this is an obvious example of using Holocaust testimonies to meet the needs of a particular group. This does not require an astute viewer to discern.

What worries me more is a subtle agenda which not only surfaces in testimonies, but also in documentaries, films, articles, books and other media. This is the viewer or audience or media need for a happy ending, for something redemptive, for trite lessons, for «closure.» The day following the opening

<sup>1</sup> Julie SALAMON, «Walls that Echo the Unspeakable», *New York Times*, September 7, 1997, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Esther B. FEIN, «Survivors of Evil Dedicate Reminder for the Future», *New York Times*, September 12, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. B3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *The Lost Children of Berlin Reclaiming their Childhood: Fifty Holocaust Survivors Reunite*, Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, Foxwood Films, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan STEINBERG, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-1943*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p. 118.

the museum [...] visitors will see people who lived in the camps [...]»<sup>2</sup> However, I do not see the focus of her malaise, the focus of the Holocaust. For I have been in the field of Holocaust studies, doing this work, quietly, and this new interest is frightening, this new interest is more than distressing to me, a complex history of intelligent people form opinions. Daniel Goldhagen's book on the Holocaust, never having been covered, never having been heard about Jerry Seinfeld's jokes which strike me as obscene; I have seen History Channel documentaries, planning to broadcast about the Holocaust following a discussion, which they distort the distorted, sentimental, inaccurate film.

Is all of this relevant to the testimonies? We have many testimonies when we videotape the life of survivors and witnesses. The primary responsibility is to the survivors and witnesses to tell their story at their own pace, in a way which they are comfortable with, without the imposition of an agent's well intentioned agenda, and without omissions, distortions and subtle - and material - manipulation of the viewer.

er 7, 1997, p. 84.

Reimite, Survivors of the

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For the last few months, a student doing dissertation research at the Fortunoff Video Archive has shared some of her experiences with me. She had previously viewed several dozen videotapes of survivors which were recorded by an orthodox Jewish organization. She found the accounts to be somewhat uniform since the questions were framed to focus almost solely on ritual and holiday observances both before, during, and after the war. This student felt the purpose of recording these testimonies was to confirm that during the Holocaust and after, survivors maintained kashrut, observed holidays, prayed, and kept their faith. The student felt the testimonies not only lacked spontaneity, but did not provide an opportunity for the witnesses to make free associations due to the rapid-fire questions posed by the interviewers. She found a marked contrast to many of the testimonies she viewed at Yale, where the interviewers play a more passive role, and are empathic listeners who ask questions primarily to clarify the witness narrative or to remind the witness of something forgotten. There is no attempt to force the testimony into a pre-established chronology. Those who talk about holidays or faith do so because it is important to them, not to provide evidence for a pre-established agenda. The former testimony format, skewed by a set of agentized questions, does not afford viewers the opportunity to really hear the witnesses' stories, and this is an obvious example of using Holocaust testimonies to meet the needs of a particular group. This does not require an astute viewer to discern.

What worries me more is a subtle agenda which not only surfaces in testimonies, but also in documentaries, films, articles, books, and other media. This is the viewer or audience or media need for a happy ending, for something redemptive, for trite lessons, for «closure.» The day following the opening of

the New York museum, a reporter described the scene :

«Frail aging arms, many bearing the tattoos branded on them in concentration camps, curled around the supporting arms of children and grandchildren. Together, old and young walked toward the ceremony, each step testimony to the failure of Hitler's plan to annihilate the Jewish people»<sup>3</sup>.

The very same article ends with a description of a survivor in the crowd pressing «[...] a sepia-toned picture of a little girl to her cheek, stroking it slowly. 'My little Rochalle,' was all she would whisper»<sup>4</sup>. I have great difficulty understanding how the writer can understand the loss of this child, which must be multiplied at least times one million to represent the reality of the murdered Jewish children of Europe, as «[...] the failure of Hitler's plan to annihilate the Jewish people»<sup>5</sup>.

A documentary screened on a cable television network this summer showed a contemporary Bar Mitzvah in Berlin, Germany. The narrator's voice-over informs the audience that this family «[...] and countless other Jewish families throughout Europe are a testament to the defeat of Adolf Hitler and the ultimate failure of the final solution»<sup>6</sup>. To speak about «the failure of the final solution» flies in the face of the facts. The statistics speak for themselves, as does the title of Raul Hilberg's definitive and seminal work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. «For Himmler and the SS it was a glorious achievement. For Hitler exterminating Jews remained the one achievement which neither defeat nor death could deny him, as he reminded the world in his testament of April 1945»<sup>7</sup>.

While historians debate motives, historiography, and interpretation, none dispute this. After 1945, European Jewry as it had been, was no more. The fact that individual sur-

vivors have been able to build lives for themselves does not change this. The postwar development of Jewish culture in Israel and the United States does not change this. Holocaust scholar and Christian theologian Harry James Cargas reminds us that survivor testimonies «are the extraordinary stories of ordinary people» who have become «the miserable recorders of atrocities on a scale never before known, never before imagined. [...] In a society dedicated to consumerism, to having, we meet people who have not. They have not their families, their normal lives, their peaceful existences. Jewish holidays are times of depression for Holocaust survivors because they are then particularly burdened, when other friends are celebrating, knowing that they are missing those with whom they would like to share joy»<sup>8</sup>.

A recent novel, *The Reader*, was reviewed twice in the *New York Times*, both in the Sunday book review and in the daily paper. The narrator's character notes :

«Today there are so many books and films that the world of the camps is part of our collective imagination [...]. Our imagination knows its way around in it, and since the television series Holocaust and movies like Sophie's Choice and especially Schindler's List, actually moves in it, not just registering, but supplementing and embellishing it»<sup>9</sup>.

This really worries me. The book was written and set in Germany, and the narrator states that his primary matrix for learning about concentration camps is books and film, fictional books and films, this in the place where so many of the crimes took place and the museum sites are the camps themselves. The author assumes that *Schindler's List* was actually filmed in the camps, which is not true, although it was filmed in Poland. We should all worry that this so-called information, which becomes part of the «collective imagination» which «knows its way around in [concentration camps]» comes from Hollywood depictions rather than any kind of reality. I am not certain about what can be done to counter this phenomenon, but I hope museums, testimonies which allow the witnesses to tell their stories their own way, thoroughly researched and truthful documentaries, and well-taught units in schools can form some kind of counterbalance.

Too many interviewers and testimony projects have been shaped by the kind of thinking that requires redemption, renewal of faith, a happy ending, triumphalism, heroes. In a recent letter, Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer stated :

«I've been writing about the Holocaust for nearly thirty years, watching video testimonies for fifteen, and doing my own interviewing for almost ten, and I have been repeatedly disappointed by

Hollywood versions of Holocaust that romanticize the ordeal and a hopeful spin on the story. [...] audience of viewers [...] have grown since the war and have depended on media misrepresentations for understanding of the event»<sup>10</sup>.

On the video jacket for the movie *from Sobibor* actors Alan Arkin and Hauer are shown holding guns above their heads as they lead the prisoners out of the death camp. The video jacket states «[...] all this and excitement, the bravery and the of the largest successful escape ever from a Nazi concentration camp facts not included on the jacket 250,000 Jews were killed at Sobibor hundred of six hundred prisoners during the uprising, and those who were instantly killed. Of the three hundred who escaped, most were killed by the Nazis, and less than fifty survived. The facts give lie to the promotional hole. Film critic Danielle Meyman of *Schindler's List* in *Le Monde* :

«We see smoke, and it's not a crematorium ; it's a train. We see the show they spout not gas, but water. The cadavers we see, we don't know, the people we identify with are And that's not how history goes»

In discussing Hollywood films, *New Times* critic Caryl Phillips notes it is a place whose approach to historically important subjects so often involves first trivial issues, then breaking their truths on a rack of commercial expediency»<sup>13</sup>.

Cynthia Ozick, write in the *New York Times* about the Anne Frank phenomenon in the United States noting :

«The end is missing. The story of Anne Frank in the fifty years since 'The Diary of a Young Girl' was first published

<sup>8</sup> Harry James CARGAS, «Preface», *Secretaries of Death* by Lore Shelley, Shengold Publishers, Inc., New York, 1986, p. XIV.

<sup>9</sup> Bernhard SCHLINK, *The Reader*, translated from the German by Carol Brown Janeway, Pantheon Books, New York, 1995, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence L. LANGER, letter to Joshua Greene, September 8, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> *Escape from Sobibor*, Zenith Productions, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Caryl PHILLIPS, «Another Course Change Toward Seriousness», *New York Times*, September 7, 1997, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia OZICK, «Who Owns Anne Frank», *The New Yorker*, October 6, 1997, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence L. LANGER, «A Playwright's Obsession With the Story of Anne Frank», *Forward*, September 19, 1997, p. 13.



ally worries me. The book was written in Germany, and the narrator has his primary matrix for learning about concentration camps in books and fictional books and films, this in the sense that so many of the crimes took place at museum sites are the camps themselves. The author assumes that *Sobibor* was actually filmed in the camp, which is not true, although it was filmed in Poland. We should all worry that the information, which becomes the «collective imagination» which comes from Hollywood depiction, is not any kind of reality. I am not about what can be done to counter the phenomenon, but I hope museums, which allow the witnesses to tell their own way, thoroughly edited and truthful documentaries, and film units in schools can form some counterbalance.

Interviewers and testimony probably have been shaped by the kind of thinking that requires redemption, renewal of a happy ending, triumphalism, heroism. In a recent letter, Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer stated:

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New York Times, September 7, 1997, p. 39.

September 6, 1997, p. 78.

Anne Frank, «Forward», September 19,

Hollywood versions of Holocaust reality that romanticize the ordeal and impose a hopeful spin on the story. [...] [A] large audience of viewers [...] have grown up since the war and have depended chiefly on media misrepresentations for their understanding of the event»<sup>10</sup>.

On the video jacket for the movie *Escape from Sobibor* actors Alan Arkin and Rutger Hauer are shown holding guns and rifles above their heads as they lead the other prisoners out of the death camp. The blurb on the video jacket states «[...] all the action and excitement, the bravery and the courage of the largest successful escape ever staged from a Nazi concentration camp»<sup>11</sup>. The facts not included on the jacket are that 250,000 Jews were killed at Sobibor. Three hundred of six hundred prisoners escaped during the uprising, and those who did not were instantly killed. Of the three hundred who escaped, most were killed by pursuing Nazis, and less than fifty survived the war. The facts give lie to the promotional hyperbole. Film critic Danielle Meymann wrote of *Schindler's List* in *Le Monde*:

«We see smoke, and it's not a crematorium; it's a train. We see the showers and they spout not gas, but water. All the cadavers we see, we don't know, and all the people we identify with are saved. And that's not how history goes»<sup>12</sup>.

In discussing Hollywood films, *New York Times* critic Caryl Phillips notes it is «[...] a place whose approach to historically important subjects so often involves first trivializing issues, then breaking their truths on the rack of commercial expediency»<sup>13</sup>.

Cynthia Ozick, writing in the *New Yorker* about the Anne Frank phenomenon in the United States noting:

«The end is missing. The story of Anne Frank in the fifty years since 'The Diary of Young Girl' was first published has

been bowdlerized, distorted, transmuted, traduced, reduced; it has been infantilized, Americanized, homogenized, sentimentalized, falsified, kitschified, and in fact, blatantly and arrogantly denied. [...] A deeply truth-telling work has been turned into an instrument of partial truth, surrogate truth, or anti-truth. [...] The diary is incomplete, truncated, broken off - or, rather, it is completed by Westerbork [...], and by Auschwitz, and by the fatal winds of Bergen-Belsen. [...] The litany of blurbs - 'a lasting testament to the indestructible nobility of human spirit' - is not more substantial than any other display of self-delusion. The success - the triumph - of Bergen-Belsen was precisely that it blotted out the possibility of courage, that it proved to be a lasting testament to the human spirit's easy destructibility. [...] Anne Frank's story, truthfully told, is unredeemed and unredeemable.

These are notions that are hard to swallow - so they have not been swallowed»<sup>14</sup>.

Lawrence Langer, in addressing the same issue, notes as the diary was adapted for the stage,

«the systematic elimination of references to persecution, murder, and gassing [...] until they had come up with the emphasis [...] considered important: 'human courage, faith, hope, brotherhood, love, and self-sacrifice.' This was quite a litany, considering that all but one of the inhabitants of the Secret Annex were murdered by the Germans»<sup>15</sup>.

Those involved in work concerning the Holocaust must be careful not to fall into the same pattern: not when we are recording survivor and witness testimonies; not when we are teaching this subject; not when we are making documentaries. We could very easily shape the testimonies so that the focus reflects this Hollywood perspective, and it

is tempting to do so ; after all, everyone prefers a happy ending. But where does that leave the bereft survivor, struggling to live with horrendous and horrific memories ? Where does that leave the six million who did not live, much less «happily ever after ?»

Russell Baker, a *New York Times* columnist, scolds those who look for happy endings when they are completely inappropriate.

«Why everyone suddenly started saying closure is a mystery, but that's what happened. Persons whose children, lovers, next of kin died in the crash of TWA Flight 800 and in the Oklahoma City bombing were said by the news reporters to be seeking closure. [...] The death of someone you love is a dreadful, dreadful thing, and not easily endured. Echoing inside the word «closure,» however, is the sound of a door being slammed and sealed, shut against the person whose loss creates your pain. The mourner is trivialized by the suggestion that the sooner he gets over the death, the better. Closure is always made to sound comforting. [...] With all its promise that the most heart-breaking loss need not haunt you forever afterward, closure is a cheerful word»<sup>16</sup>.

There is no «closure» in Holocaust testimonies : not for survivors, not for witnesses, not for viewers. It is difficult to provide hopeful messages for the young people whom we teach. However, it is incumbent upon us to teach honestly, to acknowledge that survivor testimonies are bleak and that knowing about the Holocaust has not pre-

vented other genocides from occurring while we hopelessly and impotently watch. We do not learn the history of the Holocaust from the testimonies. We learn about survivors and witnesses, about the personal universe of one person, not about universal events. Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert summarizes for me the goal of my study of this history : «I turn to history not for lessons in hope, but to confront my experience with the experience of others and to win for myself something which I should call universal compassion - a sense of responsibility for the human conscience.»

What is the point of asking a survivor what lessons are to be learned from their experience ? Some will respond with a platitude about teaching the lessons of the Holocaust so «it» will never happen again, because they think this is what the interviewer and the audience want to hear. Others will not respond at all, knowing the question reveals such naïveté that there is no common understanding with the questioner. If we don't «set up» the survivor, so innocently and yet so insidiously, we hear more honest observations. The following are among some of those observations.

Martin S. was born in Tarnobrzeg, Poland, in 1933. He was incarcerated in Skarzysko-Kamienna, then Buchenwald. He was liberated by American troops at age twelve, then came to the United States in 1946.

«One of the things I remember as a child coming out, I felt I had to tell the world what was happening. That was the highest priority. So I remember the first few

months in a yeshiva, I would speak. I would tell the kids everything. I would tell my rabbi. And one day we were on recess. One of the kids got me. We were all in a circle, and «Why don't you tell one of your stories ?» And from that day on, in 1946, '47, I did not say a word I was not until five or six years ago.

I would hate to think that my sitting is just an academic exercise, because one may be given a grant so that one can do additional research and thereby have a living. This is too painful. We must [crying] [...] do something to help the man. Because I'm a very bitter man.

Edith P. was born in Michle, Czechoslovakia in 1920. She was incarcerated in Auschwitz for six or seven years, then transferred to Salzwedel as a forced laborer in Germany. She was liberated by American troops in 1945, and emigrated to the United States where she married an American physician and had children. Her parents and other family members were killed. She was videotaped in 1980 when she was sixty.

«I have given a great deal of thought to how I should conduct myself with the Germans, how I should feel. Should I hate them ? Should I despise them ? Should I go out with a banner and do something against them ? I don't know. I never found the answer in my own mind and I have to go according to my conscience. I cannot conduct my life by what my husband tells me or my children, or by what the world has said. The only thing I can say is that I ignore them. I don't hate them. I can't hate them. I would waste a lot of time in my life. Sometimes I wish, in my darkest moments, that they would feel what we feel. Sometimes, when you are uprooted and your children are being uprooted, I'm talking as a

<sup>16</sup> Russell BAKER, «The Blatherly Gibberish,» *New York Times*, April 29, 1997, p.23.

<sup>17</sup> Martin S. Holocaust Testimony (HVT-641). Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

<sup>18</sup> Edith P. Holocaust Testimony (HVT-107). Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

<sup>19</sup> Bessie and Jacob K. Holocaust Testimony (HVT 206). Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

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19, 1997, p.23.

for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale

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months in a yeshiva, I would speak freely. I would tell the kids everything. I would tell my rabbi. And one day we went out on recess. One of the kids got hold of me. We were all in a circle, and he said, 'Why don't you tell one of your bullshit stories?' And from that day on, this was 1946, '47, I did not say a word I would say until five or six years ago.

I would hate to think that my sitting here is just an academic exercise, because some- one may be given a grant so that he may do additional research and thereby make a living. This is too painful. We must [...] [crying] [...] do something to change man. Because I'm a very bitter man»<sup>17</sup>.

Edith P. was born in Michalovce, Czechoslovakia in 1920. She was incarcerated in Auschwitz for six or seven months, then transferred to Salzwedel as a slave laborer in Germany. She was liberated by American troops in 1945, and emigrated to the United States where she married an American physician and had children. Her parents and other family members were killed. She was videotaped in 1980, when she was sixty.

«I have given a great deal of thought to how I should conduct myself with the Germans, how I should feel. Should I hate them? Should I despise them? Should I go out with a banner and say, do something against them? I don't know. I never found the answer in my own soul, and I have to go according to my own conscience. I cannot conduct myself by what my husband tells me or my children, or by what the world has said. The only thing I can say is that I ignore them. I don't hate them. I can't hate. I feel I would waste a lot of time in my life. But sometimes I wish, in my darkest hours, that they would feel what we feel sometimes, when you are uprooted and bring- ing up children. I'm talking as a mother

and a wife. There is nobody to share your sorrow or your great happiness»<sup>18</sup>.

Jacob K. was born in Zwolen, Poland in 1923. He was incarcerated in Skarzysko- Kamienna, Buchenwald, and Schlieben, and liberated from a death march in May 1945. He met and married his wife in a displaced persons camp. He was videotaped in 1983 at age sixty, when he had recently learned his wife had been married before the war and her child taken from her in Kovno.

«I can't tell you everything in an interview. I couldn't even describe one day in the ghetto. I don't want to live with that pain, but it is there. It forms its own entity. It surfaces whenever it wants to. I'll go on a train and I'll cry. I'll read something and I'll be right there where I came from. And I can't erase it. I'm not asking for it. It comes by itself. It has formulated some- thing in me. I'm a scarred human being [...]»

We perceive life as a precious thing. Then Bessie [his wife] gives birth to a child, and a German takes away the child and kills it. What are we, superhuman to brush it aside and tell the world thank you for liberating us? And that's all? We wash our hands clean like nothing ever happened? Like if the Nazis die out, no one is respon- sible any more. Somebody did it. A mani- ac did it? Hitler did it? A few Nazis did it? His government? Himmler? Others? And that's all? That's all? I can't make peace with that. Maybe other survivors can. I don't know. I can't. And yet I go on. I'm creative. We're both creative. But that is not the issue. There is another, deeper issue. You cannot brush away the pain by giving something else»<sup>19</sup>.

Helen K. was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1924. In the ghetto, her father arranged for her to marry a man ten years older than she. He was a baker, and her father believed he would be able to supply Helen with

food. She was one of the last to be deported from the Warsaw ghetto at the end of the uprising. She was deported to Majdanek in May 1943 at age 19, then transferred to Auschwitz about a year later. She was one of only about 6,000 to remain in Auschwitz in January 1945, when some 58,000 prisoners were forced onto death marches which few survived. She was liberated by Soviet troops on January 24th, the only survivor of her family. She was reunited with her husband, also the only survivor of his family. She was videotaped in 1979, at age fifty-five.

«You know, the man I married and the man he was after the war was not the same person. I'm sure I was not the same person either when I was at sixteen. But somehow or other, we needed each other. We got along because he knows who I was. You come from nothing. Nobody know you. It's a very strange feeling. You

need some contact, some connection. He was my connection. He knew who I was and I knew who he was. And we stuck it out ! We're married, I don't know how many years. We had two children. He's very different. He copes differently than how I do. And we're here to tell you the story. I don't know. I don't know if it was worth it. When I was in concentration camp, and even after, I said to myself, 'After the war, people will learn. We will learn.' But did we really learn anything ? I don't know»<sup>20</sup>.

If we are willing to really look and listen to Holocaust survivors and to their testimonies, like the above, they allow us to understand, just a bit, what Lawrence L. Langer meant when he titled his book *Holocaust Testimonies : The Ruins of Memory*.

<sup>20</sup> Helen K. Holocaust Testimony (HVT -58). Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

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